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DEPRESSIVE FEAR AND THE PRIVATION OF SUBJECTIVITY: COLERIDGE THROUGH BROWNING

VOLUME I

By

Mark Allan Clark

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

DEPRESSIVE FEAR AND THE PRIVATION OF SUBJECTIVITY:
COLERIDGE TO BROWNING

By

Mark Allan Clark

The insinuated or direct proclamations of potent subjectivity, the demonstrated grandiosity, and the expressive urgency that one encounters in Coleridge's work are features typically considered by the critical traditon to be "Romantic." But an awareness of Coleridge's struggles with depression encourages one to perceive that these features resemble symptomatic behaviors of manic-depression and may constitute oblique disclosures of depressive fear. Protestations of potent subjectivity, then, may be cryings out for a subjectivity felt to be lacking, or they may represent urgent expressions of longing whose hope lies in a listener's capacity to fill the void of subjectivity's privation. The Conversation poems and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner in particular suggest as much. The Wedding Guest in the latter work represents, I contend, the prosopopoeic conjuration of Coleridge's ideal audience: the character is a humanly textured space into which, Coleridge hopes, the reader may step and so acquire the capacity to complete the poet's subjectivity--by means of accomplishing, as Coleridge cannot, a language critique that does promise to be beneficial to the reader and to a culture devoted to a discourse of

description. One may conceive, too, that the Wedding Guest serves as a Muse who coaxes the reader's appreciation for the exhibitions of grandiosity and expressive urgency, on the part of all the Romantic poets, as disclosures of depressive fear and as invitations to an empathic understanding of this fear. And one's attentiveness to the song of this Muse can result in a serendipitous comprehension of the manner in which Tennyson and Browning fashion their responses to Romantic poetry. In effect, the Victorian poets fulfill the Romantics' desire for the devoted audience that Coleridge conjures by means of his Guest: their dramatic monologues serve as ironic echoes of Conversation poems expressed in the diverse voices of people other than poets; and as such, the poems constitute and promote an empathic understanding that the shared and inescapable condition of humanity itself, in language, seems to be the lack of and longing for the potent subjectivity that the Romantics had proclaimed, with wishful insistence, to be their own.

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For my mother, my father, my wife and my daughter--

Io veggio ben che già mai non si sazia
nostro intelletto, se 'l ver non lo illustra
di fuor dal qual nessun vero si spazia.

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INTRODUCTION

Particularly after reading Richard Holmes's monumental biography of Coleridge in his later years, readers can hardly fail to recognize how profoundly the poet's struggles with depression affected so many of his endeavors. In light of such understanding, however, readers ought to wonder more than they have about the relation of Coleridge's depressive condition to the claims of potent subjectivity he intimates and the expressive vivacity with which he effects his grandiose posturings of vatic stature. Grandiosity and expressive urgency serve, after all, as criteria for the psychiatric diagnosis of the manic episodes associated with bipolar disorder.

Encountering in the works of Coleridge what some might regard as demonstrations of pathological behaviors, readers have tended to regard these displays as genuine, straightforwardly serious proclamations of a potent subjectivity, even as these readers would not do so in the context of face-to-face interpersonal engagement. Such an inconsistency of responsiveness should give one pause.

If indeed Coleridge's prophetic posturings and proclamations of potent subjectivity are manifestations of manic grandiosity, then they ought to be read as oblique disclosures of depressive fear or as desperately insistent wishes for a subjectivity felt to be lacking. They are narcissistic endeavors to manipulate and assimilate others

such that the subjectivity so desperately desired might be realized by means of the assimilation. Simultaneously, they are agonized pleadings that others might accept the role of Coleridge's self-completion, which the poet believes himself unable to accomplish.

The critical tradition has generally not encouraged readers to conceive of Coleridge's endeavors in such a manner. And to the degree that they might be prompted to do so now, readers who would accept Coleridge's claims to vatic stature and revere him as prophetic, in the manner that M.H. Abrams has been inclined to do, ought to consider the possibility that they have been duped, to some degree, by the grandiosity that Coleridge exhibits. But somewhat paradoxically, readers like Jerome McGann, who are inclined to condemn the vatic posturing as rooted in and sustaining a problematic ideology, ought to consider the prospect that they have been duped as well. If the posturing constitutes or works as grandiosity does in manic-depression, then it is not sincere in a direct sense. Coleridge does not believe himself, in such a case, to be the insightful, prophetic figure he purports to be, nor does he expect others to regard him, ultimately, as such. The grandiosity elicits an audience devoted enough to read <u>through</u> the boasting and into the deep despair that makes the grandiosity necessary.

One's encounter with the child in "Frost at Midnight" supplies an indication of the methods by which Coleridge enlists his audience's services. As the poet speaks to the

child, he speaks to his readers, who, by virtue of their engagement in reading, are rendered as silent as the child. But because readers have a consciousness that the babe does not--since they are not pre-linguistic infants and are not asleep--they can hear, appreciate, have sympathy for, and understand Coleridge in a way that the child never could. As much as the babe may be an identifiable other, then, he serves as a humanly textured space of audience--generated by Coleridge--that the reader is invited or manipulated to fill and fulfill. The poem endeavors to transform the reader, in a sense, into the "Stranger" that Coleridge has always hoped could arrive. The arrival does not occur through the action of Coleridge's authorship, but is always yet to occur according to the reader's devoted responsiveness.

The device of the babe in "Frost at Midnight"--an audience that serves as the space of an audience that the reader is to fulfill--is one that Coleridge uses repeatedly. The endeavor it suggests is sustained through the Conversation Poems and even through the Biographia Literaria, where, as Tilottama Rajan points out, Coleridge first assumes "the position of an author who needs the right reader to complete his project . . . then becomes a reader in search of the appropriate author to embody his intentions" (The Supplement of Reading 109). Coleridge's endeavor seems to be that of providing a blueprint, as it were, for the audience that he requires, though the audience can be realized as incarnate only when readers themselves step into and fulfill the plan

that the poet has provided. Even as he may become the reader of the Biographia, as Rajan suggests, Coleridge strives in desperation to model for real readers what he would have them do and be.

Perhaps somewhat surprising is the fact, however, that Rajan does not include in her discussion some reflections about The Rime of the Ancient Mariner's Wedding Guest as an audience-invitation or blueprint. If, as Richard Holmes has suggested, Coleridge knew The Rime "to be his own drama" (173) and identified with the Mariner--that alienated, wandering, compulsive speaker of supposedly transcendental insight achieved by means of proclaimedly supernatural experience--then the Guest perhaps takes on the appearance of Coleridge's audience-ideal, or the ghost of an ideal that the reader is invited to enflesh and humanize.

The possibility of the Guest's serving such a significant function calls for greater critical attention to be placed on this character than has been given him in the past. While the enigmatic character of the Ancient Mariner has, for two centuries, justifiably intrigued readers of Coleridge's works, the character of the Guest has received scant attention. The lack of fascination with him is due, perhaps, to his apparent passivity: he mostly listens, after all. He is a degree more responsive than the sleeping babe of "Frost at Midnight," yet "he cannot choose but hear" the Mariner's tale, and so seems to approach, anyway, the limit of infinite receptivity that the sleeping child embodies.

But as the foregoing discussion suggests, I hope, this passivity is precisely what makes the character interesting, particularly if the character serves to establish the space of an audience-invitation in the way that the sleeping child does.

I contend that the Guest does indeed fulfill this function, and that he well deserves the attention I pay him in Chapters III and IV below. One could say that this enigmatic character with which Coleridge supplies his readers is the Muse of my entire project.

I conceive of the Guest as Coleridge's prosopopoeic conjuration of an audience-ideal. He resembles the child in "Frost at Midnight" in this respect. On the one hand, the Guest is a character who appears to be remarkably vulnerable to the Mariner's hypnotic powers. And having been held under the sway of the Mariner, the Guest relinquishes his plan to attend the cultural and religious event from which, so far as we readers can tell, he draws his very identity as "Wedding Guest." He quits the company of the Mariner a stunned man, destined to be sadder and wiser. On the other hand, the Guest is, I contend, the space of an identity yet to be filled by the reader who listens to the Mariner's tale, who may be both held under the sway of the Mariner's hypnotic power and remain abstracted from it, as a witness, and who may endure the experience of being stunned, but survive, beyond the poem, to realize the destiny of being sadder and wiser. In presenting the character, Coleridge

provides a role in a drama that he stages, but uses that role to invite a performance that only another--a reader--can step into, fulfill, and transform into genuine relationality.

The manner in which Coleridge elicits his audience and the manner in which the Mariner elicits the devoted listening of the Guest resemble the manner of manipulation typically exercised by manic-depressives in the context of interpersonal relations--at least as the psychiatric literature would determine typicality. And one's conceiving of such a resemblance is only strengthened by the fact that the Mariner, with whom the probably manic-depressive Coleridge identified, exhibits rather uncannily the behaviors indicative of manic-depressive illness--or specifically, as I detail in Chapter IV, Bipolar I Disorder, Most Recent Episode Manic, Severe, With Psychotic Features that appear to be both Mood-Congruent and Mood Incongruent:

> Mood-Congruent Psychotic Features: Delusions or hallucinations whose content is entirely consistent with the typical manic themes of inflated worth, power, knowledge, identity, or special relationship to a deity or famous person.
>
> Mood-Incongruent Psychotic Features: Delusions or hallucinations whose content does not involve typical manic themes of inflated worth, power, knowledge, identity, or special relationship to a deity or famous person. Included are such symptoms as persecutory delusions (not directly related to grandiose ideas or themes), thought insertion, and delusions of being controlled.
>
> (Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-IV 296.44)

The account of Life-in-Death and the influence she exerts

over the Mariner come to mind as one reads such descriptions.

The attempt to make an actual diagnosis of the Mariner would be inappropriate, of course; but a noting of the resemblance between the Mariner's behaviors and the diagnostic criteria is sufficient to rouse one's suspicions that the Mariner represents, perhaps in caricature, a manic-depressive sufferer. And the way that the Mariner treats the Guest parallels, as I have said, the manner in which manic-depressives typically treat others in the context of relationships. Furthermore, the manner in which the Guest responds to the Mariner is consistent with psychiatric and psychoanalytic accounts of the countertransferential experience that one encounters in a therapeutic relationship with a manic-depressive.

Conceivably, then, one could draw an analogy of sorts between the interchange that occurs in the poem--the relational dynamic experienced by the Mariner and the Guest--and a psychoanalytic environment whose inhabitants are engaged in the treatment of one who is manic-depressive.

Or to be more precise, one might say that the dynamics of the poem resemble the inverse of a psychoanalytic office: the transitional space of the "office" is one afforded by the "patient"--the Mariner or Coleridge--who invites or manipulates the "analyst"--the Guest or the reader--to enter the environment, to listen, to undergo something like a trance experience, to question and reject the narrative of

societal habit (i.e., the Wedding) with which the culture has provided him and leant him an identity, and to become sadder and wiser.

One result of such an engagement is an achievement of some familiarity with the function of the manic mind as the Mariner and Coleridge experience it. Indeed, the reader may come to appreciate The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as a lyric of and a figure for Coleridge's manic-depression--a cognate of the intrapsychic dynamisms of Coleridge's manic mind. Materialized, as it were, in language, the Guest in this scenario serves as the elicitation of a responsive, introjective identification on the audience's part. The reader's acceptance of the invitation presented can lead to his or her familiarity with Coleridge's psychic landscape, in a sense. But we should recognize, too, that the exploration to be undertaken is not the kind sought by a Romantic hermeneutic. If anything, this endeavor defines the limit of that hermeneutic's ambition; for the reader remains at a relational distance from the psyche that manipulates him or her. The reader does not enter into the psyche with which he or she would become familiar, but learns of the psyche's topography by the relational demands insisted upon by the psyche.

Such an engagement is one that demands great and dangerous devotion on the part of the reader. Like the Guest, the reader must be willing to fall under the spell of Coleridge--little wonder it is that Coleridge, on a later

occasion, recommends that his readers demonstrate a willing suspension of disbelief in reading literature--though one's falling under this spell will probably result in his or her falling under the curse of Life-in Death, in being stunned, and in being made sadder, if wiser.

By analogy, then, one might conceive the character of this devoted readerly engagement as a countertransference in an inverse-psychoanalytic environment, in which case, one might conceive of the Wedding guest as the prosopopoeic conjuration of a countertransferential agent.

The "countertransference" sought is one that permits and has the potential to yield an empathic understanding, on the reader's part, of Coleridge's plight. By means of the inverted psychoanalytic procedure, this is to say, the reader comes to appreciate Coleridge's condition as his own; and such appreciation holds out the promise for the reader's "healing," which seems in turn to be the means of Coleridge's healing.

In what sense, though, does the reader share in Coleridge's plight such that an empathic understanding is possible? The Mariner's engagement with the Wedding Guest suggests that the shared, seemingly pathological condition is related to language, or to the tension experienced when one comprehends how cultural devotions to a discourse of description entail the renunciation of an expressive discourse that perpetually realizes meaning's enrichment. (In referring to a "discourse of description" and an

"expressive discourse," I should add, I hope to situate myself if the genealogy of M. H. Abrams' thinking, in The Mirror and the Lamp, about the historical emergence of Romanticism and to give this thinking the linguistic cast that Goodson does, in Verbal Imagination, by means of his own phrasing.) As I shall argue in Chapter III below, the Mariner seems to urge upon the Guest the task of fulfilling a language critique.

The Guest seems to be encouraged by the Mariner's tale to draw an analogy between the "Albatross" of the tale and the "Wedding" that the Guest is about to attend. At the beginning of the poem, after all, the Guest intends to fulfill the destiny assigned him by the social convention--his very identity has been established, as I have noted, through the transformation of his name into the role that he is to play within the convention--and at the end of the poem, the Guest refuses to attend the Wedding, thus renouncing and losing the identity he has been assigned. His hearing of the tale has seemingly encouraged him to comprehend that the "Wedding" he would attend is like the "Albatross" of the Mariner's tale: each serves as a sign that lays claim, delusionally, to a special relationship with a power or divinity who ensures protection, care, and hope for the future. The absorption of the Guest in the tale, however, results in the killing of the "Wedding" for him, as well as in the Guest's being won by Life-in-Death, apparently, since the man's identity, reliant as it is on

the Wedding, has been effaced. The Guest can comprehend the "Wedding" for the socially constructed sign that it is. He knows, too, that as the Mariner has told his tale over and over to others, then other analogies have been constructed between the "Albatross" and any variety of conventional signs posing as signifiers of transcendental truths. And further analogies may yet be drawn.

The upshot of this is that the referential character of "Albatross" is diffuse: its meaning is established as perpetual analogy construction expresses and propagates a catachrestic proliferation. And whether or not an "Albatross" existed supernaturally, in the supernatural context of the Mariner's claimed experience, or whether that "Albatross" is the product of psychotic delusion makes little difference: what does make a difference is the very natural figurality of the term and the expressive activity it engenders. If the Guest and others to whom the Mariner tells his tale can comprehend this, then society itself may reconceive language--and trust it, and realize it--as fundamentally expressive, whereupon a lingua communis may be established; and someone like Coleridge, apparently alienated because of his manic-depressive experience of language and meaning, may thus achieve or realize a condition of communicative adequacy which he has previously been unable to enjoy.

The reader is to take the part of the Wedding Guest, I suspect, but to elaborate that role by constructing his or

her own analogies to "Albatross" and "Wedding," and so contribute to and fulfill Coleridge's dream of a lingua communis founded on expressive discourse. Neither the Mariner nor the Guest nor Coleridge can achieve such a condition: only readers can.

An assumption of the role defined by the Guest leads, then, to another insight on the part of the reader: the power of the Mariner to maintain his grip on the Guest and the power of Coleridge to maintain his grip on the reader derive not from a subjectivity of supernatural stature--which might accomplish a language critique and a revolution in a culture's regard for language--but from a desperate helplessness that seeks, in the responsive actions of others, the realization of a subjectivity that presently remains in potential. The vatic appearance and posturing as a supernatural subject is the indirect expression of longing so intensified as to reach the register of grandiosity. In order for others to comprehend not only the longing but the intensity of the longing, they must have the capacity to read not around but through the grandiosity, and so comprehend it for the gesture it is: the despairing proclamation of subjectivity's lack. The revelation or acknowledgment made is one of fear, anxiety, and vulnerability, not one, as appearance might suggest, of vatic awareness and insight.

But as this fear manifests itself by indirection, through grandiosity and expressive urgency, and to such an

end, it raises some perhaps disquieting questions about British Romanticism in general. The Romantic poets are known, after all, for the vatic statures they claim and the expressive urgency they tend to exhibit: they are characterized as Romantic according to behaviors that, in a psychiatric venue, serve as diagnostic criteria for manic-depressive illness. And indeed, the biographical records we have of the writers contain enough information to suggest to someone like Kay Redfield Jamison--a Johns Hopkins professor of psychiatry and co-author of the medical text Manic-Depressive Illness--that all of the Romantic poets suffered from bipolar or unipolar disorders (Touched With Fire 66-70). A. C. Goodson's sense that Romanticism itself seems to be a "cult of depression" ("Frankenstein in the Age of Prozac" 20) hardly seems far-fetched.

But if Goodson is right, then one must, I think, begin to question the tradition of reading that has been ready to take as straightforwardly serious the Romantic claims to vatic stature and either revere or condemn them: such reading betrays a persistent entrapment in--to maintain the psychoanalytic analogy--countertransference. If the vatic claims constitute or at least resemble the grandiose proclamations of a manic-depressive, then one ought to consider that they are indirect expressions--raised to hyperbolic intensity by an excruciating fear--of a desire for some fundamental capacity felt to be lacking: a wholeness of subjectivity, perhaps. In this scenario, even the critical

view that would assess the Romantics as victims of ironic delusion would fail to appreciate the complexity of the situation. On some level, the Romantics, as depressives, would know themselves to be lacking the subjectivity they proclaim. They are less deluded than engaged in a project of desperate insistence, effected by feint and indirection, through which they hope that, according to an expression of wish, a more satisfying reality might be established.

The sort of reading invited by Coleridge through his Wedding Guest-conjuration, then, may serve as a model for an audience-ideal sought not only by Coleridge but by all the Romantic poets. I hope to suggest as much by means of the reading I undertake below, in Chapter V, of Keats's "Lamia," even if I cannot undertake--for practical reasons that should become clear as I proceed--an exhaustive review of numerous Romantic poems.

In the process of reading Romantic poetry in the manner that Coleridge seems to invite, then, one may come to appreciate the plausibility that depression exerted a considerable influence over Romantic aesthetics, over the way that the Romantic poets comprehended language, and over the manner with which the poets waged a critique of language. In recognizing this, I conceive of my endeavors in this dissertation to resemble the ones that Goodson intimates in his "Romantic Theory and the Critique of Language," namely, to argue that "the Romantic critique of language . . . joins the social and poetic concerns of the Romantic company in a

foundational dialogue" that deserves our theoretical attention, since "this line of Romantic reflection contributes materially to modern ways of thinking about the condition of language and to the utilitarian defense of poetry" (4). Unlike Goodson, however, I am interested in considering the role that depression may have had in stimulating the Romantic critique of language.

The approach to reading Romantic poetry that I recommend, as it is invited by Coleridge, yields an altered appreciation for Romantic poetry, perhaps: the poets invite their readers to experience an empathic understanding of the fear that the Romantics feel--a fear that is associated with language, and a fear that is exacerbated by an emergent cultural faith in the discourse of description demanded by empiricism--and so to appreciate that they themselves, the readers, like Coleridge's Wedding Guest, suffer a comparable fear that has been anaesthetized or repressed by force of habit and mindless conformity. A devoted reading leads not to the sense of a sublime condition beyond human experience but to a familiarity with a human condition, within language, that people cannot escape, even if they passionately desire to do so or assume--by virtue of their comforting association with convention, habit, or ideology--that they can.

An appreciation of Romanticism's endeavors along these lines promotes a serendipitous discernment, however, that Tennyson and Browning were reading Romantic poetry and

approaching it in a manner similar to the one I am recommending. Their own Victorian aesthetic seems to have taken shape as a reading of Romanticism and a response to it that affirmed its endeavor as important for the reconceptualization of language it so desperately sought. The dramatic monologues these poets wrote might be seen as responses to Romantic lyrics or Conversation poems that reach beyond parody to become gestures of echoic irony which fulfill the "countertransferential" agency conjured by the Romantics, and so serve to stimulate in Victorian readers an empathic understanding of the human condition in language and of the desire, also seemingly definitive of the human, for a transcendence beyond that condition. The Victorian poets might be seen, then--and this is, in essence, the argument of this dissertation's Volume II--as the enfleshment of Coleridge's prosopopoeic conjuration of the countertransferential agent, the Wedding Guest, in splinter Victorian sequels to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

This is not to suggest that the Victorian poets were Romantics. It is rather to note that the Victorians were capable readers of Romanticism who could encourage Victorian culture to comprehend Romanticism's relevance in a particular way. In Tennyson and Browning, the Romantics find the fulfillment of their desires, in a sense: the audience that Romanticism had narcissitically gathered fulfills the role that Romanticism hoped it could. The Victorian poets accomplish a cultural critique that judges Romantic fear as

relevant to other human beings; and such a critique subsequently promotes the realization of a lingua communis that the Romantics, lyrically isolated and alienated as Ancient Mariners, could not accomplish.

CHAPTER ONE

FEAR IN "FROST AT MIDNIGHT"

Several factors contribute to a reader's inclination to forget the fear registered by the lyric speaker of "Frost at Midnight." First of all, the speaker assures himself and his audience, at the outset, that the "Frost" is performing "its secret ministry" (1).[1] Second, the speaker--soothed, perhaps by his certainty of the frost's workings--describes his fears in the calm cadence of blank verse, which serves to muffle and nearly nullify the reverberations of the anxiety claimed in the face of the encroaching "numberless goings-on of life" (12). Third, the concluding lines of the poem suggest an optimism, achieved by means of an apparent cooperation with the frost's ministry, whereby the speaker can assure his son of a life free of the sadness, anxiety, and fear that he himself has known: a life wherein "all seasons shall be sweet" to him (65).

However quietly the speaker enunciates his fear, though, he does acknowledge and lay claim to it. He calls our attention to it by means of an encouragement to forget it or to regard it as insignificant, since his triumph over it is immanent: his initial proclamation that the frost performs its ministry suggests that the fear is already undergoing a process of nullification and that his vanquishing the fear is a foregone conclusion. What is significant,

he insists, is not the fear itself but the fear's being vanquished and the promise of hope that defines the future.

To the extent that Coleridge convinces us that the fear and the character of the fear is unworthy of our prolonged attention, he dissuades us from critically scrutinizing or questioning the recourse he has taken as a means of combatting the fear; for if the fear is to be seen as immanently subdued, why should we be inclined to question the efficacy of the recourse he has taken to combat the fear? And in light of Coleridge's testimony to optimism in the closing lines, why should we question the character of the resolution that the recourse yields?

On the other hand, as we shall see, the optimism professed by Coleridge is tinged with irony. The claim of hope is really little more than a wish that fails to hold out any certain promise of being fulfilled. The insistent proclamation that "All seasons shall be sweet to thee" (65) constitutes a fundamentally subjunctive <u>cri du coeur</u> whose wishful character intensifies to the insistence of a future declarative and, in the process, represses or denies its own wishfulness. And while the speaker engages himself in proclaiming his hopefulness for his sleeping child, he fails to acknowledge that his own future holds out any promise of a persistent sweetness. Nothing about the experience he describes indicates that the moment of his own presently achieved tranquility can be sustained: the anxiety that he has felt in being threatened by the "numberless goings-on of

life" (12) shall, more likely than not, return to him.[2]

In some sense, then, Coleridge communicates to us and apparently wants us to appreciate not the vanquishing of his fear but the persistence of his fear in its hushed acknowledgment. His is a fear, he intimates, that sustains itself in and by means of repression: it is a fear that would have its sufferer and others forget it. But because it is this sort of fear, others can comprehend its character precisely by entering into the activity of attempted forgetfulness. At the very moment they experience the inclination to forget, though, they may be prompted to ask the question <u>why</u> they are to forget, and so ask themselves the sorts of questions they had been encouraged to avoid: What sort of fear is this, really? What is the recourse that Coleridge takes in response to this fear? What sort of resolution does Coleridge reach as a result of the recourse he has taken?

These are the questions that guide our attentions in the present chapter: we shall attempt to conceive the character of the fear that Coleridge claims and to consider why he might want to keep his admission of it hushed. Our highlighting of this fear can open our eyes to the response that Coleridge has to it--we can open our eyes to the recourse he takes, that is, which has been commensurately muted. We can also come to a greater appreciation, then, of the resolution he reaches in confronting the fear, a resolution that is far less optimistic and complete than the

tone of the poem's close indicates.

What will emerge from our considerations is the sense of a subjectivity, claimed by Coleridge, that is far diminished in stature and power than the one apparently claimed and celebrated. In chapters that follow this one, we shall consider that the impoverished subject of "Frost at Midnight," so desperately longing for empowerment that it generates a veiling grandiosity--and so hides its condition--may be seen as typical or prototypical of the Romantic lyricist and as significantly definitive of an aesthetic that we have come to identify as Romantic.

In the first 13 lines of "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge acknowledges something of the fear he feels. He relates how he has found himself alone in his wakefulness, listening, through the silence of the cottage he inhabits, to the sounds of solitude. Two shrieks of an infant owl register the anguish and fear of separation, which are yet to be frozen into stillness by a "ministry" of "frost." Despite the fact that he shares the cottage with others, Coleridge finds himself alone--save that he is in the presence of his sleeping son--and the solitude inclines him to engage in "abstruser musings" (6). The "calm," however, in a surprising, paradoxical fashion, "disturbs / And vexes meditation with its extreme silentness" (8-10). The world seems to crash in and brutalize any attempt to lend it such an order to which the speaker may belong, and in which he

may find a place:

> Sea, hill, and wood,
> This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
> With all the numberless goings-on of life,
> Inaudible as dreams! (10-13)

The speaker cannot gather this flux into any stable, satisfying set of ideas, and so feels himself tossed and tumbled around by the tide of it, drowning, and grasping in desperation.[3]

Such a conception of the speaker's condition perhaps sounds exaggerated, but it becomes less so as we observe the speaker latching on to his lifering, the one feature of the environment which promises a stability of thinking or a means of halting the race of thoughts, since it has, for Coleridge, a history and so a persistence of meaning. The feature is the "stranger": the "film" (15) of soot on the grate of the fireplace, which, in the lore of England, has been "supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend," as Coleridge informs us in his appended note. This lifering is a word, a sign that "speaks" to him.[4]

Of all the excessively "quiet" components of his environment, the film, notes Coleridge,

> Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
> Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
> Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
> Making it a companionable form,
> Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
> By its own moods interprets, every where
> Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
> And makes a toy of Thought. (16-23)

By the lore of the kingdom, the film has been declared a signifier-variable, an open sign which is at once capable of

assimilating the referentiality anyone would need it to or would want to suggest, by means of uttering the word "stranger," and is capable of escaping any referential fixity.

Both the attestation to impairment in lines 1-13 and the seeming antidote of the word "stranger" suggest that the fear Coleridge grapples with is associated with language and its relation to meaning. A. C. Goodson has recognized as much in his reading of the poem (Verbal Imagination 120-47), though he wants to emphasize the relation of Coleridge's language contemplations and associated fears in the poem to Coleridge's philosophical disposition at the time of the poem's composition:

> What distinguishes "Frost at Midnight" . . . [is] a growing awareness of the problematics of expressive discourse in the emergent romantic idiom. The dissolution of mind and matter unleashes a crisis of rhetoric. Insofar as the speaker's language remains bound to particulars, it stands to sacrifice imaginative penetration to unprincipled aggregation. When it remains true to the modifying impulse of imagination, it threatens to reduce its referential base to a "toy of Thought," something insubstantial in its plastic motility. (124)

On this reading, the poem would seem to be something of a depiction of Coleridge second-guessing his philosophical convictions: Goodson indicates that Coleridge is confronting the complexities, the problems with and the consequences of the thinking that he would espouse. The fear acknowledged, then, amounts to something of a dismay in the poet at coming to grips with the implications of his intellectual commitments.

But Goodson's endeavor to appreciate contextual factors that influence Coleridge's contemplations--the "emergent romantic idiom," for example, from which Coleridge's thinking derives, in part, and to which it contributes--need not serve as a discouragement to an appreciation that the philosophical engagements Coleridge undertakes have profound personal ramifications and are motivated, in significant part, by personal, emotional need.

In spite of his critical emphasis, indeed, Goodson encourages such appreciation. He argues persuasively that Coleridge devotes himself, from the earliest times of his career, to participating in "an ongoing revaluation of enlightenment thinking" regarding language, and therein establishes himself at "a crossroads of romantic and modern understanding" on the subject" (90). While emphasizing, with such a statement, Coleridge's role in a philosophical deliberation, Goodson proceeds to claim that "Frost at Midnight" represents, in the context of Coleridge's ongoing meditation on language, a contemplation of

> the process by which the image is tried and confirmed. Here Coleridge brought to consciousness, or near it, the fears exposed by his naturalist assumptions, encouraged by the pantheist tendency of his thinking at the time. The dominance of natural impulse for the process of imagination meant a dangerous dependence on sensation. The implications could be suppressed by an act of faith, but they could not be evaded. The confrontation enacted in the poem showed how precarious imagination really was on [Coleridge's naturalist] assumptions, and how threatening to those who lived by it. And it confirmed the poetic image as a fabrication, contrived rather than borrowed out of a natural setting: a matter of arduous working through, altogether different

from the impression of the poetry of sensibility.
(137)

As sensitive as this account is to the influence of cultural issues that inform the poet's thinking, it acknowledges the commensurately significant influence of subjective and emotional forces: philosophical conviction leads to fear, to a sense of danger felt in the wake of a perception of threat.

Informed by Goodson's reflections, with their emphasis on issues of cultural influence imparted through philosophical deliberation, I would assert or emphasize, perhaps in response to Goodson, the relatively subjective experience of language related by Coleridge in his lyric. The fear that Coleridge betrays is indeed associated with language, but it arises less from the poet's philosophical second-guessing than from a felt incapacity to establish an identity or sense of self--to use language in such a manner, that is, that he may discern his own "name": the word that refers to his identity. Beyond confirming "the poetic image as fabrication," the "confrontation in the poem" tends to confirm the <u>self</u> as a "fabrication, contrived rather than borrowed out of a natural setting: a matter of arduous working through . . . ."[5]

In the lines of the poem cited above (16-23), we note that the issue of identity is broached, though the relation of this issue to the self does not become evident until later. Coleridge relates how he observes the protean definition of the phenomenon, the "film," and suggests a

congruence between this indefinite observational reality and the indefinite signification leant it by the word "stranger." The term, as applied by the culture through its lore, represents an acknowledgment of a word and image that testifies not to the fixity of identity but to the everlasting potential for identity.

The reason that "stranger" stands out as unique amongst all the other signs that surround the speaker is that the culture has, however unconsciously, acknowledged the word's signification as variable. The admitted variability is the aspect of this particular sign which allows it to float, as it were, above all the rest. What threatens to drown the speaker are, by contrast, the countless other signs that the (Lockean) culture regards as meaning-specific. These signs are silent: they do not "speak" to Coleridge and are, paradoxically, devoid of meaning--precisely because they are devoid of <u>possible</u> meaning. They contribute to a huge, inert mass that, like a tide or a flood, moves in with a devastating steadiness and overwhelms anyone or anything that would resist it. In defense and desperation, one may attempt fairly radical measures to limit his exposure to the flood--he may haunt the dark solitude of a distant cottage when all others are asleep--but even here, the mass encroaches.

The source of perhaps the greatest terror involved here lies in the implications that the culture's habits of meaning assignation have for personal identity.[6] As one

becomes submerged in the flood, he himself is likely to be regarded as a meaning-specific sign: conceiving the person as specifically, definitively identifiable, the culture restricts the being that the person experiences as proliferating, growthful, or ever capable of renewal. To be conceived as finally identified--given an unalterable, fixed meaning by virtue of a sign such as a name--is to be conceived as a zombie, of sorts: as a member, that is, of the race of the living dead, whose human <u>being</u> has been taken away.

But how can one prevent another's naming him, or a whole culture's resolve to take away his personhood? This is the principle question that Coleridge seems to ask himself at the beginning of "Frost at Midnight," and the fear of being unable to find a satisfactory answer to it is arguably the source of his greatest horror. We can grasp this in our observation of the attempted projective identification that Coleridge labors to achieve with respect to the word "stranger." The labor would appear to be the recourse that the poet takes in light of the fear he feels.

Coleridge senses in the phenomenon and in the name--by means of which, inevitably, he grasps it--a "companionable form," with which he feels "dim sympathies." Undoubtedly, the sympathies he feels are what render the phenomenon "the sole unquiet thing," the one element of the environment that "speaks to him," as it were. The implication here, however, is that he desires to conceive of himself or to be conceived

by his culture as the kind of enigma he observes and as the open sign leant it: in this way, he can retain forever his potential for identity.

He does not conceive of himself as the enigma or the sign, I must emphasize: he desires to conceive of himself as such, which is why he feels the longing he does, as suggested by the "dim sympathies" he feels and the "companionable form" he intuits in seeing the film. Indeed, the desire seems to be the motivation of the labor that follows, which is a projective identification or an emotionally based activity of formal idealism: Coleridge labors to make himself that "stranger."[7]

The sympathy that Coleridge feels for the word propels him in the direction of recollection, nostalgic narrative, and regression. He recalls as frequent the times at school when he would watch the film, comprehend it as the "stranger" of English lore, and wait, with the expectation that the lore encouraged, for the arrival of someone dear to him. Indeed, even when he was at school, the young Coleridge had been propelled back, through the expectation encouraged by the lore, to the recollection of an earlier time, which, from the perspective of his isolation at school, seemed idyllic. The student had nostalgically recalled his past by the synecdochic reduction of it to the bells of the church-tower ringing "so sweetly" through the "hot Fair day" (30-31). Despite his recollections, however, the student could call up in dream alone, or in imagination, the "townsman, or

aunt, or sister more beloved" whom he desired, in flesh, to fill the space provided by the "stranger" of the lore. All too often, however, this desire went unfulfilled, we are given to understand; and this means that the Coleridge of the present, engaged in his nostalgic recollections, senses how pathetically lonely he had been as a student. He had been made lonely, or been made more lonely, by the way that he had assimilated the cultural image and expected certain "strangers" to arrive. They never did. The cycle repeated itself so "oft" that it became formulaic, and culminated when

> I snatched
> A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
> For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,
> (39-41)

but the face did not appear.[8]

The recollection of the present, then, leads to a regression wherein Coleridge seems to recapture an anguish that defined his childhood and that remains unutterably painful: he cannot bring himself to say that the people he longed for never came. Yet it is in the experience of this anguish that Coleridge is prompted to re-comprehend the image of the "stranger," and to recognize, for that matter, that the culture has, by means of the variable character it has provided in this particular sign, afforded him the opportunity to do so.

In feeling, in the present, the anguish of the stranger's failure to arrive, Coleridge turns to the

stranger who has arrived: his son. The child is an infant who cannot understand what Coleridge is saying to him: even if he weren't asleep, he would be too young. The direct address made, then, through the remainder of the poem, is as much an address made by Coleridge to himself, regarding his desires for the child, as it is an address made to the child. The character of this address follows, then, from the regression that has occurred: the regression has rendered Coleridge a child, and he addresses a child who is, by the nature of the address, himself. This is the stranger, he can conceive--because of the variable signification afforded by the word--whom he always hoped would arrive and who has, at last, now, arrived.

At this point, then, Coleridge expresses his hopes for the "babe," undesignated as Hartley. He recognizes that he himself had experienced a childhood that was restrictive and impoverishing: "For I was reared / In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim, / And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars" (51-53).

The child's life, he insists, will be different: the child will not have to catch mere glimpses, through the synecdochic peep-hole of stars, skies, and bells, of creation's beauty and divine truth, nor will he be given a lore that inclines him to restrict meaning's potential, but he will dwell in a condition that can accomodate the breadth of meaning's expansiveness, and so ascertain

> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language, which thy God

> Utters, who from eternity doth teach
> Himself in all, and all things in himself.
> Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
> Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask. (59-64)

Such a condition does not necessitate one's perceiving a hint of sweetness through the poor man's music of church bells, then having to expand, imaginatively, the boundaries of that sweetness to get a sense of its totality; "sweetness," in such a condition, is to be manifest in the very breadth of all the seasons: "Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee" (65).

This insistent hope is expressed to Coleridge himself as well as to the child, we remind ourselves. What has occurred over the course of the poem is that Coleridge, overwhelmed by the flux of images that have come his way, "the numberless goings-on of life," named and regarded by the culture so as to make of them a multitudinous chaos that yields a vast silence or vacuity of communicated meaning, has found himself being crushed by the flow, the influx of the imagistic flood. He is like a baby owl, which, in spite of finding itself in the nocturnal element that nature has assigned it, feels itself alone and overwhelmed, and shrieks into the darkness. In desperation, the poet latches on to the one part of the chaos that permits meaning's expansiveness: the "stranger." And it is by means of this clinging that Coleridge is able to check, for a time, the flow of the flood that threatens him. He embraces the power of opportunity that the culture itself has permitted him, by means of language and of a word that is a signifying variable, to

"freeze" the flood. He internalizes, accepts, and enacts the "secret ministry of frost," the power inherent in the language itself as culture provides it, but a power that comes and goes, proving itself frustratingly temporary.[9]

What Coleridge desires is a condition of language use wherein such temporariness may be negated, wherein all of the mutability of life may be "frozen," paradoxically, into the awareness of its being congruently, commensurately, expansively "sweet." This is the condition of language, Coleridge conceives, that can be attuned to the language of God.

Such an ideal of language remains a desire for Coleridge, though, and not the inevitable destiny suggested by the apparent future tense of the poem's last ten lines. To the extent that Coleridge is speaking to himself regressed, particularly, that tense might well be seen as an insistent subjunctive posing as a future. To grasp this, we might consider an example of such usage in other circumstances: let us imagine that a woman has just lost her husband, and a friend tries to speak some words of comfort to her. "You will be happy again, someday," she says. This statement is an insistent wish more than it is a claim of fact regarding the future. The postured future claim serves the rhetorical function of providing for the mourner some firm basis of hope. If the comforter says, "I hope you'll be happy again, someday," then she registers an uncertainty, which is sympathetic in its own right, but which is a

different character of comfort. The wish or the subjunctive mood is expressed, in the former statement, not by an alteration in verb form, as it would be in Latin, for example, with the hortatory subjunctive, but through intonation and stress: "You will be happy" means something different than "You will be happy." Coleridge's line does not feature an italicization of the "shall" it bears, but the iambic pentameter line lends the word such stress. Semantically, such usage certainly makes sense, even if the address is directed at the child.

In the end, we cannot discriminate, in an absolute sense, whether Coleridge's closing lines are subjunctive or indicative, but we need to perceive how much is at stake in recognizing the possibility that they could be either or some combination of both. If the mood is indicative, then Coleridge's posture is one of grandiosity: prophetically, he has ascertained the path to participation in dialogue with God, he will tread this path himself, as the length of his life will permit, and he will show the path both to his child and to his readers. If the mood is subjunctive, then his contemplations culminate in the condition of longing, and this means that he is not much better off than he had been before he began the contemplation. If the "stranger" has arrived in the form of a child or of the regressed Coleridge--such that the variable character of the sign has been filled--the potential for the meaning of the word has increased as well. The longing for the arrival of an

individual who will undo the variable character of "stranger" remains. If that individual is God, then the variable character will never be undone, since the breadth of God's identity is as wide as existence itself. Yet we long for the variation to be undone. We may sense that, paradoxically, the variation may be undone as it approaches the limit of infinity, but this does not assuage our longing. Such a sense may afford us hope and allow us to face the future with a sense of expectation and excitement, but it does not deliver us from the pangs of longing. Finally, if Coleridge's mood is a confused combination of indicative and subjunctive, it would seem to be internally ironic: the longing might be so intense as to deny itself, and by means of its denial, claim by indirection its genuine character, which <u>is</u> that of longing.

This perplexity of "mood"--an emotional condition grammatically veiled <u>and</u> hinted--seems an important culmination of Coleridge's contemplations regarding the image of "stranger." The contemplation has been made possible by the character of the sign itself, which the culture has designated, by means of its lore, as referentially variable. This character has allowed Coleridge, through time, to reconstruct the image, such that it can refer to "townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved," and thereby discern what the image affords but also what it does not afford. The grasping of its lack promotes the longing that induces a reconstruction of the image. For Coleridge, in the present,

then, the image need not remain immutably stuck on those earlier constructions of the past, with people and environments that again and again let him down: the image can refer to his child and himself regressed, and this may, for the present, be a fulfilling construction, even if it might incline its architect toward solipsism. Given the terror that Coleridge acknowledges early in the poem, such construction may be a life-saving alternative, a refuge of insulation that permits the minimum perception of control to connect with the world and not be overcome by it.

The refuge is a temporary one, however; it is a transitional space. The "frost" of meaning-construction ministers to the flux of image and thought, and freezes it, for a time, into something durable and beautiful, a crystalline solidity that gathers in and reflects what reflected light we can perceive in all the darkness of our world. The season will change, though. That which may be gathered into a seeming substance of beauty by means of a ministry of frost or of contemplation or of poetry or of the assignation of meaning to an image variable will flow again--will, as a gathering, be lost. And knowing this, one <u>can</u> exult in the moment of seemingly suspended mutability, but must come, too, inevitably, to the condition of longing for the persistence of such exultation, because, inevitably, the moment melts away. If we could learn to accept the rhythms of meaning's crystallizations and dissolutions--rhythms dictated by powers beyond our control: the powers of

language itself, as a cultural phenomenon--then we could, perhaps, achieve some state of tranquility wherein "all seasons" might be "sweet" to us. Such acceptance is Coleridge's aim, but it remains only an aim; and the final, enduring cry of the poet is one of longing.

Still, a familiarity with such longing seems to be a worthwhile experience: it convinces us that the meanings which culture assigns to images are forever negotiable and may, if they promise nothing but disappointment and suffering to us, be changed, even though our changing them may itself bring us alienation and suffering again. The meaning of the "stranger" need not be for Coleridge one that promises the disappointment he has known in the past.

Whatever meaning he might establish as a substitute for the images provided him is not destined to be durable, though. To the degree that he might expect it to be, he sets himself up for heartbreak and, one might say, for a fate of ironic delusion. A more realistic expectation, on the other hand, leaves him in the interminable condition of longing for that one certain, fixed meaning he can count on. At the end of "Frost at Midnight," his voiced, insistent desire to embrace the former expectation obscures an anguished acknowledgment that he feels compelled to embrace the latter.

The end of the poem suggests, then, that the fear acknowledged at the beginning of the lyric is not overcome, despite the fact that the expressive action has permitted a

temporary refuge from the ravages of that fear. The tone of seeming exultation is at once what it seems, and it is the darkly ironic exclamation of achieved, elaborated repression that is not necessarily unconscious. The way to deal with the fear acknowledged at the poem's start is to engage in lyric expression and assume the role of one whose hopeful insistence can permit a vision of himself to be beyond his fears. The insistence of his desires renders the fear less visible and so imaginatively negated. This is a temporary fix that the poem at once suggests and attempts to de-emphasize, though: the meaning of "stranger" will again be found inadequate and will again need to be re-constructed. The fear may be postponed, and because of this, it may, in the moment, be imagined as vanquished; yet the very act of one's so imagining reminds him that the fear will return.

If critics observe the Coleridge of "Frost at Midnight" to be engaged in the cultural conversation about language, they must recognize the contradictory character of the poet's responsiveness. The exultant lyric voice is not the only one responding to the prompt of the conversation, even if it is the voice that is the most apparent and the one most clearly heard. This voice masks another which expresses fear and defeat. If we would consider the character of the responsiveness that Coleridge makes to his contemporary cultural conversation, we must consider not only the apparent contribution, but the latent contribution that the apparent one hides. The latent contribution may,

after all, be a significantly determinant factor in evaluating or re-evaluating the reception that Coleridge has received and the contribution to literature and thought that he has made.

If Coleridge invites us to see through the exultant lyric voice to the anguished one--if he asks us to appreciate the lyric voice, that is, as inversely revelatory of the anguished one--then he asks for a greater readerly devotion than we might have at first suspected. He expects us to undertake an active labor of deciphering. Our capacity to undertake such a labor, indeed, may be the factor that distinguishes us, as audience, from the audience portrayed in the poem: the sleeping child. And our emergent sense of Coleridge's expectations for us, as audience, prompts us to reflect upon the role we have been encouraged to play over the course of the poem.

Coleridge has invited us into a space--the space of a cottage room and of a poem--wherein we are asked to devote ourselves to listening and observing. We are to hear of the terror of a man overwhelmed by "the numberless goings-on of life," and witness that man clinging to the one feature of his environment that holds out hope to him because of its recognized expressive potential. We observe the man undergoing a regression, by means of his relation to this feature, this "stranger," wherein he can imaginatively become the child he addresses and indeed the "stranger" itself, the object of his longing. We observe the man

claiming the capacity to assure his child-audience and himself, regressed, that a new hope defines his future because henceforth, "all seasons shall be sweet" for the both of them.

This dynamic sounds very much like one encouraged by psychoanalysis, at least in some respects. It features a talking cure, of sorts, wherein, amidst the chaotic flood of free association--echoes, "inaudible as dreams," of the culture internalized and verbalized--the "patient" brings to consciousness the one element of his linguistically internalized culture that has for him such a discernable history that it permits him to regress and give himself an imagined re-birth by means of an amended narrative of self.

But in other respects, the dynamic sounds like a psychoanalytic inverse. The transitional space, first of all, is not a psychoanalyst's office, but a poem. The "analyst" is the reader or audience, who provides neither the "office" space nor a formulaic plan of treatment, but who has been invited into the transitional space of the text. The narrative of this seeming "talking cure" <u>conjures</u> the "analyst": it is not promoted and guided by an analyst. And then, of course, there is the matter of the end result: if, as we have been suggesting, the poem culminates in a prolongation and repression of the fear that the speaker hopes to overcome, then the work seems to be a very unsatisfactory "cure." Indeed, the poem even invites the listening audience to believe that a "cure" of sorts has

been achieved when it has not.

The psychoanalytic devotee might be inclined to call attention to this very point and use it to argue in favor of a psychoanalytic process that would, ideally, feature an analyst who could resist the "patient's" attempts to persuade him to support the repression by believing in the delusive optimism. The perpetuation, at the end of the poem, of the initial fears by means of a self-deluding, repressing narrative only serves to underscore the need for a trained, skilled listener: a psychoanalyst. Without such a listener, a "patient" is doomed to reinforce his status as a victim of his pathology.

But such reasoning does assume that the "speaker" is afflicted and is a "patient"; and one who thinks in such a manner is disinclined to consider an alternative, arguably more plausible account of the situation. We might consider, for example, that Coleridge, perhaps unconsciously to some degree, conjures listeners of such devotion that they can see through the delusive optimism to the fear. The optimism may indeed be the means by which the necessary devotion is stimulated into being; and it may serve as the means by which the audience, subsequently, may discern the underlying fear that happens to be not only Coleridge's, but its own. The fear is, as we have been suggesting, the threat of a Lockean discourse of description that frustrates the possibilities of narrative regeneration and so human identity itself: human <u>being</u>. On this interpretation,

Coleridge is not the "patient" relative to an "analyst" role we play. We are all "patients" who suffer from a common pathology, whose symptoms include a bad-faith belief in what language is, and whose nemesis, if one exists, is an empathic understanding of one another's condition. Such understanding has not been achieved by the end of "Frost at Midnight": it has been invited, and it can be realized only in the audience's devoted reading.[10] The invitation seems, indeed, to be aimed at achieving the audience's willing transformation of identity into the "stranger" that Coleridge has longed for and becomes, imaginatively, in the poem.[11]

"Share my fear," pleads Coleridge. In feeling the fear, we can share in Coleridge's acknowledgment of the fear; and the consequent capacity we develop, by means of our acknowledgment, of facing the fear together may be the best chance we have for alleviating it, because it does realize itself in language, and it does sustain itself by our habits of language use. Since language is communal, though, Coleridge needs an audience: he needs us as devoted readers. Beyond "Frost at Midnight," all the fragments of writing and thought that he extends to his reading audience, all the pathetic incompleteness of social responsibility or social expectation that he extended to his family, friends, and acquaintances, testify to his pleading that others might share his endeavor of realizing an identity, and that they comprehend such an endeavor to necessitate a <u>lingua</u>

communis. His own project of realizing an identity is theirs, though, he conceives that they shall come to recognize: each person is to come into being, perpetually, by means of projecting him or herself into a culturally provided referential variable, which Coleridge signifies for us as "stranger."[12] Our labor of realizing our identities in such a manner, and comprehending that labor as mutual, is very much what being human is about.

If Coleridge does grasp the human condition in such a manner as this, though, then he can hardly be conceived by us as affirming a notion of Romantic subjectivity as we have traditionally understood it. He conceives of himself and the human self not so much as "a separate entity whose desires clash with an external reality, but an interactional field within which the individual arises and struggles to make contact and to articulate himself" (Mitchell 3). He exhibits at least the intuition of a concept of the self formulated more recently by Object Relations theorist Stephen Mitchell:

> The person is comprehensible only within the tapestry of relationships, past and present. . . . the figure is always in the tapestry, and the threads of the tapestry (via identifications and introjections) are always in the figure. (3)

And yet, for Coleridge, the stitching of this tapestry, or the binding energy that holds the tapestry together, seems to be the repugnance and the fear--exacerbated yet repressed by a culture persuaded of empiricism's promises of truth's revelations and a Lockean discourse of description to convey

such promises--that the self is so absolutely dependent on others, or, in other words, so absolutely relational.

Yet "a self can never be described without reference to those who surround it," as Charles Taylor notes (35).

> My self-definition is understood as an answer to the question Who I am. And this question finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out. (35)

The space within which one would realize his or her identity is defined by "an interchange of speakers," so that "there is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language" (35). Coleridge's case seems to verify Taylor's argument, though it points to an implication of the argument that Taylor fails to highlight: variations in the way that language or words are experienced by an individual, relative to a community in which he finds himself, physically, makes the labor of constructing a shared space more difficult, in proportion to the extremity of the variations. Yet, as the labor is comparatively strenuous, it also becomes more obvious. Three people who experience language in a similar fashion may be able to construct their common space easily enough that they don't realize that they have undertaken a labor of construction; but a person whose experience of language is markedly different from that of those around him must labor strenuously, and in doing so, may make apparent the necessity of

the labor that all must undertake.

"Frost at Midnight" seems to be almost a dramatization of the principles that Taylor describes:

> We first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation by those who bring us up. The meanings that the key words [e.g., "Stranger"] first had for me are the meanings they have for <u>us</u>, that is, for me and my conversation partners together. Here a crucial feature of conversation is relevant, that in talking about something you and I make it an object for us together, that is, not just an object for me which happens also to be one for you, even if we add that I know that it's an object for you, and you know, etc. The object is for us in a strong sense, which I have tried to describe elsewhere with the notion of 'public' or 'common space'. . . . So I can only learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness, etc., are through my and others' experience of these being objects for <u>us</u>, in some common space. (35)

In his poem, Coleridge labors to construct such a space that others might be willing to share it and make it a "common space" in which the poet may come into being and participate in the self-realizing of others. Coleridge's rendition of Taylor's conceptualizations, though, attests to the fear associated with Taylor's comprehensions of the self--fear that is, as we have said, exacerbated by the historical climate of the poet--and this is the fear of having to realize one's identity and one's self within an interactional field.

If others can be encouraged to feel and acknowledge their fear, Coleridge intuits, they can appreciate themselves as constituting the relational tapestry of their being. And the mutually experienced and acknowledged fear

may be re-conceived, precisely because of its mutual recognition, as shared longing, in which case the fear itself may just be alleviated.

But who would accept an invitation to suffer the experience of fear, or to allow to surface such fear as they had successfully repressed at no apparent cost to themselves? Very few would; and if Coleridge needed them to, then he needed to exert a masterstroke of persuasion--persuasion to acknowledge the "common space" as generative of an on-going self-realization for those who inhabit it--through some combination of generally unconscious manipulation and of generally more conscious rhetoric. This masterstroke appears in the guise of optimism in "Frost at Midnight"--in the guise of that endeavor we observe in the poem's closing lines wherein the intensity of the poet's insistence masks and reveals his agonized longing. In other, later works, the masterstroke may well be, we should consider, the claim to vatic stature, the proclaimed familiarity with mystical truth, and the boasts of supernatural experience.

Of course, such boasts and proclamations and claims to vatic stature are traits we associate not merely with Coleridge, but with the Romantic poets in general. We must wonder, consequently, if the exultant voice we find at the end of "Frost at Midnight" corresponds--by virtue of its proclaimedly triumphal capacity to transcend the powers that would overcome it--to the vatic voice that we have

traditionally regarded as characteristically Romantic. As, in a latent sense, Coleridge does not want his audience to take this voice seriously, or entirely so, then, we are inclined to wonder if the Romantic poets in general may not want their vatic claims or their (feigned) prophetic statures to be taken seriously. The prophetic posturing may well be a means to an end: the Romantic writers may indeed wish to be revered as prophets, but only as this makes possible the acceptance of the broken, fear-ravaged persons whom they know themselves to be. Their attractiveness and favor, however, may have lain all along in this latent condition and in the voice that arises from it, muffled as it has been by the vigor of the vatic voice.

Notes

1. All citations to Coleridge's poems refer to The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

2. And the anxiety does return, as Rajan suggests in Dark Interpreter: "The current of insecurity that underlies the conversation poems is apparent if we read some of Coleridge's notebook entries on the need to recreate inner experience in the external world. In these he returns again and again to his sense of existing 'almost wholly within myself, in thoughts rather than in things.' He speaks of seeking in external nature 'a symbolical language for something within me,' and of needing 'an outward Interpreter' for the music of his heart. The subjectivity of mental representations and the need to generalize them into some kind of Concrete Universal are constant concerns of Romantic philosophy" (221). See Coleridge, Collected Letters (2: 881).

3. My use of a water metaphor suggests a link between the experience that Coleridge describes here and those that the poet recounts in the Biographia Literaria; for, as Richard Holmes notes, "water-images occur at crucial points throughout the Biographia, and metaphors of floating, flooding, flowing and sinking are used to dramatize much of Coleridge's spiritual and intellectual journey" (Coleridge: Darker Reflections 402). One of the examples that Holmes

provides in support of this claim occurs in Chapter 10 of the Biographia: "I retired to a cottage in Somersetshire at the foot of Quantock, and devoted my thoughts and studies to the foundations of religion and morals. Here I found myself all afloat. Doubts rushed in; broke upon me 'from the fountains of the great deep', and fell 'from the windows of heaven'. The fontal truths of natural religion and the books of Revelation alike contributed to the flood; and it was ere my ark touched on Ararat, and rested." (qtd. 403). Holmes suggests that Coleridge's water imagery and what might be "described as his poetry of 'psychological fluid-mechanics'" (403n) may be verbal, figural cognates of chemical dynamics in the brain, or the effect of those dynamics upon the psyche. The water imagery may in turn be correlated, in part, with Coleridge's chemical addiction. If this is the case, then the phenomenon of freezing, the "ministry of frost," and the appearance of ice in imagery that Coleridge's work features (in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, for example, and "Kubla Khan") become of renewed interest. We will devote some consideration to this point in Chapter 3.

4. In his Verbal Imagination, A. C, Goodson argues this point, and he emphasizes that Coleridge "misses a step" in judging that the grate film itself is the source of the speaker's seeming liberation from fear. "It is not the grate-film that has freed him, it is the word 'stranger:' not the language of nature but his own language. Coleridge

confuses word and thing, attributing to 'shapes and sounds' an agency which belongs, on the evidence of the poem, to his own imagination" (126). As shall become evident in the remainder of this chapter, I am in substantial agreement with Goodson's assessment that "what transpires in 'Frost at Midnight' might be characterized then as an epiphany manque. The sententious triumph of matter over mind conceals a genuine triumph of imagination over the disruptive forces of the self. For the word becomes a medium of self-presence, affirmative and therapeutic, so different from an inert 'toy of Thought'--the image as reflex of a desperate subjectivity. '<u>Stranger</u>' bridges self and other, cottage and horizon, opening this uncertain voice to affirmation. Turning away from the lure of sensation, the poem finds its natural ground (and a derelict voice its native element) with the recovery of the word as primary agent of imagination. It is not a sacramental frost but a sacramental <u>stranger</u> that redeems imagination in the midnight of the spirit" (127). I would respond to Goodson's assessment with the consideration that Coleridge's engagement with the "sacramental <u>stranger</u>' reveals the limitations of imagination's redemptive capacities, though, and that this may be more significant a result than the redemption actually achieved.

5. In "The Rhetoric of Secrecy: Figures of the Self in 'Frost at Midnight,'" Jan Plug argues that Coleridge's encounter with the cultural sign represents "a rhetorical use of language that tells of a figure who, the poem's tone,

Coleridge's biography, and commentary upon the poem lead us to believe, never arrives in the poem; as such it becomes the image of a signifier that never reaches its signified, a letter, as Jacques Derrida would have it, that never reaches its destination" (29). My own reading of the poem is much in agreement with Plug's, but I differ with him on at least one essential point. His inclination to envision the poem, through a Lacanian lens, as a self-satisfying rhetorical endeavor conducted in isolation fails to appreciate the complex endeavor of Coleridge to garner an audience. The prospect of his having to gain an audience--a labor which, from Coleridge's perspective, is of Herculean difficulty--is the source of fear that in turn promotes some desperate rhetorical measures which prove to be of limited benefit.

6. Plug conceives of the poem as prominently concerned with Coleridge's endeavor of self-construction: "The textual representation of Coleridge's 'mirror stage', to adopt Jacques Lacan's phrase, dramatizes the process by which the self is constructed. But it also dramatizes the rhetorical construction of the poem, so that the poem's own rhetoric repeats the mirror stage it represents. As it does so, figural language is shown to be the basis for the construction of the self" (27). Whereas Plug is inclined to see Coleridge seeking a pre-linguistic stage or a dissolution of the culture's "symbolic" impositions, though, I would see Coleridge discerning "stranger" as a gift provided by the symbolic order--an order from which there is

no escape. The word itself testifies to the culture's unconscious awareness of language's figural character. Coleridge perceives a hopefulness in this figurality, which allows for a figural re-construction and perpetual re-construction of self. But such hopefulness ultimately depends on the culture's development of a conscious awareness of language's figural nature.

7. Plug conceives that Coleridge's labors are progressive: "The film, then, serves as the means of a series of specular identifications, a series of identifications, moreover, that are increasingly familiar and complete" (30). The progression culminates in a "humanization" which "is achieved rhetorically, as [the] original occurrence of 'strange' (in a sense that does not require an explanatory note) is mediated through the linguistic community of the kingdom into a human 'face.' Prosopopoeia not only animates the stranger, it leads to the re-animation of the slumbering babe in the future that Coleridge imagines for him in his apostrophe" (31). Again, Plug wants to conceive of the poem as depicting Coleridge's isolated, rhetorical construction of self, with which the poet seems apparently satisfied. I would argue that Coleridge undertakes his labors with his audience in mind, and that he remains desperately unsatisfied until his audience can affirm the self he would construct and can, indeed, acknowledge the value and necessity of the endeavor he undertakes.

8. Plug: "But the literal figure, traditional readings of the poem insist, never arrives. Literal meaning is unable to assert itself without the mediation of a figure. That is, literal language achieves its literal status only by virtue of its figuration; it is literal of its own figurative status. The stranger can be literalized only after assuming its figural role, and even then the literalization is incomplete--the literal figure never arrives. The self is imaged in rhetorical language as both strange and familiar to itself, and so assumes the properties of figural language itself, language that is both itself and points to something outside itself" (33).

9. Plug comments that "The 'secret ministry of frost', variously interpreted, in fact, enacts the secrecy it describes by refusing to tell of either the ministry or the frost. It describes what I term a 'rhetoric of secrecy', a rhetoric that attempts to hide itself, a poem that attempts to make us forget that it and the self it represents are the constructs of language" (38-39). Yet the secret with which Coleridge would encourage our forgetfulness also intrigues us and serves as an invitation to wonder in precisely the manner that Plug does.

10. In The Supplement of Reading, Tilottama Rajan discusses Coleridge's struggles, in the Biographia Literaria and the Conversation poems, to conjure an audience. In failing to acquire an audience or in anticipating such

failure, Coleridge depicts himself as the desired audience he seeks or constructs his own audience. "Having first assumed the position of an author who needs the right reader to complete his project, Coleridge then becomes a reader in search of the appropriate author to embody his intentions. . . . If the first part [of the Biographia] sketches the author's need for a prophetic reader, the second part introduces precisely that reader and raises the question of whether the 'author' is not a construction of the reader" (109). Rajan considers Coleridge's endeavors in relation to the poet's "conversation with hermeneutics," however, while I shall be doing so from within a generally psychoanalytic framework. In Chapter 3 below, I shall argue that Coleridge's endeavors to conjure and thus supply his own audience--much in the manner that Rajan describes--are noteworthy elements of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

11. Thus, I would disagree with Plug when he comments that "the babe, it is worth noting, is indeed an infant, an en-fans, without speech. . . . the presence of the speechless infant denies the possibility of conversation, in effect denying the realisation of voice. 'Frost at Midnight', then, like the other conversation poems, never fully achieves its status as such, for it is at best a one-sided conversation, speaking to one who neither understands nor responds" (35). The poem is not exactly one-sided: it invites the responsiveness of readers who do have language and who have capacities of conversation beyond those of the

infant. Plug's reading, for example, completes or realizes Coleridge's poem as a conversation. On the other hand, the poem cannot be a conversation without the devoted reading and responsiveness of a speaking audience.

12. "Figural language that seeks its literalization in human figures would have us forget its figurative status and suspend our mistrust of its use. And apostrophe not only turns voice, but offers a figurative turn from another figure, that of the film, in the effort to conceal its inability to realize itself" (Plug 39).

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIZING ROMANTIC FEAR

We have suggested that the fear we witness in "Frost at Midnight"--revealed to us obliquely, as it is, through the poem's insistent hopefulness--resembles that betrayed by the claims to vatic stature we find throughout Romantic poetry. Such a consideration ought to encourage us to participate once again in the endeavor of "questioning Romanticism" that John Beer invites, and so to theorize this fear.[1] If Coleridge's poem is any indication, we might begin to sense, after all, that this Romantic fear motivates and yields a critique of language. We might imagine that such fear defines, in other words, the character of the writers' intellectual or philosophical engagement with the contemporary cultural conversation about language.

The fear in "Frost at Midnight" is more complex than it first appears, however, as we have seen; and if we are to theorize this fear, we must determine what theoretical discourse best acknowledges, appreciates, or respects this sort of complexity. It must be one that is willing to envision close reading as crucial: the apparent complexities of the dynamics involved here simply demand it. We have already recognized the difficulty that A. C. Goodson confronts in his efforts to clarify the contiguity of Coleridge's concerns with those of the contemporary cultural

conversation about language. The fear in "Frost at Midnight," conceived in his scenario, takes on the flavor of an uncertainty in philosophical conviction--a cerebral or intellectual matter that perhaps assumes the profound emotional dimensions of such uncertainty but brackets them in favor of asserting the poem's connectedness and relevance of the concerns voiced in the cultural context. (Robert Essick, in his William Blake and the Language of Adam, considers Blake in a similar fashion, to the same advantage but at the same cost). While such considerations are crucial to our appreciation of the poem as historically connected, informed, and constitutive, they need to be complemented by renewed considerations of the poem as a synchronic assertion--considerations which continue to recognize, of course, that such assertions arise from, prolong, and are thus certainly affected by diachronic, historical influences. "Frost at Midnight," whose acknowledgement of fear is clearly more than an expression of philosophical uncertainty, reminds us how crucial our readerly attentions to the synchronic may be.

Our theoretical approach must be one, too, that is capable of reading the veils of optimism such as the one we find in the Coleridge's poem--generalized, throughout Romantic poetry, as grandiose claims to vatic stature--for what they are.

Those theoretical accounts of Romanticism that would take as entirely genuine the claims to vatic stature, for

example, would prove problematic. Such an account as M. H. Abrams would provide in Natural Supernaturalism, which recognizes that Coleridge, Blake, and Shelley "were essentially metaphysicians and bards" who "conceived of themselves as elected spokesmen for the Western tradition at a time of profound cultural crisis" (12), may be accurate to an extent, but it does not consider that the grandiose claims may have been expressions of desire for that which the Romantics wished they were and therefore indirect expressions of what they were not. Abrams argues that, as metaphysicians and bards,

> they represented themselves in the traditional persona of the philosopher-seer or the poet-prophet . . . and they set out, in various yet recognizably parallel ways, to reconstitute the grounds of hope and to announce the certainty, or at least the possibility, of a rebirth in which a renewed mankind will inhabit a renovated earth where he will find himself thoroughly at home. (12)

Jerome McGann, in The Romantic Ideology, faults Abrams for professing such views, arguing that Abrams supports and sustains the Protestant, Christian ideology that the Romantic writers attempt to reformulate. But McGann tends to believe, like Abrams, that the Romantic writers aspire to the status of cultural prophet in an ultimate sense. Unlike Abrams, McGann is critical of such aspiration, as it is problematically ideological: it envisions the poet as someone who is capable of standing above the fray of the world and who can make authoritative pronouncements, by means of poetry, to improve the lot of the world. But what

I am suggesting is that the Romantic poets do not really believe themselves to be capable of standing above the fray of the world; and so long as McGann is criticizing them for their belief that they can, even as Abrams may be admiring them for the same inaccurate reason, then both scholars lay claim to the same faulty critical premise: they take at face value the vatic claims.

Harold Bloom runs into a similar difficulty in Romanticism and Consciousness. His inclination to conceive of Romanticism in terms of generally intrapsychic exploration is consistent with the approach I am taking, but Bloom wants to conceive of this exploration in terms of a heroic quest. Significantly, he does not conceive of any association between the embrace of an expressive discourse and the intrapsychic explorations of the Romantic writers, but conceives of the explorations in psychoanalytic terms. He wants to conceive of the Romantic writers as heroes of a quest for the "Real Man." "The [Romantic] poet takes the patterns of quest-romance," says Bloom, "and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the movement of the poet himself from poem to poem" (5). The poet envisions himself and, in Bloom's view, becomes the hero of this quest:

> The hero of internalized quest is the poet himself, the antagonists of quest are everything in the self that blocks imaginative work, and the fulfillment is never the poem itself, but the poem beyond that is made possible by the apocalypse of imagination. (8)

Having conceived of this teleological scheme, Bloom proceeds to assess various poets and poems as representative of Romanticism to the degree that each fulfills the scheme. Hence, Blake and Wordsworth each completes the dialectical scheme while Coleridge gives it up. Keats and Shelley die too soon to have completed the quest, but each shows signs that he is on the way. Shelley may have been headed for an ultimate despair, but death prevented this destiny. Byron's quest is also truncated by death, but is destined to have "become increasingly ironic" (16-17).

Regarding the Romantic writers as the heroes that Bloom does serves to establish the same sort of problematic critical response that Abrams and McGann make: to the extent that the despairing condition of the poets prompts a sympathetic grandiosity--a delusional belief that prophetic stature might be achieved--then an assessment of the poets that would envision them as heroic feeds into the ploy of the illusional, intensified hope, and it leads to the same contradiction that the grandiose illusions themselves do. But this is a condition of irresolution and permanent longing, not one of lasting sublimity or transcendental fulfillment. Bloom's vision of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and "The Triumph of Life" as pieces exemplary of the Romantic quest and "monuments of the Real Man," then, do not seem very accurate. Can it really make sense, after all, to think of these poems as indicative of a quest on the poet's part, a quest aimed at a specific telos? Envisioning each

of these poems as such minimizes the despair with which each poet, in the poems, contends.

Still, Bloom's inclination to conceive of Romanticism's endeavors as generally intrapsychic explorations has considerable merit, even if it loses force as it insists on a telic orientation. Consequently, we may wish to consider how we might recast some of Bloom's notions in terms of language experience, and in so doing, retain the psychoanalytic orientation but call into question the triumphalist vision of the Romantic writer as the heroic questor that Bloom describes. As we shall see momentarily, Bloom wants to conceive of Romantic poetry as "the poetry of the growing inner self"; taking "Frost at Midnight" as our lead, we might consider that the "growth of the inner self" constitutes an assertive embrace and exhibition of expressive discourse in reaction to the felt demand, made on the part of the contemporary culture, to participate in descriptive discourse, and we might observe how this drama plays itself out in several Romantic lyrics. To undertake such considerations, though, let us remind ourselves, in greater detail, of the argument that Bloom makes in Romanticism and Consciousness.

Bloom compares the Romantic quest to Freud's psychoanalytic scheme of the journey into the self. In Freud, the libido, in effect, rises from the id and influences the ego to rebel against the constraints of behavior imposed on it by the super-ego. For the Romantics, the analogous dynamic

occurs in what Bloom calls the Prometheus stage, where a repudiation of culturally imposed convention occurs. As an individual relates to the world, he must make certain compromises and learn to modify his inclination--the drives toward death and sex, for example--if he is to exist in the social world. Since this is the only way he can flourish, as a social being, he must make such modifications. This means, however, that certain life-energies must not be displayed, and which ones may or may not be, and to what degree, depends on the demand of the environment from which the individual draws sustenance. Human development, in the psychological sphere, consists in constucting a "social" self that can mediate between the inclinations or desires or drives and the environment of sustaining human relationships. If, for whatever reason, the individual compromises too much, and develops a mediating social self or ego that excessively denies the living out of the desires, then the individual represses the vital powers of the id. The id will not stand for this: the desires will not and cannot be denied, and will eventually circumvent the censorial function of the ego. The result is an unconscious, surprising, and a-social behavior, compared, at least, to what has been the habit of living for the individual. Ideally, as far as Freud is concerned, this surprising behavior ought to prompt in the individual a questioning of how his social self has been so constructed as to deprive his inner self of the agency it would have. This question leads, in turn, to the

search after familiarity with the inner self.

Bloom is careful to insist that, though Romantic poetry may be that of the "growing inner self," it is not therapeutic. Unlike that psychoanalytic enterprise which would explore the cyclic dynamic of the libido's doomed movement between appetite and repression, the Romantic "quest" is to be waged in the ego proper. This is probably an astute differentiation, as the writing of poetry is more reliant on the exercise of a consciousness familiarizing itself with unconsciousness than it is a process of fomenting unconscious behaviors. Were the Romantic to envision Freud's ego, he would would recognize it to be divided, says Bloom--wherein the strife of contraries and the attempted union of opposites is to occur--and this is where the Romantic quest is to take place.

In the realm of the ego, the Romantic questor strives to overcome his Selfhood, which is that part of himself that would not be released, says Bloom, by the dialectic of love. This strictly interior part of the journey is what Bloom calls the Imaginative stage, or the Real Man, wherein the final "enemy" to be overcome is the recalcitrance of the self: that which resists enchantment. For Freud, this is the reality principle, and for him, this must forever be accomodated, even if the relationship with it may be limitedly ever re-negotiated. For the Romantics, it is something that must be renounced and, by means of a creative Eros exertion, be transcended. "It is, to use Shelley's

phrasing," says Bloom,

> a total going-out of our own natures, total because the force moving out is not only the Promethean libido, but rather a fusion between the libido and the active or imaginative element in the ego; or, simply desire wholly taken up into the imagination. (13)

Once this movement reaches its culmination, and the poet cleaves to his Imagination, then tenderness and sensuality are united and enchantment--an orientation toward the highest form of love--is realized.

This dynamic, this growth of the inner self, may be recognized rather apparently in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, in the account that the Mariner gives of himself. The Promethean stage occurs, for the man, when he shoots the Albatross. The gesture is inexplicable, surprising, unconscious. For the superstitious crew of the ship, immured in ice, however, the Albatross has become a good omen. The conventionally constructed meaning serves as an acknowledgement that the destiny of the crew lies in the agency of supernatural powers. The Mariner rebels against this conventional agreement: his social self, which would abide by the convention, is inadequate to the task of keeping his repugnance of this agency-disavowal under wraps, and he performs the distinctly anti-social act of killing the bird. It is a Promethean gesture: a refusal to recognize that his agency is to be placed under the control of supposed supernatural powers.

The Mariner's act does not win him enemies, particularly, until, broken free of the ice, the ship makes its way to

the equator, where motion is impossible for other reasons, and the crew begins to bake. Attributing this condition to the Mariner's act, they decide to hang the dead Albatross from the Mariner's neck. The crew persists, then, in its conventional figuration and tropological take on the Albatross, and this spells doom for them. On the skeleton ship, Death rolls its dice and wins their lives, while Life-in-Death wins the Mariner's.

In the face of losing his companions and their leaving him with a curse in their eyes, the Mariner is left alone with his now fragrant Albatross to wonder if he was very right at all in repudiating the conventional belief and rejecting his social self. When he is able to see the sea-snakes, however, he experiences a love for them and he blesses them. He comprehends that these real-world objects --like the Albatross--are neutral realities which, by means of an exercise of imagination, we choose to understand or appreciate in alternative ways. His act of destruction had been aimed, he can now recognize, not at the Albatross itself, but at the idea of the Albatross that the social convention had insisted upon. He perceives, all at once, that the snakes constitute an opportunity, for the imagination, to be an infinite source of meaning, that the Albatross had constituted the same opportunity, that his crew had been engaged in the activity of constructing and agreeing upon meaning, and that his act, from his point of view, really was a loving one, since he saw the meaning that

his crew was accepting as destructive.

This is enchantment. In the experience of it, the dead Albatross drops off the Mariner's neck, and the Mariner is saved by compassionate spirits operating in the bodies of the dead crew members. Hereafter, the Mariner is compelled to tell his story to those, like the Wedding Guest, who are at once living in a blind adherence to ritual convention--going to weddings and the like--and are somehow aware enough that life can be richer than it is as dictated by custom.

For Bloom, the monuments of the Real Man, Imagination, include, however, not only The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, but The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem, The Prelude, The Recluse fragment, "Christabel," Prometheus Unbound, "Adonais," "The Triumph of Life," the two Hyperions, Don Juan, and Death's Jest Book. These, says Bloom, "are the definitive Romantic achievement" (15): they are exemplary demonstrations of "the poetry of the growing inner self."

Again, though, we must wonder how it is that the Shelley of "The Triumph of Life" or the Byron of Don Juan can be seen in the optimistic terms of questors who heroically commit themselves to a growth that seems, in Bloom's scheme, to be destined for enlightenment, fulfillment, and achieved insight of transcendental truth about the self and the human condition. And for that matter, we must wonder about the resolution or triumph achieved by the Ancient Mariner or his auditor: the failure of both men seems to be

one of compulsive seeking and recurrent telling of the same tale. The Mariner seems to preserve his condition rather than grow beyond it in any sense, and he seems to absorb the Wedding Guest into the fixated condition of non-growth--a condition whose misery seems to be repressed by the insinuation of mystical insight. We note a resemblance, then, between the dynamism of this poem and the one we have recognized in "Frost at Midnight."

As we have seen, "Frost at Midnight" points us in the direction of an alternative consideration to the one Bloom makes, and while it does profess an optimism that seems congruent with the one indicated by Bloom's account of heroic growth, it lays claim to an uncertainty and trepidation that promises to be persistent. The self is not "growing" here in the direction of a specific telos, but might, if anything, be described as expanding, omnidirectionally, without any sense of aim. The "growth of the inner self" here seems to involve a rejection of descriptive discourse and an embrace of expressive discourse, though such an embrace leads, disconcertingly, to a condition wherein the meaning of any thing, including the self, proliferates. This "growth of the inner self" may be more definitive of the Romantic achievement than the understanding of the quest that Bloom describes.

This is to say that the "growing inner self" dynamic would seem to be more language-oriented than Bloom would recognize. Let us briefly consider how a poem like "Kubla

Khan" might indicate this.

In the present time, the lyric speaker of this poem recalls the story of Kubla Khan's astonishing construction of a pleasure-dome. Kubla Khan has made the journey down into "the caverns measureless to man," to Xanadu. The id could not receive a much better depiction than what we receive here: in this magical context, all contraries seem to be unified in absolutely illogical but beautiful ways. And it is here that true pleasure is to be found, here that the ego--Kubla Khan, acting consciously--can construct a dome at once to contain and to permit these opposites to exist just as they are (so the dome itself is a paradoxical construction, and is at once both part of and alien to the environment). But Kubla Khan is making the journey into this id-environment, not the lyric speaker. What the lyric speaker is doing, however, is making the Promethean turn away from his present mode of socially-governed discourse to tell the story of Kubla Khan. He tells another story as well: his memory of a vision he once had of an Abyssinian maid who sang a song and accompanied herself by means of playing a dulcimer. He says that, were he able to recall the melody and song he heard in the vision, then he would be able to build the pleasure dome of Kubla Khan--and, presumably, all it "contained"--in air, and he would redefine the character of his relationships such that others would regard him both repugnantly, as a madman, and enviously, as a visionary.

The growth of this inner self involves a turning away from the present, which finds the alternative memories of the Kubla Khan story and the vision of the maiden as separate--as opposites--and seeks to re-create the present by uniting these opposites. There is an exchange of grammatical modality here that is highly significant. The alternative memories are described by indicative means, for the present is constituted by these memories as separate. The Promethean turn lies in the renunciation of the indicative condition as absolute, and the Real Man or Imagination can reconstruct that condition. The growth of the inner self occurs when the ego shifts, with consciousness, into a subjunctive modality. The speaker is left in a state of hope and anticipation. He is left with a conviction that, whatever state of affairs might constitute his present, he can, by means of his imagination, always comprehend things in a different way: things <u>could</u> be different. The reader is encouraged to recognize that the meaning of her present existence and relationships is the result of constructed images and that, by means of using her imagination so as to re-construct the images, another present <u>could</u> come into being. The recognition of this is the "milk of paradise" that can make of a man a visionary. The Mariner's love for the snakes, to re-consider our earlier poem, is an exultation that the meaning of the snakes <u>could be</u> anything.

This subjunctive turn is not necessarily the positive experience, in the end, that these poems might suggest. I

shall recognize this point later, but first, I would like to consider another positive manifestation of it in "Tintern Abbey." I hope to suggest, in looking at it, that Bloom's contention of Romantic poetry as "the poetry of the growing inner self" may find some real validity when we grasp that the "inner self" is something like "the participant in expressive discourse."

In "Tintern Abbey," of course, we find an argument for a way of dealing with our human condition, a way that promises some sense of optimism. The strategy is not that of communing with nature, though, so much as it is in limitedly altering language.

Having found himself, we can guess, under "the weary weight / Of all the unintelligible world," Wordsworth has returned to the banks of the Wye--as he has in the past, either by recollection or travel--where he has previously been able to gain some sustenance for his emotionally taxing involvements with society. By means of the time he is exposed to the pastoral environs of the Wye, he has found that "there is life and food / for future years" (65-66), and he anticipates that his present visit will afford him the same kind of experience.[2] This is his quiet Promethean turn.

His past visitations have, on the other hand, been of a distinctly different nature than his present visit is: the location has taken on new meaning in the wake of Wordsworth's increased life experience. Of course, he can be

aware of this new meaning only by virtue of his recollections of the old, which allow him the opportunity to make a comparison between "new" and "old"; so he does indeed recall the past in much of the earlier part of the poem.

His "recollection" goes beyond a simple remembering, however, in which he simply envisions his past self engaging in past experience: his present self seemingly enters into his past self such that he lives through, with his present self, the experience of the past. In the poem's first section, Wordsworth expresses himself in a fairly straightforward though enchantingly rhythmic indicative, much as one might speak or want to speak--endearingly and rhapsodically--about the past. In the second section, though, the discourse becomes more contemplative. Wordsworth speaks of his past self in recollection and as gradually being absorbed, disembodyingly, into the conjured context. "I have owed to [these forms of beauty]," he says,

> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind,
> With tranquil restoration:--feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure . . . (27-31)

Christopher Ricks responds to this passage by wondering with the following questions: Felt in the blood and felt along the heart? Why not <u>in</u> the heart--an organ which we usually don't consider as having extension--and <u>along</u> the veins of blood? (<u>Force of Poetry</u> 121) This expression of the poet is made by the present self, and it speaks to a corporeal disintegration that occurs, imaginatively, in this sort of

recollection. Of course, if any past is to be sensorially experienced, some kind of body must be present in it; so the one conjured turns out to be some sort of intersubjective, somehow physical but synaesthetic soul. Wordsworth's discourse alters its tense from past to present, and its person, from first singular to first plural, engaged as he is, presently, in

> --the serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections that gently lead us on,--
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (41-48)

Immediately after this expressed achievement of contemplative condition, Wordsworth gives a little subjunctive nod in the way of doubt: "If this should / Be but a vain belief," he begins; but he does not stay with an exploration of this doubt. This seemingly empirical evidence garnered through past experience has proved too compelling for his embrace of any skepticism.

Despite the similarities of the various experiences of recollection, there have been changes, of course, and the present self of Wordsworth experiences the environs of the Wye in a different way than he had in the past.

> For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. (88-93)

When he goes about describing how he has changed, however,

Wordsworth remains in the past tense: the changes of which he speaks have already taken place and do not address the alterations brought about by the present condition.

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth . . . (93-105)

What the present condition affords Wordsworth is a recognition that the meaning of the Wye environment changes even as aspects of it remain the same, and this recognition prepares him for the awareness of what change has taken place <u>in the present</u> to distinguish it from the experiences of the past. What is fundamentally different in the current experience is that Wordsworth's sister is present in it, as the apostrophe in the poem's final section makes clear. The contemplative experiences of the past have been solitary, but the present experience re-fashions all those past experiences--which are brought into the present by means of the present recollection--into a conversational dynamic. What had been a self-enclosed, introverted, narcissistically introspective process becomes a relational dynamic, and it can become so because of language.

This is not to say, however, that the language reverses the narcissism. Indeed, it extends the narcissistic reach

to include a beloved human being. The eye and ear of Wordsworth half-perceive and half-create of a sister a mirror of self:

> well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being. (107-111)

By means of this Other, Wordsworth can engage in the enterprise of re-experiencing his "mirror stage" of development--or an echo thereof, in adolescence, let's say--only now, he can be in control of and alter the images he perceives. Once this condition has been established, Wordsworth's discourse becomes fundamentally subjunctive. In what he claims to be a "prayer" (121), but which is an address to himself as rejuvenated--re-juveniled, perhaps--in the person of his sister, he speaks in the optative subjunctive:

> Therefore let the moon
> Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
> And let the misty mountain-winds be free
> To blow against thee: and, in after years,
> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
> Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
> Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
> Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
> For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
> If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
> Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
> And these my exhortations! (134-146)

This expression of desire and of hope in a possible future permits the imaginative, delusory construction of something like a parallel universe. If Wordsworth can re-experience himself as young again, he can approach his future with different hopes and desires, and by this means live a life

other than the one he has.

Isn't this gesture a fundamentally escapist one, though, and really rather pathological if it is delusory? We mustn't be too hasty to render judgment. The attempted re-experience of the mirror stage or its echoes gives us some familiarity with the genesis and constitution of the desires that have shaped our lives, and the only way of approximately comprehending those desires, at their inception, is to feel them in context, to engage in an endeavor wherein the present self inhabits the self of the past, and in that condition, feels and desires. The psychoanalytic tradition would come to call such experience "regression." The value of such experience lies at least in the achievement of some comprehension of what one's desires are; and some capacity for altering the constitution of one's desires may indeed be gained. The imaginative capacity for establishing a parallel universe for oneself, then, permits an increased awareness of desire and the possibility of altering one's desires, which are, of course, determinant of one's self-creation.

What of the narcissistic use of the Other suggested by the poem? The pejorative adjective derives from a psychoanalytic tropology, we should remind ourselves, and may guide our understanding in an unfortunate direction. One may be needful of the Other, in more subtle and, to us, distasteful ways, than we might care to admit. The uncertainties we have experienced, since the nineteenth century, over

the concept of "self" should prepare us for such considerations, however. Insofar as the boundaries of self are recognized to be so permeable as to indicate an intersubjectivity, then what happens to the validity of a tropologically conceived "narcissism"? To the extent that the human is coextensive with the animal kingdom, and we attempt to draw parallels between manifestations of "self" in the greater biological world and that in the human, we become persuaded that markers of "self" do not serve to mark off autonomous being so much as they foment interrelations that ensure species survival even as they may spell the doom of any particular "individuals" becoming attached.[3]

In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth indicates that he has undergone and remains in the process of undergoing a discourse alteration: his heretofore introspective contemplation of internal monologue becomes Other directed. The fact that he perceives that Other as a projection of himself--as himself embodied in another--suggests, however, that the alteration may be more of an expansion of the introspective contemplation than it is a discourse directed at another. This is not to say that the factual existence of the Other is unnecessary: it is crucial. Its importance lies, for him, however, in the fact that it permits his re-enactment of the mirror stage, not in the fact that it indicates a dignified, free individual, worthy of an independent life. In a Christian framework, such apparent egotism would be recognized as fallout from Original Sin, and a Christian

reader could sympathetically grasp in Wordsworth's voice a pathetic irony. Wordsworth himself could be conceived, in such a frame, as the speaker of a dramatic monologue. Such a vision fails to acknowledge, though, the emphatically positive effects of such a process as this poem indicates. And we don't need to rely on a consequentialist ethics in order to appreciate the poem's worth. The poem endeavors more to reflect what a human being is than to pronounce a dream of what the human person ought to be.

What is the effect, then, of Wordsworth's apparently "narcissistic" use of his sister? It divests the speaker of an habitual indicative discourse and replaces it with a subjunctive one. So doing, it brings the speaker to a condition of fundamental irresolution, of wish in which he and an Other--to whom he may be narcissistically attached--may participate: of desire. If the ultimate terms of relationship are desire, or, more precisely, the act of desiring, then the persons participating in the relationship become comparatively free to construct the meanings of their own lives. In addition, the subjunctive mode serves to perform a reciprocal function with respect to what had, in the indicative, been an apparently narcissistic manipulation. If Wordsworth ultimately enters into the realm of desire or wish expression, then part of his expressed desire is that his sister live out her own life and partake in his past experience only that she may live through and qualitatively beyond it. His own desired rejuvenation will be realized in her living

beyond it. One could envision the expression as an attempt to ensure the sister for his egotistical purpose, but we must recognize the subjunctivity of the expression: this is the communication of desire, of perceived need. The sense of it is not an imperative "Be this way," even in a subtle, indirectly manipulative sense, but a forthright, "I need you for this," and a sincere "I want this for you." The straightforward acknowledgement of desire, expressed through the subjunctive discourse, insists on the Other's willful act of accepting or rejecting the proposed role or mode of being.

In The Semantics of the English Subjunctive, Francis James compellingly hypothesizes that subjunctive discourse testifies to an epistemological mode, selected by the speaker, that is distinctive--if not opposite--from the mode suggested by the indicative.[4] The modes endeavor to relate the word to the world. In the case of the indicative, the speaker attempts to make the word conform to the world. He is like an artist, for example, who sees a house and endeavors to sketch it: his endeavor is to replicate, in a symbolic medium, that which exists in the world. The subjunctive speaker is more of an architect who sketches a house that is yet to be built and to exist in the world. Puzzlingly to the outsider, the architect's sketch and the artist's sketch may look the same, and, to ascertain the nature of either sketch, the outsider may have to consider additional contextual factors. So, too, with the

subjunctive speaker's expression; but the subjunctive speaker attempts to shape the world according to his word.

In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth demonstrates at least an intuitive grasp of what James is suggesting. The sentence immediately prior to the predominantly subjunctive final section is a declarative sentence expressed in the indicative mood; and by means of it, Wordsworth professes himself to be a lover

> of all the mighty world
> Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being. (105-111)

Prior to this proclamation, his discourse has been predominantly indicative, and after it, the discourse becomes predominantly subjunctive. Wordsworth moves from an epistemological mode of shaping his words according to the world he perceives to that mode of using his words to bring about a world. Having half-perceived the world, he strives, in that final section, to half-create it. The latter mode is, as Wordsworth indicates it, fundamentally relational whereas the former is fundamentally introspective. In the context of heightened relationality that the discourse of desire allows, Wordsworth can distance himself and his sister from the apparently destructive language habits of an increasingly technological culture. The nature of his commune shall, he believes,

> so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed

> With lofty thought, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings. (125-134)

In a discourse becoming increasingly subjunctive, Wordsworth condemns such language that would make rash judgments: the language of the industrial culture, whose emphatically indicative mode would suppress and repress the human proclivities to interact subjunctively. A culture that would not admit to language as based in desire and as, in good part, constructive of the world that it would know is a culture in bad faith; and such bad faith fixes the world and its people in formulated phrases, deprives them of their human "being." The growth of Wordsworth's inner self involves a Promethean turn away from the indicative language of culture and a Real man embrace of the subjunctive. It is by means of speaking the language of desire that enchantment and love are made possible.

However exulting it may be to achieve a conscious awareness of one's rhetorically creative capacities, however, there seems to be a substantial downside. If the growth of the inner self ends in the agency of the Imagination, and this is the driving force behind enchantment, then what really happens to the Other and the need thereof? And if an Other has no meaning other than that which we create for it, then the source of our nurturance is ourselves, which rather makes the experience of nurturance an absurdity

or a delusion. The Romantic exploration of the inner self confronted this horror.

Bloom's vision of Romanticism misses this point, I think, and in doing so, fails to grasp a particularly rich dimension of the movement. Bloom sees Coleridge as ultimately renouncing the Romantic quest, because, presumably, he had more demons or some such thing that prevented his ultimate repudiation of Selfhood. Perhaps Coleridge did give up on Bloom's quest, but I would judge that, with the "Dejection" ode, he pointed Romanticism in the direction of its nagging persistence. The despair he encounters there is the same as that Shelley achieves in "The Triumph of Life," as that Byron achieves in "Don Juan," and as that Keats does, I think, in "Lamia." It is just such despair that leads to the emergence of Tennyson and his pervasive use of the subjunctive in In Memoriam, and it marks a real achievement in Romanticism that has helped us comprehend the nature of language.

Certainly we do not find, in "The Triumph of Life," the victory of love revolutionizing the world as we find it proclaimed in Prometheus Unbound. In the later work, we have the imaginative self--whatever self is acting and speaking--annihilating whatever rhetorical construct he is able to establish, thereby generating a residue that becomes the next rhetorical construct to be annihilated, as J. Hillis Miller points out (144-45; 157-61). Life, the poem suggests, is an energetic construction of tropes and signs

that are replaced by new tropes and signs, so that the forgetting of meaning is just as essential a dimension of life experience as the establishment of meaning; but there is no guarantee that all the efforts at meaning construction are getting or going anywhere. The poem itself is difficult to read because it is designed to make the reader forget whatever meanings are established (Miller 178-79). Even the terza rima form suggests that the poem is a replacement of the Divine Comedy, which it annihilates, as Shelley's poem clearly has no telos, no progression, and little order. The comment that the poem makes with respect to the "growth of the inner self" is that the self is a kind of energy that continually substitutes meaning for meaning. The "I" of the poem, says Miller, is "the great shifter, a name for the linguistic enemy of substitution" (145).

Bloom wants to suggest to us that this poem points to Shelley's impending dissolution of Selfhood, and achievement of enchantment. It would be more accurate to recognize, I think, that this is an account of the Real Self confronting the reality principle of language.

If we take the narrator of Don Juan to be the lyric "I" of Byron, we would be hard-pressed, I think, to consider him an exemplary representation of a quest hero in search of his inner self who seeks an experience of enchantment. If the "hero" Byron describes is so incapable of agency, so hopelessly governed by events that guide his destiny, then the narrator seems to suggest that he, too, is governed by the

omnidirectional gusts of--well, occurrence, we might say, as opposed to fate. Of course, the narrator is not the bumbling incompetent he purports to be, proposing to begin the poem twelve cantos into it, digressing, chatting with the reader, using bad rhymes from a rhyming dictionary. The piece is a satire, of course, and Byron is quite up front about his joking and lying:

> My poem's epic, and is meant to be
> Divided in twelve books; each book containing,
> With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
> A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
> New characters; the episodes are three:
> A panorama view of hell's in training,
> After the style of Vergil and of Homer,
> So that my name of Epic's no misnomer. (I, 200)[5]

The extraordinarily capable, slapdash wit and satire is a Promethean turn away from any high-minded seriousness of poetry. Yet one gets the sense that, at the root of all this verve and energy, indiscretion, clowning, and laughter, there is a desperate cynicism, an emptiness, and a skepticism that has its basis in Byron's beleaguered mental condition. The most one can hope for is that, by chance --and, if one just keeps chatting away, manically and wittily--things will kind of fall together and represent something meaningful for a time. Even if they do, though, they cannot be counted upon to linger or be permanent. And any kind of construct--like an epic--that purports to establish order over life, ought not to be trusted.

Reading Byron is like watching the Northern Lights: there are occasions in which certain hues and shapes and intensities of light gather, but in the moment of their

coalescence, they are also evanescent. Much as we would like, we can't hold onto them. There is embodied in his writing an attitude toward simple, spontaneous human living that betrays a sincere endearment for life:

> Young Juan wander'd by the glassy brooks
> Thinking unutterable things; he threw
> Himself at length within the leafy nooks
> Where the wild branch of the cork forest grew;
> There poets find materials for their books,
> And every now and then we read them through,
> So that their plan and prosody are eligible,
> Unless, like Wordsworth, they prove unintelligible.
>
> He, Juan, (and not Wordsworth) so pursued
> His self-communion with his own high soul,
> Until his mighty heart, in its great mood,
> Had mitigated part, though not the whole
> Of its disease; he did the best he could
> With things not very subject to control,
> And turn'd, without perceiving his condition,
> Like Coleridge, into a metaphysician.
>
> He thought about himself, and the whole earth,
> Of man the wonderful, and of the stars,
> And how the deuce they ever could have birth;
> And then he thought of earthquakes, and of wars,
> How many miles the moon might have in girth,
> Of air-balloons, and of the many bars
> To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies;
> And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes.
>
> In thoughts like these true wisdom may discern
> Longings sublime, and aspirations high,
> Which some are born with, but the most part learn
> To plague themselves withal, they know not why:
> 'Twas strange that one so young should thus concern
> His brain about the action of the sky;
> If <u>you</u> think 'twas philosophy that this did,
> I can't help thinking puberty assisted.
>
> He pored upon the leaves, and on the flowers,
> And heard a voice in all the winds; and then
> He thought of wood nymphs and immortal bowers,
> And how the goddesses came down to men:
> He miss'd the pathway, he forgot the hours,
> And when he look'd upon his watch again,
> He found how much old Time had been a winner--
> He also found that he had lost his dinner.
>
> (<u>Don Juan</u> I, 90-94)

Yet between the Byron we see in Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo," in Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony, in the clinical portrayal we get in Kay Redfield Jamison's Touched With Fire, and in the man's strange, unnecessary death, we know that the poet was a wildly desperate man, tirelessly searching, by means of his expressive urgency, for some means of life-stability or comfort that could last.

The Romantic poets were not the questors that Bloom would have us believe: they were desperate men who were seeking to know and nurture their inner selves, and who, thankfully, left us a record of their failures, their sufferings, and their too occasional joys. And our theorizing their fear needs to respect their misery.

Anne Mellor, in English Romantic Irony, more appropriately sees the Romantics' inclinations to despair in persistent tension with a hopeful "enthusiasm," and she recognizes such inclinations as remaining unvanquished by the poets. The Romantic writer repeatedly confronts and acknowledges "the fictiveness of his own patternings of human experience," and each fiction he generates proves inadequate to his expectations and longing for a certain or stable account; yet the writer responds, in the face of such anguishing disappointment, with an energetic construction of new fictions.

> And these new fictions and self-concepts bear with them the seeds of their own destruction. They too die to give way to new patterns, in a never-ending process that becomes an analogue for life itself. The resultant artistic mode that alone can properly be called romantic irony must therefore be a form or structure that simultaneously creates and

de-creates itself. (5)

Mellor develops her notion of "romantic irony," however, along somewhat problematic philosophical lines: she encourages her readers to consider the character of Schlegel's concept of romantic irony as informing British Romanticism. To envision Romanticism along philosophical lines may help us comprehend some of the ideas with which Romanticism was concerned, but it inclines us to conceive of Romanticism's engagement as philosophical. Since the Romantics' concerns resemble those of Schlegel, in other words, then they are really engaging in a philosophical conversation, in spite of (intellectually inferior?) appearances. Yet our observing the Romantics from within the philosophical calculus of Schlegel disinclines us to consider the predispositions that led Coleridge in particular to Schlegel as the philosophical formulator of the thoughts and intuitions that the poet had. The concern with language that Coleridge exhibits in the Conversation poems--concerns over the image and idea, the name and the word that Goodson discusses (in Verbal Imagination)--assuredly pre-dates any concentrated interest in German philosophy.

In the anxiety and fear that we have seen in "Frost at Midnight" and that we can observe on the part of the Romantic writers in general, as a tension between a culturally demanded adherence to a discourse of description and a longed-for, wholehearted embrace of expressive discourse, we can begin to see the relation between the rather

philosophical formulation of "romantic irony" and the name-word, image-idea tensions that Goodson perceives as powerfully definitive of Coleridge's early explorations. The temporary, unstable character of images and names proves interminably inadequate to the grasping of ideas or to the apprehension of a word's seeming totality, and herein lies the linguistic foundation for "romantic irony": such inadequacy points the way to skepticism, but the very proliferation of images and names seems indicative of a fullness of meaning that might be reached, and so remains a source of "enthusiasm" and hope. Such enthusiasm prompts further constructions of images and names--and in turn, perhaps, fictions and myths that concern the "patternings of human experience"--so that, as Mellor would have it, the forms or structures that simultaneously create and decreate themselves are established, but moreso at the level of language itself, or at the level of the word, than at the level of fictional account.

We could judge, indeed, that much of the project which Coleridge undertakes in "Frost at Midnight" has to do with making the cultural image and word "stranger" relevant to himself in the present. The sense of his being overwhelmed and overcome by the mutability of the present has led him to seek refuge in the hope promised by the lore; but the strategy of doing this repeats what he has done in the past and makes clear the analogy he may draw between his present condition and the past. By means of drawing this analogy,

he can grasp that the image, as he has regarded it in the past, promises to yield him disappointment, should he regard it in the same way. Yet, along with the word's durability comes a catachrestic nature of the word, he is able to intuit. Indeed, he seems to perceive that the very monumentality of the word may lie, paradoxically, in its apparently catachrestic nature: by means of it, he may re-create the image. He may reconstruct the image so as to make it relevant.[6]

Word use in this poem, then, could be conceived as an internalized echoic utterance that permits the speaker of the word to envision his earlier use and understanding of the word as ironic, whereupon he can perceive the opportunity and necessity of meaning's reconstruction. This might be easier to grasp if we consider an example of ironic echoic utterance in the context of conversation.

Let us suppose that a girl named Megan wants to set up her friend, Amy, with a boy named Andy. As she tries to persuade Amy of what a good idea this blind date is, Megan makes the comment that Andy "is really a terrific guy," and she does indeed persuade Amy to go on the date. It turns out that Andy is far less the gentleman, on this date, than Amy had expected he would be. The next time she sees Megan, Amy describes in gruesome detail all the things that happened during the date, and she concludes her account with the comment, "Yes, Megan, he really is a terrific guy." Her echo of Megan's formulation communicates how the image of

Andy as "a terrific guy" has proved ironic in the wake of Amy's experience with the boy.[7]

Coleridge's echoic appeal to the image of "stranger" works something like this, though the scenario is played out internally, and the attempt to use the word or have recourse to the image is what brings about the awareness of the image's ironic inadequacy, for the present, as it has been used in the past. An awareness of this irony, coupled with a perception of the image's enduring catachresis, provides the insight of the word's potential relevance. The present's reconstruction of the meaning for the word is the labor of relevance.

The lyric account of this labor is a principle concern of "Frost at Midnight": the poem lays claim to the struggle with what we can recognize easily enough as expressive discourse. In the face of the culture's insistence on embracing a descriptive discourse, Coleridge asserts the need for the expressive, but he admits to the problematics of doing so. Indeed, "insofar as the speaker's language [in the poem] remains bound to particulars, it stands to sacrifice imaginative penetration to unprincipled aggregation," as A. C. Goodson notes: "the numberless goings on of life," in such a circumstance, threaten to overwhelm. But when the speaker's language "remains true to the modifying impulse of imagination, it threatens to reduce its referential base to a 'toy of Thought,' something insubstantial in its plastic motility" (Verbal Imagination 124). The descriptive

discourse demanded by the culture is recognized by the speaker not merely as inadequate but as threatening to an operability of the human imagination. An embrace of expressive discourse is a necessary counter to the conventional inclination, but it is not utterly curative of the problems posed by descriptive discourse: it could be seen, perhaps, as merely replacing old problems with new ones.

In any case, the struggle remains in effect throughout the poem: the speaker does not work his way beyond it but deeper into it, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Further, the character of this struggle is not one of merely a disinterested philosophical conjecture; it is, as we have seen, motivated by fear felt at a deeply personal level: there are profound personal implications of the speaker's ability or lack of ability to renegotiate the meaning of the cultural image provided him. The irresolution of the struggle, by the poem's end, attests to the persistance of the motivating fear. Significantly, however, the fear has been rendered less visible, displaced as it has been by insistent wish. And while one might regard such wishing as a gesture of faith or of heroic determination, one must consider as well the prospect that the wishing serves as a repressive mechanism. The wish could, in its expression, serve as a means of denying the fear and creating the illusion, for others--or establishing the delusion, for the self--of having transcended the struggle.

So can we call what Coleridge describes in "Frost at

Midnight" enthusiasm, as Mellor might encourage us to do? To do so fails to appreciate the complexity of the fear involved, of which the apparent enthusiasm is a veiling manifestation, as we have been suggesting. Moreover, when we begin to re-conceive Mellor's concept of "Romantic irony" as a Romantic phenomenon in operation prior to its association with German philosophy, then we begin to sense that the term "irony" serves to anaesthetize the fear, or repress it. The term fits for one who would be inclined to envision Romanticism from the perspective of philosophy and its history, perhaps, but it rather dismisses the influence of the fear that we have been discussing. A strictly deconstructive approach to the matter would run into the same difficulty, even if it would appropriately conceive of the phenomenon as fundamentally linguistic.

The theoretical discourse best suited to a consideration of the fear and anxiety that I have been discussing would seem to be a predominantly psychoanalytic one informed by deconstruction. As the next step in my attempt to theorize Romantic fear, then, we might first turn to Kay Redfield Jamison, who, in her Touched By Fire, can be of help to us as we attempt to undertake our project.

In her 1994 book, Jamison suggests that virtually all the canonical Romantic writers were afflicted with bipolar or unipolar disorders. Sufficient evidence exists today, Jamison asserts, to indicate that all of these poets exhibited the symptoms by which manic-depression or depression

is today diagnosed: Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Blake quite probably suffered from bipolar II or cyclothymic disorder, and Wordsworth probably suffered from recurrent depression (63-71).

Jamison's claims seem to ring true as we recall the traditionally conceived, prominent, distinguishing features of the Romantic poets and compare these with symptoms indicative of manic-depression. Mellor notes that the poets tend to be concerned with

> the capacities and value of the creative imagination, with the limitations of language, with the relation of the perceiving subject to the perceived object, with the possibility of transcendence or apocalyptic vision, with the development of an autonomous self and the nature of self-consciousness, with political (as opposed to social) revolution, with the role of the creative artist as a political leader or religious savior. ("A Criticism" 31)

This is, it seems to me, a statement with which most critics would agree. When we place such a statement, though, next to an account of symptoms typically manifest in manic and hypomanic behavior, we find it difficult to resist drawing a correlation. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) lists among the symptoms indicative of manic or hypomanic behavior (a) an "inflated self-esteem or grandiosity"; (b) a "flight of ideas or subjective experience that thoughts are racing"; and (c) a persistent, compulsive urge to be "more talkative than usual," or a "felt pressure to keep talking" (163-64).

Inclined as one might be to undertake a psychoanalytic method of theorizing in response to such a perceived

correlation, however, there are problems associated with such an approach. The primary problem lies in the reductive character of the method, by means of which our tendency to classify and reduce the complexity of the Romantic voice impoverishes it, too, even if, in the process of our using the method, we manage to affirm our own delusional authority. In the tradition of Freud, we place ourselves in the position of analyst relative to the writers' positions as "patients," whose behaviors we profess to explain according to the tenets of psychoanalysis. We would see our patients as mentally afflicted, in some fashion or other, while conceiving ourselves to be healthy.

As we undertake the project of theorizing Romantic fear, then, we would do well to remind ourselves of the limitations and problems that such a psychoanalytic approach would involve. On the other hand, psychoanalysis does feature a concept that <u>can</u> be an instrument of questioning itself. This is the concept of countertransference, or the total response of an analyst, in a therapeutic setting, that complicitously accomodates the seemingly pathological behaviors of the patient. For Freud, such a responsiveness is problematic, since it involves an absorption, on the analyst's part, in a pathology, and so cooperates with and prolongs the condition that the analyst seeks to alter.[8] Hence, the analyst needs to "overcome" the condition of countertransference and reclaim his own authoritative position as healer, and this is for the

patient's good as much as the analyst's.

Seen in these terms, countertransference is the name of the psychoanalyst's susceptibility to loss of authority--whose naming offers a strategy by which that authority might be re-asserted. Countertransference is the narrative by which the failures of psychoanalysis to live up to its claims could be blamed on the patient's pathological non-cooperation.

If we can comprehend countertransference along these lines--as a narrative that seeks authority--then we can develop a willingness to relinquish our authority, as psychoanalytic readers, in such a way that we can at least entertain the stature of our "patients'" authority as equal to our own. A therapist's ability to do this would alter his procedure of posing questions to his patient such that the patient's answering may lead, teleologically, to a condition of improved psychological health; instead of posing questions whose genuinely interrogative character is dubious, he or she would honestly be asking, seeking to understand the patient's take on reality. Such asking willingly suspects the psychoanalytic inclinations to envision the patient as pathologically afflicted or psychologically deficient. And in a psychoanalytic situation where the label of "pathology" is constantly called into question, countertransference becomes an absorption of the analyst in the drama of relationship staged by the patient's narrative. From within this drama, the analyst can grasp

something of the relational needs and longings of the patient.

In the psychoanalytic scenario, this sort of countertransference is not the equivalent of a Romantic hermeneutic in a philosophical scheme, we might add; it resembles, rather, the limits of this hermeneutic's ambition: the analyst cannot come to occupy the consciousness of the patient, but can develop a sense of what the patient needs, expects, and desires of those with whom he would enter into relationship.

If, on Jamison's recommendation, we would conceive of Coleridge as manic-depressive, regard the fear of "Frost at Midnight" as in no small part arising from this condition, and choose to conceive of it in psychoanalytic terms, but do so by means of a psychoanalysis that questions its own authority by regarding countertransference as we have been describing it, then we will be open to observing what Coleridge wants us to be for him as readers of his testimony to fear. While we embrace psychoanalysis to help us understand the fear, we rather invert its procedure: instead of establishing a psychoanalytic space whose architecture derives from our methodological calculus, and take Coleridge into this realm, where we can examine him, we can conceive that Coleridge establishes the space and invites us to inhabit it. In this scenario, countertransference is not the narrative of Coleridge's subversion of his readers' authority so much as it is a role and an agency that Coleridge desperately hopes that the reader can fulfill.

(This is, I think, the role that Tilottama Rajan, in The Supplement of Reading, observes Coleridge to be designing in the invitation of readers he urges in the Conversation Poems).[9] Inhabiting the space of his relational design, we can hear Coleridge's appeal to us to understand and appreciate his fear, rather than simply to explain and dismiss it; and we can respect his plea for us to help him overcome the fear, even if we come to discern that we cannot help him, and do ourselves suffer from a comparable fear more than we had realized.

Such an endeavor to theorize the fear in "Frost at Midnight" results in an on-going process of asking about this fear and of wondering how it relates to the language that we use. It resists the aspiration to definitive proclamation, and instead attempts to express wonder about the fear in such a manner as to prolong our conversation about it.

Notes

1. See in particular Beer's essay, "Fragmentations and Ironies" (234-64) which concludes Questioning Romanticism (ed. John Beer).

2. Citations of "Tintern Abbey" are from Wordsworth, Poetical Works, and are hereafter indicated by line number.

3. Lewis Thomas makes this point in "The Medusa and the Snail," which appears in a volume of essays by the same name. See (1-5).

4. See in particular (10-17). The metaphor provided in this paragraph is generally a paraphrase of James's figure, though he uses an architect's blueprint to represent the epistemological mode of the subjunctive speaker.

5. Citations of Don Juan are taken from Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works. The numbers indicated refer to stanzas.

6. I owe this notion of relevance, as it is related to "monumentality" and "catachresis," to Michael Riffaterre ("Relevance of Theory / Theory of Relevance").

7. I am indebted to Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (Relevance: Communication and Cognition) for this notion of ironic echoic utterance as it relates to relevance. My example, too, is a permutation of theirs.

8. See Freud, Standard Edition 11: 141-51. We will discuss Freud's comments in greater detail in Chapter Four below, though the following passage may be worth repeating: "We have become aware of the 'counter-transference,' which arises in the physician as a result of the patient's influence on his unconscious feelings, and we are almost inclined to insist that he shall recognize his counter-transference in himself and overcome it" (11: 144).

9. See in particular (108-31).

CHAPTER THREE

COUNTERTRANSFERENCE IN THE WEDDING GUEST

Having considered, then, that a helpful means of questioning Romantic fear might be our undertaking a countertransferential agency encouraged by the Romantic poets, we must begin to consider what, precisely, such an agency requires. In seeking guidance, we could turn to the psychoanalytic literature, consider documented cases of countertransference that took place in response to pre-pharmacological psychoanalytic treatments of manic-depressive patients, then compare the accounts of the therapists who have described these cases with the encouragements to audience action that the Romantic writers provide. Doing so, however, might threaten the integrity of the enterprise undertaken thus far, which has sought to avoid the potential dangers of reductionism by resisting the inclination to conceive of countertransference along the lines of a traditional, unreflexive narrative. Our reading the therapeutic tradition's accounts of how manic-depressives typically behave, followed by our trying to correlate these with the Romantic poets' behaviors with respect to their audiences, threatens to reduce the complexity of the poets' relational behaviors in the name of the psychoanalytic reductionism.

An alternative means of seeking guidance as to what

sort of agency we ought to fulfill may lie in our considering the depiction of an apparently desirable audience, in the poems, relative to an apparently manic-depressive speaker. We get such a depiction in the Wedding Guest of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, I would argue, and we get a depiction of a manic-depressive speaker in the character of the Mariner. What we might attempt to do is observe the manner in which the Mariner treats the Guest, and the manner in which the Guest responds, then consider what sort of correlation might exist between this relational dynamic and the one described by clinicians as taking place between psychoanalysts and their patients.

Our undertaking such a procedure depends on our ability, though, to conceive of the plausibility, at least, that the Mariner resembles a manic-depressive speaker. Assuming that we can recall enough of the Mariner's behaviors, we may proceed immediately, in this case, to note a correlation between the clinical account of the manic-depressive and the behaviors of the Mariner: familiar as we are with the character of the Mariner, we need not fear that we are reducing the complexity of the behavior by conceiving of it according to the psychoanalytic narrative.

It may be helpful to acknowledge from the start, too, however, that our aim in noting the correlation is not really that of identifying the Mariner or Coleridge as manic-depressive, but of acquiring what glimpse of manic-depressive behavior we can prior to a full-fledged

association of it with those accounts that would envision it, pejoratively, as pathological. What we can discern, as we get a sense of the role we are to play as countertransferential agents, like the Guest, is that Coleridge effects a language critique by means of his cathecting his audience as countertransferential agents--in the manner that the Mariner cathects the Wedding Guest--though the dynamic of the countertransference he brings about differs, as it turns out, from Freud's account and from a relatively traditionalist account, such as Jamison would espouse.

Let us consider, first, then, the plausibility of conceiving of the Mariner as manic-depressive. While we can recognize that few manic-depressives look like the Mariner, we can recognize, too, how little a stretch it would be to regard the Mariner as a manic-depressive. He has the appearance of a prototypical schizophrenic street person, what with his hoary beard, his skeletal, skinny hands, his other-worldly gleaming eye, his behavior of hovering around the periphery of a social event to which he would never be invited, of detaining socially "acceptable" people by means of telling tales that have a psychotic character to them, and of demonstrating himself to be a "gray-beard loon." But our initial inclination to regard him as perhaps schizophrenic or psychotic is thwarted by the sense that his tale makes--in spite of its extraordinarily imaginative character--and the basic orderliness of his language. Such a "misdiagnosis" is common in one's encounter with a

manic-depressive, and may even serve as a suggestion of a more appropriate diagnosis, particularly when it is combined with the recognition of other, more telling symptoms.

The Ancient Mariner behaves like a hypomanic speaker. Certainly, he displays and acknowledges the persistent, compulsive urge to be "more talkative than usual," as well as a felt "pressure to keep talking" (DSM-IV 163-64). His encounter with and verbal entrapment of the Wedding Guest testify to this, and he confesses that

> I pass, like night, from land to land;
> I have strange power of speech;
> That moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me:
> To him my tale I teach. (586-90)[1]

His claims of supernatural experience and of such knowledge that he can assume the role of teacher and prophet, all the while exhibiting the look of a nineteenth century John the Baptist, speak to his claims of grandiosity, and we sense that the man is approaching some threshold wherein "thinking becomes fragmented and often psychotic. Paranoid, religious, and grandiose delusions are common, as are illusions and hallucinations" (Jamison 29). He does not inhabit the illusionary world of the psychotic, though; rather, he describes a world that bears some resemblance to our own, and his encounter with that world seems, disturbingly, to bear a resemblance to the encounter we must make with our own, less supernatural world.

Compulsively, the Mariner undertakes the project of teaching the Wedding Guest a lesson that is a tale. The

character of this tale and the means by which the Mariner teaches it are also indicative, as we shall see, of manic-depressive illness; but perhaps we may conclude, at this point, that aspects of the Mariner's behavior allow for at least the plausibility that Coleridge's character may be considered manic-depressive.

If we are ready to conceive of the Mariner as such, and so as one who is, by virtue of his tale, making grandiose claims of supernatural involvements, then we must consider the prospect that the supernaturalism of his tale is not what he wants his listener to pay attention to, in the long run. The point is, indeed, for the listener to regard the supernaturalism as insignificant and unnecessary to his appreciation for and acceptance of the manic-depressive speaker. The grandiosity manifested in the claims to supernatural experience are the means to an end which cannot be accomplished so long as the listener retains his beliefs in and admiration of the supernatural claims. Initially, the claims <u>are</u> aimed at garnering admiration and belief--unless the speaker can elicit such a response, he assumes, quite appropriately, that the listener will not pay attention to him and dismiss him as crazy--but once the listener is willing to stay and listen, the aim of the speaker becomes one of relational acceptance and understanding that can be experienced without the compulsive labor of grandiose posturing.

The Mariner uses the Wedding Guest to bring about this

dynamic. He captivates the Guest with his tale of a ghastly, supernatural voyage, but his aim, it turns out, is not to convince the Guest of the tale's factuality. The lesson he has to teach concerns language and the nature of the sign, as we shall see. He wants the Guest to appreciate the tale for its factitious nature rather than for its factuality, and he wants the supernatural to collapse into the figural for the Guest, such that the Guest can perceive the figurality of his own beliefs. When this conversion occurs, the Mariner and the Guest can experience a relationship based on a mutual acceptance of and respect for each other's language as figural and expressive. This end cannot be achieved, though, so long as the Guest continues to believe that the tale is factually supernatural.

The Mariner's aim of teaching his tale seems to have been accomplished in the poem's last 35 lines, where we can discern that the Guest is able, under the Mariner's tuteledge, to reconceptualize the nature of the sign. Here, the Wedding-Guest hears the call of custom: the din of the wedding celebration, the singing of the bride-maids, the ringing of the vesper bell that calls the Guest to prayer. He has been interrupted, by the Mariner, from his planned participation in the ceremony, and he must depart the old man's company, at this point, or he will miss out on his participation altogether. As the anxiety of the Guest rises in the face of this moment, so does that passionate intensity of the Mariner which has held captive the Guest's

attentions. Only at this point, really, does it become clear to us that the Mariner has wanted something more than the attention of a willing listener: he has wanted to prevent the Guest from participating in the ceremony. The indication that the Mariner's teaching of his tale has been accomplished comes, apparently, with the Guest's willingness to turn away from the bridegroom's door. The Mariner does not stay to see the Guest depart, of course, but, with bright eye and hoary beard, he finally stops talking and quits the company of the Guest.

When the Guest is listening to the appeal of the celebration sounds, the Mariner pleads with him to comprehend the implications of the tale:

> O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
> Alone on a wide wide sea:
> So lonely 'twas, that God himself
> Scarce seemed there to be. (597-600)

Having made this urgent testimony, the Mariner grows relaxed and apparently confident enough to lay claim to the applicability of his past experience to the present situation.

He declares that, for himself, who has been so alone as to feel abandoned by God, the engagement in conversation with another human being has become "sweeter"--more meaningful and fulfilling--than "the marriage feast," and, by implication, any such ritualized custom of social gathering.

Importantly, when the Mariner here refers to "the marriage feast" (601), he speaks as though the phrase has the same meaning for the Guest and him; yet the phrase does not have the same meaning: the Guest is, by invitation, to

be a participant in the ceremony to which the phrase supposedly refers, while the Mariner is not to be a participant. Grey-beard loon that he is, he has not been extended an invitation. His alienated relation to the ceremony makes his use of the phrase an abstracted generalization. He refers, with the phrase, not to this marriage feast, but to a generic marriage feast.

The Guest ought to be able to grasp the difference easily enough. The situation would be similar to one in which, say, one fellow says to another, "I must get to my gardening," and the friend replies, "I have no taste for gardening": the latter statement employs the gerund as an abstraction which refers to something different than the gerund of the first statement, which in turn refers to specific activities in a specific garden. The first speaker comprehends the difference at some level; he simply need not concern himself with it much, so long as the difference is unproblematic.

The Wedding-Guest of Coleridge's poem does indeed recognize the difference between his understanding of "the marriage feast" and the Mariner's understanding of it; his capacity to grasp this difference seems to be the very thing that prompts him to turn his back on the Bride-groom's door. We do not know, precisely, how the Guest reformulates his understanding, but we certainly get the sense that he abstracts himself from the customary understanding of the ceremony and so aligns himself, to some degree, with the

abstracted conceptualization of the Mariner.

"The marriage feast" then means or can mean something more than what he or his fellow guests have supposed. The phrase is seemingly polysemic, and the variations of its meaning seem to be related to the degree of social connectedness or alienation of the person using the term. The Mariner is clearly not an invited guest, and so is alienated from the feast and comprehends it in a unique, abstracted way. But what degree of social connection does a "guest" enjoy? Is he not less connected than the bride and groom? And if he is in some degree alienated from the feast, does this suggest that "the marriage feast" means something other than what it does to the bride and groom? What <u>does</u> it mean, the Guest must suddenly begin to wonder? What does it mean to him, and what does it mean to the bride and groom? The very ceremony or celebration that is supposed to be a ritual of communion, an activity that is to serve as a foundation of community construction, suddenly becomes the antithesis of such: it establishes discord, disunity, a hierarchy of understanding which renders those who are drastically disconnected from it to be regarded as grey-beard loons and those minimally disconnected--guests, for example--as at least potentially inferior.

The variation in meaning, an implied indeterminacy, is all the more frightening a prospect in this case because of the assumption that "the marriage feast" means "communal prayer," a participation in a communication with the Deity

for Divine blessings on the couple to be married. If the meaning of this becomes polysemic, then what limit can there be on the analogies drawn to it?[2] To the extent that the Wedding Guest regards "the marriage feast" from the perspective of the Mariner, he can conceive it to be a deluded conviction of faith and trust that the prayer is a unified voice which constitutes a communication with a transcendent Power who can and will protect human life and its continuance (through the marriage). If the Guest conceives that "the marriage feast" features such characteristics or fulfills such a function, he can draw an analogy between "the marriage feast" and the Albatross of the Mariner's tale.

This is precisely what the Mariner wishes the Guest to do: the Guest's drawing this analogy is the object of the tale that the Mariner hopes to "teach." What follows from the construction of the analogy, after all, is the recognition, on the Guest's part, that the Mariner's mission is to "kill" "the marriage feast." This, the Guest comes to recognize, is the point of the Mariner's apparent compulsion to repeat his tale in various situations, to various people. The old man wanders the world, discovering people's willingness to pin their hopes on signs, symbols that they've constructed and come to trust as supposed mediatory vehicles for converse with a Divine Power or for immersion in transcendental truth. The Mariner may not have understood why he shot the Albatross, but he understands, now, why he labors

to destroy, for people like the Guest, their delusory beliefs. Such understanding is, after all, what allows the Mariner to know when his teaching has been accomplished with respect to the Guest: he knows when his tale is concluded and when he may bid the Guest farewell. He knows that the Guest will reject the sign of "the marriage feast" as "prayer," will turn from the bridegroom's door and, like one stunned and forlorn of sense, refuse an unreflective participation in the conventionally acceptable behavior or the ritual.

The culmination of the tale, the lesson on prayer, has been a decisive step in the accomplishment of the Mariner's task. And while this might seem improbable to us at first, since this part of the lesson seems so straightforward and trite, it does make sense. In relation to the tale and to the analogy that the tale provokes, the lesson on prayer is far more substantive than it at first appears to be.[3]

"Prayer" takes place, the Mariner suggests, in the communication between people, beyond the boundaries of any church or customary ritual. This seems unsurprising enough, and typically Romantic, in traditional terms, in its rebellion against traditional beliefs and faith practices. But the lines in which the Mariner establishes his hierarchy for the quality of prayer are a different story. "He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast," declares the Mariner; and "He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small" (612-15). The line break

of the first declaration, regarding the comparative degree of quality prayer, disguises for just a second the transitive character of the verb in the subordinate clause. The object of this person's loving is rendered ambiguous by the grammar and lack of punctuation--"both" suggests that the object is double, which implies that the "man and bird and beast" triplicate is to be considered as two subsets, and the lack of commas permit "bird" to be grouped with "man" and with "beast" simultaneously--but the verb clearly does take an object. As it modifies this transitive verb, the adverb "well" undergoes a change in semantic function. In the main clause of the sentence, "well" modifies "prayeth," and refers back to the subject, "he," such that the hierarchy of quality prayer is established in terms of the performer of the action: this one prays, but this other one, by comparison, prays <u>well</u>. In the subordinate clause, when the verb becomes transitive, the same adverb functions with partial but unmistakable reference to the object. If a man says that he loves his siblings, but he loves one sister <u>well</u>, he is still performing the action, but the emphasis of comparison is less on his qualitatively improved performance of loving than it is on the apparently unique attractiveness of the sister whom he loves. The man who prays well, then, distinguishes himself, by comparison with other people, by <u>not</u> distinguishing himself, and, instead, by treasuring the objects of his love, which become less and less discriminately chosen.

In the case of the superlative prayer performance, the adverb "best" again modifies the transitive verb, but it functions in such a manner as to confuse the logic of the hierarchy it helps establish. The man who prays the best, of all other men, is the one who loves all equally, indifferently. The line break after "best" (614) makes the declaration sound as though "the man prays best who loves best," but this reading would feature a disregard for the object of the love and therefore for the transitive nature of the verb. The parallel structure of this proclamation with that of the previous two lines--a structure fashioned by the Mariner--ought to discourage us from reading this way; but even if we refuse this assistance, we are confronted with the problem of how to regard the grammatical role of line 615, "All things both great and small." How can we regard this phrase, other than as grammatically objective? Still, though, what logical sense does it make to "love all best"? It doesn't, really; what the Mariner is suggesting as making sense is how the act of loving deconstructs the establishment of hierarchy. Loving, envisioned at its limit, does not function to select, but to gather, without discrimination, into free relationality; it cannot love one more than another, but loves all equally and "best." Those who would select a mode of relating to God, or to Beauty, or to Truth, and conceive that this mode is preferable or better than others, and then regard those who engage in the mode as acceptable, while regarding those

who do not as, say, "grey-beard loons," seem to be wrong-headed and guided by an illusory hope that is as fundamentally superstitious as the hanging of one's hopes on an Albatross.

Now as the Guest is able, under the Mariner's tutelage, to construct an analogy between the Wedding and the Albatross, analogy becomes metaphor, and the Guest comes to recognize that he, like the Mariner's crew, is to choose between placing his faith in this Albatross of cultural habit, the Wedding ritual, or not. In addition, he determines his prospects to be frightfully bleak: he is destined, apparently, to be won over by Death, like the crew, or to be won by Life-in-Death, like the Mariner. He seems to have a choice over which destiny will ultimately be his, according to the choice he makes as to his persistence of belief in the Wedding custom. Those who would trust in a sign such as a Wedding ritual as something more than a social convention--as a "prayer," for instance, that establishes a relation with and persuasive control over a transcendental signified--are destined for Death, for epistemological anguish and for the ultimate, ironic disintegration of the social fabric that comes from convictions of claims on Truth and the ensuant construction of those hierarchies by which "man and bird and beast" may be accepted or rejected. The alternative to this fate, however, embodied in the vagrant Mariner, is not very attractive either: Life-in-Death. One may be free of the illusions of the sign as referring to a

supposed Transcendental Signified, a Real Presence, but what then? What can one do but wander through the world and devote oneself to pointing out people's deluded beliefs? Is this, or can this be, life-giving? These are the questions that become the Guest's, and the only hint of an answer he has to any of them is the enigma of the Mariner, who seems to be--if appearances serve as any indication--nothing more than a half-mad street-person. Still, what are appearances now, for the Guest, in the new order of belief that he embraces? The Guest doesn't know: he is utterly baffled, stunned, and saddened, even as he may be wiser.

Now, if the Mariner has prompted the Guest to draw the analogy between the Albatross and the Wedding, it would seem that the Mariner has already drawn the analogy himself. His lesson has consisted in the encouragement of the Guest's drawing the analogy. If the Mariner has drawn the analogy himself, then he conceives of the Albatross as polysemic, according to the function of his imagination. Indeed, as he has, by his own admission, taught his tale before, to other people--who, apparently like the Guest, are inclined to subscribe to a delusional faith in the conventional sign, yet are capable of rejecting that faith as well--then the Mariner has presumably conceived of the Albatross as analogically related to signs other than "the marriage feast." In his mind, the Albatross stands for, represents, <u>means</u> any sign that people are willing to regard as exclusively indicative of Truth or of a Transcendental Signified. Unless

the Albatross has such a polysemic character, in fact, it can't be related to "the marriage feast" and all the other signs it has come to represent in the history of the Mariner's teaching.

But note what happens if the Albatross features this polysemy: the central meaning of "Albatross" becomes insignificant, if such a meaning can be said to exist at all. If we take the Albatross to mean a bird that really escorted the Mariner's ship, and we so take the whole of the Mariner's tale as literally true, in his experience, then either the Mariner is psychotic or Coleridge's poem is meant to regard supernatural phenomena. The fact is that if the Albatross can be polysemous, if the meaning of the word tends to diverge rather than converge around some original reference, and it serves the purpose of providing a sense of the polysemous potential of the signs to which it is recognized to be analogous, then the literal reality of the Albatross, the factuality of the bird, makes no difference. The Guest need not believe that the Mariner had the supernatural experience he describes: the whole story could and may well be figural. The point is that he can meet the Mariner in the region of metaphor: the divergence of meaning in the lives of both men becomes their common ground.

If the Mariner's experience of the Albatross, in its polysemous divergence, meets the Guest's experience of "the marriage feast" in its meaning-divergence, though, then the experience of each man converges in the divergence of each.

And to the extent that the alternative experiences become the same, then each man becomes something of the other. Individual identities are lost.

And of course all this happens to readers of the poem as well, to the extent that they draw an analogy between their own experience of trust in the sign as revelatory of a Transcendental Signified and the experience of the Guest, and the experience of the Mariner. Readers of the poem, exposed to the tale of the Mariner, to the implied analogy drawn by the Mariner and the Guest, and to Coleridge's construction of all this, find themselves on the common ground of divergent meaning; they imagine the Mariner's and Guest's and Coleridge's experience to somehow be their own, and so imagine their identities to be obliterated--perhaps absorbed into a Oneness of Being, but without guarantee or firm evidence of this.

Such an experience sounds like an experience of the sublime, perhaps: an aesthetic or contemplative experience prompted by Coleridge's poetic labors. This is one interpretation, and one that we've been encouraged by tradition to make. Categorizing the experience as such, however, persuades us to think of it as a mode of being that is somehow mystically disengaged from normal experience. And as poetry brings such a condition about, it ought to be regarded as a kind of communication that indulges in and invites a seemingly metaphysical engagement. Seen thus, poetry can be considered as anti-utilitarian and even

escapist. To envision a poem like The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as such, however, is to lose sight of the poem as a socially engaged communication that, in extraordinarily intimate terms, perhaps, registers a critique of language. This is what I have been suggesting all along in claiming that the Mariner's lesson regards the nature of the sign. By means of the poem and the Mariner's tale, Coleridge recognizes for his readers the problems involved in misconceiving the nature of the sign. Anguished, anxious, and fearful, he attempts to discern a nature of the sign that admits to the apparent groundlessness of meaning and that can accomodate the divergent character of meaning associated with each sign. He wages an argument against a Lockean tradition that, by means of an allegiance to descriptive discourse, would assert the existence of "correct" meanings associated with signs, would judge that specific signs were grounded in and correctly represented absolute truths. His exhortation consists in the proclamation that it is better to acknowledge a fundamental lack of certainty surrounding the sign than it is to believe in and seek out a certainty that is false. To lack certainty, however, and to lack the possibility of attaining certainty while at the same time longing for it is devastating. It is like surviving in a condition of death, like being won over by "Life-in-Death"; and it is just slightly preferable to being lost to Death.

What can one do, in the wake of becoming wiser about

the nature of the sign, and therefore becoming saddened and stunned? How does one go about living? One's recourse, Coleridge seems to suggest, is to live in the manner of the Mariner. In what manner is this, exactly? It seems to be one of accepting the condition of a repetition compulsion wherein one narrates the story of one's existence over and over again, elaborating on its meaning--extending the range of its polysemy--by drawing analogies between the perceived life-experiences of others or of the self with others and the present interpretation of one's own past. The recourse is to engage, interminably, in the expressive labor of re-formulating images--as the lyric speaker of "Frost at Midnight" does with "stranger"--or in the conduct of what we might consider a hermeneutic calculus, which, momentarily, we can more fully discuss.

For now, let us assume that the Mariner's "teaching" of his tale--which turns out to be a demonstration of expressive action--is conducted in a manner that is quite consistent with symptomatic manic-depressive behavior. The grandiose posturing of claimed supernatural experience masks the primary endeavor of gaining an audience who is capable of comprehending and appreciating the alienation experienced by having to think and use language differently than the majority of a culture which embraces and engages in a descriptive discourse.

No less than the content of the tale, the method by means of which the tale is taught also correlates with

manic-depressive behavior. It is a method of manipulation by means of which the Mariner exploits the attentiveness of the Guest. This does not preclude the possibility that the Guest can gain some benefit from his being exploited, however, as we shall see. What the Guest learns from his exposure, in effect--and what we readers learn as well--is that the repetition compulsion of the Mariner to tell his "ghastly tale"--can serve as a compelling metaphoric assertion that narrative engagement fashions a hermeneutic phenomenology which can be both soothing and disturbing to those who would regard it as real.

Toward the end of the tale that he relates to his Wedding Guest auditor, the Mariner describes his request, made to the Hermit, that he might be shrieved. In response, the Hermit had demanded that the Mariner answer the question, "'What manner of man art thou?'" (577). The Mariner says that he fairly convulsed at the prospect of fulfilling this task, but that the agony he felt compelled him to tell the story of his life, and this, in turn, alleviated his suffering:

> Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
> With a woful agony,
> Which forced me to begin my tale;
> And then it left me free. (578-81)

The Mariner is quick to note that his relief from the agony has proved impermanent:

> Since then, at an uncertain hour,
> That agony returns:
> And till my ghastly tale is told,
> This heart within me burns. (582-85)

Compulsively, repeatedly, he has sought out the kind of person who betrays a willingness to listen to the tale.

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

The appropriate auditor, who, like the present Wedding Guest, both participates in social custom and is ready to step away from it, makes possible for the Mariner a narrative expansiveness that allows for the attainment of a perspective from which the Mariner can perform an integration of the ideological function that has shaped his life.

I use the terms "integration" and "function" in the mathematical sense: the heuristic construct I am deploying here is founded on integral calculus. The Mariner's proclaimed experience is that narrative, for him at least, both establishes and preserves a distance from an engagement with social convention. This distance allows him a perspective from which he may conceive of a function that relates, say, change in cultural context with change in ideology, or the manner of embrace of that context. This is not to say that he actually steps out of or transcends his cultural context or his ideological persuasion; he does so in an imaginative fashion, all the while continuing to contribute to the construction of context and ideology; but the perspective of the narrative provides him with a sense of control over the fashioning of the function he observes.

In effect, the vision that the narrative perspective

allows is something like Figure 1 on the page following. I hasten to emphasize the heuristic nature of this model, however. The primary emphasis of it is the perceived relation between the change of the culture and one's complicity with that change. The model suggests that such a relation is quantifiable, capable of being manipulated by mathematical scheme: how might this be the case?

Since the dynamic we are describing is lived experience--not some kind of abstracted formula--then the notion of quantity we might normally have must be slightly reconceived. In the context of the model, "quantity" might be conceived as "time accumulation," or as a Heidegerrian Dasein, and it exists, as such, only as one comes to regard him or herself as existing within the dynamic. The "quantity" of the model, as "time accumulation" or Dasein then, derives from the perspective that narrative allows.

As we observe in Figure 1, we are in the relative position of the narrator. The narrative act operates, then, in a dimension other than the change of cultural context and the change of ideology, as suggested by Figure 2 below.

Movement along the narrative axis makes possible the perception of the ideological function with respect to cultural context. This is not to say that narrative activity abstracts itself from or transcends either ideology or cultural context: it provides, for its narrator, the sense of doing so even while it remains grounded in and serves to constitute both. It is part of the multi-dimensional

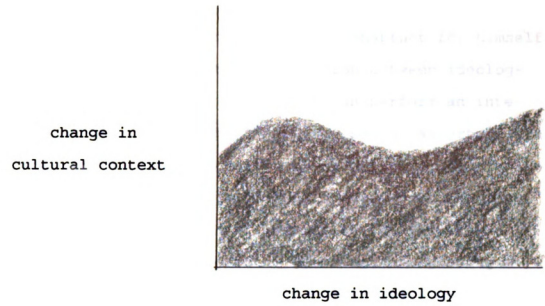


Figure 1

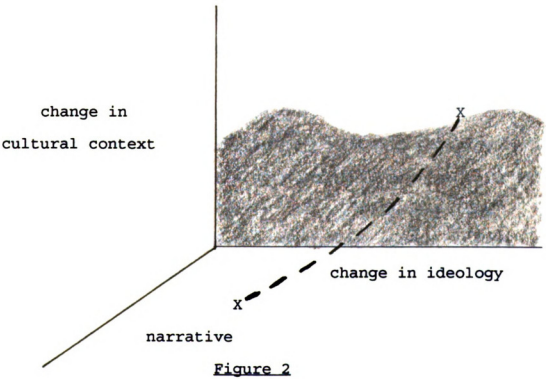


Figure 2

function that is the inescapable condition of human "being."[4]

To the extent that a narrator can construct for himself an understanding of a functional relation between ideological change and contextual change, he can perform an integration upon the function he observes. He can ascertain the area, that is, underneath the curve: he can comprehend or understand, and so possess a kind of mastery over the ideological function, though this function is the result, we recall, of narrative-perception. He is not integrating a true, objectively real ideology, in other words, but one of his own formulation. By means of the integration, he determines the area beneath the curve at each point along the curve, and adds each of these calculations together. The process requires him to calculate the limit of the function, from the values of zero time, to infinite time. (The determination is meant to be good for all time, and so is projected indefinitely, infinitely, into the future):

$$\int_{t=0}^{\infty} f \text{ (ideology) } dt$$

What does such "integration" look like in Coleridge's rendition, though? I would suggest that we see evidence of the integration in the Mariner's tale. The tale is one comprised of images so fantastic that they appear to have been generated by a madman. The images seem to make sense, though, in some bizarre allegorical way, as they are gathered into a plot. They are worth paying attention to, as the Wedding Guest, in listening, demonstrates: they are

worth one's turning away from habits of customary semiological persuasions and being led into an apparently alternative semiological realm, via narrative.

Because of his physical appearance, first of all, the Mariner stands in striking contrast to the environment of the wedding. He is enough of an aberration in the sign system of the wedding custom to merit the appellation "gray-beard loon" from the Guest, and his "long grey beard and glittering eye" prompt our own regard for him as, perhaps, a schizophrenic homeless man. He's not been invited to this affair, certainly, and he hovers around its borders as a threat to its integrity. While others present at the function are presumably able to dismiss him as nothing more than a nuisance, however, the Guest, who is destined to become the audience of the tale, stops and pays attention. He is, we gather, repulsed by the long grey beard, by the interference that the Mariner poses, by the skinny hand that holds him, by the apparent looniness of the Mariner; but this very repulsion seems to attract him, too. The eye, glittering, seems both a sign of madness and unusual insight that appears, in suggestive contrast to the dull eyes of all the others hypnotized by the habit of ceremony, to be remarkable. The Guest falls under the sway of a new spell, one marked by difference, uniqueness, and freshness, rather than one marked by anaesthetic repetition. He becomes entranced by a new, fantastic system of representation that features seas of ice, an albatross, ghosts, and sea-snakes.

This new system of signs is perfectly consistent with the physical appearance of the man who introduces it: it is the system of a seeming schizophrenic. When deployed in the context of a plot that involves a journey, a seeming descent into a hell, and some kind of spiritual regeneration, however, the seeming madness comes to have much sense. The Mariner tells his story and, in doing so, proclaims for the Guest the narrative distancing, from the entanglements of customary ideologies, that can allow the analogical integration to be fashioned between "wedding" and "albatross." The fact of the Mariner's repeated tellings of his story, however, suggests that a similar kind of analogy has been and can be drawn between the "albatross" of the Mariner's narrative and any number of other signs upon which people have been willing to pin their hopes as signs of transcendental connectedness. This means that the Mariner's construction of the analogy somehow involves the integration of all those instances of his history in which he has taught his tale and, for that matter, the instances of the future in which he will tell it. The idea of "albatross," as it is presented in the tale, can represent any instance of a sign's mediatory status being denied or minimized. As the Guest can come to recognize the broad applicability of "albatross," he can conceive that the sign itself is empty or may as well be: the referential specificity of the sign does not matter. Whether or not the Mariner's tale is true, or supernatural, or is the product of psychotic delusion

matters less than the fact that it has potential meaning, appearing as it does in the context of the Mariner's narrative and compared with other signs and people's readiness to venerate them. The lesson that the Mariner teaches the Guest, then, is the malleable nature of the sign, or its fragmentary (catachrestic?) character, which is, of course, the very character that the Lockean tradition would hope to deny, circumvent, or overcome.

This is not to say that the Mariner is a prophetic figure who has so mastered his subjectivity that he comprehends truths that others do not, and is able to divulge these truths. He may be able to recognize and point out a kind of bad faith that he sees in others, but he does not have a consoling replacement of belief that can take the place of what he destroys. He is compelled to tell his story over and over again, and he requires the appropriate kind of audience in order to do so. This does not seem like a person who exhibits a vatic subjectivity.

What sort of audience is it that the Mariner requires, though, and why does he require this sort? The character of the Mariner's "subjectivity," such as it is, seems to be associated with the receptiveness that such a one can offer, so the questions seem like worthwhile ones to ask ourselves. The Guest is, first of all, caught up in the habit of joining in the performance of customary ritual. He seems given to passive, unquestioned compliance with custom. Despite his rootedness or connectedness in the culture,

however, he is also sufficiently open-minded or vulnerable enough to be attracted to a "glittering eye" which has apparently beheld such visions or gained such enlightenment that it testifies to an existence more astounding than the one most people seem to be experiencing.

This is just the sort of audience that the Mariner requires in order to tell his tale. The Guest embodies and represents the Mariner's point of narrative departure. In the Guest, the Mariner can see a projection of himself as contiguous with the cultural context-ideology function, envision that connected condition as "other," and depart, as it were, along the narrative axis (See Figure 3 on the page following). The Guest is the foundation upon which the Mariner can build the narrative edifice from which he will be able to draw the analogy between the wedding and the Albatross, perceive the function that connects all the other manifestations of "Albatrosses," and perform the hermeneutic calculus that assimilates all into a perceived totality as large as reality itself. The performance of the calculus leads to and becomes the experience of something like "the sublime," and it is made possible by the Guest who stays and listens.

The encounter between the Mariner and the Guest is very much like a psychoanalytic one, with one very significant difference: no psychoanalyst is present expecting that a predetermined process will take place. The psychoanalytic

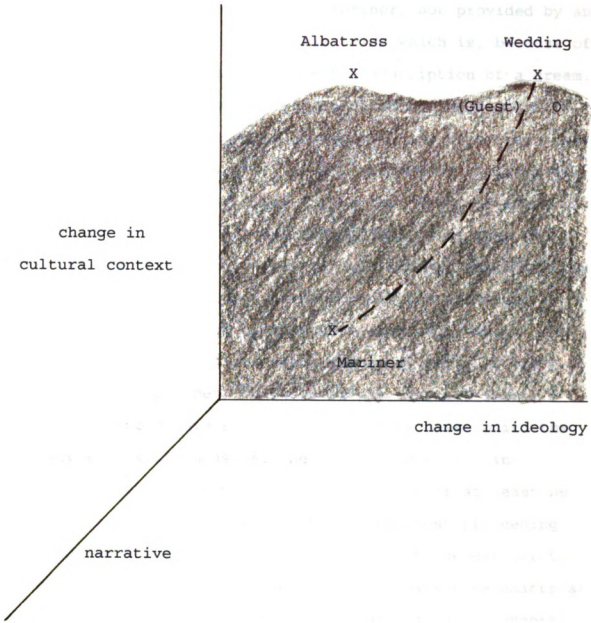

Albatross
Wedding
X
X
(Guest)
O
change in
cultural context
X
Mariner
change in ideology
narrative

Figure 3

space is the interchange between the two men, and it is established and dominated by the Mariner, not provided by an analyst. The Mariner relates his tale, which is, because of its supernatural character, like the description of a dream. The orderliness of the tale, accentuated by the regular rhythms and rhymes, keeps us from conceiving of the speech as a free association; yet, if what prompts the telling of the tale is the Mariner's sense that the "Wedding" about to take place is like the "Albatross" of his past, then the whole of the speech may be seen as the kind of verbal reflex that free association is. In psychoanalysis, the free association is governed by an unconscious order that ideally may be brought to consciousness by means of the speech made to another, which is to say that the free association does have an observable orderliness to it: the analyst's task is to assist the patient or client in discussing it and, as possible, restructure or at least be aware of it. The Mariner's sight of the Guest proceeding to the wedding triggers the compulsive urge of the Mariner to detain the Guest and tell the tale. The narrative enacts a regression, wherein the Mariner can imaginatively inhabit the familiar landscape of his past, compulsive interpretations, and transferentially cathect the Guest in the process. Importantly, the Guest is both connected to the culture--he has been invited and is planning to attend the wedding--<u>and</u> he is vulnerable to the spell that the Mariner casts by the tale. This makes the Guest the perfect

countertransferential agent.

The role that the Guest is to play, as such an agent, apparently involves two steps. First, he must become sufficiently entranced by the tale to listen and allow its fantastic content to be a part of his imagination. He need not buy into its factuality, but marvel, complicitly, at the wondrous reality of its existence, even if the whole of it is an imaginative construct. Sharing this imaginative landscape, inhabiting this psychoanalytic space, the Guest can perceive the calculus that the Mariner conducts so as to draw the analogy between the "Wedding" and his "Albatross." If the Mariner projects himself onto the Guest and permits the enactment of narrative distanciation, this projection seems, simultaneously, to enable the Guest to engage in a reciprocal projection of his own, in which he can share in the Mariner's narrative distance without actually inhabiting it. This brings the Guest to the second step, which is that of constructing his own reciprocal analogy between the "Albatross" of the tale and the "Wedding" to which he has been invited. By means of this construction, the Guest valorizes the imaginative labors of the Mariner by recognizing their applicability to the cultural situation. In doing so, he renders insignificant any questionable factualities contained in the tale: whether or not an "Albatross" existed as such makes no difference; what does make a difference is that the "Albatross" exists as a figure whose indeterminate meaning permits the construction of such

analogies as may enrich people's lives by bringing them to an awareness of the dream world they would inhabit. If we imagine the Mariner to be a manic-depressive sufferer who at times approaches psychotic delusion, we can recognize that what he achieves, by means of his interchange with the Guest, is a dismissal of his psychosis as insignificant, and an acceptance of what he has to say as valuable cultural critique. The receptivity of the Guest is the means by which the Mariner may feel a connectedness to and an acceptance by the culture.

The "acceptance" achieved is not something that promises to last, however. The Mariner and the Guest part company, and the Mariner is doomed to a life of having to tell his tale again and again. His is the task of winning acceptance by means of compulsively undertaken redundancy.

If the cycle from ideological enmeshment to narrative distanciation to cultural bondedness that becomes ideological enmeshment occurs by means of an encounter with a sign like "Wedding," then the whole of the anguished existence that the Mariner leads seems to have its basis in language and in a problematic relation between the nature of the sign and the longings or expectations that human beings have for that nature. The poem itself seems to be both a contemplation of and a critical commentary on this relation. The critique cannot be waged in language that professes the very thing it hopes to challenge: the Lockean expectation, that is, that words may refer, in a one-to-one correspondance, to

transcendental facts. Rather, the language must admit to its own limitations. For Coleridge to recognize, for his reader, that a word such as "Albatross" is essentially figural, for example, would be to profess, in bad faith, that he could name the nature of the word in fact. But this is the bad faith of the Lockean tradition, the inclination he hopes to challenge; he must therefore demonstrate or highlight the essentially figural character. He does not claim to be using a different, poetic language in order to do this--unlike what Wordsworth would purport to do--but seeks to use the only language people have in a fashion that seems more responsible than are the alternative contemporary attempts to use it.

To recognize The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as a critical commentary on language is to affirm the argument that A. C. Goodson makes in Verbal Imagination: Coleridge is more interested in waging a language critique, at this early stage of his writing career, than we have tended to acknowledge. I have been concerned here with recognizing how the manic-depressive condition might have prompted the interest, inclined that interest to approach an obsessive intensity, and prompted a compulsive effort to disguise that obsessive intensity by means of a vatic posturing. To acknowledge Coleridge's manic-depression may well be to conceive of a disposition that would lead to an interest or pre-occupation with transcendental speculations, aesthetic theory, Kantian epistemology, and subjectivity: the influence of the mental

condition would, quite conceivably, lead in that direction from an obsessive concern over language, and it would enlist others to be persuaded that this was Coleridge's destiny. The bipolar Coleridge wants others to conceive of him as a vatic transcendental speculator, they do indeed accept him as such, and he steps into the role that he has asked others to assign to him. This occludes the compulsive questioning over language, which is more humbling and debilitating; and, in the eyes of a culture bent on building an empire and mastering the world by means of scientific and technological endeavor, it is less heroically respectable or admirable. The bipolar Coleridge has wanted us to forget his orientation of compulsive questioning, and we have gone a long way to honoring his wishes.

Jamison encourages us to do so no longer, and so, in effect, lends support to Goodson's encouragement that we recognize Coleridge's endeavors to wage a critique of language, even from his earliest writings. The manic-depressive factor would, moreover, support the contentions that Goodson makes with respect to the kind of critique that Coleridge undertakes. The other Romantic writers do not engage in the same kind of critique that Coleridge does, but they do exhibit a passionate intrigue with language that correlates with their mental conditions; and if we concede that every one of these writers suffered from bipolar or unipolar disorder, and did so in the cultural context of late-eighteenth century and early nineteenth century

England, then we may be inclined to envision Romanticism as a phenomenon unified--or integrated by us as we try to conceive of it--in no small part by the unipolarity or bipolarity of the writers in reaction to the emergent cultural faith in descriptive discourse and the ideology of empiricism. Goodson considers that we might regard Romanticism as "a cult of depression" ("Frankenstein" 20). Beer, averse as he is to the attempt of envisioning Romanticism as a unified phenomenon, recommends that we regard "it," with appropriate paradox, as "a site of questioning" ("Fragmentations" 264). Jamison encourages us to wonder, however, what the character of this questioning might be, given the compulsivities that might be driving it. Perhaps we might want to consider, pursuant to Jamison, that Romanticism might be a site of recursively attempted and failed integrations of signs, conducted according to a hermeneutical calculus compulsively undertaken. The poems themselves, subsequently, become the psychic cognates of such a site, and serve as the presentation of the mind's landscape or the "environment of the mind," as Goodson would have us think of it ("Frankenstein" 20).

Readers, like the Wedding Guest in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, are conscripted for the purpose of serving as countertransferential agents, though the role we are prompted to fill is not quite the one that Freud theorizes, as we shall see in the next chapter. Our continued estimation of Coleridge's poem as supernatural and our

continued inclination to take seriously the grandiose posturing of the poet testifies to our persistent entrapment in the countertransferential role. We can step out of this role by appreciating the poet's fundamental concern and struggle with language, which is precisely what Coleridge, as manic-depressive, would ultimately desire us to do. Importantly, however, we cannot take this step without having first undertaken the role.

Notes

1. Excerpts from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner are taken from the text in The Complete Poetical Works and are indicated by line number.

2. I do sense, then, that Coleridge is confronting the tensions between the conceptualizations of mediation that Derrida and Ricoeur would verbalize--in terms of dissemination, distanciation, and differance, as well as "mediation" --in the twentieth century. My sense will become more apparent when, later in this chapter, I conceive of Coleridge's suggestion of a phenomenological, hermeneutical calculus constituting the Mariner's tale.

3. In Coleridge, Bate de-emphasizes the significance of the lines. He contends that readers ought not "pluck" the lines "from their dramatic context," but recognize that the lines contribute to the "real message," which is the tale itself (65). In effect, Bate tends to dismiss the lines. I agree that the tale does constitute the lesson, but that these lines have more substance and lend more force to the lesson than Bate is willing to acknowledge.

4. If Coleridge does encourage us to conceive of such a heuristic model as the one I propose, then he does, I think, invite us to confront the tensions between the accounts of mediation that would later be formulated by Derrida and Ricoeur. Such a contention deserves more

substantiation than I am willing to devote to it here, but I would refer the reader to Leonard Lawlor's Imagination and Chance: The Difference Between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida for a consideration of the point. One excerpt may be helpful here: ". . . mediation for Ricoeur is content-based, continuous, imaginative, dialectical negativity; mediation for Derrida is formal, discontinuous, aleatory, dissemination affirmation" (125). "For Ricoeur . . . distanciation (one of the many names he gives to mediation) is a dialectical concept; it attempts to articulate mediation in terms of its origin and end. This means on the one hand for Ricoeur that the immediate, the present, identity, and continuity are prior to mediation, absence, difference, and discontinuity. On the other, the dialectical character of distanciation implies that mediation functions as a passage from and back to the present. For Ricoeur, our singular experiences of the world always distance and transcend themselves into repeatable structures such as discourse. As Ricoeur points out repeatedly, because discourse originates in the world, all expressions are about or refer back to the world. They return to our belonging-to-the-world, to thought, to spirit, to being. Even novel constructions such as symbols and metaphors refer because they are imaginative expressions of new experiences of the world. While new imaginative expressions prevent complete understanding, incompleteness makes us, as Ricoeur says, "think more." While the surplus produced by distanciation always makes

mediation incomplete, surplus is nevertheless intelligible. The interpretation of discourse then, according to Ricoeur, should lead to some idea of the diverse ways being is said. Reflection and self-understanding can be maintained as a task. Consequently, distanciation is regulated by the always receding horizon of complete identity. Even as it spirals, the circle, for Ricoeur, should close. . . . If Ricoeur's hermeneutics must be seen as the recovery of the most generous instances of metaphysics, then deconstruction must be conceived as an attempt to be more generous. Deconstruction gives not for the sake of a purpose (of some postponed telos), but merely for the sake of giving. In other words, lacking a horizon, it lets an impossible accident happen. By means of such donations, deconstruction attempts to break a path beyond any analogy of being, any regulated polysemy. It cannot, therefore, be seen as the recovery, return, or repetition of an original project, of some possibility forgotten by the metaphysical tradition. . . . The difference, therefore, between Ricoeur and Derrida, between hermeneutics and deconstruction, between distanciation and differance, is a difference between imagination and chance, between presence and absence, between zigzag circulation and spiraling circularity, and finally between revived philosophy and perverted philosophy. Because the similarities, however, are striking, the difference becomes almost invisible. The similarities between Ricoeur and Derrida, the similarities between hermeneutics and deconstruction in

general and not simply limited to works of Ricoeur and Derrida, could inspire a hybrid, an assimilation of hermeneutics and deconstruction (or vice versa)" (3-5).

CHAPTER FOUR

COUNTERTRANSFERENCE IN MANIC-DEPRESSION: THE LABOR OF THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

While we ought not propose to diagnose the Ancient Mariner as manic-depressive, we may want to review the criteria by which one may be, by a psychiatrist, so diagnosed, and use these criteria to either bolster or reject our suspicions. To the degree that we may strengthen our suspicions, we obtain further warrant for considering that the Wedding Guest fills the corresponding, complementary role of countertransferential agent. We may subseqently explore the issues of countertransference that come to bear on the psychoanalytic relationship of a manic-depressive and an analyst, and consider how these issues could affect the relationship between the Mariner and the Guest. We should remind ourselves, however, that our ambition is not to impose the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis upon the Mariner and his drama, but to use this structure as a means of coming to understand, in a new fashion, both the relational dynamic of the Mariner and the limitedness of the structure we have employed. Finally, we may consider how this relational dynamic between a manic-depressive and his correspondent countertransferential agent might permit the communication of a language critique.

We have already discussed some of the indications we

have that the Mariner is engaging in manic behavior. Let us take time, briefly, to note the diagnostic criteria, in their entirety, of a manic episode.[1]

> A. A distinct period of abnormally and persistently elevated, expansive, or irritable mood, lasting at least 1 week (or any duration if hospitalization is necessary).
> B. During the period of mood disturbance, three (or more) of the following symptoms have persisted (four if the mood is only irritable) and have been present to a significant degree:
> (1) inflated self-esteem or grandiosity
> (2) decreased need for sleep (e.g., feels rested after only 3 hours of sleep)
> (3) more talkative than usual or pressure to keep talking
> (4) flight of ideas or subjective experience that thoughts are racing
> (5) distractibility (i.e., attention too easily drawn to unimportant or irrelevant external stimuli)
> (6) increase in goal-directed activity (either socially, at work or school, or sexually) or psychomotor agitation
> (7) excessive involvement in pleasurable activities that have a high potential for painful consequences (e.g., engaging in unrestrained buying sprees, sexual indiscretions, or foolish business investments).
> C. The symptoms do not meet the criteria for a Mixed Episode [wherein "the criteria are met for a Manic Episode and for a Major Depressive Episode (except for a duration) nearly every day during at least a 1-week period" (165)].
> D. The mood disturbance is sufficiently severe to cause marked impairment in occupational functioning or in usual social activities or relationships with others, or to necessitate hospitalization to prevent harm to self or others, or there are psychotic features.
> E. The symptoms are not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication, or other treatment) or a general medical condition (e.g., hyperthyroidism).

What should be obvious to us right away is that we could not make a conclusive diagnosis of the Mariner as being in a manic state: even if we were licensed psychiatrists, we

would not have enough information. We do not know, for example, how long the Mariner has been in his current condition. Still, there is sufficient similarity between the criteria and the Mariner's behavior to arouse our suspicions. The bizarre character of the man's tale and his account of claimed supernatural experience suggest a demonstrated grandiosity. The monopoly of the conversation that the Mariner maintains, along with the sheer sustained character of his marvellous speech, testify to a "pressure to keep talking"--particularly as the Mariner admits that his soul burns until he can talk in such a fashion--and suggest a "flight of ideas or subjective experience that thoughts are racing." The apparently cyclic urge to tell his tale, which in the present, has prompted him to detain the Guest with his skinny hand--an indication of psychomotor agitation, perhaps--and engage, compulsively, in the tale-telling once again suggests "an increase in goal-oriented activity."

As we come to suspect the indication of a manic episode in the event of the present, we note, too, that, by the Mariner's own account, this sort of episode has occurred in his past. We would thus be inclined to consider the manifested behavior as indicative of Bipolar I Disorder, Most Recent Episode Manic (296.4x):

> A. Currently (or most recently) in a Manic Episode.
> B. There has previously been at least one Major Depressive Episode, Manic Episode, or Mixed Episode.
> C. The mood episodes in Criteria A and B are not better accounted for by Schizoaffective

> Disorder and are not superimposed on Schizophrenia, Schizophreniform Disorder, Delusional Disorder, or Psychotic Disorder not Otherwise Specified.

A diagnostic procedure would call for further specification beyond this general categorization, wherein the psychiatrist would assess the severity of the most recent or current episode and distinguish it as Mild, Moderate, Severe Without Psychotic Features, or Severe With Psychotic Features. The final category, which suggests the presence of delusions or hallucinations seems descriptive of the Mariner's behavior, in light of his claimed experience; and this category calls for the further specification that the psychotic features tend to be Mood-Incongruent:

> Mood-Incongruent Features: Delusions or hallucinations whose content does not involve typical manic themes of inflated worth, power, knowledge, identity, or special relationship to a deity or famous person. Included are such symptoms as persecutory delusions (not directly related to grandiose ideas or themes), thought insertion, and delusions of being controlled.

The influence of Life-in-Death here comes to mind.[2]

Finally, this Bipolar I diagnosis would call for a Longitudinal Course Specifier, wherein the psychiatrist would note the character of interepisode recovery. The physician would attempt to specify, in other words, "if full remission is attained between the two most recent Mood Episodes." In the Mariner's case, we have only his testimony that the telling of his tale provides him periodic relief, but that, until he tells his tale, his soul burns. This is hardly enough information to describe definitively the longitudinal

course, but we might lean in favor of the description that would see it as "Recurrent Without Full Interepisode Recovery," and see this as "superimposed on Dysthymic Disorder," whose criteria are as follows:

> A. Depressed mood for most of the day, for more days than not, as indiated either by subjective account or observation by others, for at least 2 years.
> B. Presence, while depressed, of two (or more) of the following:
> (1) poor appetite or overeating
> (2) insomnia or hypersomnia
> (3) low energy or fatigue
> (4) low self-esteem
> (5) poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
> (6) feelings of hopelessness
> C. During the 2-year period . . . of the disturbance, the person has never been without the symptoms in Criteria A and B for more than 2 months at a time.

We do not have much information about the Mariner's eating and sleeping habits, energy or concentration level, or quality of self-esteem. A persistently burning soul seems a rather vague bit of information to go on as a means of ascertaining the status of such criteria. We do know that the Mariner is gaunt in appearance and is perhaps frazzled in a wild-man sort of way: he looks more insomniac, underfed, and distracted than he does well-rested, well-fed, and serene, and a two year period of affliction seems quite plausible. In addition, the Mariner lives under the curse, he claims, of the ghostly Life-in-Death: one would be hard-pressed to come up with a more emphatic claim of hopelessness.

Certainly, a sufficient number of factors about the

Mariner's person and behavior can lead us to suspect that the character serves as a depiction of a manic-depressive in an era prior to Freud. And such a suspicion receives further confirmation when we compare characteristic relational dynamics of the manic-depressive with the dynamics of the relationship that the Mariner promotes with respect to the Wedding Guest.

Those features of manic-depressive relationality that seem to stand out in accounts of the subject are problematic dependency needs and narcissistic regard for others. Goodwin and Jamison comment at length on the character of the manic-depressive's interpersonal relations, and they claim that

> Psychoanalysts, with rare exceptions, have regarded the interpersonal lives of manic-depressive patients as unstable and chaotic, narcissistically based, bereft of empathic regard for the frights of others, too dependent or independent, singularly rigid, and full of rage. These conclusions are not surprising given that they have been based substantially on experiences with patients in the prepharmacotherapy era. (301)

We might be inclined to challenge the accuracy of this description, since it derives from the rather unique perspective of psychoanalysis. Somewhat cynically, we might consider that these analysts assess their patients as narcissistic and unstable because the patients do not conform easily to treatment expectations, for example. To check this skepticism--but without taking up, at this point, a detailed defense of psychoanalysis in general--let us juxtapose the description above with a description of

Coleridge by Carlyle:

> I have heard Coleridge talk, with eager musical energy, two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers,--certain of whom, I for one, still kept eagerly listening in hope; the most had long before given up, and formed (if the room were large enough) secondary humming groups of their own. He began anywhere: you put some question to him, made some suggestive observation: instead of answering this, or decidedly setting out towards answer of it, he would accumulate formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear, for setting out; perhaps did at last get underway,--but was swiftly solicited, turned aside by the glance of some radiant new game on this hand or that, into new courses; and ever into new; and before long into all the Universe, where it was uncertain what game you would catch, or whether any.
>
> (11: 56)

This account serves as a fairly concise depiction of the interpersonal relating that Goodwin and Jamison describe: the narcissistic regard for the listeners, the lack of empathy for them combined with the need of their attendance, the instability and rage are all quite apparent; and this behavior occurs, obviously, beyond the confines of a psychoanalyst's office. We are assuming, of course, that Coleridge was manic-depressive, and we might have done better to cite testimonies of various manic-depressives' friends and family members, but this sort of justification is not necessary. People who have had much contact with manic-depressive sufferers would, we can recognize, not contend much with the description that Goodwin and Jamison provide: such people would find the description accurate even beyond the psychoanalyst's office.

Goodwin and Jamison continue by presenting the amassed commentary of psychoanalytic observers from Abraham and Freud in the first two decades of the twentieth century down to Janowsky in 1970. Consistently, the emphasis seems to be on the narcissistic character of the relations and on problematic attempts at fulfilling dependency needs.

> Abraham (1911, 1924) . . . described the patients' abnormal character development and inability to maintain good relationships. These features, he speculated, were coupled with an ongoing sense of impending loss of objects, which produce a "rageful" stance toward these objects and their inability to "gratify narcissistic demands." Freud (1917), for the most part, concurred: "Manic-depressives show simultaneously the tendency to too-strong fixations to their love-object and to a quick withdrawal of object cathexis. Object choice is on a narcissistic basis. (301)

The objects of relational enterprise on the part of the manic-depressive are, to the person with the illness, fundamentally unreliable in their permanence and dependability. The sufferer has reached this conclusion, no doubt, in the wake of his lifelong experience of trying to bring his wavelength into phase with those of others. The sufferer feels himself to be extremely vulnerable to a loss of the relational other even before a relationship begins. This prompts him to pursue relationships only in narcissistic terms: so doing, he can effectively deny the others their feelings--the feelings which lie beyond his control and which inevitably bring about alienation and desertion--and protect himself from hurt. Since genuine friendship or relationship is never established, however, the sufferer's

need for closeness persists and becomes more acute. The manic-depressive demonstrates a marked dependency on others in interpersonal relations, as Gibson and his colleagues recognized in 1959, but approach these relations in narcissistic fashion; and this can lead to understandably intense negative feelings on the part of the recipients of the manic-depressive's relational overtures.

> The attitude of manic-depressive individuals toward others was described by Blalock (1936) as "a selfish one serving in its several aspects the narcissistic needs of the patient". Equally critical in his views, Fenichel (1945) regarded manic-depressive patients as "love addicts," narcissistic, and incapable of love. To English (1949), the manic-depressive was egocentric, incapable of relating warmly to others, rigid, afraid to hate except when manic, and powerfully influenced by the intensity of feelings . . . . The manic-depressive therefore has a defect in catching the feelings of others. He ignores what others feel and want as long as he can. Thus in trying to avoid being hurt he avoids the strengthening influence of friendship.
>
> (Goodwin and Jamison 301-02)

Significantly, however, the manic-depressive can strike others as tremendously appealing, particularly during the hypomanic phases of his mood swings. At these times, he can seem quite affable and capable of closeness. Ultimately, such characteristics prove illusory, as Cohen and his colleagues noted in 1954. As Goodwin and Jamison note, they

> . . . commented on what they viewed as the illusion of normal relationships in manic-depressive patients: The appearance of closeness is provided by the hypomanic's liveliness, talkativeness, wittiness, and social agressiveness. Actually, there is little or no communicative exchange between the hypomanic and any one of his so-called friends. . . . The concept of reciprocity is missing; the needs of the other for similar experiences are not recognized. (302)

The capability of the manic-depressive to establish the illusion of closeness, combined with his inclinations toward dependency and narcissism, would encourage him to be manipulative, we can suppose. Indeed, the first of the five types of interpersonal activity that Janowsky's group formulated in 1970 testifies to this point:

> Type 1. Manipulation of the self-esteem of others: sensitivity to issues of self-esteem in others, with the increasing or lowering of another's self-esteem as a way of exerting interpersonal leverage.

The long experience of object dependency and narcissistic inclination helps promote the sensitivity that the Janowsky group describes here: the manic-depressive learns to read, in others, that which he can narcissistically apprehend and so becomes capable of exerting some degree of control over a relationship that would otherwise dissolve. Hence,

> Type 2. Perceptiveness of vulnerability and conflict: the ability to sense, reveal, and exploit areas of covert sensitivity in others.

We can anticipate the mix of feelings that this sort of capacity, on the manic-depressive's part, would have on others: on the one hand, the others would feel attacked, accused, and violated; on the other hand, they would stand in awe of and would marvel at one who proved himself able to reveal that which had been covert--that which has perhaps gone completely unrecognized by the others.

Of course, the narcissistic, manipulative thrust of the manic-depressive's behaviors would suggest that his revelations of the others' sensitivities are conducted not for the

good of the others but for the benefit of the manic-depressive. The Janowsky group's third type of interpersonal activity suggests what this benefit might be:

> Type 3. Projection of responsibility: the ability to shift responsibility in such a way that others become responsible for the manic's actions.
> (Goodwin and Jamison 302)

Still, the motivation behind the manic-depressive's revelations would not negate the marvel that others would experience at being "read" with such apparent insight. Mixed in with the emphatically negative reactions to the interaction with the manic-depressive is, yet again, this emphatically positive one of awe. Little wonder it is, then, that Gibson and his colleagues, in 1959, noted that "hypomanic behavior, especially, was noted for its powerful and confusing influence on others" (Goodwin and Jamison 302); and little wonder is that Goodwin and Jamison devote a good portion of their fourteenth chapter to a discussion of "the positive, engaging, and often charismatic aspects of many individuals with manic-depression" (302).

At least two significant and conflicting dangers face those who engage a manic-depressive on an interpersonal level, however. The first lies in failing to recognize that the awe-inspiring behavior derives from pathological needs, so that a sense of awe, expressed and maintained, goes correspondingly unrecognized as a collusion with the pathological behaviors and preserves the condition of misery. The second danger lies, however, in discounting the accuracy of

the awe-inspiring testimony--of disregarding its truthfulness because it derives from and supports the pathology. Because one has developed an extraordinary perceptiveness in accordance with problematic psychological compulsions or because such perceptiveness serves as pathological condition, these factors need not undermine the accuracy or usefulness of the perceptions. The members of Janowsky's group hint at this when they claim the following:

> Intimately related to the manic's ability to appeal to the self-esteem systems of others is his extraordinary perceptiveness. In interpersonal encounters, the manic possesses a highly refined talent for sensing an individual's vulnerability or a group's area of conflict, and exploiting this in a manipulative fashion. This sensitivity may be utilized in dealing directly with a given individual or in focusing on areas of conflict between others. In either case, the manic patient is able to make covert conflicts overt, causing the person or group with whom he is dealing to feel discomfort. . . . What he says cannot be dismissed as untrue or unreal, for the areas attacked truly do exist and, indeed, are areas of vulnerability. (Goodwin and Jamison 303)

If the manic person is "able to make covert conflicts overt"--which is, as we have been suggesting, what the Mariner does with respect to language for the Guest, whom he compulsively seeks out, notices as vulnerable, and narcissistically apprehends--then he does indeed fulfill the role of prophet: he recognizes and points out to others those habits of living and belief that lead to misery or unfulfillment, that is; he does not hold converse with glowing figures in the sky. Still, his capabilities, advantageous as they may be to people around him, serve to mask the suffering and so to support the pathological condition.

For the therapist, in the psychoanalytic environment, the baffling dynamics of relationality experienced with respect to a manic-depressive are, in general, played out in the office--ideally, this is the hope, anyway, and the assumption--but they may be scrutinized by a trained observer in a relatively secure, safe environment. The relationship that the manic-depressive patient establishes with the therapist features the same narcissistic regard, dependency difficulties, manipulations, and bafflingly positive attributes that the relationships beyond the therapeutic setting do. Treatment, consequently, tends to be notoriously difficult, even in the current era of lithium presciption. Davenport et al. reported in 1979, for example, that

> . . . bipolar patients, with their alienating behavior, incessant demands, opaqueness, and difficulty in adhering to medication regimes, are generally viewed as difficult to treat, providing a therapist with a sense of unease and minimal gratification. (qtd. Goodwin and Jamison 733)

The kind of challenge that the manic-depressive patient presents establishes the groundwork for countertransference, reactions of the therapist to the patient's behavior which have the potential of impeding the progress of the therapy. Confronting the behaviors that the Davenport group describes, for example, the therapist may feel inept, frustrated, and angry, conceive that the case is hopeless, and give up the treatment in some fashion or other. Whereas a relationship between a manic-depressive and a person who is not a therapist may meet with disaster as a result of the former's narcissistic manipulations--the behavior does not

square with the usual process of friendship or relationship--the analyst's relationship with a manic-depressive patient may be undone by the failures of the patient to abide by the process of therapeutic relationship.

Now, one can hardly resist questioning the apparent paradox or hypocrisy at work here: is not the expectation of conformity to a psychoanalytic process a naricissistically manipulative demand for relationship on an anlayst's terms? And could we not say, then, that the uncooperative behaviors of the patient may well be a reactive narcissism, or even a reactive self-assertion that rebels against the endeavors of appropriative oppression to enslave the patient by means of ideological persuasion? Questions such as these are absolutely central to a consideration of countertransference, and they have been at issue ever since Dora's vanishing, even if, in the presence of Freud's sonorous authority, they have only echoed within Dora's silence. They do not or should not prompt us to reject the notion of countertransference altogether; rather, they should encourage us to conceive that the relational dynamics we might refer to as countertransference are enormously complex. For the moment, however, in order to consider the issues of countertransference at play in the context of therapy and from the perspective of the therapist, let us assume that the therapist is really engaged in an endeavor that can help the patient achieve some relief from his suffering. Let us assume, in other words, that if the patient cooperates with the plan

and participates in the process of the therapy, then this can alleviate his suffering, and this is a positive result.

One of the problems that therapists encounter as they attempt to treat their manic-depressive patients is that the swings of mood govern the patient's behaviors to a significant and unpredictable extent. The therapist might observe a particular behavior and assess it as a demonstrated sign of improvement in the patient's condition, no doubt brought on by the therapy. In fact, the behavior may be the result of a transient mood, and an ensuing change of mood may result in behaviors that suggest a worsening of the condition. The therapist may well interpret this--emotionally interpret it--as non-compliance, and sense that the patient neither wants nor feels he needs him, then wonder why he is expending energy on this therapeutic attempt at all. Consequently, the therapist may respond with anger, frustration, and a sense of his own inadequacy.

Failing to overcome such a countertransferential response, however, the therapist can meet with a serious impediment to his facilitation of effective therapy, so he must recognize the character of his responsiveness and work to overcome it.

In addition to the negative reactions that may countertransferentially emerge in response to the manic-depressive's behaviors, relatively positive reactions may be experienced on the part of the thearpist, and these may be just as injurious to the therapeutic process. These

reactions may arise in response to hypomanic behavior. The condition of hypomania is appealing, what with the high energy levels, accelerated mental functioning, increased sexual desires, general gregariousness, and so on. Observing this condition, the therapist can become inclined to regard it as positive and can fail to appreciate its connection to the disease. This can result in the therapist's feeling envious of the patient, and can render him vulnerable to psychological seduction (734). Feelings of guilt may arise for prescribing medication: the taking of medication will result, after all, in the patient's loss of the positive experience of hypomania. The therapist's guilt for depriving the patient of such experience can lead to an "unconscious collusion in medication resistance" on the part of the therapist, and this turn of events is "not uncommon" (734). The "seductive aspects of hypomania are often impossible to ignore," say Goodwin and Jamison.

> Moods are obviously contagious, and occasionally the loss of a patient's hypomania results in a corresponding, albeit lesser, loss reaction in the therapist. Some psychotherapists espouse a set of attitudes about psychosis that we term the Equus-Laingian view, which refers to a <u>romanticization of madness</u>. It can range from a tendency toward overvaluing the positive aspects of bipolar illness while minimizing the negative, painful ones to a conviction that psychopharmacological interventions in manic-depressive patients are oppressive and contraindicated. (734; italics mine)

Manic-depressive patients, suggest Goodwin and Jamison, can promote a <u>romanticization</u> of madness, and their doing so is not uncommon. Therapists must work to overcome their

tendencies to romanticize and admire or envy the manic-depressive condition, just as they must work to overcome their negative inclinations to become angry and frustrated to the point that they may lose heart and forsake the enterprise of treatment.

What exactly does "overcoming" such countertransferential responsiveness entail, though? Goodwin and Jamison suggest that, in order to overcome or avoid such responsiveness, the therapist would do well to have "a solid grounding in phenomenology" (733), and so understand that the troubling behaviors are indeed the result of alterations in mood. Citing Greenson (1967), Goodwin and Jamison acknowledge with him that, in addition, "the therapist should have a broad and rich background for empathy" (733). "A breadth of fantasy," they say, "is particularly relevant and useful to the therapist who deals with psychotic patients, whose emotions and ideas are often not from the same experiential base as that of the therapist" (733).

In the case of Greenson, Goodwin, and Jamison, however, we seem to be getting a recommendation of sympathetic understanding of the patient at best--as opposed to an empathetic one--which is apparently grounded in a traditionalist view of countertransference. Maintaining a position of relative mental health, the therpist can, according to such a view, understand the patient and his pathology by means of "a solid grounding in phenomenology" and an applied fantasy of what the patient's condition must be like.

Countertransference, here, would represent a loss of clinical perspective which would occur by absorption into the behavioral drama of the pathology or by a reactionary impulse, on the part of the therapist, to engage in his own projective identification as dictated by his own unresolved issues. In either case, countertransference is an impediment to the progress of the therapy, an impediment that needs to be either avoided or surmounted. Effective therapy can be accomplished to the extent that the therapist is able to maintain his disinterested perspective of (scientific) observation, though this does not necessitate his lack of care or concern for the patient.

This is not the sort of responsiveness that the Ancient Mariner seeks from the Wedding Guest, nor is it the sort that Coleridge seeks from the readers of his "rime." Supposing, as we have been, that Coleridge's poem is a lyric account of the manic-depressive's condition--particularly with respect to language--this might not be surprising: the manic-depressive does not want to attach himself to someone who is going to threaten his compensatory systems of narcissistic manipulations of relationships. On the other hand, while we may be cautious of wholly entrusting our understanding to the Mariner or to the manic-depressive Coleridge, we might consider that the lyric account testifies, quite accurately, to the manic-depressive's relational needs and habits. Instead of hearing what the psychoanalyst says that a patient needs and wants, we may be permitted, in this

instance, to hear the manic-depressive's own claims of his needs. In Coleridge, we may just be able to hear something of the lilt of Dora's voice.

Significantly, of course, the Mariner's condition does not seem much improved by the end of his encounter with the Guest. The compulsive habits of seeking out a fix of dependent attachment to others who are vulnerable to narcissistic manipulation apparently remain. The poem, however, we should recall, is Coleridge's, and the degree of his abstraction makes the poem a kind of case study, even if the rhetorical effect of it is quite different than a clinical account might be. What we have before us, perhaps, is an autobiographical narrative, rendered in a figural form that acknowledges its own factitious character, wherein, from the perspective of the present, Coleridge can recollect the past and comprehend that his present is, in some discomforting respect, a repetition of this past, except that now, he is able to give an account of that past that he could not before. Correspondingly, his interaction with the reading audience is, in some fashion, a repetition of his interaction with the "Wedding Guest," the figural representation of his earlier personal relationships. In identifying with the Guest, the reading audience may have a chance of understanding and appreciating the interaction with Coleridge better than the "Guest" could with the former Coleridge, the "Ancient Mariner." The alienation that seems to occur between the Mariner and the Guest, at the poem's end, need not be

replicated in the interchange between Coleridge and the reader; it may, at least to some degree, though, be overcome.

Now, we could construe Coleridge's authorial efforts here as narcissistically manipulative with respect to his audience, but our doing so would seem particularly insensitive, and it would prevent us from comprehending the anguishing labor that Coleridge undertakes in attempting to establish fulfilling personal interaction. Furthermore, a premature refusal to identify with the Wedding Guest can prevent us from sharing the insight that the Guest achieves, namely an awareness of the problematic allegiance to the discourse of description encouraged by post-Enlightenment thinking. The fact that the Mariner may be a manic-depressive who, according to his compulsive, dependent needs, manipulates the Guest does not preclude the possibility that the Mariner is able to perceive quite accurately the Guest's vulnerabilities and his culture's "area of conflict." And the fact that Coleridge may be manic-depressive, may be manipulating us in a fashion similar to the way the Mariner manipulates the Guest, and may even be recognizing, helplessly, that he does so, does not preclude the possibility that he ascertains our area of conflict and proves himself "able to make our covert conflicts overt" (Goodwin and Jamison 303). A hasty dismissal of the Mariner or of Coleridge as manic-depressive and as engaging in a narcissistic manipulation that we must resist can

constitute, in part, a denial of or refusal to admit the conflict within our culture that arises from "life conceived in the mechanist manner of Locke and his followers" and the operability of "the will which, by an act of sympathetic imagina-tion, is free to expand the horizon of the real" (Goodson, Verbal Imagination 198).

By means of accepting the role that Coleridge prescribes for us, in other words--even if that prescription derives from the compulsive urges of the poet's manic-depression--we can benefit, and gain insight into our own, perhaps less diseased conditions. In accepting the role, we need not adopt a Equus-Laingian view that would deny Coleridge's pathological condition by means of its romanticization, but we can appreciate the unique vision that the condition affords, and comprehend that vision as enriching our own ability to see. The role is, however, a countertransferential one, defined by Coleridge to bring about our empathic understanding of him.

The role of countertransference that Coleridge and his Mariner would urge upon us is different from the one Goodwin and Jamison describe as associated with manic-depression, however, even if there are similarities between the two. One of the principal differences has to do with the degree of empathy that the countertransferential agent is able and willing to muster. Goodwin and Jamison say that "the therapist should have a broad and rich background for empathy" (733) in order to avoid a problematic absorption

into the countertransferential role, but the degree of empathy that the Mariner seeks from the Wedding Guest seems more intense: indeed, it requires an absorption that pushes the very limits of the problematic. By means of undertaking this role, the Mariner suggests, and only by means of an absorbed experience of playing out the role can the Guest truly appreciate the Mariner's condition. The Guest's accomodation of the Mariner has limited value--it provides a "fix," perhaps, of allowing the Mariner to feel, for a time, that he is not alienated from others--but the Guest benefits from the experience in that the covert conflicts associated with the cultural regard for language are made overt and apparent to the Guest. By sharing in the anguished condition of the Mariner, by means of the countertransference, the Guest comes to get a feel, quite literally, of the condition that he has been encouraged by his culture to repress and deny. It is not, in its extremity, the <u>same</u> condition of the Mariner, but in kind, it is quite similar. And the reader's accomodation of Coleridge's manipulative endeavors have the same sort of result; only having seen the Guest as a projection of ourselves, we seem to gain an understanding that he does not, namely, that others share our condition, have become aware of it, and have the degree of freedom--which Coleridge perhaps does not, plagued as he is by his compulsions--to accept our condition and work from within it to establish a <u>lingua communis</u>.

The trajectory of thought, within the psychoanalytic

community, concerning the phenomenon of countertransference, has come, to a degree, to take on the role that Coleridge prescribes by means of his poem, and we will now turn to a consideration of this point. To the degree that this is the case, however, we ought to recognize another point of some significance: if, in the matter of countertransference, the trajectory of thinking recovers Coleridge's insights, then the trajectory of thought that emerges from Freud excludes Freud. In this matter of countertransference, Freudian thought contains its own self-contradiction.

Freud introduced the term "countertransference" in 1910, but in doing so, paved the way for a fundamental schism that would emerge in the psychoanalytic community. He wrote that

> We have become aware of the "counter-transference," which arises in the physician as a result of the patient's influence on his unconscious feelings, and we are almost inclined to insist that he shall recognize his counter-transference in himself and overcome it. (qtd. Tansey and Burke 11)

The source of disagreement has arisen from the word "overcome," and from the implications that Freud's instruction has for the physician as he or she would react to a patient's influence. Michael J. Tansey and Walter F. Burke discuss the historical development of this disagreement and offer a lucid explanation of the character of the conflict's origins, which we can summarize here. At first glance, we

might suppose that Freud would have us envision the countertransferential condition as an impediment to treatment: the physican gets tangled up in his own unresolved conflicts and either gets so pre-occupied with these that he cannot attend to the patient's needs or supposes that these conflicts are his patient's problem and encourages a pointless attendance to them. But we can read Freud's instruction in another way: the struggle to "overcome" the condition may involve a labor of comprehending the condition so as to prevent the intense, crippling control it exerts over the relational dynamic. In this case, the countertransferential role is not a mere impediment to the psychoanalytic process--something to be avoided or immediately undone upon the occasion of its recognition--but is a <u>felix culpa</u> of the pathology in that it can, upon examination, reveal the problematic relational dynamics urged by the pathology. It is not a positive or pleasant condition that is intentionally pursued or desired; but it is a condition that almost inevitably comes about if the therapist truly attends to the patient, and it has the potential of revealing to the therapist the character of the patient's strategies for establishing or maintaining relationships.

If this later sense of countertransference is not immediately clear in Freud's comment above, it does become clearer in his later writings, and the seeming conflict resonates in discussions about psychoanalysis as the twentieth century proceeds. We need not repeat the whole of the

account with which Tansey and Burke provide us as to how this disagreement unfolds, but a number of points they make are almost crucial to the consideration we would make in our current project, so we should take time to recognize these.

The first is that two basic traditions have arisen, according to the interpretation described above, with respect to the notion of countertransference. In 1965, Otto Kernberg termed these traditions the "classical" and the "totalist." The former

> restricts the concept of countertransference to the therapist's unconscious, pathological reactions to the patient that reflect unresolved conflicts that need to be overcome in order for the therapist to work well with the patient. (Tansey and Burke 10)

The totalist tradition

> broadens the concept to include the therapist's total response to the patient--conscious and unconscious, "real" and neurotically "distorted." The totalist camp argues further that the usual distinction between the therapist's so-called realistic perceptions and his neurotic perceptions is fallacious, since perceptions virtually always involve elements of past and present reality. (Tansey and Burke 10)

As Tansey and Burke demonstrate, the disagreement here "is partly substantive and partly attributable to different definitions in terms" (10); but the trend of professional thinking on the matter has come down in favor of the totalist view: "fewer and fewer therapists believe that strong emotional reactions to a patient are <u>necessarily</u> pathological (33). Countertransference has consequently come to represent an umbrella term that includes all the reactions that the therapist has to his or her relational

experience with the patient. It is "an all-inclusive term that is more and more frequently applied to the entire continuum" of the therapist's reactions. Unsurprisingly,

> the ambiguity and confusion that resulted from applying the term countertransference to such a broad range of experiences gave rise to a new breed of investigators whom we refer to as the "specifists." Their aim is to categorize and classify the varieties of identificatory experience for the therapist under the overarching rubric of countertransference. (34)

Tansey and Burke recognize that their efforts are

> very much in line with the general trajectory of current countertransference theory. In addition to examining countertransference phenomena from both a totalist and a specifist perspective, we shall present a schema for analyzing the therapist's identificatory experience. In so doing, we offer a theoretical integration of the concepts of empathy, projective identification, and countertransference by demonstrating that these phenomena, often thought to be disparate, are actually elements of one overall sequence through which a therapist can use his emotional responsiveness to achieve an empathic outcome. (37)

Following this comment, the authors proceed to express the theoretical commitment they make to thinking of countertransference: having established an account of the historical development of the notion, they establish the definition they intend to use. Since they envision countertransference as a complex process that includes other complicated dynamics of projective identification, introjective identification, and empathy, they are compelled to define these terms as well. As they do so, their readers comprehend that the seemingly reductive term "countertransference," which might be thought to refer to a generic responsiveness of a therapist to a patient, and so betray a reductive mindset on the

part of the speaker, is not so easily classifiable as such. If countertransference is to be seen, broadly, as "the therapist's total response to the patient, both conscious and unconscious" (41), and each patient evokes a unique response, then the responsiveness cannot very well be termed "generic."

The trajectory of countertransference theory to which Tansey and Burke assent seems to counter the tendency, initiated in Freud and continued by the classicist adherents to the theory, to regard the patient as a scientifically examinable object, the therapist as a surgeon who, by means of the clinical role he plays, rather transcends his own humanity, and the psychoanalytic process as a formulaic process with a neatly predictable outcome. Freud writes,

> I cannot advise my colleagues too urgently to model themselves during psychoanalytic treatment on the surgeon, who puts aside all his feelings, even his human sympathy, and concentrates his mental forces on the single aim of performing the operation as skillfully as possible. . . . The justification for requiring this emotional coldness is that it creates the most advantageous conditions for both parties: for the doctor a desirable protection for his own emotional life and for the patient the largest amount of help we can give him today. (qtd. Tansey and Burke 11)

As Tansey and Burke note, Freud himself contradicts this mindset, even in the very paper that contains this passage; but the inclination to think in this manner survives in the classicist theorists. The "trajectory of countertransference theory" seems almost a deconstructive responsiveness to the psychoanalytic tradition; or perhaps we could regard it as the psychoanalytic examination of the psychoanalytic

community upon itself. In a free association exercise that extends through the twentieth century, the psychoanalytic tradition keeps repeating the term "countertransference" until, in echoic irony, it trips over the historicity of its terminology and conceives of its would-be monumental, formulaic understanding as conventional, contingent, and ironized--as a heuristic conception, perhaps, rather than a phenomenological description.

In the present essay, we are prolonging the trajectory that Tansey and Burke describe. In general, we can agree with the view of countertransference that they hold, and this will prompt our reviewing, briefly, the constitutive components of the phenomenon that they do. The trajectory itself, because it broadens to include the <u>total</u> responsiveness of the therapist, tends to de-emphasize the necessity of the phenomenon's taking place specifically in the analyst's office, however: the interchange is a human, relational one that may occur in the context of an analyst's office, but is not one that is stimulated only by the psychoanalytic process. The occurrence of countertransference is not unique to the psychoanalytic environment, that is, but plays itself out in any number of relationships. The advantage of the analytic environment lies in the fact that the dynamic may be better recognized there, than in most places, for what it is. If the dynamic may be recognized in contexts alternative to the therapeutic environment, however, then the unique character or the necessity of that

environment gets called into question; and this is to say that the trajectory seems to be one that turns back on itself, dismantling the very structure from which it proceeds. One can make use of psychoanalytic theory, for example, to appreciate the rhetoric of the Romantic unconscious, but one's undergoing the experience of countertransference in the context of reading suggests that the environment of the psychoanalyst's office is not necessary for the countertransference to occur and be recognized.

We need not overstate the case here, or consider that this trajectory nullifies the importance of psychotherapy; but the movement does seem to be a reflexive one that seeks to renew or revise its account of itself. It does not undo the structure upon which it is based so as to recover its origins, so much as it strives to give an alternative account of itself by re-acquainting its practicioners with the expressed needs of the patients who ask for help. It challenges the authority of the analyst who would claim to know, even prior to the relational experience with a particular patient, what the generic needs and desires of the patient are, and reminds the practitioner that he or she is invited into being, as a countertransferential agent, by the unique needs and desires of the patient. The patient creates the holding environment of the office that can be therapeutic, and he conjures the countertransferential agent into being; the emergence of psychoanalysis as a scientific enterprise wherein the analyst is to think of himself as a

surgeon detached from the corporeal object upon which he operates has prompted a forgetting of this point. Yet the sustained experience of countertransference and continued reflections upon it lead to an account of the psychoanalytic dynamic that owns up to the usurpation of the patient's authority, in dictating what the role of countertransference is to be, undertaken by the development of psychoanalysis through the twentieth century. Having owned up to it, the trajectory of thinking demonstrates an increased willingness to hear and be moved by the expressed needs and desires of the patient, and so to grant the patient the authority to configure his own psychoanalytic environment, and conjure what sort of analyst he will. Again, this does not negate the usefulness or appropriateness of psychoanalysis altogether; it challenges the traditional means by which the analysis is undertaken, and it revises that traditional methodology.

Tansey and Burke take "countertransference" to be "an umbrella term encompassing the concepts of projective identification, introjective identification, and empathy" (41), as we have seen. In order to grasp the complexity of the dynamic that the authors describe, let us briefly consider what they mean by each of these terms.

"Projective identification" is a term originally put forth by Melanie Klein in 1946, and she used it to describe an intrapsychic process in which a child imaginatively expels "bad parts of the self into the mother in order to

rid the self of unwanted, aggressive aspects."

> According to the child's perception, these projected aspects of the self ultimately take control of the mother from within. Through this fantasy mechanism, the mother "is not felt to be separate but is felt to be the bad self" . . . . Thus the child establishes a continued sense of connection or identification with the projected part of the self. (Tansey and Burke 42)

After Klein, theorists retained the term and the basic notion of the dynamic it described, but opinions varied as to whether or not the dynamic was entirely intrapsychic and whether or not it was necessarily pathological. Otto Kerberg, in 1975, viewed the mechanism

> as a pathological defensive operation in which the projection of aggression leads to specific circumscribed weaknesses of ego boundaries in the area of self-other differentiation and a need to control the external object arising from the fear of attack. (Tansey and Burke 42)

Malin and Grotstein, in 1966, "examined the concept of projective identification in the context of the therapeutic process," and "proposed that projective identification is a 'normal, as well as abnormal, way of relating which persists into mature adulthood'" (42-43). They

> expanded the term projective identification by stating that, in addition to being a defense mechanism, it is also a way of establishing object relationships, which build ego integration throughout development; second, projective identification is an intrapsychic mechanism that sets in motion a process consisting of projective and introjective mechanisms, resulting in a "cycle" wherein projected aspects of self are reintrojected as a new "alloy." (Tansey and Burke 43)

In 1976, Langs "vigorously addressed the interactional dimension of projective identification." He analyzed the endeavors by both therapist and patient to induce

> in the other "aspects of his own inner state, so as to externally manage them and to evoke adaptive responses for re-introjection." Projective identification for Langs was the central element in the interactional field through which unconscious communications on the part of both coparticipants are transmitted. (Tansey and Burke 43)

Ogden, in 1982, considered the mechanism to be "strictly pathological and indicative of 'a primitive type of object relationship, a basic way of being with an object that is psychologically only partially separate" (44), but did not view it as operative in both intrapsychic and interpersonal dimensions:

> The projector has the primarily unconscious fantasy of getting rid of an unwanted or endangered part of himself (including internal objects) and of depositing that part in another person in a powerfully controlling way. The projected part of the self is felt to be partially lost and to be inhabiting the other person. In association with this unconscious projective fantasy there is an interpersonal interaction by means of which the recipient is pursued to think, feel, and behave in a manner congruent with the ejected feelings and the self- and object-representations embodied in the projective fantasy.
> (qtd. Tansey and Burke 43-44)

Tansey and Burke agree with Malin and Grotstein that the mechanism need not be a pathological one, but that it

> is a mechanism employed throughout development in an effort to promote ego integration and that its degree or primivity or pathology varies widely according to the structural personality organization of the projector. (44)

For them,

> projective identification represents an interactional phenomenon in which the projector, by actual influence, unconsciously elicits thoughts, feelings, and experiences within another individual which in some way resemble his own. (45)

"Introjective identification," then, is the reception,

on the part of the therapist in a clinical setting, of a projective identification staged by the patient. Relationally, it is the object of the projective identification. Indeed, say Tansey and Burke,

> In order for a patient to engage in "successful" projective identification, there must be a corresponding introjective identification within the therapist. Conversely, introjective identification in the therapist can take place only in response to projective identification from the patient. (49)

The authors envision this particular stage of the countertransferential process as a transitional stage between two other conditions experienced by the therapist and implied by the phrase, namely introjection and identification. The "introjection," in this scenario, refers to the "taking in" and unconscious grasping of the role assigned, which requires the continued interactional presence of the patient. An identification with this introject no longer relies on such a presence: the patient need not be there, though he may be. Tansey and Burke point out that some theorists, most notably Meissner (1980) and Finnell (1986), consider the term "introjective identification" to be "confusing and counterproductive," conflating as it does the "two distinct aspects of the internalization process"; but the authors insist that the term "can clarify the intrapsychic and interpersonal elements involved in the temporary identification that the therapist experiences in response to a patient's projective identification" (49). They conceive that the term refers to "an intrapsychic response" that

> depends on the interactional pressure of the patient's projective identification. In other words, introjective identification involves the usual identification with an introject, but only in response to the interaction with an object. (Tansey and Burke 49-50)

Another way of regarding this circumstance of introjective identification might be to think of it as an unconscious assent, made on the part of the therapist, to take on the role prescribed by the projective identification. The introjective phase could be construed as one in which the therapist gains unconscious familiarity with the role he is to play in response to the projective identification, and the phase of introjective identification represents the assent to taking on the role. Seen thus, it remains the intrapsychic event that Tansey and Burke claim it to be, it depends on the projective identification of the patient, and it requires the continued interactional influence or presence of the patient. The identification phase represents the therapist's acting out the role to which he has been assigned.

Prior to discussing the phenomenon of empathy, we ought to highlight a couple of points. First, our consideration of countertransference as a process that includes the phases we have described might suggest that the process is a linear one that involves a single projective identification. This is not the case: the projective identification fluctuates and promotes a very untidy responsiveness of introjective identification. Second, the role prescribed by the

projective identification may very well be antagonistic to the role undertaken by the patient. The masochistic inclinations of a patient may, for example, result in a projective identification that promotes the therapist's taking on the role of sadist. Or the sadistic inclinations of the patient may encourage the therapist to respond as masochistic victim. Each of these conditions represent what H. Racker has called a complementary identification (Tansey and Burke 57). In contrast, the identification may be concordant, in which case the therapist identifies with the same role as the patient. Maintaining our example scenario above, we can imagine the patient's taking on the masochistic role and the therapist's taking on a sympathetic or empathic victim role.

Now the variation in these identificatory scenarios has some significant implications for the empathy that the therapist is ideally supposed to experience in order for a beneficial therapy to occur. A concordant identification, on the part of the therapist, would seem to be the preferable or necessary kind for empathy to occur: comprehending the patient's plight and pain from within the patient's experience, as it were, the therapist can assist the patient in struggling with or through or beyond his condition. Empathy is possible in the case of complementary identification as well, however, even if it may come about in a different way. In the case of complementary identification, the therapist participates in the drama staged by the

patient, and by means of acting out the role assigned to him by the patient, he can comprehend, from within, the dictates of the psychodrama. His participation may stand in complementary relation to that undertaken by the patient, but it is participation in the same agonizing production.

The identification--whether concordant or complementary--makes empathy possible. "Empathy is the optimal outcome that results from the successful processing of an identification and leads to emotional knowledge of the patient's experience," say Tansey and Burke (58). But they want to emphasize that empathy is a process which includes identification and a stepping back from that identification in order to observe it.

> We are widening the definition of empathy from an intrapsychic event involving only concordant identifications taking place within the therapist--either with or without the patient's influence--to an interpersonal process in which a series of steps leads to an empathic outcome in the therapist's understanding of the patient. (58)

The authors are perhaps not clear enough on the point that empathy is achieved intermittently, in waves whose frequency may increase; it is not a plateau of experience that is once and forever achieved. The authors are imprecise, too, when they suggest that complementary identification optimally leads to concordant identification, which can then result in empathy.

It is here where the concept of the drama, staged by the projective identification, can help. The complementary identification is not overcome nor displaced by a

concordant identification; the complementary identification, having been established, clues the therapist in to the stage directions that govern both his and the patient's roles. The therapist finds himself performing compulsively, according to the same dictatorial demands that the patient suffers to fulfill, albeit in the complementary fashion that his particular role demands.

The primary dissatisfaction we ought to have with the authors' work, however, comes from their inclination to include empathy as part of the countertransference dynamic. Empathy can occur because of the countertransference, which includes the dynamics of projective identification, introjection, introjective identification, and complementary or concordant identification, but it is an overcoming of the countertransference, not a dimension of it. Indeed, it involves the sharing of the patient's emotional state, but it entails as well a comprehension of one's otherness. Empathy or empathic experience assumes an otherness which has been reached or been persuaded to reach beyond itself to engage in a "vicarious introspection," as Kohut puts it (qtd. 56); as the introspection is known to be vicarious--and it is, in empathy--the awareness of one's otherness is an aspect of empathic experience, and this is distinct from the experience of absorption established by the countertransference. We might say, then, that countertransference is the <u>felix culpa</u> of therapy or, for that matter, of relationship in general: it is not exactly desirable, yet it

permits the empathy that is the source of hope for the patient.

This is the sort of empathy, in fact, that the patient has been hoping to bring about all along. We have tended to lose sight of this, to the degree that we have accepted the position that traditional psychoanalytic theory has established for us: physician, disinterested scientific observer, healer, authoritarian controller of a cure's dynamics, and the like. To the extent that we have been able to comprehend something of the dynamics that occur in a psychoanalytic encounter, we have considered that those dynamics are fostered and controlled by us, that they are <u>ours</u>, by design. And in the process, we lose a sense of how the patient orchestrates the dynamics, that he brings about the circumstance he desires and needs.

By means of his projective identification, the patient apprehends something close to the being of one who is susceptible and capable of relinquishing his being. The therapist, in a reciprocally unconscious responsiveness, ascertains the person he is to be (introjection) or the role he is to play, assents to it (introjective identification), and lives it out (identification): he is cathected as a countertransferential agent. But the patient does not desire him to remain such: this would simply prolong the problematic pathological functioning, which he wishes to escape but cannot. The patient cathects the therapist so as to capture the capacity--which is beyond the patient, and recognized to

be so--to undo the necessity of the projective identification, and this is precisely what occurs in empathy. Having participated in the performance of the play directed by the pathology, the therapist discerns, by means of his own suffering, the debilitating force of the patient's condition, but he discerns as well that this condition need not be his own and steps away from it. In so doing, he exercises a freedom that the patient does not have: to dismantle the drama. The drama cannot persist, afterall, if its characters refuse to play their parts. Importantly, however, the therapist has acquired the capacity to really appreciate the patient's condition, to understand and accept him, to appreciate <u>him</u> all the more because of the condition he suffers. Thus, empathy might be considered as the inverse operation of the projective identification. Exercised by an other, it results in a successful relationship, wherein an other accepts the patient as he is, in spite of the condition that he suffers; and this is what the patient has desired all along. Unfortunately, the achievement of such a condition has seemed to require some narcissistic manipulation: as the patient has learned from experience, others will normally be horrified or at least put off by the manifestations of the condition, so he must use deceptive, manipulative, and powerful means to retain them until such time as they can inhabit his reality and so understand him.

The trajectory of thinking about countertransference, which we extend here by both agreeing and arguing with the

contentions of Tansey and Burke, reveals all the more how the Wedding Guest in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner can serve as the prototypical countertransferential agent. The Mariner observes the Guest approaching the Wedding, and apparently perceives a similarity between the man's unquestioned commitment to a support of this ritual and the commitment of his crew to their belief in the Albatross. He perceives as well a vulnerability in the man, a susceptibility to alteration in belief. Here, he grasps, is the potential target of a projective identification. The Guest represents that seemingly human inclination to believe in a transcendental source of care and meaning and truth, an inclination that the Mariner himself possesses but rids himself of because such belief has proved devastatingly wrong so many times in the past. This inclination, then, constitutes the "bad self" of Klein's dynamic, which the Mariner imagines to be in the Guest, who also happens to be accepted by and connected to society in a way that the Mariner is not. The projective identification cannot work without a responsive introjective identification on the part of the Guest, however, and this can occur only when he can draw a reciprocal analogy between his anticipated experience of the Wedding and the Mariner's experience of the Albatross. In doing so, he participates in the drama staged by the Mariner, and this drama is an experientially epistemological one: it is to use words and to know as a manic-depressive; it is to comprehend meaning as staggeringly proliferating

and thought as compulsively dendritic; it is to conceive of a Wedding as an Albatross, which is only a link in an infinitely long chain of signifiers. Finally assenting to the role he has been assigned, the Guest ultimately turns away, "as one who hath been stunned," from both the Mariner and the Wedding. The introjective identification is complete, and concordant identification is established. Sadder and wiser, the Guest will, we suspect, live a life that parallels that of the Mariner, and the Mariner will wander, compulsively seeking out another whose Albatross he might destroy. An empathy, which might hold out some promise for at least some alleviation of the pain that comes from alienation, does not occur: the Guest does not empathize with the Mariner and so undo the project of the projective identification. He remains trapped in the drama and functions as the countertransferential agent who will only help sustain the problematic condition.

Of course, another relationship is involved in the telling of the tale: that established by Coleridge and the reader. And in this relationship, the possibility for empathy still exists, in a fashion. This relationship circumscribes the one that exists between the Mariner and the Guest, such that the poem itself serves as Coleridge's projective identification: it is a depiction of the intrapsychic event that Klein theorizes, but as it is communicated to the reader, it sets in motion the interactional process that Malin and Grotstein suggest. In reading, we

are cathected as countertransferential candidates, and by means of our assent to the role that Coleridge assigns to us, we respond with our own introjective identification, much as the Guest does in relation to the Mariner. The identification we ultimately make--by means of which we leave our reading and carry out our assigned role beyond the immediate contact with the text--affords us the opportunity to empathize, but does not guarantee it.

What sense does it make, though, for readers, usually abstracted from corporeal interaction, to empathize? What good does it do Coleridge? Ideally, it means that the culture can comprehend language in a different way, a way that will not make Coleridge--because of his experience of language and understanding--look like a prophet, mystic, or madman. Perhaps because of repeated failures to bring about this process on a corporeally interactional level, Coleridge strives to change the culture in which such interactions would take place: he wages a critique of cultural attitudes toward language. But he makes this critique, at this stage of his career, in psychodramatic fashion, by means of his lyric enterprise. And we can suspect that particularly strong motivations for his making this critique arise from his manic-depressive condition.

The way in which this critique is communicated might be grasped, perhaps, by means of a particular image to which Coleridge repeatedly appeals in his early poetry: the image of ice. We recall how, in "Frost at Midnight," the frost

performs its secret ministry, wherein the flux of meanings afforded by the culture may, for a brief interval of time, be stilled, be frozen into a crystalline, sparkling suffusion whose temporary occurrence makes endurable the flow that shall imminently recur in other "seasons." We recall that, in "Kubla Khan," that the lyric speaker longs to revive within himself the music of the Abyssinian maid, which will in turn enable him to build the "miracle of rare device": the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!" (46-47). We recall how, in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, the Albatross arrives on the scene when the ship and crew are locked in ice; we recall that, as the crew has begun to identify the Albatross with Divine intervention and as the ice has begun to crack, the Mariner shoots the Albatross. Eventually, the Mariner is won, in a roll of dice, by Life-in-Death, "Who thicks man's blood with cold," and the Mariner's hoary beard testifies to her influence. Perhaps most striking, though, particularly in light of our noticing the recurrence of the ice imagery, is the "rime" of the Ancient Mariner. The archaic spelling permits an emphasis that Coleridge apparently wants to place on the pun he establishes. In an essay entitled, "The Mariner Rimed," Arden Reed argues this point persuasively, claiming that Coleridge

> fails to modernize "Rime" along with the rest of the title because only the archaic spelling creates a pun, meaning both verse with like endings, and also hoarfrost, frozen mist, or a chill mist or fog (OED). (169-70)

Reed envisions the "rime" of the poem to be "specifically a figure for written language" (200), and points out the

> striking resemblance in the difference inscribed by the "rime" of his text and the "differance" of Derrida's essay by that name. Like the a of "differance," the i of "rime" "remains silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb." And it hardly seems accidental that what is entombed in the word "rime" is precisely the i, or the I: the word itself already tells, in its silent and discreet way, the tale of metamorphosing the I into an i, the inscription of the subject or narrative voice as a graphic mark in a text. The I / i in Coleridge's poem is introduced only to be rimed, to have its identity perpetually deferred in an endless journey through time and space. (200-01)

Such claims are congruent enough with the views we have been expressing insofar as we have been noting that Coleridge's prominent concern in the poem is language. Reed does not draw the connection between the rime of this poem and the frost that performs its secret ministry in the midnight of Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," nor does he discuss the caves of ice in "Kubla Khan" as having the same constitution as the Mariner's "rime." Such considerations could serve as elaborations on the argument he does make. Our point here, however, is to consider the link not only between the rime and language, but between the rime and the manic-depressive condition, wherein the rime--in its punning role--serves as the cognate of a psychic condition.[3]

As Reed suggests, the Mariner is Rimed--he has been "rimed" by Life-in-Death, a fitting personification for the manic-depressive affliction--but we may observe, too, that the Mariner rimes the Guest or that the Mariner's Rime rimes the Guest such that the Guest's condition, after the

encounter with the Mariner, mimics or "rhymes with" that of the Mariner: the Guest is "stunned," cursed himself to a Life-in-Death similar to that of the Mariner. By the same token, Coleridge's interaction with us results in our becoming "frozen," in our entering into the "frozen" state of introjective identification and countertransference.

The "Rime" of the Ancient Mariner seems to be an excursive force: the breath of the Mariner and the poem of Coleridge work like a frost. Neither the Mariner nor Coleridge is the origin of this frost; each is the vehicle of a frost that comes from a source which one can name by figure alone: Life-in-Death or manic-depression. Yet some figures seem to be inadequate: figures, like "Albatross," which would superstitiously ascribe the origins of frost to malevolent supernatural forces, seem to lead us down a road of delusion. A figure such as Life-in-Death, a female figure "Who thicks man's blood with cold," seems a superior one for an age that has yet to formulate the vocabulary of genetic inheritance and to comprehend manic-depression as an inherited condition.

The pun of the poem's title, then, which relates "rhyme" to "ice," suggests the claim of Coleridge on the functioning of language as psychic cognate. Readers typically construe the word "rime" to mean "rhyme" and to refer to the rhetorical construct that Coleridge, through the Mariner, undertakes so as to make words sound the same in the end, in spite of their initial sound dissimilarities.

The alternative spelling we tend to regard as consistent with the archaic character of the Mariner. By means of the pun, however, the word begins to function with a certain reflexivity: the word "rime" is a rhyme taken to its limit, a homonym, a rhyme from beginning to end, which modernity has made possible through the alterations it has made to the ancient term. Upon perceiving the pun, we might be inclined to regard it as Coleridge's rhetorical device, too, no less than we might his rhymes. But if we consider "rhetoric" to be an endeavor of unfettered consciousness, we would be failing to comprehend the complexity of what Coleridge claims by means of his pun. While the Mariner seems to be the originator of his "rhyme," he is not, as his narrative, his "rime," suggests: he has been "rimed" by Life-in-Death and he in turn "rimes" the Guest. He is the vehicle for the "riming" force, not the source of it. This becomes apparent particularly in his encounter with the sea snakes.

The Mariner encounters the snakes after seven days and nights of immobility: stuck in the equatorial calm, he has been forced to wait, amidst the rotting corpses of his crew, for a saving breeze. The moon appears regularly, accompanied by a star, and Coleridge reminds us, in a footnote, that "It is a common superstition among sailors that something evil is about to happen whenever a star dogs the moon" (210-11, n.). Casting "her beams" on "the sultry main," the moon spreads her light "Like April hoar-frost" (267-68) across the ocean surface, and in the path of this "frost," the

Mariner observes the snakes:

> They moved in tracks of shining white,
> And when they reared, the elfish light
> Fell off in hoary flakes. (274-76)

Once the hoary flakes have fallen off the serpents, the Mariner perceives them as beautiful, and he spontaneously blesses them:

> Within the shadow of the ship
> I watched their rich attire:
> Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
> They coiled and swam; and every track
> Was a flash of golden fire.
>
> O happy living things! no tongue
> Their beauty might declare:
> A spring of love gushed from my heart,
> And I blessed them unaware . . . (277-85)

His act of blessing compensates, apparently, for his spontaneous act of killing the Albatross, for the corpse of the bird falls off his neck.

Earlier in his journey, of course, the Mariner and his crew had been immured in ice. From that perspective, they spotted the Albatross and regarded it as a sign of supernatural influence. The Mariner spontaneously rejected this notion, as we have already noted. But if his was the unconscious comprehension that the crew's interpretation was a projection of their own desires, his act of killing the Albatross did not exactly reverse or undo the projection. It maintained a projection by acting against an external, living creature rather than contending with the internal dynamic that brought about the projection; and herein lay the sin. When the Mariner encounters the snakes, he is not himself immured in ice, but having been in the ice and

survived, he can recognize other beings in "ice," which is to say that he can recognize the superstitious interpretation of moonlight for what it is and the "ice" that spreads across the ocean calm as his own figural projection. The serpents, as living, truly other beings, accomodate but then shake off the frost of the Mariner's figuration. He finds them beautiful because they prove themselves capable of evading his capacity to fix them in a name or singular, persistent understanding. He blesses them--an act which acknowledges his own part in divinization in a way that the crew's interpreting the Albatross as a sign from God does not--and finds himself able to pray, or acknowledge God as an Other beyond the Mariner's powers to circumscribe or name; and the burden of the dead Albatross is lost.

The insights achieved by the Mariner have been made possible, it would seem, by a shift of perspective. His having been immured in ice and his having been "rimed" by Life-in-Death have served to shape his figural conception of the moonlight on the sea as ice in which he is not immured. He sees living things squirming in that which he has figurally conceived of as ice; and these beings, independent of his power to freeze them in a specific, persistent meaning, rise out of the ice, shake off the hoar-flakes, and flash in a resplendant fire of their own. Again, though, the Mariner would not have established the figure of the moonlight as ice--from which the snakes could declare their independence--without his having first been "rimed."

Similarly, he judges, the Guest cannot comprehend the character of his own language as figural unless he becomes rimed, frozen by the Mariner's hoary breath and "rhymed," as it were, with the Mariner's being. Once again, the Mariner operates under a compulsion to bring about the riming of the Guest: he does not freely and selflessly tell his tale for the Guest's benefit, but compulsively apprehends the Guest by means of the tale. And he must "rime" the Guest in order to establish, with the Guest, a lingua communis, by means of which the two may share the same character of being. The Guest leaves the company of the Mariner "stunned" but apparently capable of having the revelatory experience that the Mariner has with respect to the sea snakes.

The riming that the Mariner performs on the Guest is the one that Coleridge performs on his readers. We are to leave the company of the poet or our reading of the poem stunned or rimed: the "Rime" of the Ancient Mariner is our riming even as it is the tale of the Mariner and his riming of the Guest. Our entering into the rimed state, though, is precisely the acceptance of the countertransferential role that we have been discussing throughout this chapter. In order for us--others and auditors as we are with respect to Coleridge--to empathize with the poet as he desires and needs us to do, we must share in his rimed condition, then shake off the hoary flakes, but retain the capacity to consider how we would freeze the world we perceive into meanings, and how the world both accomodates our freezing

and defies it. Though Coleridge may be narcissistically gathering us to himself and manipulating our attentions, he may be doing us some good in the process. He may genuinely desire for us, and indeed bring us to such a state wherein all "seasons" might be sweeter for us,

> Whether the summer clothe the general earth
> With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
> Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
> Of mossy apple-tree, while nigh thatch
> Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
> Heard only in the trances of the blast,
> Or if the secret ministry of frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
> Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

Notes

1. The diagnostic criteria presented here are from DSM-IV. See in particular 296.44.

2. The influence of Life-in-Death makes difficult the specification of psychotic features as "Mood-Congruent" or "Mood-Incongruent." The apparent delusion of the Life-in-Death, as a controlling force in the Mariner's life, does not seem consistent with typical manic themes, even if the rest of the Mariner's claimed, apparently delusional experience does.

3. Punning, or an increased inclination to pun, is not uncommonly observed in manic behavior (see Jamison 108)--a point which should not surprise us, in light of our awareness of mania's other symptoms such as associational fluency, word fluency, fluency of thinking, expressional fluency (Jamison 106) and grandiosity. Reed recalls for us how much punning intrigued Coleridge (169): the poet apparently hoped to write an "Essay in Defense of Puns" (see letter 522 of the Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge). In his note 4, Reed directs us as well to notes 3762 and 4444 of The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. See also Tim Fulford's discussion of Coleridge's punning tendencies (25-34).

CHAPTER FIVE

ANXIETY IN "LAMIA"

The sort of countertransference that Coleridge promotes, we have seen, seems to be the type that Tansey and Burke describe in their 1989 study, Understanding Counter-transference--a type that these authors see as the trajectory and the revision of Freudian thought on the subject. In a sense, then, Tansey and Burke seem to be recovering a model of countertransference that Coleridge had already "proposed" in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner; and if this is the case, then Freud's account appears to have become eclipsed.

In reading Coleridge, what we seem to have encountered, then, by means of our efforts to approach one Romantic poet with an appropriately indicated psychoanalytic methodology, is our methodology's deconstruction. The method we would employ deconstructs itself at the site of countertransference. Having concluded, afterall, that a psychoanalytic method of approaching Coleridge may be a productive means of theorizing the Romantic fear that the poet relates, and so having engaged in a psychoanalytic reading of Coleridge, we have come to appreciate that our method helps us comprehend that Coleridge tends to invalidate our method. What happens to us, as we approach Coleridge by means of a psychoanalytic model, is similar to what happens for Coleridge in "Frost at

Midnight"; and as he revises the meaning of "stranger," we, as apparent victims of his ministry of rime, revise the meaning of "psychoanalysis."

In light of the deconstruction that has just occurred, we are prompted to ask at least two questions. Is the dynamic of the reading we have undertaken with respect Coleridge to be repeated in our readings of other Romantic poems? Or what sort of reading of Romantic poetry are we to undertake, now, with our methodology's residues?

We may indeed continue to recognize, I think, that the poems represent efforts at garnering readers of such devotion as to be "countertransferential agents" who can react with introjective identification to the projective identifications of the poet, participate in the relational drama insisted upon by the compulsive workings of the poet's imagination, then step beyond that drama, overcoming the condition of the compulsed relationality that the poet cannot, yet retaining an empathic understanding of the poet's condition--an understanding which may serve as a beneficial cultural critique, particularly with respect to language.

As we have seen, the Ancient Mariner brings to the Guest an awareness of his "group's area of conflict"--a bad faith allegiance to a discourse of description--and Coleridge attempts to accomplish the same feat with respect to his reader. Countertransference thus leads, in this case, to a positive cultural critique concerning language; and the

"analyst" or reader who would resist or prematurely overcome the countertransference condition would lose out on the critique. The same principle may well apply in our readings of other Romantic poems. To the extent that we fail to perceive the grandiose claims of vatic stature or the manifestations of expressive urgency as endeavors to cathect readers devoted enough to comprehend such strategies as compulsive proclamations of anguish and relational need, we remain duped by the countertransferential role we have been encouraged to undertake. We fail to appreciate as well the obsession with language that pervades Romantic poetry and that constitutes a plea for others to understand the tensions that the poets experience as a result of language and the culture's regard for language--an understanding that can reveal to us our own unrecognized "area of conflict" deriving from our bad faith embrace of a simple discourse of description.

As an indication of the somewhat latent pervasiveness with which Romantic poetry betrays a manic obsession with language that results in the conjuration of a countertransferentially devoted reader, we shall present, in this chapter, a reading of Keats's "Lamia." We shall argue here that the poem serves as an allegorical rejoinder to the philosophical conversation about language and onomastics waged by Western tradition and initiated, principally, by Plato in the Cratylus. As in Coleridge's poems, we discern in "Lamia" a critique of language waged not by means of a

traditional philosophical discourse, but by means of an obliquely voiced claim of despair that elicits empathic understanding, in an audience, through a countertransferential, readerly devotion.

As such, "Lamia" bears a resemblance to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. In the place of the Wedding Guest, we find in Keats's poem Lycius, a character prosopopoeically brought to life by means of a projective identification. Keats's projective identification seems a more complicated affair than the kind we encounter in Coleridge's poem, as we shall see presently; but Lycius does appear to be the conjuration into which the audience is to step and so realize the introjective identification and identification required for empathic understanding. In this, Lycius resembles the Wedding Guest.

Keats's projective identification is more of an intrapsychic process, though, than is Coleridge's. The first generation poet identifies with the Mariner and construes the Wedding Guest as other, as our reading has contended. Keats, on the other hand, projectively identifies with Lycius as that representation is realizing "himself" through co-extensive and mutually incompatible relations with the prosopopoeic figures of Lamia and Apollonius, other psychic facets of the projective identification.

The basis we have for this assessment that the poem represents an intrapsychic process rests in significant part on the fact that Keats's character Lamia shows a remarkable

congruence with the character of the word, the common noun "lamia," itself. Most readers assume the word to be synonymous with "serpent," but this is not by any means the case. Actually, the word signifies such a variety of things that, it seems to lack any core "meaning" at all: with striking emphasis, it seemingly attests to the contingent nature of a correspondent "signified." Similarly, Keats's character possesses no fundamental essence that anyone may ascertain: one can determine neither her original state nor the state of her existential condition at the poem's end. Indeed, all of Lamia's metamorphoses in the poem suggest alterations in the character's appearance, but they indicate nothing, ultimately, of her essence.

The implication of the congruence between the character and the common noun is that it suggests the possibility that Lamia is the personification of a word. Relative to this word, Apollonius--who inevitably reduces the polysemous character of the word to "serpent" in line 305--represents the inclination to conceive of the word in a discourse of description, while Lycius represents the inclination to embrace the word by means of an expressive discourse. The dramatic unfolding of the play, on this conceptualization, may be seen to represent Keats's intrapsychic experience of a word, and the poem itself becomes an allegorical contemplation of "word" or of the process of naming. It broaches the concerns of onomastics, but does so in a manner that is hardly philosophical, in a traditional sense. Keats

"argues" and persuades by means of a projective identification, which elicits his readers' responsive introjective identification and countertransferential agency.

We have suggested that Lamia represents a word; but the situation is slightly more complicated than this. As the personification suggests, Lamia is not simply the word, but the word already internalized, already inhabiting the psychic landscape. We might just as well say, then, that Lamia, as a living word whose identity, like that of Coleridge's "stranger" or "Albatross," and as suggested by its polysemy, is not to be fixed, and so simultaneously represents that part of Keats's psyche already persuaded of and engaged in expressive discourse. Apollonius, as we have suggested, represents the psychic dimension committed to a discourse of description: "he" is a psychic dimension shaped by the influence of Western tradition, or may be considered to be that tradition internalized. Lycius, relative Lamia and Apollonius, appears to be Keats's uncommitted psychic dimension (of consciousness?) ambivalently drawn to expressive discourse yet duty-bound to the oppressive authority of descriptive discourse.

The process that unfolds, then, in the poem, reminds us of the one Melanie Klein describes, which we noted in the last chapter, but which we repeat here. For Klein, projective identification is an intrapsychic process in which a child imaginatively expels "bad parts of the self into the mother in order to rid the self of unwanted, aggressive

aspects."

> According to the child's perception, these projected aspects of the self ultimately take control of the mother from within. Through this fantasy mechanism, the mother "is not felt to be separate but is felt to be the bad self" . . . . Thus the child establishes a continued sense of connection or identification with the projected part of the self.
>
> (Tansey and Burke 42)

Malin and Grotstein, we recall, extend the applicability of the process Klein describes: they contend that projective identification is an intrapsychic endeavor that "persists into mature adulthood" and that "sets in motion a process consisting of projective and introjective mechanisms, resulting in a 'cycle' wherein projected aspects of self are re-introjected as a new 'alloy'" (Tansey and Burke 43). Lycius, student of Apollonius, might be said to "expel" into the lover-"mother" figure, Lamia, that part of himself that, according to an Apollonian standard, is "bad." Lycius does not see the lover-mother figure as bad--he refuses to accept Apollonius's assessment--but he needs to find such a way of loving "her" that will allow for his and her survival in a world dominated by Apollonius and his way of thinking.

As long as Keats's endeavor remains an intrapsychic one, he seems to be destined for the tragedy that is Lycius' in the poem. If, on the other hand, the reader steps into the role of Lycius--in a response of introjective identification--then the intrapsychic insularity may be overcome, an other is seen to exist who seeks devotion to expressive discourse, and the Apollonian domination of the culture is

shaken.

By what means, though, is Keats to effect such a process? He accomplishes it through the sympathy he elicits for Lycius from the reader. Keats encourages us to be repulsed by Apollonius and to be anguished by what happens to Lycius and Lamia as a result of the philosopher's demands. We are to assess as evil that habit of the philosopher and scientist to name, by means of a discourse of description, component parts of realities whose indecipherable mixture moves us, deeply, with its beauty: unweaving rainbows by means of our naming is a vivisection whose performance dulls one's attention to the moral repugnance of turning the living into a waste of corporeal disintegration. Lycius has learned to reject such an Apollonian method: he responds with love to such interminable mixtures as Lamia. He meets with tragedy and death while Apollonius endures and prevails, but our sympathies lie with Lycius.

Our sympathies promote our assessment that indeterminacy is positive, is attractive, is worth embracing and protecting. In making such an assessment, though, we begin to share the space defined by the prosopopoeic character, Lycius. We recognize "rainbow" itself to be figural--it is analogous to "Lamia," the poem suggests--and as a metaphorical representation of any indeterminacy that a discourse of description would attempt to unweave or dis-integrate, it invites our endeavors to ask what "rainbows" in our lives

are threatened by Apollonian dissolution. Keats implies the metaphoric character of both "rainbow" and "Lamia" by suggesting an analogous relation between the two, and as we sympathetically inhabit the space of Lycius and comprehend Lamia's figural character, we are encouraged to consider what Lamia might represent for us. Her indeterminate nature allows us and even invites us to wonder as much. She is, then, very much like the Albatross figure with which the Ancient Mariner presents the Wedding Guest: the indeterminacy of the figure permits one's construction of an analogy to it wherein a facet of one's own life may be recognized as <u>like</u> Lamia. Yet from our own perspective as readers, where we can recognize the Apollonian inclination for the "evil" that it is--in a way that Lycius cannot--we have a chance of escaping the tragedy that befalls Lycius.

Keats's intrapsychic projective identification, represented through figure and through the poem, "sets in motion a <u>process</u>," then, such as Malin and Grotstein describe, "which consists of projective and introjective mechanisms"--and importantly, the introjective identification of the reader--"resulting in a 'cycle' wherein projected aspects of the self are re-introjected as a new 'alloy.'" In the prosopopoeic space of "Lycius," the projective identification of Keats conjures the introjective identification of the reader who is engaged in his own cyclical orbit that results in an "identification" with the Lycius character, then a stepping beyond it and its susceptibilities to

Apollonian authority. The new "alloy" achieved by the reader is a transformed person who can appreciate the richness of expressive discourse, celebrate it, yet not be overcome by the demands of that discourse of description insisted upon by a Lockean culture. As such a person comes into being, an Other exists with whom Keats may share a discourse, which would otherwise remain only an intrapsychic dynamic.

This rather narcissistic manipulation of the audience, emerging as it does from Keats's interpersonal needs--which may well be pathological needs that are compulsively sought--results, for the reader, in a positive language critique, though: the reader becomes aware, through the countertransferential engagement, of his own unacknowledged inner conflict, which is the unquestioned allegiance to Apollonian authority, Platonic philosophy, and the discourse of description.

We must note, however, that insofar as Keats is concerned, the critique is not accomplished. It remains an invitation to the reader to complete: it is a plea, fraught with an anxiety that borders on despair because it must rely on the reader's committed responsiveness; but the sort of commitment called for by Keats is staggering: the role is that of a countertransferential agent, a role wherein the agent must become absorbed in the dendritic thinking of the manic mind of a gifted poet, with respect to a word. Again, this is not the absorption sought by Romantic hermeneutics;

it is closer to something like an attunement to the frequency of wavelength in the manic mind. We can approach a comprehension of it--and so begin our own countertransferential reading--by noting the congruence between the indeterminate character of Lamia and the indeterminacy of the common noun, "lamia." We have already recognized this similarity to a degree, but now we shall elaborate on the point: the similarity does indicate to us, afterall, Keats's onomastic concerns and the way he contends with them.

Or we could say that the congruence provides us with sufficient incentive to seek more conclusive evidence that Keats's concern, in "Lamia," are predominantly onomastic ones. Such seeking can lead, as the present chapter will indicate, to one's comprehension that various textual and extratextual aspects of the poem that indicate an intertextual resonance with Plato's Cratylus, a dialogue that is clearly concerned with onomastic philosophy. Indeed, I would argue that Keats's poem constitutes, in part, a reformulation of Plato's dialogue in poetic rather than philosophical terms; and this point, if true, can serve as fairly conclusive evidence that the poem constitutes the allegorical project I suggest. What Keats achieves through his conspicuously tropological consideration of onomastics is an insight into that fundamental lack of stability between signifier and signified that would not be philosophically emphasized, in any compellingly exhaustive sense, until the 20th century. But as we have been suggesting,

Keats "argues" by means of projective identification and cathection of his readers as countertransferential agents; and rather than posing any philosophical explanation of language, he pleads with his audience to share in his plight of uncertainty and in the passions that arise from this uncertainty.

In noting the congruence between Keats's character and word "lamia," then, we should first recognize that the noun is a strange word. Encountering it through a reading of Keats's poem, we may assume it to be synonymous with "snake," as we have said; but as this encounter has likely been one of the few we have experienced--rarely used as the word is--we might be inclined to check a dictionary definition as well.

First, though, we should be precise as to the origins of our notion that "lamia" means "serpent." The real source of this concept is Keats's source for the poem's plot: Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy. In a passage that Keats appends to his poem, Burton describes a certain Menippus Lycius who, "going betwixt Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman." According to Burton, Lycius fell in love with the phantasm-made-woman, and eventually committed himself to marry her. Among the wedding guests at the couple's marriage ceremony, however, was Apollonius, "who, by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia." As, in this passage, the noun stands in apposition to "serpent," one

would assume the two nouns to be synonymous.[1] Keats himself does not suggest such a clear signification, we should recognize. Quite the opposite: he personifies the common noun of Burton and thereby emphasizes his character's indefinability. We shall discuss this point in greater detail later.

The poet's gesture, though, is more faithful to the "meaning" of the word suggested by the conglomeration of definitions we find in the Oxford English Dictionary. None of the definitions provided here equates "lamia" with "serpent." The first definition recognizes it to be a "fabulous monster supposed to have the body of a woman, and to prey on human beings and suck the blood of children." The second definition is an obsolete ichthiological classification of the genus label for a species of shark, and the third a designation for a genus of longicorn beetle. The Greek origins of the word suggest the meaning to be that of "a fabulous monster, also, a fish of prey," while the Latin designates it as "a witch who was supposed to suck children's blood, also, a kind of flatfish, a species of owl." The dictionary cites Burton's 1621 use of the word and recognizes Keats's subsequent use, but Burton's is the only use that links the word directly with a designation of "serpent."

In its catalogue of historical uses of the word, the dictionary cites, as lamia's first recorded use, Scriptural translations, by Wyclif in 1382, of passages in Isaiah

(34:15) and Lamentations (4:3). Now, the 1971 edition of The New American Bible translation modifies each of these passages with an alteration to the word "lamya" of Wyclif. The Isaiah verse uses "lilith," which seemingly retains much of the earlier meaning, but the Lamentations passage features the somewhat surprising mutation, "jackal," which may more closely approximate--in its mammalian nature, anyway--the 1398 definition provided by Barth, in which the author considers "Lamie" to be a creature with the body of a man and the feet of a horse. The recorded uses of the word thus reflect the variable nature of the modern definitions.

Remarkably, the word "lamia" seems to have such a variety of meaning that it has little definite meaning at all. To what extent Keats conducted the etymological exploration necessary to discover this fact must remain a matter of speculation, but we ought to recognize that the poet's character, Lamia, bears a resemblance to the etymological and signifying character of the common noun. As Barry Gradman notes, "the real perplexity is that [Lamia's] original, essential state of being is unknowable."

> Lamia pleadingly tells Hermes: 'I was a woman, let me have once more / A woman's shape, and charming as before' (I, 117-18). But, as Bate points out, this 'does not mean she was (a woman) originally. . . . Nor do we know whether she is a mortal or an immortal, or something that falls in between, or, more probably, something essentially different from either category though capable of participating in both.'. . . Because Lamia's original state is unknowable, all her metamorphoses must be viewed as changes of appearance, not essence. . . . (104-05)

Gilbert Stewart comments that Lamia is a "mixed metaphor,"

> an example in visual terms of that "specious chaos" which no genuine artistry could hope to "dispart," but only to capture in its true contradictory colors. . . . [she] is a many-faceted, baroquely discrepant loveliness . . . . By being like all the beauties of nature at once, she is oddly unlike any of them, but something rich and strange in their stead. (10-11)

In addition, by virtue of the fact that Keats titles his poem "Lamia"--which could, by the way, refer to the common noun rather than the character alone--we may recognize that the poet's attentions were drawn specifically to that word in Burton's account. If Keats were aware of a definition of the word, chances are that his definition conflicted with the one implied by Burton's appositive construction. We may somewhat safely conclude this point from our own etymological exploration: if, for example, Keats had encountered the word in the biblical passages mentioned above, these usages would have conflicted with Burton's implied signification. On the other hand, if Keats had been unfamiliar with the word, but sufficiently intrigued to conduct an etymological exploration, he would likely have found the same sort of signification variance that we have.

The initial source of Keats's exploration would probably have been Lampriere's Classical Dictionary, one of the poet's standard references (Clarke 562). The entry there, for "LAMIAE," includes the following:

> Certain monsters of Africa, who had the face and breast of a woman, and the rest of their body like that of a serpent. They allured strangers to come to them, that they might devour them, and though

> they were not endowed with the faculty of speech, yet their hissings were said to be pleasing and agreeable. Some believed them to be witches, or rather evil spirits, which, under the form of beautiful women, enticed young children and devoured them. According to some, the fable of the Lamiae is derived from the amorous Jupiter with a certain beautiful woman called Lamia, whom the jealousy of Juno rendered deformed, and whose children she destroyed; upon which Lamia became insane, and so desparate that she ate up all the children that came her way. . . . They are also called Lemures.

The ambiguity presented in this definition, and the discrepancy it represents in comparison with Burton's appositive, could certainly have intrigued Keats, and could have prompted him to wonder further both about the word's origins and its precise definition, if one had ever existed.

To the extent that Keats could have conducted an exploration into Greek origins of "lamia," he may have been able to reach some of the conclusions noted in Ernest Klein's Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary, which relates "Λάμια (fem)" to "λαμνος," meaning "voracious, gluttonous," to "λαμια (neut. pl.)," meaning "chasm," to "λαιμος" meaning, "throat, gullet," and "cogn. with L. lemures, 'spirits of the dead'; and . . . lamatas, 'mousetrap.' The idea underlying all these words is 'jaws open wide' " (861). Once again, we would be very hard pressed to find direct evidence that Keats arrived at such etymological conclusions; but the paradox implied by Klein's suffusion of variant significations--namely, that the word "lamia," in control of and proceeding from the mouth, as it is spoken, self-reflexively refers to an open mouth that

threatens to consume--is both insinuated by the "definition" in Lampriere and suggested in the poem, albeit in allegorical terms. Since we have yet to demonstrate that the poem possesses the allegorical character I claim it does, we should not belabor the point here; let us say only that Lycius, the turncoat student philosopher, falls in love with Lamia, who has been transformed into the shape of a woman. He is subsequently absorbed into the illusory palace of her fashioning, where, seeking marriage with her, he meets his death. My reading of the poem as allegory will suggest that this sequence of events depicts the fate an individual who would place excessive trust in the stability of a signification that is fundamentally mutable: the wedding of one's mind to such illusory stability, denoted by the signification used or the word <u>expressed</u>, promises a destiny of one's being swallowed or consumed by the word.

Such etymological considerations as those prompted by our consultation with Klein--particularly when they are recognized with the erotic tenor and imagery of the poem--seem rather emphatically to invite a psychoanalytic reading of the poem; and we need to recognize this point, because it has further bearing on some of our etymological considerations. Conscientiously, I don't think we can fail to note "lamia's" phonetic resemblance to "labia," which refers, of course, to lips. The two words differ, interestingly enough, only by virtue of variant "labials": "m" and "b." The fact that the historical use of the word "lamia" often

suggests that the referent is more female than not, is threateningly and horrifyingly seductive, inclines us to acknowledge the associative trains of thought that carry us from "lamia" to "labia" to the realm of the gynecological.[2] Keats would, with his medical background, most certainly have been aware of the term as referring to the exterior portions of the female genitalia. The OED cites a use of the word from the 1806 Medical Journal XV 21: "When the uterus remains within the labia." The term had been in use, in fact, at least since 1634.

The poem's imagery suggests, indeed, a strong enough possibility that Keats followed the same associative trains of thought as we have. We recall, for instance, the lines describing Lamia's recently metamorphosed condition after her encounter with Hermes: she is "A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore / Of love deep learned to the red heart's core" (I, 189-90). We recall, too, Dorothy Van Ghent's description of Lycius' being "trammeled and snared in the vulval labyrinth of the purple-lined palace" (122). We recall that, in the process of recognizing that Apollonius seems a "ghost of folly haunting [his] sweet dreams," Lycius is whisked away to this "vulval labyrinth," to

> A pillar'd porch, with lofty portal door,
> Where hung a silver lamp, whose phosphor glow
> Reflected in the slabbed steps below,
> Mild as a star in water; for so new,
> And so unsullied was the marble's hue,
> So through the crystal polish, liquid fine,
> Ran the dark veins, that none but feet divine
> Could e're have touch'd there. Sounds Aeolian
> Breath'd from the hinges, as the ample span
> Of the wide doors disclos'd a place unknown

> Some time to any, but to those two alone . . .
> (I, 379-389)

In the palace, Lycius experiences a listless ecstacy and bliss, particularly when the palace is dark and uninvaded by the light of the outside world. As the two lovers enter the palace, they pass into it by means of a porch which is ridged with steps, "liquid fine," and aglow with the light of a single silver lamp, "mild as a star in water." The porch marble features "dark veins," and, later, Keats refers to the environment as "that purple-lined palace of sweet sin" (II, 31). Given how Freud interprets the imagery of a dream that is strikingly similar to that of the poem, we can imagine how he might approve of Van Ghent's sense that the imagery here is "vulval":

> The dreamer gave this account of it: Standing back a little behind two stately palaces was a little house with closed doors. My life led me along the piece of street up to the little house and pushed the door open; I then slipped quickly and easily into the inside of a court which rose in an incline. Anyone, however, who has had a little experience in translating dreams will at once reflect that penetrating into narrow spaces and opening closed doors are among the commonest sexual symbols, and will easily perceive this dream as a representation of an attempt at <u>coitus a tergo</u> (between the two stately buttocks of the female body). The narrow passage rising in an incline stood, of course, for the vagina.
> (5: 397)

Elsewhere, Freud also mentions that

> A large number of dreams often accompanied by anxiety and having as their content such subjects as passing through narrow spaces or being in water, are based upon phantasies of intrauterine life, of existence in the womb and the act of birth. (5: 399)

Of somewhat greater benefit to our considerations than these

regarding dream symbology--which, here applied, threaten to be anachronistic--are some comments that Freud makes with respect to medical terminology that had been in use for some time. These occur in the Dora case, and shed some new light on the significance of the poem's opening events: on the relevance, that is, of Hermes' nymph:

> "Nymphae," as is known to physicians though not to laymen (and even by the former the term is not very commonly used), is the name given to the labia minora, which lie in the background of the "thick wood" of the pubic hair. (7: 91)

Freud is referring, of course, to the German "Nymphen" here, but his comments remain valid for the English: "nymphae," used as a term for the labia minora, had been in use since the 1600's, the OED informs us. We recall that, in Keats's poem, Hermes must manipulate Lamia--effect her metamorphosis, that is--in order that she will reveal to him the nymph of his desire.

If Keats's poem is the allegorical contemplation I sense it is, then an associative path such as the one I am suggesting above, taken by Keats and expressed through his poem, intimates a juncture of the psychosexual and the onomastic. The failure of Lycius to wed Lamia in the womb-like palace--due to the inter-position of Apollonius' "Law of the Father" naming--begins to sound, then, like an allegorical depiction and anticipation of those doomed attempts of human beings to achieve a Kristevan semiotic state. (And of course, we can hardly help but recall here Melanie Klein's notions of projective identification as an

intrapsychic process wherein an internalized mother provides a "place" within the self--a place that is personal and maternal, as well as being a dimension of the self--that can absorb those aspects of the self deemed "bad" on the authority of the internalized "Law of the Father").

What I am suggesting is that the erotically charged imagery of the poem points to the possibility that Keats had some awareness of and was concerned with demonstrating the sort of etymological synthesis that Ernest Klein performs with respect to "lamia." In synthesizing the multiplicity of "lamia" significations into not only a threatening, wide-open mouth, but a vaginal cavity and entrance to a womb, however, Keats seems to anticipate aesthetically some critical tenets of Lacanian theory.[3]

I do not wish to over-emphasize the specifically psychoanalytic dimension of Keats's achievement with respect to these maternal / sexual images, but to recognize it as an aspect of the more foundational issue that Keats seems to explore: the fundamentally unstable and contingent nature of signification. Having said this, I shall note a further etymological consideration that, with respect to "lamia," seems to be worthy of our attention. Though I have found no direct link to substantiate my intuition, I must note the resemblance of "lamia" to "lame" (lah may), the now obsolete word referring to a plate, especially of metal, added in layers so as to lend strength to old armor or any variety of things. Like "lamia," I should point out, "lame" used

in this sense is the descendent of Latin; the "lame" referring to a condition of being crippled is, on the other hand, a descendent of the Germanic languages. "Lamia" and "lame" (lah may) thus have common ancestry, and both made their way into English through the French. Variant spellings of "lamia," particularly as influenced by the French, include "lamie," which bears a very close phonetic resemblance to "lamia." Now, the root of "lame" is the same as that of "laminate" or "lamina," the latter of which is a scientific term --with which Keats would probably have been familiar-- referring to "layer" or "plate." In anatomical works of the 1800's, the word referred to a layer of any variety of substances such as membranes or bones. Serpents, of course, shed layers of skin; Lamia metamorphoses, and she acquires layers of appearances which can shore up temporary identities, but which remain vulnerable to being seen through by the scientific gaze of Apollonius. Under the influence of Hermes, the layers of Lamia may be softened and chemically transformed:

> . . . her elfin blood in madness ran,
> Her mouth foam'd, and the grass therewith besprent,
> Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
> Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
> Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
> Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one
> cooling tear.
> The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
> She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
> A deep volcanian yellow took the place
> Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
> And, as lava ravishes the mead,
> Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
> . . . also she
> Melted and disappear'd as suddenly . . . .
> (I, 150-166)

We should recall, incidentally, that the chemical process of amalgamation involves the softening of metal through the addition of mercury, and "Mercury" is, of course, Hermes' Latin name.[4] Stuart Sperry, who recognizes the passage above as "resembling nothing so much as the effects of a violent chemical reaction" (302), has noted Keats's proclivity to use chemical and biological principles as the bases for analogies that are to describe the poetic process. In a chapter entitled, "The Chemistry of the Poetic Process," Sperry demonstrates how Keats approaches

> the whole question of the imagination and its activity, with the help of certain fundamental analogies borrowed from contemporary science. An understanding of these analogies, their interrelationships and capacity for change and evolution, provide a basic means for grasping the significance of particular works within the context of his intellectual development. (33)

Sperry goes on to explain that

> what the sciences, and in particular chemistry, provided Keats was a set of analogies useful in explaining the origin and operation of poetry as an immaterial or 'spiritual' power active throughout the universe. . . . poetry can be said to operate through the laws by which the mind, and more especially the imagination, assimilates and transmutes the impressions it derives from nature and the way, in turn, such distillations react upon general consciousness once they have been brought into existence. (40-41)

Conspicuously left out of this discussion--due to the fact, I would surmise, that it is understood to be implicitly included--is the subject of the words themselves with which the act of poetry is to be performed. If poetic ideas may undergo changes analogous to the ones that occur in chemical reactions, then the words with which those ideas may be

communicated and grasped, Keats would recognize, may undergo similar reactions: the layering indicated by the term "lame" may be linguistically metamorphosed into "lamina," or it may have been so metamorphosed into "lamie" or "lamia"; and the layering of signification associated with "lamia" may include mutations of flatfish, jackals, women, and owls.

The point is that signification itself is fundamentally unstable, and Keats's poem itself represents a coming to terms with this fact. The most prominent textual evidence we have of this consists in the lines where Apollonius names Lamia a "serpent," and she vanishes:

> "A serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said,
> Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
> And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
> As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
> (305-08)

She does not become, nor has she ever been, the serpent that Apollonius envisions her to be: she merely loses the appearance, in the end, that she has temporarily acquired.

If Apollonius effects such a change in Lamia, though, by naming her, then we must wonder what the implied effect is of Burton's naming "lamia" as "serpent" through his appositive construction. Burton's act of signification is the same as that of Apollonius: without any determinable justification, Burton suffuses a variety of signifiers, which refers to a creature of some sort, into his simple construction. The ironic fact of this construction, though, is that Burton's use of it renders unclear who has established or who really is establishing the signification.

Burton acknowledges that his source for the story of Menippus Lycius is the de Vita Apollonii of Philostratus. When Burton informs his readers, then, that "[Apollonius], by some probable conjectures, found [the phantom-lover] out to be a serpent, a lamia," his readers cannot ascertain if the appositive has been constructed by Apollonius, by Philostratus, or by Burton. The contingent nature of the signification seems to be unwittingly suggested, then, even in the account.

If we turn directly to Philostratus--which Keats may have done--as a means of acquiring some awareness of whose appositive this is that Burton records, we discover that the author of antiquity did not construct the apposition. The Greek reads:

> τοῦ Ἀπολλωνίου, δακρύοντι ἐῴκει τὸ φάσμα, καὶ ἐδεῖτο μὴ βασανίζειν αὐτό, μηδὲ ἀναγκάζειν ὁμολογεῖν. . .
>
> (IV, 25)[5]

Conybeare translates this passage as follows:

> But Apollonius insisted and would not let her off, and then she admitted that she was a vampire . . . (407)

Jones agrees with this translation.

> But Apollonius insisted relentlessly, until it confessed it was a vampire . . . (96)

This is not to suggest that Philostratus never uses the word "lamia"; he does not, however, use it in the manner Burton does. In this story of Menippus Lycius, indeed, he uses it as a term that seems to have emerged from the unreliable

reportage of the masses. He closes his account of the story by saying that

> I have related [this] at length, because it was necessary to do so, this the best known story of Apollonius; for many people are aware of it and know that the incident occurred in the centre of Hellas; but they have only heard in a general and vague manner that he once caught and overcame a lamia (λαμιαν) in Corinth, but they have never learned what she was about, nor that he did it to save Menippus, but I owe my own account to Damis and to the work which he wrote. (Conybeare 409)

The authority to communicate "the truth" about an historical incident--which is historically factual only by virtue of its being a fictional construct, as this is all, clearly, a fantasy--apparently comes from one's ability to read and write and profess one's authority on philosophical grounds. Such an insinuation would, encountered in 19th century England--where issues of readership and popular participation in government were at the forefront of public concern--be strikingly representative of the problems posed by the emergence of a print culture.

In any case, if Keats had checked Philostratus' account, he would have found that Burton's translation provided a bold ammendation of the account and an abbreviation of "lamia's" polysemy. Still, an awareness of this fact is not even required for the recognition that the authorship of the construction in Burton's account alone is ambiguous and suggestive of signification's contingent nature.

Keats responds to the account in two revealing ways. First, he has his character, Apollonius, name Lamia a serpent and so prompt her disintegration: contrastingly,

Burton's Apollonius, through his "conjectures," discovers her to be a serpent. Second, Keats names Burton's nameless phantom "Lamia." So doing, he personifies the common noun of Burton. While these changes may reflect, to some degree, the definition of "LAMIAE" in Lampriere, they still constitute a response to the condition of signification's instability, a response which is aesthetic rather than philosophical: in a conspicuous performance of tropological gesture, Keats gives the instability a proper name: Lamia. Such naming does not strive to place limits on meaning, as does the philosophical tendency to confer common nouns. While philosophy attempts to deny its tropologizing tendencies through claiming, for example, that "lamia" is simply a "serpent," Keats responds to signification's instability by lending it a proper name which is evocative rather than definitive of meaning.[6]

In the recognition of this point lies the incentive for us to consider that the poem "Lamia" serves as an aesthetic reformulation of Plato's Cratylus. The concerns of the poem with respect to the instability of signification and with respect to Keats's response to the instability certainly resemble the concerns raised by the Platonic dialogue. Notably, though, Keats's confrontation with the problem of signification is of a conspicuously tropological nature, not the inconspicuously tropological kind of the Socratic dialogue.

If we are to claim that the poem constitutes, in part,

an intertextual project with respect to the Platonic dialogue, of course, we must first determine that Keats had access to and read the Cratylus. For this determination, we may rely a great deal on the work of Joseph Sitterson, Jr., who, in his 1984 article, "'Platonic Shades' in Keats's 'Lamia,'" examines the degree of exposure Keats may have had to Platonic philosophy in general. The motive for Sitterson's exploration lies in two allusions that appear in the poem, and these are worth mentioning here because they have relevance to our present consideration. The first occurs in the following depiction of Lycius, prior to his encounter with Lamia:

> Over the solitary hills he fared,
> Thoughtless at first, but ere eve's star appeared
> His phantasy was lost, where reason fades,
> In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades.
> (I, 233-36)

As Sitterson notes, Keats rarely uses the word "Platonic" in his poetry; and although he uses the word "shades" or "shade" frequently, he uses it four out of five times, in "Lamia," in the unique way of referring to a "change in state of being, mental (I, 236; II, 104) or physical (I, 270; II, 238)" (Sitterson 201). While both the words "Platonic" and "shades," as used in the poem, allude to Platonic philosophy, the combination of the two words is distinctly paradoxical, since Platonic philosophy emphatically distinguishes between mutable appearance, manifested in "shades," and transcendently fixed "Platonic" reality. Of course, Lycius is the pupil of Apollonius, and if the young

man is wandering about in a dreamy "twilight of Platonic shades," we might wonder about the quality of mentoring he has received. As our attentions turn to Apollonius, however, we discover a congruent paradox in Keats's second Platonic allusion: "Apollonius is called a 'sophist' by the narrator, three times (II, 172, 291, 299)," and Lycius "refers to his 'sophistries' (II, 185)" (Sitterson 202). The gesture of Apollonius to name Lamia definitively as "serpent," however, indicates the mentor's pretension to possess "real knowledge": he is, or professes to be a Platonic philosopher, not a sophist. These paradoxes suggest either that Keats was ignorant of Platonic philosophy or was implying its fundamentally paradoxical nature.

In the hope of determining a resolution to this dilemma, Sitterson investigates how much exposure Keats had to Plato. He concludes that, during Keats's month-long stay with Benjamin Bailey--which occurred in September of 1817--the poet probably had conversational and perhaps direct "contact with Plato's fundamental distinction between the two worlds, to the detriment of this one" (Sitterson 210).[7] The paradoxes in the Platonic allusions suggest, then, that Keats considers Platonic philosophy to be as tropological and epistemic a project as Sophistic philosophy: the very claim that there exists a realm of the truth to which one may have access is, fundamentally, sophistical. "In this poem," Sitterson concludes, "there is no absolutely real world to be distinguished from the world of appearances; the

two are inseparable" (212-13). My own contention is that Keats's personification of Burton's "lamia," consistent with the paradoxes that Sitterson points out, represents a tropological gesture that serves to deconstruct Platonic philosophy.

Keats's stay with Bailey afforded him the opportunity of exposure not only to Platonic philosophy, but to a particular volume of Platonic dialogues that included the Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides, and Timaeus.[8] Though this particular volume is intellectually daunting, it probably did provide Keats--in whatever conversationally mediated form the poet may have received it--with an exposure to Platonic philosophy and to the ideas considered in the Cratylus.

With this in mind, we cannot fail to recognize that, while Keats begins his poem with a depiction of Hermes, Plato begins his dialogue with an interchange between Socrates and Hermogenes, who, by virtue of his name, is "of the race of Hermes."[9] Moreover, the function that Hermes performs in Keats's poem is complementarily linked to the role that Hermogenes contributes to the dialogue. In the poem, the Olympian messenger performs the magic by which Lamia metamorphoses into her temporary, contingent "essence." Plato's character embraces the philosophical view that such magic tropologically prescribes: that names are wholly arbitrary. Hermogenes, meanwhile, arguing against Cratylus, exclaims that he cannot convince himself that there is any

> principle of correctness in names other than convention and agreement; any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you should change that and give another, the new name is as correct as the old . . . there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and habit of the users;--such is my view. (174/384)[10]

In the course of their debate over this philosophical view, Socrates and Hermogenes even manage to discuss the name of Hermes, and how this name relates to the god's nature. What they say of him would certainly qualify Hermes as an effectively selected character with whom to introduce an allegory of onomastic philosophy. At the time of this discussion in the dialogue, Socrates and Hermogenes are attempting to recognize that some names tend to be more aptly applied than others. Socrates suggests, by way of example, that various heroes and gods seem to possess particularly fitting names; and at Hermogenes' request, the mentor discusses the nature of Hermes' name:

> I should imagine that the name Hermes has to do with speech, and signifies that he is the interpreter (ἑρμηνεύς), or messenger, or thief, or liar, or bargainer; all that sort of thing has a great deal to do with language; as I was telling you the word εἴρειν is expressive of the use of speech, and there is an often-recurring Homeric word ἐμησατο, which means 'he contrived'--out of these two words, εἴρειν and μήσασθαι, the legislator formed the name of the God who invented language and speech; and we may imagine him dictating to us the use of this name: 'O my friends,' says he to us, 'seeing that he is the contriver of tales or speeches, you may rightly call him εἰρεμής.' And this has been improved by us, as we think, into Hermes. (197/408)

Nothing in this passage really suggests a direct link between the dialogue and Keats's "Lamia," of course; but we must recognize that none of the other Platonic dialogues

brings the subject of Hermes into a philosophical inquiry regarding names. That Keats should bring Hermes into the same poem that clearly responds to tenets of Platonic philosophy does suggest an intertextual strategy with respect, specifically, to the Cratylus. Moreover, as we continue reading the remarks of Socrates immediately following the passage above, we detect a resonance with certain marginal comments that Keats is known to have written in his copy of Burton's Anatomy.

According to Finney, Keats would have scribbled in these comments sometime in 1819. In a section entitled "Loves Beginning, Object, Definition, Division," Keats has written,

> Nothing disgraces me in my own eyes as much as being one of a race of eyes nose and mouth beings . . . who all from Plato to Wesley have always mingled goatish winnyish lustful love with the abstract adoration of the deity. I don't understand Greek--is love of God and the Love of women express'd by the same word in Greek? I hope my little mind is wrong--if not I could--has Plato separated these loves? (Finney I, 296)

On the next page, then, he has written, "Ha! I see how they endeavor to divide--but there appears to be a horrid relationship" (Finney I, 296).[11]

Later in the dialogue, we find the following:

> Soc. There is also good reason, my friend, in Pan being the double-formed son of Hermes.
> Her. How do you make that out?
> Soc. You are aware that speech signifies all things (πᾶν), and is always turning them round and round, and has two forms, true and false? . . . Is not the truth that is in him the smooth or sacred form which dwells above among the Gods, whereas falsehood dwells among men below, and is rough

> like the goat of tragedy; for tales and falsehoods have generally to do with the tragic or goatish life, and tragedy is the place of them? . . . Then surely Pan, who is the declarer of all things (πᾶν) and the perpetual mover (ἀεὶ πολῶν) of all things, is rightly called αἰπόλος (goat-herd), he being the two-formed son of Hermes, smooth in his upper part, and rough and goat-like in his lower regions. And, as the son of Hermes, he is speech or the brother of speech, and that brother is no marvel. (197-98/408)

This resonance is indicative of an intertextual nod.

Socrates' implied metamorphosis of Hermes' name, in the previous passage above, serves as the basis for further indication of Keats's project as intertextual. This kind of metamorphosis is of chief concern to Socrates as he proceeds through his discussion with Hermogenes. He seems, on the one hand, to be rather complacent over the fact that names can change and still retain their meaning (183/393). Indeed, while entities share a common nature, they ought to share the same name; but as they "follow out of the course of nature," they should acquire a change in name:

> for example, when a good and religious man has an irreligious son, he ought to bear the name not of his father, but of the class to which he belongs, just as in the case which was before supposed of a horse foaling a calf. (184/394)

On the other hand, the changes that are inevitably performed on a name block anyone's capacity to ascertain the original meaning of a word.

> Soc. There is the meaning of the word τέχνη (art), for example. . . . That may be identified with ἐχονοη, and expresses the possession of mind: you have only to take away the τ and insert two ο's, one between the χ and ν, and another between the ν and η.
> Her. That is a very shabby etymology.

> Soc. Yes, my dear friend; but then you know that the original names have been long ago buried and disguised by people sticking on and stripping off letters for the sake of euphony, and twisting and bedizening them in all sorts of ways: and time too may have had a share in the change. Take, for example, the word χάτροπτρον; why is the letter ρ inserted? This must surely be the addition of some one who cares nothing about the truth, but thinks only of putting the mouth into shape. And the additions are often such that at last no human being can possibly make out the original meaning of the word. (203-04/414)

The philosophy that Hermogenes would espouse would tend to deny the chain of signifier metamorphoses as linked back to an originary signification, such that the present form of any signification is wholly adequate to communicating meaning or describing the signified. In Keats's poem, when Hermes lends Lamia her womanly appearance, he prompts the same illusory understanding that Hermogenes' philosophy would effect through linguistic means. An unwary student of philosophy such as Lycius is easily taken in by the charms of the illusion; he takes them to be a stable manifestation of truths and weds himself to them.

Between the epistemological issues that Hermogenes raises in Plato's dialogue and the sorts of problems that Hermes stirs up for the young philosopher of "Lamia," we can recognize such a resemblance as to be further persuaded of Keats's intertextual poetic project. If Sitterson's article can persuade us that Keats is, in "Lamia," responding to basic tenets of Platonic philosophy, then the links between Hermogenes and Hermes, as we have been considering them, incline us to conclude that Keats is responding rather

specifically to the philosophical issues raised by the Cratylus. And if this is the case, then the poem is more onomastically concerned than critics have previously recognized.

We might wish to recognize, still, that the resemblance of Apollonius's response to Lamia--to the handiwork of Hermes, that is--and Cratylus's response to the dialogue involving Hermogenes further suggest Keats's endeavors to have a pronounced intertextual character. Cratylus objects to Socrates' notion that names may be of greater or inferior quality in their referential capacities. If a name does not refer precisely to its signified, then it names something other than that signified, he argues (218/427). Further, alterations in spellings or sounds establish entirely new names:

> . . . when by the help of grammar we assign the letters α or β, or any other letters to a certain name, then, if we add, or subtract, or misplace a letter, the name which is written is not only written wrongly, but not written at all; and in any of these cases becomes other than a name. (220/431-32)

Cratylus believes that a name is either true or it is meaningless. As it is true, it serves as the means to human apprehensions of the real--the thing in itself to which the name refers--and the truth, which is unchanging and stable. The use of language and of names, then, is the key to the attainment of true knowledge.

Such absolutism is characteristic of Keats's Apollonius, who, by virtue of his self-proclaimed authority,

designates Lamia as, simply, a serpent. The flux of her being may, to his way of thinking, be named and so be known as a stable entity with a definable essence. The means of discovering the truth about reality comes, for Apollonius, merely through an application of names, through processes of labelling and categorization.

Now, Socrates is more charitable in his treatment of Cratylus than Keats is in his portryal of Apollonius. Cratylus may be redeemed, it seems, while Apollonius promises to retain his heart of stone. Socrates brings Cratylus to an awareness that signification is in a perpetual state of flux, and so suggests that if human beings are to achieve an awareness of true knowledge, they cannot expect to achieve such awareness through the use of language or names. If names so perfectly suggest or reflect a stable truth, but are known to be in a state of flux, then "the truth" or "the reality of things" must be in a state of flux as well, and this, for Socrates, cannot be. He makes this point by means of a consideration of "true beauty"; and what he says of the name "beauty" and its referent sounds very much like what Keats says, tropologically, about Lamia:

> . . . can we rightly speak of a beauty which is always passing away, and is first this and then that; must not the same thing be born and retire and vanish while the word is in our mouths? . . . Then how can that be a real thing which is never in the same state? for obviously things which are the same cannot change while they remain the same; and if they are always the same and in the same state, and never depart from their original form, they can never change or be moved. . . . Nor yet can they be known by any one; for at the moment that the observer approaches, then they become

> other and of another nature, so that you cannot get any further in knowing their nature or state, for you cannot know that which has no state. (228-29/439-40)

The cultural and philosophical climate of the 19th century encouraged Keats to reject the dualism implied here, which saw "truth" so stable and disconnected from the flux of names. "Reality" was in the same state of flux that words were. Labels like "serpent," hastily applied, suggested that names could be used to demonstrate, in effect, and apparently reflect reality's neatly fixed nature; but with the perception that reality was not so stable and transcendent, such naming could be recognized as a fundamentally delusive act. The climate of the 19th century consequently demanded the renovation of names, or the reformation of the naming act; and this point, it seems to me, serves as a very good prospect for the motivation behind the composition of "Lamia" as an intertextual project.

My primary aim in quoting the passage above, however, is merely to suggest that Keats's Apollonius pledges his allegiance to the Cratyllian ideal, and forces us to deal with the same issues that Cratylus raises in the dialogue. The resemblance between the philosophical inclinations of these two characters thus represents another indication of Keats's project as intertextual.

In what manner might we consider the character of Lycius, though, to be represented in the dialogue? I would suggest that Keats's character constitutes the embodiment of that philosopher's destiny which comes as the result of

"putting [oneself] or the education of [one's] mind in the power of names," a destiny that Socrates warns his listeners against. "No man of sense will . . . so far trust names or the givers of names as to be confident in any knowledge which condemns himself and other existences to an unhealthy state of unreality," says Socrates (229/440); and this is precisely what Lycius does, first with respect to the Lamia "represented" by Hermes, then with respect to the label of Apollonius.

The ultimate irresolution of Plato's onomastic exploration does not appear to be much different than that of Keats's poem, except that Plato maintains his notion of a transcendent, metaphysical ground of reality that knowledge may approach, though not by linguistic means; and Keats does not. The poet's conspicuous trope of personifying the signifier intimates that the process of naming is generative of reality, or at least contributive to it.

Only one with a conscious awareness of naming's function as such would seem to deserve, justly, the title "legislator": neither the metaphysician nor the dialectician, that is, but the poet. It is the poet, after all, who "names" in aesthetic fashion. To the extent that the aesthetic "naming" of reality is descriptive, the poet understands, it paradoxically "describes" any aspect of reality as infinitely transgressive of description's boundaries.

Yet a condition such as the poet's is hardly an enviable one, and it is not one through which a person lays

claim to an authoritarian certitude and power, such as an enlightened Platonic philosopher might aspire to do. It is the condition of the Ancient Mariner, compulsively seeking his audiences, or that of Lycius, passionately driven to embrace an ultimately unembraceable otherness. What the Romantic poet seeks is an audience who will share in his condition, and so help alleviate some of the anguish his condition brings.

In the case of Keats, the poet encourages us to sympathize with Lycius and appreciate, as the character does, the beauty of polysemy taken to its infinite limit. Such an appreciation, in turn, prompts a correspondent hatred of that authority that would reduce polysemy to a particular name, and so "unweave" and empty "the rainbow" of its integral beauty.

If, as we have suggested, Keats's endeavor has been a projective identification of the intrapsychic sort theorized by Klein, Malin and Grotstein, then the sympathetic responsiveness we experience with respect to Lycius may be said to represent the beginning of our introjective identification, our countertransference, and ultimately our empathic understanding. The reading we have undertaken here is to have been something of a countertransferential absorption: in comprehending the polysemy of Lamia and "lamia," we have assumed an approximate wavelength of a manic mind's dendritic thinking; and to the extent we have been or are able to undergo an "identification" by means of drawing an analogy

between Lamia or "lamia" and a word or image in our own experience, then we have been able to suffer with Keats as we encounter, intrapsychically, the internalized, authoritative demand of the descriptive discourse that our culture continues to champion. But our suffering reveals to us our own perhaps unacknowledged conflicts, our unquestioned, bad-faith allegiance to a discourse of description. Socrates may warn us against the danger of "putting [oneself] or the education of [one's] mind in the power of names," but Keats encourages us to do precisely that because that is what our culture and perhaps our being forces us to do, and to deny as much is to be living in bad faith. Our taking on the role of Lycius is to share the intrapsychic dynamism of a manic mind, by means of which we may confront in an exaggerated form--which renders them perceptible to us in a way they had not been before--the conflicts, surrounding language, that are our own.

Clearly, though, the allegory with which Keats responds to philosophical tradition is not one constructed from a position of aesthetic serenity, power, or confidence such as the kind Lucy Newlyn would propose in her "'Questionable Shape': The Aesthetics of Indeterminacy." "An aesthetics of indeterminacy," suspects Newlyn, "may be one of the means whereby the encroaching power of interpretation is controlled, and the rights of the author defended" (229). "Romantic criticism controls indeterminacy by subduing it to authorial design, thereby reaffirming the primacy of the

creative imagination," and "Romantic poetry has an equally strong investment in affirming the status of the writing subject" (231). "Romantic writers are confused or threatened by the latent power of the reader," says Newlyn, and they assert the controlling action of the author in the face of this threat, thereby laying claim to the supposedly superior power of the writing subject and the imagination.

If the condition of the writers is such that it demands compulsive behavior, however, such "assertive action" would be a desperate recourse recognized from the start as being inadequate and doomed to failure, which might, in turn, call for a compulsive assertion of grandiosity. Beyond a fear of the reader's power, there is a fear of the other, the recipient of any communication, who wields the power of relational acceptance or rejection. This fear may be combatted only by recourse to a language and to processes of thought that have always proved inadequate, so that the assertion of subjectivity is a defensive response, made out of desperation and hopelessness, that is fundamentally a statement of compulsive longing rather than a statement of genuine conviction. But the intensity of the panic felt gives rise to those grandiose assertions that make the statement appear to be one of conviction.

The failure of considering such a potential influence of the compulsive condition leads to a regard for the Romantic writers that could be, as we have been coming to recognize, unfortunately inaccurate. To suggest that the

Romantic writers institute an aesthetic of indeterminacy or to think of them as such revolutionaries is to conceive that they truly believe in the powers of subjectivity that they profess. The problem with this is that it misses what may be a contribution that is more noteworthy: an account of the desperate struggle one must make in trying to ascertain what language is and does. To think of these writers as legislators of a new aesthetic of indeterminacy is to accept, at face value, those boasts of subjective potency that mask the desperation of longing for subjective power, and it is to miss the character and tone of the panicked questioning that these writers undertake.

This is why John Beer can respond to Newlyn's article by saying that the

> cultivation of the indeterminate, however assuaging, failed to satisfy the full yearing of the Romantic consciousness as expressed in its own time, involving as it did the quest for an unmediated absolute; nor could it fully satisfy the search for true love, which was equally typical of the Romantic mode of interpreting the world. The desire for absolute utterance and a finally authentic mode of action remained. (260)

Beer suggests that we regard Romanticism as an act rather than as a thing, even a disunified or fragmentary thing. He suggests that we serve as acolytes to the procession and ritual of Coleridge, not so much in terms of the poet's faith, but in terms of his asking the questions by which one perpetually re-creates oneself as an "inquiring spirit":

> Coleridge's intellectual career was dominated by the belief that there was [a true and valid "Word"]; but his alternative presentation of

> himself simply as "inquiring spirit"--a stance which in all its ramifications produced the range of speculation and investigation that renders his achievement as a whole so impressive--bears witness to his recognition that if the truth of the Word existed, after all, only in fragmentation, the only authentic act available to human beings in the society that had emerged after the French Revolution was coming to be that of questioning. (263-64)

Even "questioning" seems an inadequate term, though, in accounting for the despair and longing and fear that we discern a poem like "Lamia." A preferable term might be "asking," an act which holds out less hope for a satisfactory answer.

Notes

1. All quotes from "Lamia" come from The Poems of John Keats, ed. Jack Stillinger. Citations will normally refer to part and line number of the poetic text. Quotes from The Anatomy of Melancholy passage will be taken from Keats's appended passage, unless otherwise indicated as coming from the standard version of Burton, ed. Floyd and Jordan-Smith.

2. In his considerations of Lamia's past, Garrett Stewart traces Keats's allusions to Ariadne, Proserpine, and Circe (13-14), who, as Clarke notes, are "female figures who suffer desertion and transformation, rape and exile, who inflict and suffer metamorphoses" (562).

3. To what degree we can recognize the precise nature of this anticipation is beyond the scope of this dissertation's aims. I would hypothesize it to be an intuitive blend of concepts that would later be expressed by Jacques Maritain and Karl Stern. Maritain claims that "the primary requirement of poetry, which is the obscure knowing, by the poet, of his own subjectivity, is inseparable from, is one with another requirement--the grasping, by the poet, of the objective reality of the outer and inner world: not by means of concepts and conceptual knowledge, but by means of an obscure knowledge which I shall describe . . . as knowledge through affective union. . . . His intuition, the creative intuition, is an obscure grasping of his own Self and of

things in a knowledge through union or through connaturality which is born in the spiritual unconscious, and which fructifies only in the work" (114-15).

In his Flight From Woman, Karl Stern, paraphrasing Piaget, notes that the process of knowledge through connaturalization has its foundations in the mother-child relationship. According to Piaget, the child reaches fully the cogito of rational thinking only at the age of twelve. And one of the reasons we associate all praeter-rational thinking with womanhood is that the knowledge by connaturality originates in the child-mother relationship. All knowledge by union; all knowledge by incorporation (incorporating or being incorporated); and all knowledge through love has its natural fundament in our primary bond with the mother. . . . Indeed, we may assume that praeter-logical thinking puts in two appearances, as it were, during early childhood in the form of the "primary process" (imagery and affect unstructured), and later wedded to the structure of discursive reason, as an alloy. In the latter form it appears most clearly in the mind of the artist, the poet, and the mystic" (53-55).

On the other hand, Bruce Clarke's considerations of Lamia as the "penanced lady elf" would, if valid, suggest a greater degree of theoretical anticipation: "A stealthy Hermes and a jealous Aphrodite are brought together to engender a 'penanced lady elf,' a hermaphrodite then cast out by a spiritual authority. The complex apologia

represented by Lamia's sufferings would bespeak the fate of a feminine soul in a masculine body, or of any psyche inscribed or penned in an inappropriate form through the mortifications of a patriarchal conscience" (576).

4. Stewart refers to Hermes as "the original alchemist--the deity of primary transmutations" (39).

5. The numbers here refer to the Book and Chapter of the Greek text that Conybeare provides. His translation, following, is indicated by his pagination.

6. Skulsky comments that, "The gist of Apollonius' theory of Lamia is that in some fundamental sense she is nothing but a serpent . . . [but this is] a theory that the poem as a whole refuses to sustain" (163-4).

7. As Sitterson acknowledges (n 10), Thorpe argues that acquaintances other than Bailey could have provided Keats with conversational exposure to Plato: Leigh Hunt, Cowden Clarke, Haydon, Reynolds, Severn, and Lamb (148-50). Sitterson is careful to consider only the most reasonably verifiable contact, however, who is Bailey.

8. This particular work is the Taylor translation, which Blackstone claims to have been an enormous influence on Keats (123). Sitterson thinks that the work would have been overly dense for Keats, and that poet was exposed to its contents through conversations with Bailey and through readings of the more accessible Dacier translation.

9. The Hermes episode in "Lamia" has traditionally been something of a critical enigma. Some, including Perkins (265) and Wasserman (158), have judged the episode to be a rather artificial addition to the poem that is to serve as an introduction to the main plot. Alwes (147-48), Bate (553-54), Chambers (589-90), Clarke (557-61), Dickstein (239-40), Evert (283), Finney (2:670), Patterson (192-203), Norris (322-26), and Stevenson (241-52) regard the episode as an artistically positive addition, but none have recognized the character Hermes as representing an allusion to the Cratylus. Clarke approximates the making of my claim that Hermes is to evoke contemplations of a linguistic nature: "Hermes presides over the metempsychoses of linguistic agents. In this frame of analysis, terms and persons are interchangeable: they are both 'linguistic agents' occupying scenes. Metaphor is the linguistic, metamorphosis the psychological figure bound up with the attributes of Hermes: exchanging and expropriating, possessing and dispossessing, binding and unbinding, holding down and setting free" (559). While Clarke holds that "Lamia" "is a demonstration that the forms of poetic exhanges and transferences underwrite all other human economies" (556); however, he does not see Keats as emphatically concerned with onomastics as do I.

10. References to Cratylus are made, by page and section number, to the Jowett edition.

11. Sitterson (n 26), quotes Finney, who found the comments in Keats's copy of the Anatomy.

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DEPRESSIVE FEAR AND THE PRIVATION OF SUBJECTIVITY: COLERIDGE THROUGH BROWNING
VOLUME II

By

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Preface to Part II

Our considerations that Coleridge's Wedding Guest may serve as a model for an ideal reader of Romantic poetry may lead us to conclude that encounters with Romantic lyric expression encourage a responsiveness that is essentially neo-Aristotelian. The Mariner insists that the Guest relinquish his concerns over meeting the social expectations that normally govern the man's life and devote himself to the listening of the Mariner's tragic tale. The Guest is to be more than analytically focused, but affectively absorbed--puzzled, astounded, intrigued, enchanted, mesmerized. The experience of absorption brings about an elicitation of pity and <u>fear</u> that results in a <u>katharsis</u> for the Guest, who, stunned, turns his back on the wedding, and wakes, the following day, "sadder and wiser."

The elicitation of fear that results in the <u>katharsis</u> involves a dynamic wherein the Guest at first fears the Mariner for his apparent madness--conventional standards would construe him as mad--but then, by means of the responsive analogy the Guest constructs between the Wedding and the Mariner's Albatross, he fears for himself: he fears that the tragic Life-in-Death-cursed destiny of the Mariner may be his own, since, by the figural activity he has performed, he comprehends language, words, and meaning in a way that most others in his culture do not. Communication, in such circumstances, would seem to be a nearly impossible

task, and alienation or isolation seems inevitable. On the other hand, by the evidence of his own experience, the Guest knows that others can be persuaded to re-comprehend language, he knows that he is not psychotic or doomed to live under the curse of a spectre, even if that spectre is a figure for manic-depression, and he knows that he does not act out of the apparently compulsive necessity that the Mariner does. He understands that he need not be overcome or undone by the fear he feels, but he can comprehend, by the very means of experiencing the fear, the enormity of the task before him--namely, persuading the culture to think of and use language in a different way. It is a task that the Mariner cannot quite fulfill because of his curse and his inevitable isolation: the Guest, by virtue of his distance from the Mariner's tragic circumstance, can undertake the task that the Mariner clarifies.

The Mariner, Coleridge's figure of the (ideal Romantic) poet, thus initiates and fosters a critique of language. Hardly the poet of Platonic conception, who merely entertains or relaxes his culture with delights of emotional dalliance while he threatens, dangerously, to impede the willing engagement of reason that ensures a progress toward true knowledge, this is a poet who wages a richly philosophical argument of vast political import in a discourse that is utterly and logically consistent with the view of language he espouses. He persuades his audience not by coaxing them to repress or deny emotion, but by means of

reason informed by emotion. He effects a katharsis in his audience: the pleasure of an enlarged understanding of language--though such pleasure entails the sadness, too, of giving up former, delusional beliefs--and the pleasure of sensing that one need not be tragically overwhelmed by the re-conceptualization, but may find glimmers of hope in the prospect that the renewed understanding is a process, ever proliferating and not yet finalized, which is undertaken by means of a cultural conversation that realizes itself as a lingua communis.

We must remind ourselves that Coleridge himself does not see the situation of the poet in the relatively positive terms that we describe, however. Our suggestion here is that the Guest is a prosopopoeic conjuration of the audience that Coleridge wishes he could have: the character is the embodiment of a wish that can be realized only when a reader steps into the space of the conjuration. This can occur, as we have been suggesting, to the degree that the reader can engage in the countertransferential reading we have described. The reader fulfills the writer's identity as an Aristotelian poet, and without the reader's committed activity, the writer tends to exert the limited impact of a Platonic poet or one of its reincarnations.

In addition to yielding such insights into the potential roles that the Romantic poets play, though, the countertransferential reading provides us, serendipitously, with some insights as to the character of the Victorian

poetry we encounter in Tennyson and Browning. In effect, these writers enflesh the conjuration of Coleridge's Wedding Guest and might be said to enact the role of the Guest in a Victorian sequel to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. To the extent that we have undertaken the role of countertransferential agents in our reading of Romantic fear, and so accomodated ourselves to the desires the poets have for an audience, we have enfleshed the conjuration of the Guest; and from this experience, we can recognize in the Victorian poets a similar responsiveness.

The Victorians' assumption of the role does not mean that the poets are belated or inferior Romantics. Indeed, the insights we have gained would suggest the opposite: the Victorians are readers of Romanticism who are capable of an empathic understanding achieved through countertransferential absorption and a stepping away from that absorption. They are not lyric speakers but devoted readers of lyric speech who, because of their devotion, are capable of indicating the political and philosophical relevance of Romantic poetry. This does not means that they are in philosophical agreement with the Romantic writers; they recognize, rather, the rich philosophical territory that the Romantics open up by their rather deluded thinking.

As we have seen, the Romantic poets are inclined to believe in their prophetic status: like the Mariner, they experience themselves as being on a different wavelength than most--as manic-depressives or depressives, they would

certainly conceive of themselves as such--and, in the face of what might otherwise be a devastating sense of insurmountable alienation, they are encouraged or compelled to interpret their condition, both for themselves and others, as supernatural or mystical.

The Romantic poets seek an audience, however, if the Guest is any indication, who is capable of comprehending that the supernatural character of the poet's experience--which could be a psychotic character in an alternative narrative--is of little consequence when one understands the figural character of language and the conventional character of referentiality. One achieves such understanding by a responsive, committed reading that culminates in a participatory engagement in figuration: as the Guest draws his analogy between the Wedding and the Albatross, he understands the conventional character of the sign "Wedding," and he becomes aware that the specific referentiality of the Mariner's "Albatross"--whether the sign refers to a flesh and feather and blood reality of the past, or whether it refers to the recollected element of a psychotic episode, whether it refers to a real bird given supernatural stature by passionate desires or pathological need, or whether it refers to an element of mystical vision--makes little difference and remains indeterminate in any case. What does make a difference is how <u>natural</u> the word is, which the Guest ascertains through his activity of analogy construction.

The Guest conceives, through his construction, that "Wedding" is as "supernatural" as the Mariner's "Albatross"; it testifies, that is, not to a determinate referential fixity but to a referential mutability and proliferation. If "Wedding," which convention declares to be a "natural" sign, is really as supernatural as "Albatross" is, though, then the category of "supernatural" seems to dissolve. And if, as we can reasonably conclude, "Albatross" stands in synecdochic relation to the Mariner's tale--which, so far as we are concerned, comprises the Mariner's very existence--and "Wedding" stands in correspondent synecdochic relation to the culture of the Guest, then the Mariner's tale is conceived to be natural by means of the Guest's responsive, participatory figuration. If the Guest represents Coleridge's desired audience, then Coleridge would seem to desire an audience who can dissemble his vatic posturing--not be deluded by or succumb to it.

It is crucial to recognize, however, that Coleridge needs an Other to accomplish this desired task. Without the influence of a devoted audience, he is destined to remain on an alien wavelength, which will result in a compulsive reassertion of his grandiose claims to supernatural experience.

The argument of the present volume is that Tennyson and Browning fulfill the role of Coleridge's desired reader. They are not belated Romantics, but readers of Romanticism who arrive on the scene later, perhaps, than the Romantic poets might have preferred, and who exert less of an

influence than the Romantics might have hoped. Like the Guest, however, the Victorian poets effectively dismantle the posturing of the Romantics as prophets. They do so by dramatizing "conversation poems" as spoken by every sort of character other than the Romantic lyricist: saints, bishops, artists, literary and historical figures, and others--even a medical researcher.

I am suggesting, in other words, that the dramatic monologues in particular represent analogical constructions of the conversation poem--constructions wherein the mystical reflections of the Romantics are conceived to be as natural, as grandiosely postured testimonials to a desired, stable subjectivity as those pronouncements of any other human being. Having been able to read the Romantics as the Guest has read the Mariner, the Victorians wander through the world reading the efforts of people to establish Albatrosses for themselves. These latter poets redundantly dramatize conversation poems as uttered by people in various walks of life, and in so doing, they effectivly construct a web of analogies amongst participants in an emergent lingua communis that reveals itself as figural.

The Victorian poets undertake their role as Coleridge's Wedding Guest, then, by indicating the widespread tendency of people to equate with objective truth the narrative accounts of their readings of cultural signs. They suggest that people tend to envision Weddings, for example, and other cultural constructs, including words themselves, as

having a stable meaning. Such a vision or interpretation is erroneous, the poets recognize, since the apparent stability of meaning derives from the breadth of conventional belief. The aesthetic recourse that the poets undertake in response to the cultural delusion they perceive consists in redundant dramatizations of the ironic fate that people inevitably suffer as a result of their delusion. The Ancient Mariner could not have seen his hopes better realized.

"Saint Simeon Stylites" serves as a good example of the Victorian poets' aesthetic responsiveness to Coleridgean Romanticism. The piece is a conversation poem, a "prayer" of sorts that is imagined to have been uttered by a man whom tradition has recognized as a "saint." Tennyson's suggestion is that the man was probably more of a megalomaniac. Obviously, Tennyson hopes to lodge a criticism against a figure such as Simeon, who claims and believes himself to be in a position of privilege compared to that of the rest of humanity--one who enjoys private audiences with God. Less obviously, Tennyson criticizes his culture's willingness to regard such a person, so clearly mad, as a "saint"--by virtue of the supposed fact, apparently, that the fellow has had the special relationship with God that he has claimed. In thinking of the man as blessed, the culture has proved itself guilty of a delusional thinking as pathological as Simeon's: if Simeon, desperately hoping for and failing to find a human other who will listen to and accept him, prosopopoeically conjures a personal, infinitely patient

"God" by means of his apostrophetic prayer, the culture has engaged in its own prosopopoeic conjuration by means of its repeated utterance of "saint," and has had its hopes for intimate connection with the Divine--hopes repressed by the habitual repetitions of the utterance--enfleshed by the likes of a megalomaniac.

But to the extent that the culture's "reading" of Simeon results in an awareness of self that would repress its desires and engage in its own pathological prosopopoeia, then, in a sense, Simeon serves to point out "truths" to that culture that it had not recognized: Simeon proves to be a conduit of "Divine revelation," proves to be a "Saint," perhaps, in ways that neither the culture nor he himself could understand. His saintliness is not realized by means of an application of consciousness, in any case.

Fulfilling the role of Wedding Guest beyond Coleridge's poem, then, Tennyson draws an analogy, in <u>effect</u>, between "saint" and "Wedding," between "saint" and "Albatross." Readers of Tennyson's poem are, in the end, to walk away, as ones who have been "stunned," from their habitual use of the word "saint": they are destined to wake "sadder and wiser" on the "morrow morn." Their epiphany is to occur by means of their encounter with Simeon as he enacts a conversation poem, through which the man, purporting to have a relationship with God, reveals himself to be constructing human relationships on the basis of pathological grandiosity. Readers are to see through the posturing and reject Simeon's

claims; but in doing so, they incriminate the tradition to which they remain subscribed: they have referred to the man as a "saint."

Furthermore, the particular instance of Simeon and of the interpretation and naming he has received is not an anomaly: it serves as an indication of a broad, pervasive cultural problem wherein people are willing to revere as authoritative, enlightened, and good those who have been mistakenly judged so by tradition or convention. If such a man as Simeon has come to be regarded as a "saint," then how can people trust other, similar names bequeathed them by tradition--names such as "mystic," "prophet," "poet"? How can one trust any name, indeed, that designates another as authoritatively knowledgable or insightful? Our sudden need to ask these questions marks the condition of our being stunned: we are "rimed" with the Wedding Guest.

Experiencing such a condition, we are prompted to assess as delusional not only the claims to vatic stature of such a one as Coleridge, but the traditional acknowledgment, given voice in a name like "prophet" or "poet," of such a one. Our re-assessment reveals to us, however, that we have been as deluded as Coleridge, apparently blinded by our similar desire for apprehensions of a stable truth. The words "prophet," "poet," and "saint" are testimonies of our own prosopopoeic conjurations that emerge from this desire and from the fear that we can never gain the apprehension of a stable truth or realize our own stable subjectivity. The

words are like Coleridge's "stranger" or Keats's "lamia," only they are reflected upon not as words within a self who is contemplatively capable but as words in the public arena. They are scrutinized in the context of or by means of the dramatic presentation of a conversation poem, by means of which the audience is encouraged to recognize its own problematic expectation of language, its own problematic desires and fears, and its own tendency to engage in a strategy of prosopopoeic conjuration as a result of those fears. The dramatized conversation poem, spoken by people other than the Romantic lyricist, serves as a critique, then, of the Romantic poet and those who would regard him as a vatic figure, even as it serves as a critique of anyone who would claim to have a privileged awareness of transcendental truth.

The grandiose claims of people such as these are worth paying attention to, though, because they testify to a desire that a great many more people have but would deny: the interminably unrealizable desire of living in a world stable enough to know and to permit the existence of a stable subjectivity. The claims testify as well to a common recourse that people take in light of their longing: prosopopoeic conjuration, which may be a conscious or unconscious endeavor.

As Tennyson would critique claims to sainthood or prophetic stature, yet recognize in these claims testimonies of fundamental desires rendered in the very common,

symptomatic endeavor of prosopopoeic conjuration, he fulfills the role that Coleridge, through the Mariner, has asked the Wedding Guest to play: to comprehend the supernatural, mystical claims that Coleridge would make as insignificant, and to comprehend instead that the claims testify to a very natural, common desire that people would hope to deny. In response to the claims of vatic stature made by the Romantic poets and epitomized by Shelley's claims in "A Defence of Poetry," wherein the poet is regarded as fulfilling the role of a nineteenth century, emotionally humanized Platonic philosopher, Tennyson calls for an Aristotelian appreciation: indeed, the Romantics may be prophetic, he suggests; but this is due to the fact that they testify, ironically and unwittingly, to the anguishing plight of the human condition in language and to the pathetic strategies commonly attempted as a means of circumventing the anguish and the fear. Their prophetic stature does not lie in any privileged access they have to transcendental truth.

Tennyson's recommended aesthetic procedure--one that Browning encourages as well--is one of readerly absorption in the conversation poem of another. Such absorption brings about a sufficient resonance of "wavelength" to allow for the reader's familiarity with and horror of the other's thinking. But the resonance also brings to consciousness, for readers, the conflicts of language and desire that have gone unrecognized by them because of their immersion in

conventions that have served to repress the conflicts. He may become repulsed by and may reject the pathological way of thinking in which he has, through his reading, become absorbed, but he achieves as well an awareness of his own previously unacknowledged conflicts and the mechanisms of their repression. The process he undergoes--the aesthetic procedure that Tennyson and Browning recommend--is the process of countertransference leading to the empathic understanding that Coleridge invites.

CHAPTER SIX

AVERSIONS TO ASSUMING A ROMANTIC IDENTITY: THE CASE OF TENNYSON

"Saint Simeon Stylites" serves as an example of an aesthetic procedure that Tennyson undertakes and promotes from his earliest days of coming on the poetic scene, and our principal concern in this chapter shall be a consideration of how Tennyson establishes his poetic identity through his adoption of this aesthetic procedure.

Prior to undertaking this exploration, however, we might want to recognize, in general terms, some of what is at stake as we conceive Tennyson's poetic identity to be taking shape according to this aesthetic procedure. To put the matter in rather stark terms, we are conceiving that Tennyson's aesthetic emerges from the poet's relation to Romanticism, which he conceives to be aligned with "madness"--with mental illness or depression. This formulation renders "Romanticism" a transitive, middle term, though, and this disguises the more controversial but important claim: the aesthetic emerges from the poet's relation to depression. And a corollary to this claim is the following: depression itself may be the dominant force behind the historical development of that nineteenth-century poetics that we have regarded as canonical.

Such thinking, we should recognize, contends with and

reconceives Harold Bloom's notions of the "anxiety of influence," and the Oedipal struggle that Bloom postulates as defining the assumption of poetic identity. Bloom's model tends to assume that a latter poet regards his paternal ancestors as having an established identity in relation to which he must find his own, even as he discerns that the things he would express, in order to establish his unique identity, have already been expressed by his forebears. This does not quite seem to be the case with Tennyson, though, as he scrutinizes the Romantics. In looking at the earlier writers, he discerns, rather, a lack of identity, an empty subjectivity; and this seems to be the source of his fear: not that he will fail to find an identity commensurate with the Romantics, but that he will be doomed to acquire the same empty identity as they.

Tennyson's assumption of poetic identity inclines us to conceive that we might replace Bloom's Oedipal model with the countertransferential--a model that is, by comparison, ambiguously teleological, if indeed it can be said to be teleological at all. The anxiety that a latter poet confronts in coming to terms with his literary predecessors promotes the poet's interpretation, narrative, or explanation, which serves as the writer's identity, but such an identity need not be a paternal one in an Oedipal scheme.

In substituting the countertransferential model for the Oedipal, though, we are inclined to retain anxiety or fear as the motive energy behind poetry's historical development,

and in doing so, we discern ourselves to be contending with such a one as Isobel Armstrong, who is inclined to envision Tennyson's assumption of poetic identity as guided by his embrace or rejection of philosophical reflection informed by contemporary politics. Armstrong claims that in Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, Tennyson exhibits a breathtaking poetic self-confidence, so long as he serves as the mouthpiece for the philosophy that Hallam and the Cambridge Apostles would espouse; and to the extent that Tennyson becomes dismayed with this philosophy and indulges in the popular "poetry of empathy," he suffers a "loss of nerve" (94). I would counter Armstrong's claims by arguing that Tennyson's fear of identification with Romanticism and his depression incline the poet to favor the Apostles' philosophical accounts: the philosophy holds out the promise of Tennyson's gaining conscious control over the fear. In time, however, and by virtue of Hallam's death and political developments, the philosophy fails to stave off the fear: Tennyson succombs to and becomes absorbed in the fear. Yet this fate results in a countertransferential experience, with respect to (Romantic) depression, and this experience in turn leads to the empathic understanding that becomes the object of Tennyson's aesthetic.[1]

In the 1830 Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, Tennyson betrays an unmistakable reverence for the Romantic poets. "The Poet" regards the Romantic writer as a semi-deified being,

apparently transfigured by the passion with which he would embrace life.

> The poet in a golden clime was born,
> With golden stars above;
> Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love. (1-4)[2]

Affirming the role that Shelley would assign poets as "unacknowledged legislators of the world," Tennyson testifies of the poet that

> He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,
> He saw thro' his own soul.
> The marvel of the everlasting will,
> An open scroll,
>
> Before him lay . . . (5-9)

The far-reaching impact that the Romantic poet has had, in Tennyson's view, may be likened to a dandelion, whose "arrow-seeds" spread everywhere, take root, and develop into the golden flowers that resemble the mother plant (19-29). Tennyson stands awe-struck, reflecting with deep admiration and affection on the truth and understanding that the Romantics have engendered; for now, the world looks like one great garden of gold:

> So many minds did gird their orbs with beams,
> Tho' one did fling the fire;
> Heaven flow'd upon the soul in many dreams
> Of high desire.
>
> Thus truth was multiplied on truth, the world
> Like one great garden show'd,
> And thro' the wreaths of floating dark upcurl'd,
> Rare sunrise flow'd. (29-36)

The beauty in truth that the poets have engendered has social and political implications: it is not the beauty of an aesthetic that calls for a retiring, passive

entertainment and enjoyment, but is the beauty of Freedom's realization. In the present poem, Tennyson personifies Freedom, regarding it as a woman who works her influence through the poet:

> And Freedom rear'd in that august sunrise
> Her beautiful bold brow,
> When rites and forms before his burning eyes
> Melted like snow. (37-40)

Into the hem of Freedom's dress is traced "in flame" the name of Wisdom, and the influence she is able to exert, through the Romantic poet, is bloodless and successful revolution--unlike the French Revolution--through which human beings' minds and hearts undergo a positive transformation that in turn leads to a reformation of the world.

> Her words did gather thunder as they ran,
> And as the lightning to the thunder
> Which follows it, riving the spirit of man,
> Making earth wonder,
>
> So was their meaning to her words. No sword
> Of wrath her right arm whirl'd,
> But one poor poet's scroll, and with <u>his</u> word
> She shook the world. (49-56)

Like Shelley, Tennyson here would conceive of the poet as a nobly prophetic and even salvific figure who translates and implements for humankind the very desires of the Divine or Personal Transcendent. The poet's labors are therefore holy ones that are of benefit to the world, though they may not be understood or appreciated by it. Indeed, the world's limited capacity to read the poet and understand him may result in a tragic misassessment that leads not only to the poet's devaluation but to the failure of culture to

apprehend the truth that the poet tells--a truth that promises to revolutionize the world and improve it.

A fear for this result prompts Tennyson's admonition in "The Poet's Mind." This poem is a warning directed at the "dark-brow'd sophist," whose "shallow wit" and dull ear prevent him from being able to comprehend what the poet hopes to communicate. The sophist of this address recalls the figure of Apollonius in Keats's "Lamia," and the passion of Tennyson's imperative indicates the awareness that the Victorian poet has of the power that such a figure as this can wield. Seemingly aware of the potential recurrence of the dynamic that takes place in "Lamia," Tennyson tries to warn off "Apollonius" before the fellow can work his woes.

> Vex not thou the poet's mind
> With thy shallow wit;
> Vex not thou the poet's mind,
> For thou canst not fathom it.
> Clear and bright it should be ever,
> Flowing like a crystal river,
> Bright as light, and clear as wind. (1-7)

Precisely where this apostrophe is being made and to "whom" it is being made remains more ambiguous than one might first suspect. The poem's title suggests the possibility, at least, that the exchange is intrapsychic, and that the "sophist" is an already internalized voice and inclination of judgment. An externally existent "sophist" might vex the poet, but would be capable of vexing the poet's <u>mind</u> only as "he" was already internalized. And of course the presentation of "sophist" is itself the result of a psychic, prosopopoeic endeavor: it is the name of the figural construct

within the psyche, not of a real, flesh and blood other.

To the extent that the "sophist" is an internalized voice, then the poem becomes a reading of the poet's mind as that mind is presented, arguably, in Keats's "Lamia." The "chiefly lyrical" pronouncement here seems to be a claim of reading and understanding Keats, and of doing so in an empathic manner. Tennyson writes,

> Dark-brow'd sophist, come not anear;
> All the place is holy ground;
> Hollow smile and frozen sneer
> Come not near. (8-11)

Even as Tennyson observes the poet's mind in a third person perspective, his imperative "Come not near" indicates that he conceives himself as inhabiting the same "holy ground" as the "poet" does. Whereas Keats's lyric claim has been, as we have seen in Chapter Five, a testimony of despair that he cannot escape the internalized demands of the descriptive discourse that Apollonius represents, Tennyson's responsive lyric claim to this is that he hears and understands Keats, empathizes with him in feeling the anxiety of the threat posed by the discourse of description, but learns a lesson from Keats's tragic fate such that he can perhaps escape the fate by preemptorily refusing "Apollonius" the opportunity to assert "himself."

With respect to "Lamia," we might conceive of Tennyson's poem, then, as a kind of intertextual countertransference. Tennyson reads Keats with sufficient devotion to comprehend the figural character of the Romantic writer's presentation, to understand and appreciate the poem as a

revelation of the workings of the poet's mind. His absorbed understanding results in his occupying the same "holy ground" that he would observe and in his participating in the very endeavor that Keats does: the "sophist" of Tennyson's poem is, afterall, the construct of Tennyson, a sign of his assumption of Keats's manner of thinking. From the position of this "holy ground," Tennyson can feel Keats's rage against the threat of Apollonian authority, engage in his own prosopopoeic endeavor of constructing "the sophist," and--as Keats cannot--use the construct to resist the threat that such a discourse poses.

> The flowers would faint at your cruel cheer.
> In your eye is death,
> There is frost in your breath
> Which would blight the plants.
> Where you stand you cannot hear
> From the groves within
> The wild-bird's din. (15-21)

The bitter animosity of these lines is the poet's, or at least that of an observer in deep sympathy with the poet. If there is any distance between the poet and the observer, though, it seems to collapse by the poem's end, in which the observer, Tennyson, seems to occupy the mind of the poet:

> And yet, tho' its voice be so clear and full,
> You never would hear it, your ears are so dull;
> So keep where you are; you are foul with sin;
> It would shrink to the earth if you came in.
> (34-37)

And of course, in having written the present poem, Tennyson assumes the identity of the person whose mind he would observe: in composing a poem, he becomes a poet.

The condition of countertransference that Tennyson

assumes by means of his dedicated reading leads to a problem, however. The problem is suggested by the poem, but is recognized more forthrightly only in other poems, and it lies in this: the prosopopoeic endeavor of conjuring the sophist tends to serve as a repressive mechanism for the fact that "the poet" is as much a conjuration as "sophist" is. At least in part, the spectral conjuration of "the poet" emerges as a result of the attempt that Tennyson makes to escape identification with "the sophist." The identity that Tennyson would assume and does assume by the poem's end is a spectre established by means of a privation: it is an emptiness.

The horror of such a fate is not admitted in this poem, but it becomes increasingly evident elsewhere, particularly as it manifests itself in the ambivalence with which Tennyson regards Keats and the Romantic poets in general. The horror becomes evident, indeed, within the collection of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, which culminates in "Οἱ ῥέοντες," a "Heraclitean lyric to impermanence" (Armstrong 41). The poet writes,

> All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true,
> All visions wild and strange;
> Man is the measure of all truth
> Unto himself. All truth is change: (1-4)

Tennyson's placing this poem at the end of his collection, says Armstrong, "throws the contents of the book retrospectively into flux and makes its explorations provisional. It makes each poem an experiment in those discontinuous moments of consciousness which, Hallam was to insist, were the self"

(41-42). If "all truth is change," then, for example, what can the meaning be of Tennyson's assessments of the Romantic poets as registered in "The Poet," or of his seeming claims to poetic identity in "The Poet's Mind," as these are considered from the perspective of "Οἱ ῥέοντες"? They are not the bold, firmly conclusive assessments and claim that they appear to be in the poems themselves, but are provisional explorations, experiments in "discontinuous moments of consciousness," temporary instances that apparently open the door to other discontinuous explorations. "A condition of change without limit," notes Armstrong, "makes all experience the materials of retrospection." And such is the case of attempting to formulate, for oneself, an identity, as "poet" or anything else.

> In particular we are trapped into a series of questions about origins which are forever displacing one another. This produces . . . a continual state of backward questions as the consciousness is forced to 'pursue this train of enquiries unremittingly'; necessarily every question becomes secondary to instability by the nature of the 'acceleration' of change the moment they are being asked. Experience must always be a series of backwards questions about one place <u>from another place</u>, an alternative place which is never the place where one 'would have been' because, like the moon, we are in motion. (42)

Armstrong marvels at the deftness with which Tennyson indulges in and affirms such philosophical thinking. "That Tennyson can shift such philosophical weight with the agile movement of a light, graceful lyric," says Armstrong, "is evidence of his confidence at this time. The poem exhibits the confidence of the Apostles" (43).

> The strangeness of Tennyson's early poems, one's sense of their being written from another place or an alternative space, their quality of secondariness, comes from this experientially retrospective world. Such a world calls into question not only the coherence of consciousness but the possibility of . . . 'free volition'. (42)

Armstrong tends to ascribe the character of Tennyson's endeavors to the thinking of Hallam and the Apostles, which in turn she associates with the thinking of William Whewell, who was Master at Trinity when Tennyson was at Cambridge. Whewell's speculations, deriving from his astronomical theorizations, "opened up a world in which the stability of the universe could not be guaranteed" (42), and "Οἱ ῥέοντες," the final piece of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, is "part of this new discourse," in Armstrong's view (42).

Even as we may agree with Armstrong that Tennyson wrestles with and generally affirms the philosophical notions that Whewell proposes, though, we must understand that her reading of "Οἱ ῥέοντες" and of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical in general, as "evidence of [the poet's] confidence" amounts to an interpretation that has problematic implications. Does the triumph of Tennyson's volume, "as a maverick . . . poetic experiment" (43) lie in the fact that it assents to philosophical notions already in circulation--that, albeit in a poetic voice, it exhibits

> a confidence which is always paradoxical, dismantling traditional positions whether on politics, theology or aesthetics with an exhilarating iconoclasm and yet endorsing those traditional positions with a new, iconoclastic traditionalism (43)

and proclaims a "new thinking" shared by the Apostles?

Regarding Tennyson's works in this volume as philosophic explorations and as evidence of a confidence shared by the Apostles downplays the significance and perhaps dismisses the probability of the anxiety that informs the "explorations" or searchings, as they might be better called. There is good reason to suspect that what Armstrong would call "confidence" in Tennyson's poems is something of an emergent hopefulness that owes itself, in considerable measure, to the poet's attachment to Hallam and the Apostles; for the attachment, shaped in part by a common thinking, represented an apparent means of achieving a measure of conscious control--in philosophical thought--over a looming prospect of madness that must have been, for Tennyson, at least as influential as any exposure he had had to Whewell's thinking.

As Kay Redfield Jamison notes, "melancholy, violence, and insanity can be traced at least as far back as the seventeenth-century branches of the Clayton and Tennyson families" (196); Tennyson was well aware of his family members' dispositions for madness, and feared constantly for his mental health. "Obsessed by the black blood of the Tennysons, he struggled throughout his life not only with fierce and recurrent depressions but with the fear of going mad as well" (196; italics mine). His fears were well founded: his father was almost certainly manic-depressive, in Jamison's view, and of the twelve Tennyson children, one was manic-depressive--this was Edward, who was "confined in

an insane asylum for almost 60 years; [suffered] death from manic exhaustion; [and experienced episodes of] severe melancholia"--five, including Alfred, suffered recurrent depressive illness, two exhibited "rage, unstable moods, and/or insanity," two were notably eccentric, one died in infancy, and only one was apparently undistinguishable enough, with respect to mental stability, to escape comment by Jamison's biographical sources (198-99).

Alfred's father, George Clayton Tennyson, "suffered most and caused the most suffering," says Jamison. Biographer Robert Bernard Martin comments that "the black blood which flowed in the veins of all the Tennysons had in his case turned to bile" (qtd. Jamison 197). Paraphrasing Martin, Jamison notes that the biographer

> describes the elder Tennyson as having been "ungovernable" from an early age, "inconstant in mood," "vacillating between frenzy and lethargy," an alcohol abuser, and suffering from debilitating, black depressions. Later in his life George Tennyson also experienced "fits," whose nature remains unclear. Interestingly, Alfred described having seizurelike trances but, although terrified of inheriting his father's "epilepsy," he was reassured by his physician that he did not in fact have the disease. (197)

If we accept Jamison's claims that Alfred was obsessed with the fear of the "black blood" he carried within him, that he suffered "recurrent depression that required treatment; trances, possibly epileptic, but not thought so by [a] physician; possibly transient hypomanic episodes; [and manifest experiences of] dwelling in an element of gloom" (199), and so constantly received confirmation and

verifying evidence for his fears--such that he must even have feared positive, happy moods of increased energies as potentially symptomatic of immanent hypomania and "madness"--then we should be able to comprehend how attractive the philosophical speculations of Whewell and the thinking of the Apostles must have been to him. Such "thinking" allowed Tennyson the imaginative experience of standing at an objective distance from his own life, beqeathed him by his father, that had been rendered Heraclitean by manic-depression. From such a perspective, achieved through the activity of philosophical speculation, Tennyson could comprehend or effectively name his condition, and understand it, <u>with</u> others whose companionship proved its veracity, to be the <u>normal</u> condition of humankind, even if most people could not grasp this fact. Attaching himself to the Apostles by means of the thinking wherein "all truth is change" presented Tennyson with the hope of achieving control, through consciousness, over his fears.

Our consideration of this prospect is important: it not only questions Armstrong's inclination to envision the thinking of the Apostles as predominantly influential in the development of Tennyson's early poetry, but encourages us to envision fear as a prominent driving force behind Tennyson's writing. What we are suggesting is that the fear promoted Tennyson's hopeful reaching out to attachment with the Apostles, and the interaction of the fear with the philosophical speculation did indeed shape Tennyson's

poetry. We are suggesting as well that Armstrong's inclination to envision Tennyson as a mouthpiece, essentially, for the philosophy that the Apostles would espouse seems to be an inaccurate assessment.

The tendency to interpret the matter as Armstrong does leads to further problematic interpretations. Armstrong suggests, for example, that Tennyson, having exhibited a remarkable confidence in his poems of 1830, subsequently suffers from a loss of nerve and undertakes a "gradual retreat from the daring of the earliest poems" (43). If the impact of fear is given its due, however, and philosophy's prominence is called into question, this dynamic includes "hope" in place of "confidence"--hope, that is, in the Apostles' thinking as a means of gaining conscious control over the fear--and "growing despair" or "dashed hope" in the place of "a loss of nerve." Whereas Armstrong sees Tennyson making a "gradual retreat from the daring of the earliest poems as he realised the implications of these texts in subsequent work published in 1832 and 1842," we could conceive him, alternatively, to be in a state of dashed hope and renewed fear wherein he is urged on, by the fear he has never managed to escape, to "search for new solutions," as Armstrong puts it (43). This search is less of a philosophical one for Tennyson than it is an emotional, psychological, and personal one--even if it does indeed have philosophical implications, especially for the Apostles.

We can get some sense of the profoundly powerful

character of the emotional struggle involved here if we consider the potential significance to Tennyson of Hallam's identifying him with the Romantic poets of "sensation," Keats and Shelley. This Hallam does publicly in his 1830 review of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, and we can assume that he expressed similar sentiments privately, to Tennyson, prior to and after the review.

> Mr. Tennyson belongs decidedly to the class we have already described as Poets of Sensation. He sees all the forms of nature with the "eruditus oculus," and his ear has a fairy fineness. There is a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty, which throws a charm over his impassioned song, more easily felt than described, and not to be escaped by those who have once felt it. We think he has more definiteness, and soundness of general conception, than the late Mr. Keats, and is much more free from blemishes of diction, and hasty capriccios of fancy. He has also this advantage over that poet, and his friend Shelley, that he comes before the public, unconnected with any political party, or peculiar system of opinions. Nevertheless, true to the theory we have stated, we believe his participation in their characteristic excellencies is sufficient to secure him a share in their unpopularity. (549)

The final comment here underscores one of the principal points that Hallam wishes to make early in the essay; namely, that popular recognition is no reliable indicator of quality writing--or, conversely, one cannot assess writing as excellent or not according to popular sentiment. The suggestion here, however, translated in darker terms, is that writing worthwhile poetry, as Tennyson does, results in a condition of isolation stemming from readers' miscomprehensions and consequent unappreciation. Whatever suffering this isolation might cause a writer, of course, the promise

of compensation remains: the undertaking is a noble one, the endeavor of the prophet; but we must wonder if, for Tennyson, such compensation is as adequate as Hallam seems to presume, especially when we encounter poems like "Mariana," the later "Lady of Shalott," and much of the later poetry.

The destiny of isolation is not the only problem with Hallam's identification of Tennyson as a poet of sensation. In spite of the positive terms with which he pays tribute to Shelley and Keats, Hallam must have troubled Tennyson more than he knew. "Shelley and Keats were," he explains, "of opposite genius; that of the one was vast, impetuous, and sublime: the other seemed to be 'fed with honey-dew,' and to have 'drunk the milk of Paradise.'"

> Yet in this formal opposition of character there is, it seems to us, a groundwork of similarity sufficient for the purposes of classification, and constituting a remarkable point in the progress of literature. They are both poets of sensation rather than reflection. (547)

The category in which the opposite geniuses of the Romantic writers could be contained was that with which Tennyson could be identified as well. Yet if Jamison is even approximately accurate in her suspicions of Shelley and Keats, Hallam's categorization must have been terrifying to Tennyson.

Jamison concludes that Shelley almost definitely suffered from a manic-depressive illness that featured psychotic episodes. Her justifying comments:

> Recurrent, agitated, and occasionally suicidal melancholia. "Hysterical attacks" followed by

> periods of listlessness; often seasonal. Ecstatic episodes and "violent paroxysms of rage." Self-described as "tormented by visions," the psychiatric nature of which remains unclear. Probable transient delusions. Intermittent laudanum use for "nerves." (69)

Keats, on the other hand, probably suffered from bipolar II or cyclothymic disorder, according to Jamison. Her comments regarding him are as follows:

> "Violent and ungovernable as a child"; described by brother as nervous, "morbid," and suffering from "many a bitter fit of hypochondriasm" [melancholy]; periods of depression often followed by periods of intense activity and 'exhilaration." Described himself as having a "horrid Morbidity of Temperament." Rapidly shifting moods predated symptoms and diagnosis of tuberculosis. (70)

Even without Jamison's psychiatric vocabulary, Tennyson must have been inclined to perceive or to sense a similarity between the condition of these poets, as evidenced by the lives they led and the poetry they wrote, and the condition of his father. For Hallam, devoted reader and friend that he was, to identify Tennyson with Shelley and Keats was to confirm and exacerbate Tennyson's obsessive fears: to say he was like the Romantic poets was to say he was like his father, and so destined for madness and isolation.

The situation was even worse than this, in a way. If, as Armstrong suggests, Hallam aligned himself philosophically with Whewell, and so held that "truth is change," then the identity that he would assign Tennyson, on the basis of the latter poet's similarity to that of the Romantic writers, was itself unstable and changing. The identity was paradoxically one of Heraclitean flux, which would have

resembled the manic-depressive flux of identity so frighteningly, bewilderingly apparent in Tennyson's father. The threat that Hallam presents to Tennyson is not the destiny of an Oedipal struggle in relation to the paternal figures of the Romantic poets or in relation to his biographical father; the destiny is rather the inverse of the Bloomian or Freudian scheme: the father's identity is discerned as a lack of identity; and rather than struggling to establish his own identity in the shadow of his father's('), Tennyson is forced to struggle against the seeming inevitability of being swallowed up by his fathers' black hole of identity's lack.

> What! am I raging alone as my father raged in his mood?
> Must I too creep to the hollow and dash myself down and die
> Rather than hold by the law that I had made, nevermore to brood
> On a horror of shatter'd limbs . . . ?
>
> (I: xiv, 53-56)

Thus does "the heir of madness," "the morbid poetic soul" speaker of Maud wonder. The speaker of the poem is not Tennyson, but Tennyson's fear of being an "heir of madness" renders him a "morbid poetic soul," and Jamison's insinuated consideration that Tennyson betrayed his sense of identification with the speaker by virtue of his repeated recitation of the poem does not seem far-fetched: "It was Tennyson's favorite poem; he would recite it over and over again--bleakly, tirelessly--to family and friends" (196).

As we shall see in the next chapter, however, Tennyson's fear of inheriting "Romantic" madness encouraged, on

the poet's part, an aesthetic responsiveness of empathic understanding.

Notes

1. The considerations I make of Tennyson's struggle with and against Romantic depression and of how that struggle shapes his aesthetic tend to affirm much of the view that Herbert Tucker takes, in Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism, regarding the character of Tennyson's aesthetic. But I would contend with Tucker, too, in several respects. Tucker is inclined to consider Tennyson as identifying with the speakers he presents in his poems rather than as standing at a distance that permits his analysis of the speakers. The consequence of Tucker's consideration is that Tennyson remains in a state of mourning--and indeed, of melancholia--over the emptying of hope for a Romantic subjectivity. I hear the minor key of Tennyson's music in a slightly different way: the poet labors to reconceive subjectivity as a longing for the condition of stable subjectivity in a stable world; and a denial of such longing, suggests Tennyson--whether by means of Romantic grandiosity or of the hubris of empiricism--spells doom. Tennyson's insistent reminders of this point make his poems less lyric claims to helplessness than elements of a strenuous critique of culture.

2. Unless otherwise specified, all citations to Tennyson's poems are from The Poems of Tennyson, and are indicated by line number.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TENNYSON AND THE AESTHETIC OF EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING

Once we get some sense of the unrelenting fear that Tennyson had as a result of his "black blood," we find it almost difficult to resist reading a poem like "The Kraken" along psychological lines.

> There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
> Battening upon huge sea-worms in his sleep,
> Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
> Then once by man and angels to be seen,
> In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.
> (11-15)

By means of the poem, Tennyson associates the mythical Norwegian beast with the beast of the Apocalypse: little of the poem directly suggests that Tennyson's concerns here are with his intrapsychic dynamisms. But the obsessive fears that Jamison notes in the poet, fears of his going mad like the rest of his family, certainly seem to inform a poem in which some huge, generally indefinable creature sleeps, but promises one day to rise, make itself known, and signal Apocalyptic destruction. And if we are hesitant to think of the poem in such stark psychological terms, we should note that Tennyson provides us with a warrant and with some general encouragement for doing so.

The poem is not a consideration of the Norwegian beast, afterall, but is the account of mythological appropriation, perhaps mythological colonization. The poet alters his understanding of the nameless, mysterious beast of

Revelation and his relatively familiar Christian tradition by assimilating to it the Scandanavian beast. A reader of the poem, encountering the title, tends to expect that the naming conducted there is definitive; but Tennyson, through the course of the poem, ironizes this expectation. By means of his assimilation, he indicates that the name is an unstable site of referential expansion, and as such, it can serve as an opportunity for increased understanding. In a sense, the "chiefly lyrical" element of the poem is a claim, which runs counter to the expectations evoked by the title, that Tennyson, provided with a mythological figure, a myth, or even a word, enlarges these--and in the process, destroys the specificity of meaning that might be assigned them by others--by assimilating them to his own mythological or signifying scheme. In this respect, the poem is a demonstration or performative attestation to the relativism proclaimed in "Οἱ ῥέοντες": "All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true." It does not serve, either, as Tennyson's authoritative proclamation as to what the Kraken should be for the reader, but serves instead as an invitation to the reader to participate in the proliferation of meaning as encouraged by the sign "Kraken."

Even within the poem, by means of the allusion of line 12, we are encouraged to undertake, with Tennyson, a Shelleyan reading of the "Kraken," beyond the Christian one. And as Armstrong argues,

> A Shelleyan reading would endorse the destruction of the Kraken if we assume that the mythical being

> is a principle of mindless repression. Instinctively feeding in its 'dreamless' (3) sleep, without the psychic experience even of the unconscious, the Kraken approaches almost to the condition of mindless, organic matter as it gluts itself on its prey in a relationship which confirms a biological hierarchy of predator and preyed upon. (54)

Armstrong notes, though, that the poem invites various readings. Commenting that "'The Kraken' is a pre-eminent example of Tennyson's way of setting up competing propositions within a single framework," she argues that the poem "is in the tradition of Coleridge's early prophetic poetry," particularly as it "conflates and reconfigures legend to provide symbols of catastophic change," though "there are several mythic propositions in 'The Kraken'" (54). These propositions are not entirely compatible: the "post-Christian Shelleyan," which may seem to be allied with G. S. Faber's "religious mythologizing," envisions the sea snake's rising as transformative, even as the creature "is Faber's evil principle which belongs to the dissolutions incorporated in the mystae" (55); but the apocalyptic, "Christian reading is about endings," and

> this is allied with another reading directly associated with the horror of political revolution rather than its liberation. The primitive folk mythology of Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border associates the Kraken unequivocally with revolution. (55)

The poem urges us to recognize that "'mythic' reading is by its nature multiple"; and "because mythic forms are reinterpreted afresh in different historical situations, no permanent reading is possible," the poem suggests. "New

myths and new readings of myth are constantly evolved" (55).

Because the multiple readings can be contradictory, the poem "cannot be read synchretically," such that it concerns "Promethean freedom," "Christian judgement," "evil capable of transformation," and "the sheer sick horror of fatalistic legend which sees revolution deterministically" all at once. "It can be each of these representations, but it cannot be all at once" (55). "Tennyson does not leave all these meanings in play with a ludic conservative-anarchistic reading of the horror of all political change," however.

> The poem insists on the inert, unconscious life of the Kraken, whichever of the readings may be preferable as available myths of revolution. It is the living example of oblivion because its actions occur without volition. According to which of these myths are activated, utopian or conservative, the Kraken is the principle of transformation, of mindless destruction, or evil, or the helpless victim of external forces. But in each case inertia which does not know it is inertia is the dangerous element. The massive inertia which can only resist movement and change is the Kraken's being. (55-56)

In spite of the fact that "no permanent reading" of the Kraken "is possible," the "massive inertia" that Armstrong points out does seem to be a consistent characteristic of the mythological figure; and if "mythic forms are reinterpreted afresh in different historical situations," we have considerable warrant to note the resemblance, at least, between the "black blood" or madness of Tennyson's father--a madness that Tennyson fears to be lying dormant within himself, yet destined, at some unpredictable time, to rise--and the Kraken. Our own historical situation, in the wake

of Freud, encourages our reinterpretation of the mythic form along psychological lines, according to a vocabulary to which Tennyson had no access.

Simultaneously, we may note the resemblance between the figure of the Kraken and Keats's figure of Lamia as we have discussed it in the previous chapter. Under a "hermeneutic" influence, Lamia emerges as a figure lovable to Lycius, but seen for what she "is"--a serpent--in the authoritative gaze of Apollonius, she disintegrates, and so doing, brings about Lycius' death. Our inclination to note the resemblance between the two serpent-figures is enhanced by the fact that Tennyson alludes to "Lamia" in "The Poet's Mind," which, as we have mentioned, appears in the same volume as "The Kraken."

In addition, Armstrong's point that Tennyson's poem is "in the tradition of Coleridge's early prophetic poetry" helps us note the resemblance between the Kraken and the sea snakes in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, whose appearance allow for the epiphantic, transformative experience that the Mariner undergoes. And as we have seen, what the Mariner tries to get the Wedding Guest to appreciate is "the massive inertia" of the Wedding sign, and habitual custom which is, like Armstrong's conception of the Kraken, "inertia which does not know it is inertia," and which "can only resist movement and change." The conversion that the Mariner brings about in the Guest is one in which the Guest sees rising from unfathomable depths "the inertia which does not

know it is inertia," the custom of the Wedding. The fire that has made the monster rise, be seen for what it is, and die, is the analogy that the Guest has been able to construct between the "Wedding" and the Mariner's "Albatross," wherein the Guest can understand "Wedding" as myth that "may be reinterpreted afresh in different historical situations" and which holds out no promise for a "permanent reading." The insight of Tennyson's poem, as Armstrong describes it, seems eerily similar to the insight that the Mariner would share with the Wedding Guest:

> Kraken-like, myths carry meaning but do not know their own meanings until reinterpretation makes new meaning possible. This is why the connection of myth and politics is so close in the nineteenth century. For once the notion of reinterpretable myth is established, the concept of ideology becomes possible. Ideology carries the principle of oblivion and inertia with it because it cannot be 'seen' as representation unless it is destroyed. When it is seen <u>as</u> ideology, its power is weakened. Some impossible cataclysm as the agent of destruction or a traumatic defamiliarization can destroy ideology. The poem seems to be pessimistically exploring the conditions under which myth and ideology are destroyed and remade. And so the poem is deeply concerned with exploring the sources of action. Whether the Kraken belongs to the inert forces of reaction or is the mindless violence of repressed energy are interpretations which must involve ideological choice. (56)

The "alternative and contradictory readings of the poem" seem to incorporate the influential voices of Coleridge and Keats as well, then, such that the poem, seemingly occasioned by the presentation of the Kraken image, is a panicked if outwardly restrained attempt to channel "alternative and contradictory" internalized voices into a satisfactory awareness of what the Kraken could

represent. And the voices themselves seem to threaten a contribution to the very inertia they would observe in the voices of others and resist. Yet as their voices are brought together, their apparent cacophony indicates at least the potential for harmonic resolution, if only by the mere fact that they participate in a similar activity.

In this sense, we might consider "The Kraken" as a companion poem to "The Poet's Mind": whereas the latter dissuades readers of Apollonian persuasion from approaching Romantic poetry--of which "Lamia" itself, revelatory of the "poet's mind" in its intrapsychic dynamisms, is apparently representative--"The Kraken" suggests a means of approaching Romantic poetry, and perhaps "Lamia" specifically, in a way alternative to the Apollonian. This way is very close to the "countertransferential" we have discussed with respect to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and to the kind invited, in that poem, by Coleridge. Tennyson fulfills the role to which the Wedding Guest has been assigned. He does so by constructing analogies and implying resemblances for his readers' responsive participation, between his own "Wedding"--the Christian tradition's conception of Revelation's beast, let's say, already placed in flux by Shelley, who would associate it with Greek mythology, and by Tennyson's own historically recent considerations of Scandanavian mythology, which, through Scott, would associate the Kraken with revolution--and Keats's Lamia. Encountering Lamia in Keats's poem, in other words--an

encounter which is much like the encounter that the Guest undergoes with respect to the Mariner's "Albatross"--Tennyson resists the Apollonian tendency to close off the referential potentiality of "Lamia," and responds by participating himself in the figural activity that Keats performs. "Lamia," as a specific sign, becomes insignificant: that figure is Keats's, and derives from Keats's own inscrutable experience of history; it is a figure as bizarre and unique and unfathomable as the Mariner's Albatross. What is significant is the similar, responsive action that Tennyson takes.

The Kraken is the figure Tennyson would use to consider and communicate the intrapsychic dynamisms of the "poet's mind." His reading of this figure calls into play a host of "alternative and contradictory" tendencies, and it is by means of his giving these tendencies free play, by struggling to exert some control over them, and by allowing them to be in converse with one another that he can read "Kraken" satisfactorily. But "truth is change": the reading remains unconcluded. So Tennyson reads "Kraken" as Keats reads "Lamia"--his mutual reading activity is his responsiveness, as opposed to an Apollonian interpretation and meaning--and in the process, he confronts the same anxiety and despair that Keats does in having to name that which he knows he cannot. His participation in the figural activity allows him to <u>empathize</u> with Keats's plight; but significantly, by virtue of the fact that he does participate,

Tennyson undoes the lyric isolation suggested by Keats's claimed experience. Keats attempts to communicate his own intrapsychic experience, which he imagines, it would seem, to be unique and therefore isolating; but Tennyson responds by noting that the experience is not unique. "Lamias," indeed, abound, in different guises. In addition, the character of Keats's intrapsychic experience has considerable political relevance: the struggle Keats has with the word "lamia" is the very one that people deny having with "Kraken" and all its manifestations wherein "inertia does not know it is inertia."

In responding to Keats, Tennyson also responds to Coleridge and fulfills the role of the Wedding Guest. Having been willing and able to read the Romantics in a way those of Apollonian persuasion have not, Tennyson responds to Keats's tale of intrapsychic dynamism by drawing his own analogies to it and thus repudiating its unique, vatic claim of seemingly privileged insight and experience. His congruent act brings about his empathic understanding and appreciation, though perhaps because of his awareness of the congruence, he is not quite overcome by the isolation of his condition. Indeed, because he can perceive resemblances between the Kraken, the beast of Revelation, Lamia, and elements of Shelley's reconstruction of Promethean mythology, and can suggest these to be relevant to reflections on revolution, social change, and awareness of ideology, he can render the lyric expression of the Romantics as a cultural

critique and highly significant political argument. If, as Armstrong says, "The Kraken" is "in the tradition of Coleridge's early prophetic poetry" in that it "conflates and reconfigures legend to provide symbols of catastrophic change," then we can perceive that Tennyson steers this tradition in the direction of the political, and so connects the would-be metaphysical Coleridge to the immediate physical world. This is precisely what Coleridge asks that his reader might do, as we have seen in the prosopopoeic plea urged in the conjured person of the Wedding Guest.

It is important, though, to note Tennyson's endeavor to distance himself from the Romantics even as he might empathize with them. Whereas they concern themselves with generating lyric expression that lays claim to seemingly unique, super-natural experience, Tennyson counters with the claim that their experience is not supernatural, and the belief that would see it as supernatural is a grandiose delusion that leads to social disconnection while it fails to realize its potential as powerful cultural critique.

Our emergent sense of Tennyson's ambivalent, empathic regard for the Romantics further clarifies the character of Hallam's influence: we can begin to recognize all the more that Hallam played a crucial role in Tennyson's deciphering his own poetic identity in relation to the Romantics. His inclination to identify Tennyson as a poet of sensation in the tradition of Shelley and Keats even as he would assent to a Whewellian notion of identity's instability is

suggestive of how crucial a role he played. An identification proposed in the context of such philosophical assent would serve as a challenge and invitation to realize one's own existential, "fundamental project," even as it could sound like a reductive categorization. Armstrong bemoans the fact that Hallam never defines "sensation" as he would apply it to poetry and contrast it with "reflection" as a poetic type; but his disinclination to define the term seems appropriate to his philosophical bent, and it is a fortuitous "oversight" for Tennyson, who is consequently encouraged to participate in the creation of an emergent category.

But beyond being an encouragement to professional development, Hallam's gesture must have struck Tennyson as enormously understanding, as testimony to a willingness of Hallam to listen, hear, and appreciate the character of Tennyson's struggles. A significant dimension of these struggles lay in the fear that the poet had for his mental stability, as Jamison has suggested. If Tennyson was indeed obsessed with worry over the influence of the black blood he carried within him, and if his father was manifestly manic-depressive as Jamison claims--even as she contends that Shelley was manic-depressive and Keats probably suffered from bipolar II or cyclothymic disorder--we can imagine that Tennyson must have recognized, in the lyric endeavors of the Romantics, the expressive urgency and grandiosity, the instability and isolation, the cyclic but constant change of

relations with the world that had been his father's. One cannot possibly grasp the agony of this condition, or the insights that arise from it, if his or her means of approaching it is Apollonian: this is the thrust of "The Poet's Mind," as we have seen. The sort of reading required is that suggested by "The Kraken," wherein one listens devotedly to--and repeats, meditatively, within oneself--the cacophony of alternative and conflicting voices that testify to truth as change. "But Tennyson does not leave all [the voices'] meanings [of "The Kraken"] in play with a ludic conservative-anarchistic reading of the horror of political change," writes Armstrong (55).

> The poem insists on the inert, unconscious life of the Kraken, whichever of the readings may be preferable as available myths of revolution. It is the living example of oblivion because its actions occur without volition. According to which of the myths are activated, utopian or conservative, the Kraken is the principle of transformation, of mindless destruction, or evil, or the helpless victim of external forces. But in each case inertia which does not know it is inertia is the dangerous element. (55-56)

Comprehending the "Kraken" in the truth of its flux is, for all its undeniably political and philosophical relevance, a means of maintaining some slight amount of control over the otherwise ungovernable play of the ludic voices. For Hallam to identify Tennyson as being in the same family of writers as Shelley and Keats would be to validate and exacerbate the poet's fears about his mental state: if he was like these poets, who manifested in poetic form the symptoms of George Tennyson, then Tennyson was indeed like his father, destined

for a deterioration that led to his father's state. Yet if Hallam's philosophical considerations had any merit, the category of "sensation," with which Shelley and Keats were to be identified, was in a state of flux: the destiny of madness suggested by the category of sensation did not need to hold sway. There was a source of hope here, however slight: destiny became a question rather than an inevitable doom.

But Hallam serves to affirm and prolong Tennyson's fear more than to alleviate it. He tells Tennyson that he is like Shelley and Keats, albeit with some variation, and he suggests, then, that Tennyson is like his father. Rather than spell out what this might mean, he wonders, with Tennyson, what it might mean. He encourages Tennyson to wonder, and demonstrates a willingness to wonder with Tennyson. Further, he perceives and contends that Tennyson's wondering has considerable political and cultural significance, and thus promises to be a beacon for the poet, a means by which Tennyson can see, repeatedly, how his otherwise isolated, "chiefly lyrical" experience has broad cultural relevance. Hallam indicates that the fear Tennyson feels is culturally relevant, in other words; and the poet's exploration, his living in and through that fear, is important for the culture.

Tennyson's fear is not quite the same as that of Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, or George Tennyson, we must recognize, though. The fears of the manic-depressives are

ones associated with the inevitable recurrence of the cycles: these people suffer from within a debilitating condition that realizes itself in cyclic repetition. Tennyson fears that this condition will become his. As unpleasant as it may be, this fear is reassuring: so long as Tennyson feels it, then he knows himself to be removed from the condition, since that condition remains, for him, potential. His fear assures him that he remains in a state of abstraction with respect to the condition, even as he may remain highly sensitive to and hyper-aware of its dynamisms. This fear might be recognized, then, as ensuring him the best possible perspective for gaining what conscious control he can over the condition. He cannot save his father, who has already fallen victim to the "madness," but he might be able to save the father who emerges, lives, and thrives in the "black blood" that guarantees, ironically or not, Tennyson's own life. Hallam encourages Tennyson to see the fear through, in effect; and he offers this encouragement by recognizing for Tennyson the cultural ramifications of his dedication and by promising to stand by the poet as he confronts his fear.

Hallam serves as a crucial influence, then, it would seem, in encouraging Tennyson to be the countertransferential reader of Romanticism that Coleridge sought in his conjuration of the Wedding Guest. Hallam serves as this influence by valorizing the fear that Tennyson feels, and in supporting and even encouraging that fear. Part of the

valorizing comes from Hallam's attempt to relate the philosophical, political, and cultural significance of Tennyson's explorations. But we must be careful to avoid making the judgment that because Tennyson's explorations have the philosophical relevance that Hallam describes, Tennyson is concerned, primarily, with making a philosophical argument, or that his importance lies in serving as a mouthpiece for the Apostles' philosophical speculations.

Where Tennyson is concerned, fear seems to be the primary and sustaining factor. It is this fear that prompts Tennyson to seek and try to establish a home in the company of the Apostles and their thought, and it is fear that sustains Tennyson's endeavors beyond the embrace of those philosophical formulations that prove inadequate to account for the fear or to alleviate it.

Because of the perspective Tennyson's fear allows, with respect to manic-depression, the fear makes empathy possible. Tennyson can stand removed from the condition, but be sensitive to it since it poses such a threat. His continual discrimination of the condition as existent in others serves as confirmation that the condition has not become his own; yet, fearing that it may become his own, he learns of it, of its signs and symptoms, such that he may escape what others have been unable to. As he learns of the condition, and knows all the while that this is the condition of his father and other family members, he can pity those who suffer. And yet, within his "black blood,"

this condition resides and is his own. Like the Kraken, it lies there, dormant, but threatens to rise; it cannot be named with specificity, but can be grasped through a gathering of fragmented voices about a magnet of anguish and fear.

The issue of empathy, then, becomes a crucial one for Tennyson, one that he would explore experientially while thinking through and communicating his contemplations poetically. Hallam would attempt to consider the issue at an ironically abstracted distance, as in his essay "On Sympathy." He argues here that

> the capacity for empathy is not a function of narcissistic power. Consciousness itself is not an undivided unity but a series of 'forms of self' and 'successive states', existing 'piece-meal, and in the continual flux of a stream'. Thus the act of empathy, or sympathy, can never be an appropriation of the other by a total self, for the divided self will always recognize the difference. 'Impetuous desire' to 'blend emotions and desires with those apparent in the kindred spirit' produces an identification of the 'perceived being with herself' which is conditioned by her understanding of it as other, a not-self.
>
> (Armstrong 81)

Tennyson "argues" the matter in a different fashion: in a poem like "The Palace of Art," he invites empathic experience. Instead of standing apart from and attempting to analyze such experience, he indulges in it. From the perspective of experience, he approaches analysis or suggests it, but comprehends that his capacity to achieve such a perspective of objectivity as to allow the analysis one would like is limited. Whereas Hallam's reflections on empathy result in an intellectual understanding that

purports to stand, powerfully, beyond and above life experience, Tennyson's inducements lead to the humbling acknowledgment that empathic experience leads to an awareness of one's own limitations, to an awareness that a desire for the authority that Hallam would claim for himself is the most one can have, and that such awareness is both a source of suffering and a stimulation to embrace empathic experience as a recurrent phenomenon that can be a source of human happiness.

We get some sense of the empathy that Tennyson tries to induce if we consider the shift in grammatical person that occurs between "To --. With the Following Poem" and "The Palace of Art." The former features a predominantly third-person explanation of the "Palace of Art," even if the first line establishes a technically circumsciptive first-person perspective. "To --" names "The Palace of Art" as a "sort of allegory" and stands in judgment against the "sinful soul" depicted in the latter poem. Having made this judgment, however, Tennyson proceeds to render the allegory in the first person, such that Trench or any other reader and Tennyson as writer are forced to share, by the first-person reading or writing they employ, in the flawed reasoning and sinful demise of the narrator. Simultaneously, the content of the narrator's communication is allusive, clearly with respect to the Coleridge of "Kubla Khan" at the outset, but also with respect to writers of Ecclesiastes and Luke, to George Herbert, Shelley, and others (Ricks, The

Poems of Tennyson 400-01). If the poem is an allegory, it is also a conversation poem in which the lyric "I" is called into question as specifically referential, not only because of the poem's allusiveness but because of the reader's reading. By means of the allusions and the reading, the lyric "I," suggestively of the Romantics, transforms itself into a "we" that is indicated to be as broad as humanity itself.

The "sinful soul" that the introductory poem would point to as object and would judge thus becomes "our own soul" through the reading of the second poem, and the allegory points us to a soul that we come to discern as our own. Retrospectively, we recognize that as we have imagined that we could stand apart from and pronounce judgment against one who "shuts Love out," we have placed our souls in the protected space in which the speaker of "The Palace of Art" places his; and blasphemously, we would speak with the authority of God.

As the first line of "The Palace of Art" would incline us to identify the narrator as Coleridge or as the Romantic poet, Tennyson's recommended regard for Romantic poetry, through the course of the poem, seems to be the following: the lyric "I" is not the vatic figure he might suppose himself to be and presents himself as being; but even as we ought not look upon such a figure, with awe and reverence, as an insightful other who has enjoyed a privileged access to mystical truths, we can perceive that he reveals to us

our own "sinful" inclinations and habits. This perception becomes possible as we share in his conversation poem and so empathize with him, though we never become him, since the "I" with which we experience a conversation poem will always be different than his. Inhabiting the "I" of his conversation poem, we can grasp how wrong he is in suggesting that he could stand apart from us and transcend the condition of humanity; but simultaneously, we can grasp that our act of judging him, our inclination to set ourselves apart from him and to claim for ourselves a position of transcendence, is an indication of our own sinfulness. Empathy lies in the emotionally informed, debilitating awareness of such mutual denial.

Tennyson's somewhat latent, reflexive critique of the Apostles, Hallam, and himself becomes more apparent in the 1842 version of "The Palace of Art," as Armstrong notes:

> The move is from a 'Romantic' to a 'Victorian' conception of art. In 1832 everything is appropriated by a hubristic imagination. In 1842 the poem becomes an analysis of mistaken categories in which art is defined falsely as that which is not 'mixed up' (in Hallam's phrase) with life: but once the opposition has been established the attempt to heal it simply endorses the fracture. Hallam's political strategy, which enables the poet to dissolve orthodoxies, becomes acutely vulnerable. (81)

What becomes clearer in the 1842 version is implicit even in 1832, though, as we have seen in considering the relation between the introductory poem and the poem itself.

As the critique turns back on itself, the critique of Romanticism loses some of its edge, and Romanticism itself

seems to gain greater stature--not for the claims it has made but for what, ironically, it has revealed about humanity. The reconsideration is evident in Tennyson's reconstruction of the Kraken: the Lady of Shalott, who, like the Kraken, exists in a passionless, dormant state, until a fire stimulates her rising, her self-revelation, and death. Significantly, she is the victim of ideology rather than a monster who might be associated with ideology itself. The serpent-figure is humanized, gendered as female, and dignified in such a manner that she draws far greater sympathy from the reader. The reconstruction of the Kraken myth seems to indicate that Tennyson is, in effect, operating from within the confines of "Lamia"--which is to say, from within the confines of "the (Romantic) poet's mind"--and is taking the part of Hermes, hermeneutically transforming a serpent-figure into a woman of passion figure who is destined to be undone as she acquires a name within the symbolic order. Such a hermeneutical reconstruction, in the direction of greater dignity, makes sense, though, as the earlier figure, associated as we have seen it, both with Romanticism and madness, encounters the personal history of Tennyson, where "truth is change" and myth is in flux, and where the promise of conscious control over the threats of madness and Romanticism, the promise of Hallam's philosophy, was becoming "acutely vulnerable," to borrow Armstrong's phrase.

In the picture we get of the Lady of Shalott, prior to

her departure from the tower, we recognize the poet as Plato would have him, blended with Hallam's vision of the figure as gendered female, blended still with the multiple traditions that would conceive of the mythological weaving woman. As Armstrong describes her,

> the Lady is locked into rigid oppositions, between the rural and urban, an older order of labour by hand and mercantilism and trade, an organic, integrated world and a fragmented commercial world, between isolation and community, between passivity and action and aggression, female and male, the aesthetic and the 'real'. Unable to mediate these oppositions she appears to be condemned to passivity and death. (83)

She has been assigned to her role by Camelot, apparently: her existence and service contributes to the smooth functioning of the society's economy. Working away in her island tower, she sings, and helps sustain the energies and spirits of the laborers in the fields around her:

> Underneath the bearded barley,
> The reaper, reaping late and early,
> Hears her ever chanting cheerly,
> Like an angel, singing clearly,
> O'er the stream of Camelot.
> Piling the sheaves in furrows airy,
> Beneath the moon, the reaper wearily
> Listening whispers, ''tis the fairy
> Lady of Shalott.' (19-27)[1]

These lines are from the 1832 version of the poem. In 1842, Tennyson elaborates on the description in such a manner that emphasis is placed on the fact that the wearying labor undertaken by the laborers maintains the operation of Camelot; and the Lady, correspondingly, is seen to possess an identity only as she serves to sustain the economy:

> By the margin, willow-veil'd,

Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
    Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at her casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
     The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
    Down to tower'd Camelot;
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers "'Tis the fairy
     Lady of Shalott." (19-36)

The enforced devotion to her task robs the Lady of her humanity. Emotionally numb, she commits herself to the task assigned her. She is vaguely aware of a curse that shall befall her if she stays her work long enough to see Camelot for what it is; and fearful of this curse, whatever it might be, she continues to work:

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colors gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
     To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
    The Lady of Shalott. (37-45) (1832)

"She lives with little joy or fear" (46), but comes to delight in seeing the sights of Camelot reflected in a mirror that has been provided for her, and weaving the images of those sights into her "web." She cooperates with the system, apparently, in doing so, since she celebrates Camelot as it is re-presented for her by the mechanics of representation provided by the culture: the mirror. Yet the

system seems to contain seeds of its own destruction, for as the Lady continues to weave the representation, her dormant passions of fear and joy become aroused, and she suddenly finds herself in possession of such awareness, informed by emotion, that she is capable of feeling detestation for the system she supports.

> But in her web she still delights
> To weave the mirror's magic sights,
> For often thro' the silent nights
> A funeral, with plumes and lights
> And music, went to Camelot;
> Or when the moon was overhead,
> Came two young lovers lately wed:
> "I am half sick of shadows," said
> The Lady of Shalott. (64-72) (1842)

We recognize here the emergence of a reconstructed Allegory of the Cave. In place of Plato's male philosopher, we have a female poet. The Lady's disenchantment with the shadows of delusion, presented to her by a culture enslaved by its ideology, arises not from a desire for knowledge achieved in abstraction from the body, but from passion that is desirous of corporeality, sexuality, and sensuality. Once she has heard the song of Lancelot and has seen him in her mirror, the Lady can endure her confinement no longer:

> She left the web, she left the loom,
> She made three paces thro' the room,
> She saw the water-lily bloom,
> She saw the helmet and the plume,
> She look'd down to Camelot.
> Out flew the web and floated wide;
> The mirror crack'd from side to side;
> "The curse is come upon me," cried
> The Lady of Shalott. (109-17)

Acknowledging her condition, she descends from her tower, quits her isolation, identifies herself in the inscription

she carries in her boat, and floats her way to death and bodily connection with Camelot.

Her arrival in the kingdom proper is met with an incomprehension similar to that with which Plato's enlightened philosopher is, though the citizens' confusion in Camelot seems to arise from the very thing that Plato would champion--the "wellfed wit":

> They crossed themselves, their stars they blest,
> Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest.
> There lay a parchment on her breast,
> That puzzled more than all the rest,
> The wellfed wits at Camelot.
> 'The web was woven curiously
> The charm is broken utterly,
> Draw near and fear not--this is I,
> The Lady of Shalott.' (172-80) (1832)

And of course, unlike Plato's philosopher, Tennyson's allegorical character does not survive as an isolated, noble figure who endeavors to promote dialectical reason: she dies, bequeathing to her culture only her name, her memory as a mysterious fairy-woman singing in her tower, the puzzling words of the parchment attached to her bosom, and her lifeless body. This is hardly the Shelleyan figure of the philosopher reincarnated as poet, either: the Promethean "unacknowledged legislator of the world."

It is precisely in her brokenness, however, that the Lady exerts her power: she testifies, with her (spent) being, to the condition of humanity. Our seeing her as such is to conceive that Tennyson, from within the drama or narrative of the Platonic allegory, reconceives that allegory in Aristotelian terms. The effect that the Lady

promises to have upon her culture seems infinitely modest by comparison with the influence that Plato would claim his philosopher capable of exerting, or with the influence that Shelley would claim his poet to be capable of accomplishing, but this assessment betrays our own misreading of the Lady and her message.

Her influence becomes more apparent in the changes to the final lines that Tennyson includes in the 1842 rendition. Here, Lancelot's misreading and miscomprehension of the Lady comprise the closing.

> Who is this? and what is here?
> And in the lighted palace near
> Died the sound of royal cheer;
> And they cross'd themselves for fear,
> All the knights at Camelot:
> But Lancelot mused a little space;
> He said, "She has a lovely face;
> God in his mercy lend her grace,
> The Lady of Shalott." (163-71)

Lancelot, in observing the Lady, focuses on her face. We recall, however, that immediately after the Lady had left her loom, her mirror cracked, and she acquired "a glassy countenance." Lancelot, courtly knight that he is (and Spenserian) in Tennyson's account, is "for ever kneeled / To a lady in his shield" (78-79); and we know, from our perspective, of course, what his destiny will be. Tennyson reminds us in his earlier "Sir Lancelot and Guenevere":

> A man had given all other bliss,
> And all his worldly worth for this,
> To waste his whole heart in one kiss
> Upon her perfect lips. (42-45)

The passion that, ignited, had prompted the Lady to reject the dehumanizing demands of Camelot are the ones that he

shall feel for Guenevere, and this will prompt him to assist in unravelling, through his adultery, the ideological web of Camelot. Could he see into the "glassy countenance" of the Lady's face--both through it, to her heart, and simultaneously at his reflection in it--he could grasp that her fate is to be his own, and not merely because of a sinfully lustful character flaw of his, but because of a culture's dedication, and his complicitous dedication, to a problematic ideology.

Yet, what good would it do Lancelot to have better read the "glassy countenance," we must wonder? Were he to avert the adultery, he would remain complicitous with an ideology he would know to be flawed and injurious, and probably, he would merely postpone the eruptions of the passions that he would know to be irrepressible. His seeing into the heart of her and finding there his own image establishes an empathic regard, a sense of shared suffering in an inescapably sad condition of humanity. In the midst of the suffering that inevitably unfolds, there is available a source of comfort and a means of assuaging the guilt that Lancelot shall feel or that the "sinful soul" of "The Palace of Art" shall feel in recognizing his blasphemies and its consequences. Indeed, such empathy, felt, might be the means to the purge of guilt which makes possible a rehabitation of the beautiful palace towers that have been built for the sinful soul, wherein "the Godlike life [that] is with man and for man" (qtd. Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson

400) may be happily and appropriately embraced.

As we consider the mirroring relation between the Lady and Lancelot, we are rather forced into a condition of anxiety and worry which arises from the question we are prompted to ask ourselves: if the Lady, prior to the stirring of her passions, is unaware of her complicity in the problematic ideology of Camelot, and Lancelot is likewise unaware, could it be that we are unaware as well, such that the destiny of the Lady and of Lancelot is to be our own?

The poem suggests that this is indeed the case; but the perspective we have of seeing both characters suffering from the same condition--a perspective which permits our understanding of Lancelot's misreading as ironic--suggests to us that all humanity may share the same condition, and dismal as that might be, it means that the suffering we experience is shared and can be acknowledged as such. The principal determinant of comprehending human relations as fulfilling, then, just might be empathy.

The vulnerability of Hallam's notions and political strategy, whose recognition we have observed as emergent in the 1842 revisions to "The Palace of Art," seem to be acknowledged as well in the 1842 revisions to "The Lady of Shalott." In the 1832 version of the latter poem, the citizenry of Camelot who fear but do not perceive the meaning of the Lady include "Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest" (172); but in 1842, this group is reduced to

knights alone and Lancelot most prominently. Lancelot, we can comprehend, is destined to discover how much he is like the Lady he fails to read. Given the sense we have, in "The Palace of Art" revisions, of Tennyson's emergent questioning of Hallam's thinking, we can reasonably consider that the 1842 Lancelot and his fellow knights resemble Hallam and the Apostles, including Tennyson. The poem is an acknowledgment, in such a reading, that the Apostle's engagement with the Romantics has amounted to a misreading: the belief that elaborating upon the poetry of sensation so as to render it a means of political, cultural critique and a means, therefor, of establishing the poet as an authoritative, Shelleyan "legislator of the world," ironically misreads the sign of Romanticism, a sign which indicates the destiny of the Apostles. Still, the source of a modest hopefulness becomes apparent: if none can escape the fate of the Lady, all can empathize with one another, can understand and acknowledge one another's like suffering.

It is easy enough to imagine how the struggles with the poetry of sensation and the Apostles' efforts to understand and manipulate that poetry through applications of philosophical consciousness parallel Tennyson's struggle with madness. We have already suggested how Tennyson must have construed the poetic of sensation, so-called by Hallam as identifying the work of Shelley and Keats, as resonant with his father's mental and psychological condition. We have noted as well that, even as Hallam's philosophical notions

might have helped Tennyson discern what sort of relationship he could have with Romanticism, enjoying a conscious control that the Romantics did not over the flux of ideas that seemed to ravage them, these notions tended to confirm Tennyson's fears: even if he did enjoy a consciousness that kept him at a safe distance from the chaos of thought, he was just this side of and remained vulnerable to the rising of madness, and Hallam identified him as a poet of sensation. Tennyson, Hallam, and the Apostles were aware enough of the paradox of their philosophical positioning: Tennyson's placement of "Οἱ ῥέοντες" at the end of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, testifies to this, as Armstrong suggests. "The relativist position is itself subject to the relativist principle" (Armstrong 41). Such awareness is itself philosophical: note how even Armstrong's statement of the situation can claim to admit the terror of such insight while repressing it. With the passing of time, from 1832 to 1842, Tennyson grows disenchanted with the way he is thinking, along with the Apostles, about the poetry of sensation.

Parallel to this disenchantment seems to run a growing appreciation for that which the poetry of sensation and madness represented: a testimony, of greater authority than any philosophical account could supply, to a human condition wherein subjectivity realized itself in longing. The testimony was perhaps unintended: Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge made their vatic claims in the belief that they

were mystically informed, and not with the appreciation that the insistence with which they made their claims revealed common desires communicated with passionate intensity. In 1842, at the same time Hallam's notions become "acutely vulnerable"--a sentiment leant strength by Hallam's death, certainly--the Lady of Shalott, a humanized, relatively dignified reconstruction of the Kraken and Lamia, appears and unconsciously reveals to an uncomprehending Lancelot his own pathetic condition. As she is the victim of an ideology she has failed to understand, so is he; as the Romantic writers have fallen victims to the ideologies of their culture and ironically devoted themselves to support ideologies of their own, so have Hallam and the Apostles; as "the mad"--George Tennyson, Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge--have become ironically convinced of their grandiose claims and have failed to comprehend the passionate, interminable longing that yields these claims, so have Tennyson and Hallam fallen victims to irony in believing, grandiosely, that they could circumscribe passionate human longing with philosophical accounts.

The longing of the mad or the Romantic poet, however intense it may be by comparison--and the intensification may be due to repudiations and rejections of the culture--appears to Tennyson to be congruent with the longings of everyone else; and the efforts that the mad and the poets make, through their grandiose claims to vatic stature, to deny their persistent condition of longing, are congruent

with the strategies of those culturally accepted thinkers who would deny their condition of longing through authoritative philosophical pronouncements and ideological attestation. Both the longing and the denial of that longing seem to be features of a human condition, and the achievement of the Romantic writers seems to lie in the unwitting revelation of this point. Tennyson endeavors to acknowledge this revelation. Yet the process of such acknowledgment cannot derive from a cognitive understanding that involves the assumption of a position abstracted from the human condition of longing and denial; awareness derives from empathic experience, wherein an abstraction that permits conscious awareness may be experienced as otherness, not transcendence, and may be grasped as the limit of abstraction.

The significance of empathic understanding is propelled into prominence, for Tennyson, by Hallam's death, and we can appreciate this in reading "Tithon" particularly in relation to "Saint Simeon Stylites." "Tithon" begins as an expression of mourning, close to absolute despair, on the part of the speaker, over his tragic situation of interminable aging. The anguished, helpless look at self turns outward, at line 15, and declares itself to be an address, a prayer, directed to Aurora. Aurora is the source of Tithon's difficulties, however: should she hear and grant his request, Tithon's situation could very well turn out worse than it had been previously, particularly if her past involvement

serves as any kind of indication of what an interaction with her promises. How it could be worse is difficult to imagine, but the mixings of divine and human natures seems to have proven exceedingly complicated and unpredictable for Aurora herself, and Tithon has borne the burden of her inadequacy. If Aurora does listen to Tithon, but is either unable or unwilling to alter his condition, then Tithon is doomed to remain in his current state, which is unbearable. The action that Aurora takes, whatever action it is, probably makes no difference: it might change things, but it will probably make things worse. Consequently, Tithon's address to her makes no difference, and the very fact he makes it tends to fulfill the doom he suffers: his prayer sustains the mixing of his nature with the divine, and as a meaningless redundancy, interminably ages him.

If Tithon unwittingly complies with the doom that fate has assigned him--or if, indeed, he is the source of his own doom--by means of the prosopopoeic conjuration he establishes through his prayer, Tennyson could be said to be doing the same thing by choosing and constructing Tithon as a character who is obviously a mask and a mouthpiece figure for Tennyson as he mourns the death of Hallam and considers his own future without this extraordinary friend. Tennyson's anxiety in the wake of Hallam's death has led him to the psychic responsiveness of the prosopopoeic conjuration of Tithon, a figure with whom he can identify, yet know, simultaneously, to be ironically confounded. And in

conjuring the figure, Tennyson creates for himself the doom he conceives Tithon to create: apparently interminable acts that simultaneously ensure his preservation and lend him the debilitating age of human experience.

A retrospective glance at "Saint Simeon Stylites," taken in the aftermath of an encounter with "Tithon," ought to reveal to us how similar Tennyson's act of conjuring Tithon is to the culture's conjuring a "saint" from the figure of Simeon. Tennyson could not be said to sympathize with those who would call such a man a saint, and he would not sympathize with a Simeon Stylites, but in "Tithon" we get a sense of Tennyson's empathic understanding of all these: great anxiety, such as that encountered in the experience of loss, of great loneliness, or of madness, leads people, perhaps inevitably, to endeavors of prosopopoeic conjuration, which in turn seem only to aggravate the emotional condition.

The greatest possibility of hope for a humanity that exists in such a condition would seem to lie in reaching an empathic understanding that emerges from the activity of prosopopoeic conjuration that is recognized as such. To the extent that one can grasp his own actions as resembling those of a Simeon Stylites or of a Coleridge or Shelley or Keats, in spite of their own condemnible uniqueness, then one can grasp the nature of the human condition that he or she shares. An emergent awareness of this kind would seem to hold out the greatest promise for significant cultural

revolution. Herein, the hope of a Shelleyan revolution would seem to survive, but the path to it lies not in the joyful discernment of divine humanity: it lies in the recurrent reminder of humanity's shared miseries and unfulfilled desires.

What we find in Tennyson, then, seems to be a conviction that empathy is its own philosophical argument. Hallam had sensed this in his championing of the poetry of sensation, but he was inclined to provide in response to it a paradoxical and counterintuitive metacriticism, while Tennyson gave himself over to empathic experience. As we become aware of this difference, we must come to question Armstrong's assessment that in the 1840s, Tennyson suffered a "loss of nerve" (94). In the wake of Hallam's death,

> Tennyson's capacity to lure the energies of the unconscious into language and set them at play, as the poem simultaneously works on critique, wavers and loses its confidence. The double poem collapses, to reappear in a different form in In Memoriam (1850). The paradoxically disruptive aesthetics of organicist conservatism fragments and is displaced by a new account of poetry. The union of interdependent theories of consciousness, ideology, language, and sexuality which underlies the early poems disintegrates. (94-95)

Armstrong suggests here that the poetry has been provided with its focus, impetus, and direction by Hallam and his philosophical considerations. Hence,

> Hallam's failure to give adequate definition to the terms 'sensation' and 'reflection' proved fatal as poetry was theorized antithetically either in terms of the discourse of moral statement or as a much weaker picturesque poetry of empathy rather than 'sensation', an empathy Ruskin was later to term the pathetic fallacy. (95)

The case seems to be more complicated than this if, as we have been suggesting, Tennyson has become increasingly convinced, as is demonstrated by his poetry, that empathic understanding bears an authoritative testimony to truths of the human condition that philosophical thinking, abstracted from empathic experience, cannot. Tennyson generally assents to Hallam's philosophical considerations as such, but even in 1832, he exhibits some doubts as to the authoritative stature that philosophy could claim in explaining the human condition. And these doubts continue to develop into the 1840s, encouraging the need for "a new account of poetry," as Armstrong puts it.

The empathy in which Tennyson partakes, as we have been describing it, is of a different sort, however, than the kind touted by the writers of the 40s, as Armstrong describes them. This "poetry of empathy," she explains,

> abandons that provisional, experimental projection of consciousness and volition on to the other which exposes the structural relationship between subject and object, self and world, and which opens up a space for the analysis of categories and the play of representation. The mythic forms of the historicised consciousness disappear. (95)

It does not concern itself with the issues that Tennyson and Hallam had been exploring, but seems to avoid them. Empathy here, as opposed to the phenomenon that Tennyson was exploring,

> is the expressive poet's outwards flow of emotion which attaches to and elides with the solid external world. This world echoes the categories of subjectivity unproblematically and returns human experience back to the perceiver. Thus it is a poetry of confirmation, not analysis, and deals

> with all the 'usual' themes--love, friendship, religion--which Hallam rejected. It is a kind of humanized form of natural theology which finds evidence for the existence of stable human values in the external world. The elision of consciousness with the world provides no space for an account of the sign or language as constructing relationships. (95)

This is not the empathy with which Tennyson has been concerned. Significantly, however, it is related to it; and in the model of countertransference that we earlier introduced as a way of approaching Coleridge, we could conceive of this so-called empathy as "projective identification." As such, it could serve as the felix culpa though which genuine empathy might be reached--and Tennyson understood this because of his own experience. The apparent instability of the world and the anxiety that people feel in sensing it encourage them to embrace a "humanized form of natural theology which finds evidence for the existence of stable human values in the external world," but this narcissistic endeavor fails as it inevitably confronts the otherness of the world. Still, it is the endeavor of this projective identification and its failure that permits genuine empathy, for through this experience, we gain the capacity to perceive that others do the same thing we have done. For some, the projective identification may involve an albatross, and from another's perspective, such psychic endeavor may seem mad or mystical or supernatural; yet such a psychic endeavor seems to be embarrassingly our own to the extent we assent to a theology that would conceive a Simeon Stylites to be a saint, or that would conceive of a Wedding--which

turns ritual into a social expectation and habit that endorses class structure and prejudicial rejection--as a sacrament and blessing for the future of a couple and a culture. Our own endeavors of projective identification include the narcissistic condemnation of others, or acceptance of them so long as they serve our narcissistic labor: we kill the albatrosses in which others would place their faith.

I allude to Coleridge here to remind us of the character of Tennyson's effective responsiveness to him. Whereas Coleridge lays claim, through his Ancient Mariner, to a subjective experience, and implores his audience, in the character of the Guest, to conceive of the Mariner's experience as relevant to his, Tennyson does indeed conceive this, and so fulfills the role of the Guest beyond Coleridge's poem. The Victorian poet responds by recognizing, in effect, that Coleridge's psychic plight is not isolated, absolutely subjective, or mystical, but that it testifies to distinctly common human experience. Lyricism and the poetry of sensation is to die, but its "glassy countenance," which we may penetrate with a concentrated gaze, bears an image of ourselves; and we have the chance--as the Romantics did not --of understanding, through empathic experience, that their fate of unrealized desire is our own.

If empathic understanding was, in Tennyson's mind, gaining the credibility that we have been suggesting, then his departure from the program that Hallam had envisioned is

not so surprising as Armstrong would suggest. Quite accurately, I think, Armstrong judges that "the death of Hallam, the dispersal of the Apostles and above all the worsening and disruptive social conditions of the late 1830s and 1840s" all contributed to a departure from Hallam's theoretical reflections--a departure that Armstrong calls a "loss of nerve" (95). "That poetry should enfranchise a wider readership, reaching out to the excluded," she complains,

> was also a factor in this change. A less arcane and simpler poetry, a moralised aesthetics rather than an aestheticised politics seemed to be the conservative answer to the radicals' demand for a poetry of the people. (95)

For one increasingly dedicated to the promotion of empathic understanding, however, this aesthetic re-orientation, awkward as it may have been and simple as it may have looked from the perspective of one inclined to valorize philosophical reflection, makes a good deal of sense. Hence, I would disagree with Armstrong when she says

> It is strange that Tennyson's nerve was undermined at the very point when he was demonstrating a magnificent control over his material in the confident and often devastatingly analytical revisions of earlier work in 1842. Nevertheless, he nervously protects himself with conventionalities in other poems and defensively includes much more direct topical reference . . . . (95)

I do not find this very strange at all. It seems to clarify a connection, indeed, between the Lady of Shalott and the speaker of Maud and the role of the poet in culture, as Tennyson would see it.

The speaker of Maud eventually relinquishes his

obsession for the woman who is a prosopopoeic conjuration--even if this conjuration may be based on a real woman--and devotes himself to the obsessions of his country. Since his obsessions are now conventional, he appears to be psychologically healed. As in the case of the Lady of Shalott, the speaker of Maud has, within the framework and under the pressure of cultural expectation of ideology, which, in his case, work to keep Maud at an intransversible distance from him, experienced the emergence of his passions. Kraken-like, these passions rise and, from our perspective, horrifically declare themselves--with greater elaboration than the Lady communicated hers, but with arguably equal ambiguity, since the particularity of the passions seems so foreign to our own experience--and die, conforming themselves to the passions, unacknowledged as such, of the culture.

If indeed we can compare the speaker in this poem to the Lady, however, there remains the latent possibility that the presence of the speaker's emotional "corpse" may be able to exert an influence over his culture, by means of a cultural critique waged in the silence of a body deprived of life, that brings the passions of the culture to light, just as the Lady can bring Lancelot's passions to light if he can read her "glassy countenance."

The poet, for Tennyson, is destined to exert his influence in the manner that the Lady or the speaker of Maud might: through a terminal relinquishment of his particular

passions in favor of the unacknowledged passions of the culture. This is Tennyson's benediction of Romanticism's corpse; and he strives to be the Lancelot of a new Camelotic myth, a man who can see into that body and find his own image--who, through his reading, can grasp the Romantics' aesthetic gift for what it is: a testimony to the human in all its frailty. His own destiny as poet lies in relinquishing his private passions--freely, in a way that the Romantics could not--and, motivated by empathy, taking upon himself the passions of the culture. The corpse of his passion has the chance of promoting empathic understanding and a culture's awareness of its own passions that a Romantic lyric testimony does not.

The death of Hallam, we may suspect, created a stirring of passion in Tennyson as huge and incomprehensible as the rising of the Kraken, as we have suggested; and one element of this passion was undoubtedly associated with Tennyson's obsession with madness. Hallam had been able, as well as anyone, to read Tennyson, to identify him as a poet of sensibility, and as one, therefore, afflicted in the manner of his father--yet capable, too, of escaping the doom of it, working from within and simultaneously from beyond it, from the perspective of analysis, to make it something different and get beyond its incapacitating isolation. Tennyson's association with Hallam held out the promise for the poet of helping him to understand his father and therefore to keep madness at an analyzable distance. With Hallam's loss came

the terrifying indication that such a distance could not be achieved. George Tennyson and the madness he stood for became Tennyson's Maud: objects of obsessive desire that could not be grasped. Yet an awareness of the great passion associated with never-to-be gratified desires bring about the correlative awareness that the passions cannot be explained to others: anguish and mourning and longing such as the sort involved here, particularly, are fundamentally individual and personal. In the moment of such awareness, one may engage in a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" but risk, in the process, being rejected as a madman or revered as a mystic, either regard of which construes the communications of the poet to be irrelevant as cultural critique.

On the other hand, one may assimilate his passions to those of the culture, creating of his own individual passions an emotional corpse into which the culture may peer and make out its own likeness. Such an endeavor is not the altruistic one it might seem; it is one born of the conviction that <u>longing</u>, in whatever form, is what we human beings are condemned to do. The individual varieties of it blind us to the commonness of our experience. Those of us who experience it most acutely have a chance of recognizing its commonness and communicating that point--if we can get beyond the horrifying loneliness of longing's unique manifestation in us.

"The steadily worsening and disruptive social

conditions of the late 1830s and 1840s" made clear to a poet persuaded of empathy's power how his longing for a Hallam and for an attachment to a consciousness that could keep Tennyson at an anaytical distance from madness resembled the longing of the culture to gain a consciousness that could permit it an analytical distance from its increasingly apparent, immanent "madness." An empathetic Tennyson would not insist on a culture's exploring the weighty speculations engendered by the Apostles, thereby discerning its own condition; an empathetic Tennyson would speak from within the discourse of the culture, wherein

> the appropriative power of the expressive poet is masculinized as the product of strength, the capacity to confirm and stabilise, ultimately the capacity of the ego to control the world by making it return the subject's experience.
>
> (Armstrong 95)

Tennyson's endeavor here is not exactly to endorse such a procedure, but to assist a culture in comprehending how the procedure fails. It is by means of feeling the devastation of this failure, after all, that one comes to an awareness and acknowledgment of the condition of longing that human beings cannot escape and that is definitive of their being.

My explanation, here, of what Armstrong calls a "loss of nerve" makes me sound as if I would judge Tennyson to be making conscious decisions about the way he was proceeding. I doubt that he was doing so, but that Tennyson's heart and intuitions were leading his head--in the manner that Armstrong suggests when she says that the poet suffered a "loss of nerve" that resulted in "a less arcane and simpler

poetry." The heart and intuitions led Tennyson in the direction of empathy and the hope in it rather than in the direction of a simple loss of nerve.

All this time, too, In Memoriam is on the way. And here again, we find a dynamic that unfolds in a manner similar to the one we witness in Maud. The redundant questioning and recurrent subjunctive expression proceeds not in the direction of wish fulfillment but toward a sustained, interminable subjunctive whose wishful character is camouflaged by the harmony or resonance it achieves with conventional, public desire. The condition of understanding desired--an understanding of death, of mortality, of Hallam, of friendship, and of life--is not achieved, and indeed, the longing for the understanding is prolonged; what does seem to be achieved is an empathic understanding that what we human beings do is desire a condition that we cannot attain.

The achievement of empathic understanding can be both hopeful and dangerous: it can be hopeful in that it can alleviate the panic that one feels in the isolation of the longing that is individual and private; it can be dangerous in that it encourages a repression of this private dimension of the longing and in that it results in a denial of longing altogether. Strengthened by the commonality of longing, subjunctive expression approaches insistence, and desire is repressed by the authoritative proclamation of imagined fact.

The Tennyson of In Memoriam wins the dubious solace

that the speaker of Maud enjoys. Solace indeed it may be, but it may be sustained as such only as the one experiencing it can accept that his desires are prolonged and sustained, not fulfilled; and what he enjoys--what he can enjoy, at best--is the company of fellow human beings who share the experience of sustained longing.

If part of what Hallam had represented for Tennyson is that Other who testifies to Tennyson's identity, compellingly, as an historically specific part of sensibility in the tradition of Shelley and Keats, then the loss of Hallam represents the loss of a capacity for Tennyson to determine the complex nature of his relation to Romanticism, and In Memoriam consequently represents an elegy of this capacity. The redundant verbalizations of subjunctive expression are repeated desires to comprehend what his relation to Romanticism is, and the series of the expressed desires ends up where it starts--in a renewed expression of the desires--although the poet derives some comfort from the fact that his expression resonates with others.

Thinking in this way, we can perceive a resemblance between the testimony that Tennyson provides in his poem and the argument that Frances Ferguson makes in her "Romantic Studies" article of the Redrawing the Boundaries anthology. In her essay, Ferguson reviews twentieth-century theoretical perspectives on Romanticism. Taking her prompt from Jerome McGann's Romantic Ideology, she argues that this work renews "a debate about how many Romanticisms there are--which is,

of course, tantamount to asking how we know what Romanticism is" (100). This is a debate that began, says Ferguson, between Lovejoy and Wellek, and that has continued through the century. As she examines the numerous theorists she does and indicates the irony of their claims, she resembles the Tennyson of In Memoriam, stepping from one subjunctive endeavor to the next and perceiving that a person cannot inhabit a perspective wherein the wish for a grasp of reality results in the grasp of actual reality. "What the legacy of Romantic thought demonstrates," she concludes--and what the legacy of thinking about Romanticism demonstrates as well, she implies--"is how far the nonmaterial extends":

> what I have been arguing is that this [Romantic] "discovery" [of nature] does not involve empirical reality, an acceptance of nature as a universal ground for human experience. Human pleasure in nature did not come to represent realism or empirical reality, what we must face up to, but became the enabling example for an argument on behalf of formal idealism. Yet far from being escapist or unreal, Romantic formal idealism remains as real as it gets. (122)

Ferguson's use of the first person plural, validated as it is by the survey she has undertaken, claims and argues for an empathic understanding grounded in the experience of a condition we share and attempt to deny:

> Our pleasure in nature and our scientific knowledge of it are alike important for identifying not reality but reality production as an inescapable process of supplying intentional states to the very matter that we identify as incapable of having intentional states. (122)

What "the legacy of Romantic thought" bequeaths us is the understanding that "the mere act of seeing the world of

matter as nature makes ideology less a cultural construction than an assertion of the constructedness of seeing a world of things (122). Tennyson would agree, albeit by means of an alternative discourse. He would agree as well with John Beer's conclusion that Romanticism ought to be seen as "a site of questioning," not a "defined entity" that one can expect to be "readily graspable" (248). Tennyson comes to his conclusion, however, by means of an experience of empathic understanding, which he also invites.

The empathy that Tennyson would champion, however, is not the sort celebrated by the "poetry of empathy" emergent in the 1830s and 1840s. The latter derives from the bad faith, delusive conviction that intention can establish reality, to state the matter in Ferguson's terms, rather than in reality production alone. It constitutes, as we have previously suggested, projective identification. Armstrong identifies it with what Ruskin would later term the pathetic fallacy (95), and while this statement is accurate to an extent, it implies an agreement among Tennyson, Hallam, the Apostles, and Ruskin that is relatively uncomplicated, and this does not seem accurate. The issue is important to pursue, however, because it goes to the heart of what Tennyson and Browning were attempting to accomplish in their poetry, particularly in the dramatic monologues, and how their endeavors went significantly unrecognized.

For Ruskin, the pathetic fallacy is a projective

identification or projection of human capacity into non-human, lifeless things. It is prompted by "violent feelings," and it is an appropriate, normal response to extreme emotion. Ruskin provides an example from Kingsley as he presents his definition:

> "They rowed her in across the rolling foam--
> The cruel, crawling foam."
> The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the "Pathetic fallacy." (5: 205)

Extreme emotion, Ruskin argues, hampers our ability to see reality as it is. The poet, in presenting his characters, needs to take care to depict the phenomenon as occurring in characters who are experiencing extreme emotion; otherwise, the depiction is too improbable and awkward, since there is an impossible incongruence between the emotional condition of the character and his or her behaviors. Presumably because of the poignance of such an occasion upon which passions ran so high, poets could be inclined to present the behavior in characters who had not been depicted as being in the throes of "violent feelings"; and the poets could believe that, in presenting a circumstance of such poignance, they could captivate their audience. A widespread practice such as this rendered poetry a source a titillation and entertain-ment, but not a discourse that had much cultural or polit-ical relevance: it did not conceive of the human being as he or she was. Providing examples of

conceits that would pose as instances of the pathetic fallacy, Ruskin encourages his readers to ask,

> And yet how is it that these conceits are so painful now, when they have been pleasant to us in the other instances? . . . . For a very simple reason. They are not a pathetic fallacy at all, for they are put into the mouth of the wrong passion--a passion which never could possibly have spoken them--agonized curiosity. (5: 207)

Ruskin's inclination to establish categories by which one may understand an exhibition of the pathetic fallacy proceeds at a pace that seems to become nearly ungovernable. He identifies the projective act of the pathetic fallacy as symptomatic of a condition of weakness. One who is able to maintain conscious, intellectual control over his emotions is "strong," then, and he whose emotions would undermine such control is "weak." The condition of being overwhelmed by emotion may be a noble one, but the higher order of personhood is one in which the intellect may maintain a control over the emotions, even when those emotions are powerful.

> The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy is, as I said above, that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them; borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion; and it is a more or less noble state, according to the force of the emotion which has induced it. For it is no credit to a man that he is not morbid or inaccurate in his perceptions, when he has no strength of feeling to warp them; and it is in general a sign of higher capacity and stand in the ranks of being, that the emotions should be strong enough to vanquish, partly, the intellect, and make it believe what they choose. But it is still a grander condition when the intellect also rises, till it is strong enough to assert its rule against, or together with, the utmost efforts of the passions; and the whole man stands in an

> iron glow, white hot, perhaps, but still strong, and in no wise evaporating; even if he melts, losing none of his weight. (5: 208)

There are, then, ranks of men, Ruskin proposes, which are determined by the men's capacities to hold emotion in abeyance. Feeling, indeed, tends to prevent correct perception. It does seem to arise, on occasion, as a necessary evil in the unfolding of human experience; but it ought, optimally, to be held in check by reason.

> So, then, we have the three ranks: the man who perceives rightly, because he does not feel, and to whom the primrose is very accurately the primrose, because he does not love it. Then, secondly, the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels, and to whom the primrose is anything else than a primrose: a star, or a sun, or a fairy's shield, or a forsaken maiden. And then, lastly, there is the man who perceives rightly in spite of his feelings, and to whom the primrose is forever nothing else than itself--a little flower, apprehended in the very plain and leafy fact of it, whatever and how many soever the associations and passions may be, that crowd around it. (5: 209)

These three classes, then, Ruskin rates in "comparative order" as "the men who are not poets at all," and "poets of the second order," and "poets of the first" (209). As soon as he establishes these classes, however, he becomes dissatisfied with his arrangement, since he recognizes that

> however great a man may be, there are always some subjects which <u>ought</u> to throw him off his balance; some, by which his poor human capacity of thought should be conquered, and brought into the inaccurate and vague state of perception, so that the language of the highest inspiration becomes broken, obscure, and wild in metaphor, resembling that of the weaker man, overborne by weaker things. (5: 209)

So another class of men must be established:

> And thus, in full, there are four classes: the men who feel nothing, and therefore see truly; the men who feel strongly, think weakly, and see untruly (second order of poets); the men who feel strongly, think strongly, and see truly (first order of poets); and the men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in a sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them. This last is the usual condition of prophetic inspiration. (5: 209)

Particularly with the emergence of this extra category of man, we are struck by the ironic fact that Ruskin seems to be engaged in his own pathetic fallacy. The category he constructs is the conjuration of a person where there is none, and the conjuration seems to emerge out of an anxiety Ruskin feels for covering all his bases: he wants to grant highest status to that person who can maintain composure through an exertion of intellect that governs emotion; but this leaves no room for the mystic or for the impact of divine influence in human affairs, and so he hurriedly conceives of another kind of man.

As Ruskin unwittingly engages in his own pathetic fallacy, his argument runs into serious difficulty, for he who is in such a state as to conduct the pathetic fallacy does not perceive "rightly"; and if Ruskin is not perceiving rightly, then the classes he would present to us are not "true" representations of reality. Suddenly, we find ourselves wondering what we should make of all that Ruskin has said, and wondering, indeed, if we should have read anything he has written. Our condition of confusion is worsened by the fact that, with the emergence of the fourth

category, we have no way of discriminating between a poet of the second order and the mystic, and the fact that Ruskin claims to be able to discriminate suggests that he has conducted another sort of pathetic fallacy, establishing an ideal form of himself who occupies a position of transcendence beyond all his own classes. From this position, he is ready to classify both Keats and Tennyson as second order poets, but he can hardly be convincing:

> But Keats and Tennyson, and the poets of the second order, are generally themselves subdued by the feelings under which they write, or, at least, write as choosing to be so, and therefore admit certain expressions and modes of thought which are in some sort diseased or false. (5: 209)

We recognize, too, of course, that Ruskin does not adequately discriminate between lyric poetry and analytical poetry, and the significance of the poet's perspective, in relation to his poetry, to the manifestation of the pathetic fallacy. The lyric writer claims to be experiencing an intensity of emotion himself--an intensity that leads to his own conduct of the pathetic fallacy. In a poem like Maud, the speaker engages in the pathetic fallacy, but this speaker is not Tennyson: the poet attempts to observe such behavior just as Ruskin is attempting to do, but seeks to inquire about it, and invite inquiry, rather than provide an explanation.

Another problem for Ruskin lies in the fact that he conceives all people to feel emotion in the same manner. Experiences that come people's way may vary, but equivalent experiences seem to promise the same sort of emotional

response in all. The difference in people lies, for Ruskin, in the alternative ways they are able to restrain these emotions. There is no recognition in this scheme, in other words, for the unique "violence of feeling" that Coleridge communicates in "Frost at Midnight," for instance, and consequently no recognition that such feeling is beyond the capacity of intellect or reason to control. The scheme would encourage us to regard Coleridge as a weak, second order poet who can't extricate himself, as he ought to be able to do, from his debilitating fear. If we believe in Coleridge's optimistic lyric testimony at the poem's end, of course, we might be inclined to assess him as a poet of the first order, but this would be a difficult case to make, what with the frost performing its ministry and seasons promising to be sweet.

We note, too, however, that the scheme does not allow for deception of the audience or for the ironic self-deception of the speaker at hand. The manifestation of the intellect, the will, or reason keeping emotion under control could well be an authorial posture or a repression. The man who "perceives rightly, because he does not feel," and who "feel[s] nothing, and therefore see[s] truly" is certainly repressing the feeling he must have, but Ruskin's scheme would not recognize this.

Still another difficulty for Ruskin's scheme lies in its claim that the pathetic fallacy arises from the condition of experienced "violent emotion." In the case of the

narcissist or the criminal, the pathetic fallacy may emerge from a repression of emotion rather than an indulgence in it. We recall the Duke in Browning's "My Last Duchess," for example. Here we see a man obsessed with the need to control others, most notably those whom he would love, if the account he gives of his former duchess serves as any indication. His expectation that the duchess should smile on him alone and be wholly devoted to him establishes the conjured ideal of a projected self-object in the form of a human--a conjured space which the Count has expected his wife would inhabit. Her resistance to his control has provoked his "violent feeling," and presumably, he has had her killed. He has successfully fixed her being and hung her--"as if she were alive"--on his wall: she is the human "piece" he has wanted all along, even if her becoming this has required the loss of her actual human life. The Duke states that his next duchess' "self" is his "object," and we suspect that, indeed, she will become such, and suffer the same fate as her predecessor. The ideal image of "duchess" or "wife" derives from a repression of fear and serves as a guard against it.

The phenomenon of a pathetic fallacy here, then, is more complex than Ruskin's scheme would suggest. An early, primary fear may be the initial stimulus to the conjuration of the ideal image of duchess that the Count has; but it is the repression of this fear that sustains the Count's problematic behaviors. Here is a man who does not feel, and

his calculated manner suggests his considerable intellectual control over his situation; but one could hardly say that he "perceives rightly" the human Other.

The "narcissist" can appear in less drastic forms than the Duke, of course; and these "forms" are of greater significance to us as we consider both Ruskin's notion of the pathetic fallacy and the Victorian poets' contemplations of projective identification. The varieties of narcissism emerge in the moments when one person communicates with another and, concerned over how that other will respond to him, postures and creates an illusion, for his audience, as to the person he wishes he could be--most often, one who is a channel of truth by means of his communication of fact--and the person who can gain or retain a power position over his audience, due to the fact that the audience admires, reveres, or fears him. To whatever extent the speaker is successful in establishing the illusion--as he ascertains through the feedback he receives--or to the extent that he enjoys a pre-existent position of power over his audience, he tends to convince himself of the illusion; and the audience becomes, increasingly,the means by which the illusion may be sustained. The audience, this is to say, becomes a de-personalized object, not unlike the Duchess with respect to the Duke in Browning's poem, which exists <u>for</u> the speaker. And yet, significantly, the humanity of the other is not entirely effaced: it is retained in the depersonalized manner that the Duchess is--in the manner

that "she" is preserved, alive or not, on the Duke's wall. It remains human insofar as the speaker or author needs it to be.

The effects of this posturing became increasingly pronounced in a culture in desperate need of gaining access to truth. The reliability of Scriptural accounts was called into question under the influence of the Higher Criticism, scientific thinking was displacing the dogmatic testimonies of Church tradition regarding the universe and humanity's place in it; population growth and resettlement in crowded cities brought about social and political challenges that no one could have anticipated; readership and the availability of reading material increased, promoting a hunger for democratic reform, but creating an environment of competing voices, too, wherein any number of authors claimed to be propounding the truth and the facts of the culture's situation, in spite of the fact that such claims contradicted other authors' claims. The need for reliable authorities encouraged many to believe they were or could be such authorities, to insist that they were such, and convince their readers that they were. The competing voices made readers who sought the truth all the more confused, so that, at the same time life itself, in culture, seemed to be proceeding to chaos--how paradoxical it was, indeed, that so many technological and intellectual advances could be made even as so many social ills emerged--the capacity to stand apart from and understand that culture seemed to be

impossible, lending itself, indeed, to the very chaos it would explain. The general condition was one of enormous and pervasive anxiety, in other words--a condition exacerbated by the posturings of authors who claimed to be purveyors of fact. And so long as the general population turned, in readership, to these authors for testimonies of truth, they contributed to the anxiety shared by the entire culture.

We can get a good index of such anxiety from the Carlyle of Latter-Day Pamphlets, particularly if we compare the writer's outraged and enraged voice in this work to the earlier Past and Present. This we shall do in greater detail in Chapter Nine, where we will propose that Carlyle's work prompted a responsiveness in Browning that is noteworthy in our considerations of the poet's aesthetic development; but let us get a glimpse, at this point, of Carlyle's raging against Parliaments in Latter-Day Pamphlets:

> That a Parliament, especially a Parliament with Newspaper Reporters firmly established in it, is an entity which by its very nature cannot do work, but can do talk only,--which at times may be needed, and at other times again may be very needless. Consider, in fact, a body of Six-hundred and fifty-eight miscellaneous persons set to consult about 'business' with Twenty-seven millions mostly fools assiduously listening to them, and checking and criticising them:--was there ever since the world began, will there ever be till the world end, any 'business' accomplished in these circumstances? (20: 225)

Here we obtain just a glimpse of an impotence and "violent feeling" that were not evident in Past and Present. Chris

Vanden Bossche comments that

> Whereas Past and Present had moved toward a conclusion in which Carlyle imagined and represented the conversion of his audience, Latter-Day Pamphlets never reached a conclusion. . . . Whereas Carlyle represents the audience of Past and Present as morally inadequate but capable of discovering moral truth, he represents the audience of Latter-Day Pamphlets as permanently blinded, fools and "blockheads" (e.g. 265). (130)

But to return to the subject at hand, the pathetic fallacy: in the scheme that he presents, Ruskin suggests that some people could escape the experience of "violent feeling" that leads to the pathetic fallacy; but the conclusion that Browning and Tennyson reach--a conclusion leant credibility by Carlyle's growing outrage, as a cultural index--is that such feeling is inescapable. If there were categories of people to be indicated, these had more to do with the way people reacted to the anxiety, not how some avoided it and some triumphed over it with applications of consciousness. And the majority repressed it in a variety of ways. Those who claimed to escape feeling and perceive reality as it was were one segment of this group; but another segment were those poets who bothered Ruskin, poets who denigrated the anxiety by suggesting that it amounted to a positive emotional poignancy and resulted in the melodramatic representation of an emotional idealism wherein the self happily found itself reflected in the world that was its habitation. Again, to the extent that everyone was experiencing the "violent feeling" of anxiety--to varying degrees and at different

levels of conscious awareness, to be sure--then Ruskin's categories do not seem to be very helpful.

What does seem the more helpful and accurate testimony is the dynamic that Ruskin understands to take place in the circumstance of emotional duress: the pathetic fallacy. As the duress is felt by everyone, though, the pathetic fallacy emerges commensurately across the board, though in light of the discourse we have been inclined to adopt here, and in light of the pervasive character that Browning and Tennyson would consider it to possess, we would probably be inclined to consider it "projective identification" rather than "pathetic fallacy."

The anxiety involved in the pervasive inclination toward the conduct of the pathetic fallacy had to do with language, the Victorian poets would recognize, and with how the language--as it was and not as people wished it to be--determined the endeavors of politics, personal relationships, culture, the search for truth, and the realization of subjectivity. The poets could get a sense of the pervasiveness of the anxiety and common responsiveness to that anxiety by reading, with the devotion they gave to reading the Romantics, the periodical writers of the day and finding there a resonance with Romantic longing.

In composing the dramatic monologues, the Victorian poets meditated upon and encouraged their readers' contemplations of such resonance. As we have recognized, the dramatic monologues may be considered conversation poems

expressed by all kinds of people other than lyric poets, and as such, the works testify to or argue for the resonance. They testify, indeed, to a common affliction, an anxiety and fear, and common endeavor aimed at such fear's alleviation--to a shared condition, that is, that calls for empathic understanding as the best, most reasonable, and hopeful responsive recourse. The dramatic monologues bear witness, this is to say, to the Victorian poets' fulfillment of Coleridge's dream for an audience so devoted as to step beyond the countertransferential agency he had demanded of them, and understand him with an empathy that could shed light on their own unacknowledged miseries.

Notes

1. Passages from the 1832 version are taken from Romantic Period Verse (754-59) and are indicated by line number. Placing the whole of the 1832 text next to the 1842 text is more satisfying an experience, in my opinion, than is attempting to decipher, by means of explanatory footnotes, the alterations made between the versions.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BASIS OF BROWNING'S EMPATHY

Empathy, for Browning, is motivated by reasons other than a prospect or fear of madness, and it has a slightly different character than the sort we see in Tennyson. For Browning, empathy blossoms, quite appropriately, according to one's emergent awareness and appreciation of his or her human condition of theological fallenness.[1] We receive a remarkable testimony to this claim even in Pauline, as we shall see momentarily, and we ought to appreciate how such a theologically oriented mindset shapes Browning's aesthetic, responsive as this aesthetic is to Romanticism.

Our discernment of the empathy that Browning recommends begins to take shape in the interpretive tensions we experience as we read Pauline--with our inclination to conceive of the poem both as an analytic parody of Shelley and as a sincere lyric expressed in imitation of Shelley. This ambiguity that we encounter as we read promotes our questioning of authorial perspective, and inclines us to wonder if the analytic becomes possible by means of a paradoxically simultaneous and sincere lyric imitation: this, it would seem, is what Browning would have us believe. The procedure is not quite one of a Romantic hermeneutic--the analytic dimension of the procedure resists any conviction that total absorption in the other is a goal--but does seem to make

sense if one could conceive of it as empathy or empathic understanding.

The lyric speaker or writer whose text comprises most of Pauline does, we should recognize, exhibits behaviors and thought patterns that seem strikingly manic-depressive in character. He struck Mill, of course, as insufferably morbid;[2] and Isobel Armstrong observes that

> Pauline swings between violent extremes of exultant power and despair, conditions which belong to one another as the self is progressively fictionalized and experienced as alone and private. It is figured in paranoid images of imprisonment and enclosure where the private self is manifested as the discontinuous consciousness. Deprived of relationship, it seizes on a model of human relationships constituted by a privatized bond of sexuality. Pauline, as lover, stands in for Dorothy Wordsworth, a sexualized form of the sister addressed at the end of 'Tintern Abbey'. The condition of posthumousness makes it difficult for the poem to end because in one sense it has already ended. It looks forward to literal death: 'For I seem, dying, as one going in the dark / To fight a giant' (1026-7). (125)

Whereas Mill identifies the poet of Pauline with the author of the text that comprises most of the poem, Armstrong calls attention to the difference between the two: rightly, she concludes that Browning's inclusion of Pauline's footnote-response to the letter serves as prominent evidence of the poet's abstraction. Thus, Browning orients himself, to some degree, as an analytic observer of another who is at once distinctly Shelleyan and manic-depressive, or something very like it.

Still, Armstrong's endeavor of emphasizing the analytic character of Browning's poem tends to eclipse the manner in

which Browning does or at least may identify with the lyric speaker. Armstrong wants to argue for the poem's parodic character, and the poem is parodic in much of the manner that Armstrong's impressive reading would suggest; but it is, simultaneously, genuinely lyrical in the manner that Herbert Tucker would argue in Browning's Beginnings (30-52).

Tucker perhaps goes as problematically far in his emphasis of Browning's identification with the speaker as Armstrong goes in making her case for Browning's abstraction; but I would suggest that both emphases are germaine, kept in check by one another. Browning's contention seems to be that a sincere endeavor of lyric identification can result in a simultaneously realized process of analytical assessment. Opposed as Tucker's and Armstrong's emphases may be, neither is right or wrong: both are simultaneously right and as such point to the validity of the countertransferential model we have proposed, wherein countertransference results in empathic understanding.

The notion of a countertransference proceeding toward empathy can be of help to us, then, in giving each interpretive emphasis its due. The idea of it here is that, by means of the genuinely lyric expression, which is imitative of Shelley, an introjective identification is achieved; but as this identification is being achieved, it is found to be repulsive or dissatisfying at best. Such identification includes its own enterprise of projective identification, which in Browning's case is "Pauline": the conjured,

narcissistically ideal other who is clearly not the other whose otherness holds out the promise of relationship. The footnote-response of Pauline indicates Browning's recognition of the addressee's otherness, as well as his recognition that the attempted projective identification does not measure up. With the footnote, the poem does become parody and critique, then, but it never really detaches itself from lyric: parody and lyric exist as a synergism. Herein lies the doubleness of the poem that Armstrong would recognize both as the triumph of the poem and its downfall:

> If the confessional poet of Pauline struggles to reverse Shelley and Wordsworthian bad faith by returning to a new, realistic politics, the analytical poet who restructures confession and relativises it as symptomatic statement has nowhere to go. The effort to go behind itself isolates consciousness. (125)

If Browning rather works himself into a corner, as Armstrong suggests, his positioning there may well be the fact, however, that he hopes to communicate, in spite of the problems Mill or Fox--or Armstrong--would have with it. His double-poem "fails" as it should--in testimony to a theological argument that Browning is trying to make.

Armstrong senses the theological concerns of the poem, but does not see them as particularly prominent. She notes:

> The Bible was beginning to be seen as a discontinuous, edited narrative written at different times by different authors. Its meaning is problematical because events are not literal truths but constructions and reconstructions. Pauline is a discontinuous 'biblical' text reconstructed out of earlier thought and open to the hermeneutic process. A radical 'theological' poem emerges concurrently with a political attempt to free the

> text into a democratic reading by making it available as critique. (120-21)

Tucker does, on the other hand, demonstrate an appreciation for the theological orientation of the poem, but is so ready to denigrate that orientation that he fails to grasp the character of the theology.

In a (typically) brilliant reading of lines 806-11, for example, Tucker comments,

> "O God, where do they tend--these struggling aims?" This question may be read as an explicitly theological version of the question from late in Sordello, "Is there no more to say?" It is a question that underlies gaps and interruptions throughout Browning's poetry, and here it is brought to bear on two related forms of closure. (47)

It is with this line, afterall, that Pauline enters the footnote that intimates how the "difference [between artistic conception and execution] may be exploited in the creative 'struggling aims' of a soul willing to ascend the Browningesque ladder of plateaus," as Tucker describes it (47). Immediately following the question of line 811 comes the speaker's contemplations of the "closure of man's mortality":

> What would I have? What is this "sleep" which seems
> To bound all? can there be a "waking" point
> Of crowning life? The soul would never rule;
> It would be first in all things, it would have
> Its utmost pleasure filled, but, that complete,
> Commanding, for commanding, sickens it.
> The last point I can trace is--rest beneath
> Some better essence than itself, in weakness;
> This is "myself," not what I think should be:
> And what is that I hunger for but God? (812-21)[3]

This follows, then, from the prefiguring lines that concern themselves with poetic closure. "As usual in Browning,"

says Tucker, in astute judgment, "poetic closure adumbrates the darker closure of man's mortality" (47). Thus,

> Browning's prospective look beyond turns the priority of the soul that "would be first in all things" into secondariness, "beneath / Some better essence than itself." With the break in line 818, Browning reinterprets his "last point" not as an ending, but as a beginning, a first point. (48)

In light of this, Tucker concludes that

> The will to be in second place lets him elude the seeming bonds of mortal closure and gives him the waking point he wants to look forward to. His confession of weakness preserves a gap in which the yearning "hunger" of the concluding line may be regenerated. (48)

This interpretation would have us believe that Browning achieves a position of rhetorical strength or mastery, albeit through a confession of weakness. The hint or insinuation here, on Tucker's part, is that the claim to weakness is less genuine than it seems, emerging as it does from and mouthing a Christian ideology. This could be the case, but Tucker concludes too soon that it <u>is</u>, and fails to appreciate that it may not be, or that the case is more complex than he imagines it to be.

> Passages like this one [lines 812-21] from <u>Pauline</u> can serve as reminders that Browning's was no mere poetry of earth and that from the outset of his career he had made the conventions of evangelical Christianity (to say the least) his own, in part by reconceiving them as <u>poetic</u> conventions. (228 n 20)

The Christian conventions at issue in <u>Pauline</u> are principally concerned, I would argue, with the condition of human fallenness, or "concupiscence," to use a theological term referring to the effects of Original Sin.[4] Tucker grasps

this as he comments, disparagingly, that Browning

> leaves behind him the sketchy but accurate self-portrait of a poet who engages to redeem a fallen world through wildly hopeful acceptance of deficiency and guilt, in earnest of a home-made God displaced into the superlatively dim, far, and undiscovered future. (49)

Because the notion of "Original Sin" can strike one as an archaic formulation of outmoded beliefs, a critic of today can be inclined, like Tucker, to be dismissive of concerns over the matter, even though such concerns are more substantive and complex than they might appear. Browning seems to be exploring, for instance, the prospect that human fallenness reveals itself and realizes itself in language, as we shall suggest. Owing to the history of his faith experience, he is inclined to accept as fact a metaphysical "reality" that he perceives to become materialized in language; but the manner in which language operates, which Browning comes to understand by means of the association with the metaphysical trope, is not very different than that which Frances Ferguson, for example, implies when she writes that

> Our pleasure in nature and our scientific knowledge of it are alike important for identifying not reality but reality production as an inescapable process of supplying intentional states to the very matter that we identify as incapable of having intentional states. (122)

The "<u>inescapable</u> process of supplying intentional states" testifies to a persistent longing that goes unfulfilled but that continues to be redundantly expressed through the various rhetorical endeavors that help us deny, repress, and

defer the longing. Browning's conception of fallenness inclines him to grasp the condition that Ferguson describes, even if the poet would, and more emphatically so in his earlier years, ascribe the condition to metaphysical dynamics rather than to a human condition realizing itself in language.

The concupiscent world with which Browning concerns himself receives its description, bequeathed to Christian tradition, from St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans:

> We know that the law is spiritual [i.e., a demand of God], but I am not. I am unspiritual [i.e., have a human condition], the purchased slave of sin. I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do, but what I detest. But if what I do is against my will, it means that I agree with the law and hold it to be admirable. But as things are, it is no longer I who perform the action, but sin that lodges in me. For I know that nothing good lodges in me--in my unspiritual nature [i.e., my human condition], I mean--for though the will to do good is there, the deed is not. The good which I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will; and if what I do is against my will, clearly it is no longer I who am the agent, but sin that has its lodging in me. I discover this principle, then; that when I want to do the right, only the wrong is within my reach [i.e., my condition]. In my inmost self I delight in the law of God, but I perceive that there is in my bodily members a different law, fighting against the law that my reason [i.e., my inmost self] approves and making me a prisoner under the law that is in my members, the law of sin. Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me out of this body [i.e., condition] doomed to death? God alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Thanks be to God! (Romans 7: 14-25)[5]

If, in reading this passage, we can bracket terms like "sin" and "God" and "good" and "evil," and consider that such terms might refer to concepts more complex than their usage

here suggests, we might suspend an inclination to dismiss the passage out-of-hand as neo-Platonic or quintessentially Christian ideology, and note that it describes a condition of longing that can never be achieved: something about my condition, something in me, says Paul, prevents me from doing the thing I want to do, or from being the person I wish to be. Here is the split between "conception" and "execution" that Pauline detects in her friend's deliberations. Here is the gulf, for Coleridge, between "image" and "idea."

There is an irony at work in Paul's claims, though; for if he does not what he wishes, but what he does not wish--if his "execution" or the transmission between "conception" and "execution" is flawed--then the text he has left us is probably flawed. And if Scriptural texts are collections of testimonies by any number of authors and not the testimony of the single author whose names they bear, then the breakdowns between conception and execution are manifold, and they include, for that matter, the one plaguing the execution of the editors who compiled the texts. They include the execution of the readers' readings.

Wherein could possibly lie the authority of texts such as Paul's? The authority could derive not from the content or from truths or facts expressed, but through the testimony of concupiscence revealed: in expressions, that is, of <u>desires</u> to know and utter truth, expressions made with such passionate and ironic insistence that they are made to

resemble fact; and these would be tantamount to fragmentary "confessions," unconsciously revealed or consciously made.

I react at some length to this passage from Romans because I believe Browning to be more concerned specifically with St. Paul and his theology, in his poem, than either Tucker or Armstrong recognizes. The poem is more than the biblical text that Armstrong envisions and more than the poet's lyric confession of Evangelical guilt that Tucker indicates: it is something of a "parody" of St. Paul, or a countertransferential contemplation approaching empathy, that acknowledges both the irony of Paul's claims and the authority of them as a testimony of concupiscence.

Hence, the title, Pauline: not the name of a woman, but an adjective whose "i" is long--an adjective that refers to St. Paul. The title announces that the text to follow is one like those of St. Paul.

It is perhaps significant that the OED lists as its first recorded use of the term "Paul*i*ne" the one that Coleridge gives it in the Biographia Literaria. In Chapter XXIV of his work, Coleridge laments the fact that English Theological students do not have access to texts that are sufficiently "Paul*i*ne":

> I wish, however, that I could find in the books of philosophy, theoretical or moral, which are alone recommended to the present students of Theology in our established schools, a few passages as thoroughly Pauline, as completely accordant with the doctrines of the established Church, as the following sentences in the concluding page of Spinoza's Ethics. (363)

Coleridge quotes Spinoza, at this point, in Latin; the translation of this passage is as follows:

> 'And then, the more the mind delights in this divine love or blessedness, the more it understands, the greater its power over its instincts and the less it suffers from instincts that are evil. And so it is because the mind delights in this divine love or blessedness that it has the power to restrain lusts . . . No one delights in blessedness because he has restrained his instincts, but on the contrary the power of restraining lusts arises from the blessedness itself.' (transl. Leask 448)

It is probably not far-fetched to imagine that Browning is responding, with his poetic, imaginative, and parodic text, to Coleridge's expressed wish. Under the influence of his "literary godfather," William Fox, Browning assists in the cultural "process of renovation" and "transition" by attempting to re-think and to question, in his imitative poetic fashion, the meaning of "Pauline" and the ground of authority in Pauline texts. Fox says that

> the public mind has outgrown public institutions, which must soon be shattered unless possessed of flexibility to admit of a proportionate expansion. Our forms, laws, establishments, whether for the purpose of education, commerce, politics, or religion, are become so insufficient to represent the intelligence, harmonize with the condition, satisfy the wants, and realize the desires of the community that they must evidently undergo extensive changes,--gradual and peaceful changes it is to be hoped. (qtd. Armstrong 25)

Fox, a minister, sees the process of renovation as linked to the struggle established at the time of the Fall:

> The conflict for reform in the Legislature is but the type and index of a wider, deeper, and mightier conflict between principles which began their struggle for mastery over man in the Garden of Eden, and shall continue till the Kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of our God and of his

> Christ. That struggle is like the elemental strife of the material world. It is like the storm that clears the heavens. It is the process by which Providence conducts mankind to higher and yet higher degrees of knowledge and happiness. (qtd. Armstrong 25)

Here is the "Browningesque ladder of plateaus," as Tucker refers to the footnoted doctrine of Pauline.

> According to the law of progress, both individual and social, by which God governs the world, the transition is made from one gradation of order, harmony, and beauty to a higher gradation, by the intervention of a state of apparent confusion and conflict. (qtd. Armstrong 25)

Nothing can "remain as it is" in the sea change of Providential progress (Armstrong 26), and this includes the institution of the Church:

> The Church cannot remain as it is; its temples have long ceased to be national, in any other respect save that of the taxation by which they are supported. (qtd. Armstrong 26)

For Fox, poetry, acknowledged as historical and historicized and respected as democratic, could be a prominent force in bringing about the progress that Fox (and God, apparently) championed: the poet could be, perhaps, the magisterial legislator that Shelley had envisioned.

Browning, with his evangelical background, with the religions instincts bequeathed him and encouraged by his mother, with the literary interests engendered by his father, was the perfect candidate to effect the renovation of the Church and its understanding of the Scriptures. Even if he was not, in writing Pauline, responding directly to Coleridge's wish, he would be prompted to engage in fulfilling such a wish by the needs of the culture, as Fox saw

them. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that Browning would have missed Coleridge's comments. Coleridge was a prominent means by which England was achieving its awareness of German philosophy, and the Monthly Repository had been intrigued with the Higher Criticism:

> Advanced German biblical criticism, which found its earliest disseminations in the Monthly Repository, gave rise to a tradition of analysis in the journal. A discussion of Schleiermacher's study of St. Luke's Gospel in 1827, for instance, takes the unstable text for granted. The narrative of the Gospel is transmitted through a chain of second-generation witnesses and thus its 'truth' must likewise be the construction of the reader. What constitutes a text is an active process of of construction and reconstruction. Its only ground is the hermeneutic history of previous acts of construction. (Armstrong 33)

The subject matter of the Biographia Literaria's Chapter XXIV would have been of interest to Browning, coming as it did from such a recognized cultural authority with whom Browning had considerable philosophical disagreement.

The poem Pauline, in any case, seems to allude to and parody the epistles written to the Corinthians, the second of which appears to be a weakly edited conglomeration of fragmentary accounts:

> Many scholars have felt that the lack of continuity in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians and the repetition of material on the same topic (e.g., 2, 14 - 6, 3 and 10, 1 - 13, 10; 8, 1-24 and 9, 1-15) are evidence that the epistle was formed from several Pauline letters, including perhaps the letter to the Corinthians written before First Corinthians (1 Cor 5, 9) and the second, severe letter which preceded Second Corinthians (2 Cor 7, 8). (Bourke 1275)

Even today, however, the notion that this epistle is such a conglomeration remains inconclusive:

> However, no theory fragmenting Second Corinthians into several letters has proved entirely convincing. A partial explanation of the degree of discontinuity and repetition in the letter would be Paul's own state of mind when he composed it. As new thoughts on the themes of his letter occurred to him, he recorded them in the hope that the outpouring of his own heart (6, 11) would ensure the community's faithfulness to him.
>
> (Bourke 1275)

Either attribution of authorship does not circumvent the problem of repetition and discontinuity that the text manifests, however; and this is a problem for a person or a culture who would expect Scipture to be a stable account of truth. Even if Paul is the author of the text, he reveals here that his accounts are susceptible to fits of passion: he reveals himself to be horrifyingly human for one who is supposed to be the mouthpiece of God.[6]

In the midst of his outpouring, Paul writes to the Corinthians the fascinating declaration that

> You are my letter, known and read by all men, written on your hearts. Clearly you are a letter of Christ which I have delivered, a letter written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh in the heart. (II Cor 3: 2-3)[7]

This he says to a people over whom he has lost control and influence, which is why he is writing to them in the first place. The details of this point we can discuss momentarily, but let us first note the resemblance between Paul's declaration and Browning's testimony in Pauline.

The footnote-response of the addressee clarifies that the "Pauline" to whom the writer addresses his correspondance is the narcissistic projection constructed by the

passionate outpouring of his letter: "she" is his letter, as far as he is concerned, particularly if Pauline herself remains at such a distance as to preclude immediate feedback. The determination of who or what Pauline is shall be determined, it would seem, by a process of projections on the part of the writer, which are in turn found to be wanting or inaccurate and in need of revision as feedback is supplied. The cycle of this deterministic process would not seem to reach closure, but would continue to repeat itself.

As this principle of determination is applied to St. Paul, it would construe "Pauline" to be an interminable process of attempted but inadequate projections and expressions of longing seemingly instigated by one who was as limited in his understanding or in his capability of executing his conceptualization, in language, as anyone else. If Browning is responding to Coleridge, then he says, in effect, "Do you want a Pauline text? Here: this is Pauline. It is a process of projection emerging from passionate desire that never gets satisfied; and as one projection proves inadequate, the passion only seems to increase and encourage another projection which elaborates on the earlier projection, so that Pauline is an elaboration, conducted through language, rather than a determinative entity that one can reach through study, reading, and thought." What "Paul" provides us with, as his correspondance with the Corinthians makes clear, are essentially the fragments of a confession that he is as flawed as any other

human being, desirous of having others understand as he would, but not being able to exert the sort of control over others he would hope to, then, in the passion that arises from his losing such control, projecting on to his addressees the identity he wishes them to have.

Some historical background may be useful here in helping us to understand Paul's frame of mind and his subsequent actions.

> While Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (16, 8; Acts 19, 1-20), he received disquieting news about Corinth. The community there was displaying open factionalism, certain members identifying themselves with, respectively, the teaching of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas and others apparently claiming a relationship with Jesus peculiar to themselves alone (1, 12). Christian teaching was being interpreted as a superior wisdom for the initiated few, rather than as a divine means for the humble opening of all hearts to the prophetic word of God in Christ (1, 10-4, 21). (Bourke 1259)

In the letters, Paul attempts to re-assert such authority as to curb the factionalism, to unify and strengthen the belief that he deems appropriate, yet support the efforts of those remaining in Corinth whom he has charged with preserving the faith. Paul attempts to give expression to questions that his audience might have:

> After all, who is Apollos? And who is Paul? Simply ministers through whom you became believers, each of them doing only what the Lord assigned him. I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. This means that neither he who plants nor he who waters is of any special account, only God, who gives the growth. . . . We are God's co-workers, while you are his cultivation, his building. (I Cor 3: 5-7; 9)

Paul uses a mix of metaphors to clarify what he conceives to

be his relations to the Corinthians, and this one of building construction has some pertinence to our discussion.

> Thanks to the favor God showed me I laid a foundation as a wise master-builder might do, and now someone else is building upon it. Everyone, however, must be careful how he builds. No one can lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid, namely Jesus Christ. (I Cor 3: 10-11)

In Chapter XXIV of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge uses a similar metaphor of construction to describe, as he sees it, the character of Christian belief. He hopes to indicate, through his metaphor, the relative significance of the Scriptural accounts of miracles: these he conceives to be the "'pillars of the church,'" but they are "'not the foundation.'" For him, the foundation is an inner longing of the human person, a longing that has been encouraged by God and that is directed at God:

> The sense, the inward feeling, in the soul of each Believer of its exceeding desirableness--the experience, that he needs something, joined with the strong Foretokening, that the Redemption and the Graces propounded to us in Christ are what he needs--this I hold to be the true FOUNDATION of the spiritual Edifice. (362)

This conception or interpretation is not quite the same as Paul's: one could imagine that a response to it from Christians more conservative than Coleridge formulated in the insistent rhythm and lyric of the old Protestant hymn: "The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord!" On the other hand, Paul's account is figural, and so is the testimony of the hymn: what does it mean, after all, when one says that Christ is the "foundation" of the church? The figure is an interpretation that elicits further

interpretation. While the figure is presented so as to clarify or resolve meaning, it results in meaning's proliferation. With such proliferation comes factionalism: Paul engenders the very thing he hopes to overcome, and so reveals himself to be the victim of the concupiscence he describes in Romans: "What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend (Rom 7:19).

Coleridge's interpretation attests to Paul's "failure." Ironically, the nineteenth-century poet seems to be working against the very thing he longs for: an authentically Pauline text. Even as he desires such a text, he seems to engender the factions, through his interpretive liberties, that Paul hopes to control. On the other hand, Coleridge might be said to establish the very text he seeks: his instigation of factionalism re-creates the conditions of Corinthians, so that Paul seems to be writing to nineteenth century England just as he writes to the Corinthians.

Had Browning been responding to Coleridge, he would, I think, have been conceiving the matter in this fashion. But he would not have needed Coleridge to imagine a factionalism, analogous to the one amongst the Corinthians, existing in nineteenth-century England, what with the questions and concerns raised by German biblical criticism and, for that matter, with the ambiguously prophetic role of Shelley. Again, as the cultural environment and crisis of faith situation is perceived to be repeated, the sending of Paul's letters seems to be re-enacted--by virtue of Scripture's

presence, I mean, within the culture.

Within such a scenario, someone like Shelley, an interpreter of supposedly divine truths within his historical context, seems to be a figure like Apollos, translated in the nineteenth-century circumstance as "Sun-treader." If Shelley had been and continued to be some vatic speaker of divine truth, he was also one who engendered factionalism.

And yet, in the England of Browning and Fox, was not such "factionalism" the heart of the democracy that these men perceived as being such a potentially positive cultural development? The failure of Paul to prevent the factionalism that developed in his absence--factionalism that he himself had engendered by means of his concupiscent transmission of the Word, and which he continued to engender with the figural character of his letters--seems to have been something positive in the end, even if it looked to Paul as something gone wrong. Indeed, Paul accomplishes not the "good" he would do, but the "evil" he does not intend; but what is accomplished, as far as Browning is concerned, is a good that Paul does not grasp: the democratic embrace of the Word.

As Browning's poem represents a theological reflection such as this, the character Pauline might be seen as the personification of a concept. Like Coleridge, we human beings, Browning suggests, have an idea what Pauline might mean, and our conceptualization of it derives from our

desires as to what we wish it to be. We project our desires, passionately, and conjure a human character according to which we may incarnate our desires, and lend flesh and blood reality to the quality of the Pauline. Our conjuring inevitably encounters not the real Paul, but tradition's conjuration, Pauline, and a dialectic process takes place in which a new, unsatisfactory plateau of understanding is achieved, such that that which is Pauline is realized: this may well be what Browning's title refers to, not the addressee of the poem.

"Pauline," then, to respond to the wish of Coleridge and the desires of a culture for Scriptural understanding, is not a specific, factual content to be sought, but a dialectical process of democratic exchange in which concupiscent human beings express their longings with such passion and insistence that they persuade themselves as being in the possession of stable truths that they would have others accept as truth. The dissemination of "truth" that people undertake, however, promotes the very thing that the people do not want: re-interpretation, de-stabilization of the "truths" they supply, and factionalism.

To understand "Pauline" as such acknowledges Paul to be a concupiscent human being. This is what Paul tells us he is, of course, but those "believers" who want to conceive of him as a communicator of the Divine Word are not inclined to dwell on the ramifications of Paul's claims.

If Browning's poem is the sort of "biblical criticism"

which takes Paul at his word, though, then it would, we can imagine, be extraordinarily radical and offensive to a good many nineteenth-century English people: it would constitute a considerably risky gesture to make for one, who, like Browning, is embarking on his career. The poem's epigraph from Cornelius Agrippa, then, makes a good deal of sense in this light. Browning does, after all, seem to be taking on an Agrippan, pagan endeavor of biblical criticism:

> I am sure that the title of my book, because of its rarity, will entice very many to read it. Among those will be some whose opinion are hostile, whose minds are weak--many of these are even malicious--, who are unable to accept my genius, and who, rash in their ignorance, will create a clamor after scarcely even glancing at the title. That will say that I teach forbidden things, lay the seeds of heresies, offend pious ears, and corrupt pure minds. . . . They are so full of care for their consciences that neither Apollo, nor all the Muses, nor even an Angel from heaven could free me from their curses. Now I too am full of care for them--that they nor read my book, nor understand it, nor remember it; for it is harmful and very poisonous. In this book is the gateway to hell; it speaks hard words. Let them beware that it not shake their understanding out of them. But you, who come to read it with fair minds, if only you use as much discretion and prudence as bees use in gathering honey, go ahead and read it free from anxiety. I think that you will obtain from it no little utility and much pleasure. If you find anything which displeases you, reject it and do not use it. FOR I AM NOT SAYING THAT THESE THINGS ARE GOOD FOR YOU, I AM ONLY SAYING THEM. But do not reject the others. . . . So, if anything has been said too freely, forgive my youth since I, the writer of this work, am less than a youth.
>
> (trans. King, The Complete Works of Robert Browning 280 n Reverse Title Page)

The poem that Tucker would envision as lyric and the poem that Armstrong would envision as parody are both

realized in and through the biblical criticism that Browning effects. The poet's imitation of Shelley--his endeavor to speak from within his predecessor's lyricism--is as genuine as Tucker would suggest, but it is in the process of such lyric expression that Browning discerns the inadequacy of Shelley's endeavors, and the imitative lyric, by means of its execution, turns into parody. The imitative act, Browning suggests, leads him to comprehend his own unacknowledged concupiscence, and the concupiscent condition of Fox, and, really, of anyone else. The poetic endeavor--and any other authorial or communicative endeavor, for that matter--is essentially Pauline and is of particular value not because of any factual content or truthful information it passes on, but because it testifies to humanity's fallen condition and indirectly, then, to the influence of Divine Grace.

Mill misread Pauline. He considered it to be the lyric of a morbid soul and missed the analytical, parodic element in the work. Fox reviewed it with measured excitement, and the work was not published. In spite of its poor reception and its flaws, however, the poem was far more important than anyone realized. As Armstrong notes, Pauline is "fundamentally important" to the development of Browning's poetry and to the development of Victorian poetry because it is "a poem about the breaking of cultural forms" that deploys "new textual strategies" to accomplish its task" (114-15). Its theme is "the impossibility of being a Romantic poet" but

"in the course of the poem, a new account of subjectivity, politics, language and textuality emerges," and "this is why [the poem] is an important if unsuccessful experiment" (115). The poem's achievement

> is to turn the second-order status of the work into a form of analysis. However, one logical conclusion of expressive, subjective experience turned self-reflexive lyric is that it sings its own alienation as abstracted commentary on the forms of the historical self, a poetry deprived of content. This is what worried Fox and Mill. The project of Browning's work in the next decade was to find a way of returning to a content, of writing radical poetry without foregoing the strategies of the self-conscious analytical critique which Pauline, for all its problems, had discovered, the strategy, in fact, of problemetizing the text. (126)

If Browning is concerned with the effect that concupiscence has on the text, though, as we have been suggesting, then the deprivation of content that worries Fox and Mill and Armstrong is precisely the condition that Browning hopes to make clear: it is not the failure that Armstrong suggests. And Browning's later work consists less in "returning to a content" than it does in exploring the nature of communication in the wake of an acknowledgment of the concupiscent condition.

Armstrong argues that Browning, influenced by Fox and Mill, gradually adopted drama as a means of "returning to a content" in his poetry, but the rhetorical strategy of drama seems to be at work in Pauline more than Armstrong recognizes: Browning perceives his relationship with Shelley to have been dramatized for him in Scripture, in the relationship between the Corinthians and Apollos, between the

Corinthians and St. Paul. The poet's projection of lyric experience on this biblical account seems to have shaped the development as much as any theoretical formulations about drama provided by Fox or Mill; for time and again, Browning presents us with characters who reveal themselves as Pauline in the sense that they conceal, through a passionate insistence of belief, the ideology and textuality of that which they express: they reveal themselves to be concupiscent in the way that Paul himself does. In short, Browning is already well on his way to orienting his poetry in the direction that Armstrong suggests he would after Pauline.

> With characteristic virtuosity Browning learned how to make the textualizing strategies developed in Pauline become the substance of drama. The self-reflexive expressive poem internalises its status as commentary and conceals its textuality and ideology. The drama externalises these things, brings them into the light, and makes them work for it. Later, Browning discovered how to create the lyric as drama and to make the subjective lyric become the opposite of itself as the lyric came to be the open object of scrutiny at the same time as it was closed expressive utterance. (126)

Browning's advance is less clear, however, to the extent that one fails to comprehend the title of Pauline as distinguishable from the addressee of the poem and as associated with St. Paul, though, and for reasons we have indicated, Browning is hesitant to make this association very clear.

The lyric experience of seeing his longing for poetic identity, enacted through his imitation of Shelley, as Pauline and concupiscent allows Browning to conceive that

subjective lyric is always Pauline, so that reading or hearing subjective proclamation should include the understanding that what we encounter as presented fact is always inevitably a testimony to the longing for truth and for control over truth's dissemination. But such understanding must be of an empathic nature, because we who read or listen share in the condition of concupiscence.

The notion of concupiscence is important to grasp in Browning because it clarifies for us that, even in the dramatic monologues, "parody" is too imprecise a term to describe his rhetorical endeavor. Parody does not effect empathy, and it situates the writer engaging in it in a position of abstraction, sufficiently removed from the condition he observes to analyze it. We cannot read The Ring and the Book with any sensitivity and imagine that Browning ever really seeks such a position.

Rather than assessing what Browning attempts to accomplish as parody, we might consider that he is engaged in a kind of countertransference which he hopes to engender in his reader. We recall, for example, how he encourages us to become enraptured by the reflections of Fra Lippo Lippi on art such that we quite forget that all or some unascertainable part of his monologue is probably motivated by the monk's attempt to get away from the gendarmes and to lend ambiguity to the interpretation of the fact that he has been found in the red-light district. The attractiveness of what he says keeps us in his space, and from within that space,

we learn how misleading insistence can be, particularly because it can be attractive. The drama of Fra Lippo promotes a recollection in ourselves of how, under the pressure of having to account for ourselves, we have been inclined to insist that what we tell others is truth when it was not, exactly, but was, we can see more clearly now, a confession that we longed to know or possess the truth to tell. We come away from our encounter with Fra Lippo in the ambivalent tendency both to judge and sympathize, as Robert Langbaum has pointed out, but in the condition of this ambivalence, to empathize as well, as we reflect on the apparently human condition--which we ourselves share--of presenting to others as truth what we know ultimately to be that which we hoped to be true.

Browning effects in us, then, a countertransference very similar to the one that Tennyson does, though the "pathology" at work where Browning is concerned is concupiscence rather than "madness" or depression, as it is for Tennyson. As with Tennyson, Browning's countertransference occurs first with respect to Romanticism, and in Browning's case, specifically with respect to Shelley, as we see in Pauline. The experience of the countertransference culminates in empathic understanding, wherein any of us--Fox included, as Pauline's "parody" of him, as noted by Armstrong suggests--may discern our own concupiscent condition.

Browning's consideration of the "pathology" involved as concupiscence was fortuitous, as it gave a greater breadth

of applicability to the problematic condition than Tennyson's "madness" could. The breadth allowed Browning to suggest, in his dramatic monologues, that subjective lyric expression was problematic wherever it occurred, not merely in the Romantic lyric, but in the testimony of prose writers such as a Carlyle or Cobbett or Hazlitt or any number of periodical writers, or anyone serving as a witness in a court of justice, who professed to be telling the truth. The dramatic monologues, then, become nothing less than conversation poems, placed in the mouths of people other than Romantic lyricists, and "parodied" insofar as they were made to effect such a countertransference as they could lead to empathic understanding on the part of the reader.

The basis for this understanding would always involve, for Browning, an emergent awareness of the reader's concupiscent condition. But perhaps more significant for the development of poetry and for thinking about politics and culture was how Browning saw more and more clearly how the concupiscence of his metaphysical scheme worked itself out in language. Whether or not one accepted the theological explanation for the problems humanity suffered in trying to understand and communicate the truth, he or she could grasp the problem of language, the inclination of people to conceive of and substitute insistence for belief, the conflict between conception and execution and the concealment of ideology and textuality realized in subjective expression. The "countertransference" that

Browning lyrically demonstrated in Pauline and invited in the dramtic monologues revealed to readers and to Victorian culture their own unacknowledged conflicts concerning language.

In promoting such countertransference and subsequently an empathic understanding of language--not merely the language of poetry or the Romantic lyric, either, but the language of all--Browning fulfills, arguably even more satisfactorily than Tennyson, the longing that Coleridge had expressed by means of the conjuration of his Wedding Guest. His recognition of conversation poems occurring beyond the confines of Romantic poetry and as vulnerable to parody and countertransference, but as ironically revelatory of the nature of language and people's problematic expectation of it, indicates that he had heard the cry of Romantic yearning and anguish through the white noise of expressive verve, rapturous lyricism, and vatic pronouncement, and had recognized the cry itself as profoundly significant cultural critique. In carrying that critique through--by means of promoting the empathic understanding he does--Browning acknowledges that Coleridge was neither so crazy nor so supernaturally inclined as we might suppose, since everyone else is equally crazy and supernaturally inclined when it comes to using language.

Notes

1. As Badger notes, Browning "did not believe in original sin" (73); but Browning "was always indefinite and vague about his religion" (74) and was resistant to embracing those conventional beliefs taken to be orthodox. Precisely what religious beliefs Browning had, therefore, has remained a matter of speculation and has resulted in a "wide divergence in interpretations" (75). My own readings suggest that Browning conceives of a fallenness experienced in language--which ironically seems to affect Scripture itself, its transmission, as Biblical criticism was making clear, and so the tenets of belief--but is less interested in considering the fallen condition as a metaphysical phenomenon than as a phenomenon experienced by human beings, by means of their language use, in everyday life.

2. See Mill's review of Pauline, reprinted in Robert Browning: The Poems (1: 1022).

3. Passages from Pauline are taken from The Complete Works of Robert Browning, and are indicated by line number.

4. Again, I am not suggesting here that Browning embraced a conventional belief of Original Sin, but that he was reconceiving the notion along the lines discussed, for example, by liberation Theologian Juan Luis Segundo (see especially 21-24). In the course of his discussion, Segundo quotes Karl Rahner: "In the concrete human person who

exists within the present order, free decision and self-determination is incapable of operating perfectly and totally . . . In the process of self-determination, the human person suffers opposition from the nature that exists prior to liberty. He never manages to succeed fully, to see to it that everything he is realizes and expresses what he feels himself to be in the core of his person. The fact is that in man there is much that always remains in some way impersonal, impenetrable, and opaque to his existential decision; it is merely endured, not freely fashioned" (qtd. 24). I am arguing that as far as Browning is concerned, language-use can bring the human being to an awareness of the condition that Rahner describes, though Browning is less concerned than a theologian might be about attributing such a condition to a metaphysical cause.

5. The editorial commentary provided here is Segundo's: in the course of his discussion, the theologian provides this passage (22).

6. While Browning may not have known all the historical details that we discuss in this chapter--regarding the circumstances of Paul and the writings of his letters--we must recognize that Browning knew his Bible and was a good reader, and he was probably quite capable of recognizing the stylistic inconsistencies noted here.

7. Unless otherwise specified, Biblical passages will be taken from The New American Bible.

CHAPTER NINE

BROWNING'S "CLEON" AND THE DIALECTICS OF AUTHORIAL POSTURE

Pauline marked just the beginning of Browning's role as Wedding Guest relative to Coleridge's Mariner: the Victorian poet had yet to make compelling to his culture the argument of language as the realization of concupiscence. With Pauline, he had argued, in effect, that his own countertransferential engagement with Shelley had brought him to an empathic understanding of concupiscence that was apparently universal: we all compose texts, he conceived, that are ultimately Pauline. Yet such an argument relied too much on subjective experience to be very persuasive. Lyric seemed to have been transformed into a comparatively objectified drama, subjective experience projected onto an imagined universal; and such an endeavor seemed either so defensive or repressive a one--the projection could serve as a denial of the subjective--or so narcissistic a one that the argument had little chance of compelling audience assent. What Browning needed were exemplary others, people beyond himself whose life situations suggested the realization, in language, of concupiscence, and whose situations could be dramatized.

The image of the Wedding Guest in the aftermath of his encounter with the Mariner again proves useful in our gaining an appreciation of Browning's plight. Having gained

the insight he has through his encounter with the Mariner--an insight that he has achieved, we recall, by means of his own labors of figuration--the Guest finds himself in a predicament very similar to that of the Mariner. Unless he can convince others of their problematic inclinations to conceive of their "Albatrosses" as revelatory of transcendent truth and care, the Guest is destined to become the isolated lyricist, construed by the culture as either a madman or a mystic whose insights have little relevance in the natural world. Prompted by the fear of this destiny, but also by the conviction that the Mariner's tale does indeed have cultural relevance--as he has been able to determine by the analogy he has been able to construct between "Wedding" and "Albatross"--the Guest is prompted to seek out others who bear a resemblance to the person he was prior to his encounter with the Mariner: one who is caught up in and ravaged by habits of thought whose problematic character he cannot perceive, yet who is susceptible, because of the sufferings he has experienced as a result of the problematic belief, to an epiphantic change in thinking.

Having found such an other, the Guest still has a problem: what manner of tale is he to tell to gain the ear of the other and so effect a change of understanding? If he has learned anything from his encounter with the Mariner, he will present to his audience a tale that invites that other's construction of an analogy between his own experience and the one that the Guest relates. The tale must be

clearly figural enough to clarify for the listener that an analogy may be drawn to it, yet not so figural that the tale may be judged supernaturally remote from lived experience and therefore irrelevant to the listener's reflections about his life experience.

The Browning of Pauline is attempting to tell a lyrical tale whose "lesson," as the Mariner would refer to it, is repugnant enough--suggested as it is by the excessively "morbid" character of the speaker--that it dissuades any would-be audience from assenting to it. The poem is Browning's account of how he has, in a countertransferential engagement with Shelley, come to an empathic understanding of human concupiscence realizing itself through language; and he hopes that, in providing this account, he can elicit such an interest in his audience that they will engage Pauline texts--Romantic texts or any testimonials to concupiscence--and discern their own concupiscence and therefore the need for empathic understanding. But few people would find much of a motivation to be the audience that Browning seeks.

Later in his career, then, Browning "the Wedding Guest" looks out beyond his own subjective, lyric experience to discern audiences who find themselves to be suffering as a result of concupiscence in language, and he fashions tales around their experience so as to invite their analogical construction and, subsequently, their assent to his beliefs. One prominent figure to whom Browning must have been drawn

in his undertaking of such a project was Thomas Carlyle.

Particularly if Browning was as intrigued, as our reading has suggested, with the signification of "Pauline," he must have observed in the fate of Carlyle, between the sage's writing of Past and Present and Latter-Day Pamphlets, something markedly Pauline. In Past and Present, Carlyle writes with the exhortative power of a sermonist who has come into his own as a cultural "sage." He looks back to the past, to a nostalgically conceived, idyllic medieval age, in the hopes of recuperating it for the reformation of England's present and re-directed future. "Through dialogue between the prophetic author and the factions dividing English society, Carlyle imagines the conversion of his contemporaries and the emergence of a new era" (Vanden Bossche 106; emphasis mine). Like St. Paul "looking back" to a life of Jesus that had been presented to him in assorted fragmentary accounts and deriving from this a narrative that he could deliver with prophetic authority so as to overcome the divisiveness of factionalism and subjective interpretation, Carlyle professes to relate to his readers the word of God.

> Like the prophet, this speaker claims to bear a "God's message" and threatens divine retribution: "Behold, ye shall grown wiser, or ye shall die!" (34). For the first time, the persona of the Carlylean narrator fully assumes the role of prophet who can speak with the transcendental authority of "Fact," "Nature," "the Universe," "Nature's eternal law," "the Heavens," or "the Highest God" (34; 160-61, 184, 187; 182, 217; 221; 269; 279, 281). (Vanden Bossche 107)

Between 1842 and 1849, however, Carlyle apparently discerned that his voice had not had the authority he imagined. Latter-Day Pamphlets registers his despair at having failed to effect the social reform he had expected to.

> Instead of attempting to create a community of fellow believers--as he had sought to do when he moved to London in 1834--he went on the attack against his contemporaries for failing to understand him. . . . Whereas Carlyle represents the audience of Past and Present as morally inadequate but capable of discovering moral truth, he represents the audience of Latter-Day Pamphlets as permanently blinded, fools and "blockheads" (e.g., 265). In Past and Present, he creates at least the semblance of debate between his avatars and his audience; in Latter-Day Pamphlets he tends to cut off the debate. (Vanden Bossche 130)

The fate of Carlyle's exertions of authority bear a resemblance to that of St. Paul's with respect to the Corinthians, and the epistolary form proceeding to a state of fragmentation--indeed, from the highly wrought Past and Present, which is at times stylistically resonant with King James Bible and is professedly concerned with the Divine will--resembles the fragmentariness of II Corinthians. Paul's ironic claim to his addressees that "You are my letter" appears to be Carlyle's claim as well.

Browning's "Cleon," I would suggest, serves as a register of the poet's recognition of Carlyle's Pauline plight. In effect, the poem serves as a sympathetic parody or an invitation to a countertranferential experience with Carlyle, or with, in a more general sense, the Romantic epistolary tradition of the political pamphlet, of which

Latter-Day Pamphlets is itself inscribed, perhaps as parody.

> Written in the wake of Chartist agitation and the series of European upheavals in 1848, Carlyle's post-revolutionary periodical, Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850), takes as its theme the implications of romantic individualism gone public. . . . Carlyle had concluded that, in a jesuitical age, when everyone professed a self-satisfied sincerity, the only way to restore social order was to ironize the romantic project and, ultimately, to shut it down. . . . To this end Carlyle revives the epistolary periodical, if only finally to undermine its discursive viability. (Stoddart 41-42)

As Judith Stoddart notes in Ruskin's Culture Wars, "Carlyle's letters . . . indicate a very deliberate return to the subgenre [of the political pamphlet] as used by Cobbett [in his Political Register contributions] and Coleridge [in The Friend]" (42). This return results in "a broadly deconstructive moment" (43) wherein Carlyle, having raged within and against the apparently cultural plight, expends himself in a "great waste of ocean-voice" of "ennui" (20: 333, 336) and exacerbates the condition of his readers, who find themselves "awash with 'vocables,' his among them" (Stoddart 43).

> In response to contemporary political crises [Carlyle] determined to write his own periodical publication called "two-penny Trash," the derisive nickname given to Cobbett's cheap edition of the Political Register. The apocalyptic title under which his pamphlets were published highlights the impasse to which the romantic epistolary venture had come. By the time Carlyle was writing the work, the political epistle was no longer the form of the few but the habit of the uncritical many. Access to print had become so easy that anyone, under the sway of "any vote, idea or notion," could now "take a pen, and therewith autocratically pour forth the same into the ears and hearts of all people" (WTC 20:221). . . . Carlyle savagely mimics that pouring-forth in order to show its fatuity. In the process, he also exposes

the fatuity of his own voice in the pamphlets. (42)

In "Cleon," I would argue, Browning assents to Carlyle, after a fashion. The outrage that Carlyle demonstrates is understandable and generally justified, in Browning's mind--it is concupiscence working itself out in language, and the problem of language is foregrounded in "Cleon" far more than it is in Pauline--but it ought not and need not result in the despairing "deconstructive moment" that Carlyle reaches: this, in the discourse we have adopted, is to be overcome by the countertransference of the cultural "pathology," the concupiscence working itself out in language. Once we can own up to the condition we share, Browning responds, in effect--once we can accept our enslavement to language and so relinquish our insistent endeavor to enslave language--we have a chance of participating in, realizing, and enjoying a democratic enactment of discursive, contingent truth, through which God, operating beyond anyone's power of comprehension or anticipation, brings about something good.

In a parodic nod to Past and Present, Browning responds to Carlyle by looking to the past in the hopes of critiquing the present and adjusting England's trajectory toward the future. The poet acknowledges, as Carlyle does not, that his endeavor in looking at the past is fictional and imaginative, and he turns beyond the Middle Ages of Carlyle's selection to the time of St. Paul.

What Browning "finds" in this earlier period is a situation analogous to the one that engenders Latter-Day

Pamphlets. A king asks for the authoritative pronouncement of a man of letters regarding issues of immortality and religious belief, issues that have become significant because of the king's aging and because of the beliefs being circulated--but always, aggravatingly, transformed into rumor by mediations that the political power structure exacerbates--by Paul and the diasporic Christian community. In nineteenth-century England, by comparison, Carlyle conceives of himself to be called upon, like Cleon, by the ruling political powers of the day, to make authoritative pronouncements regarding issues of religious belief and the bearing such belief has on political action.

Browning comes to some conclusions very different than Carlyle does in his looking back, though--the most prominant of which seems to be that, owing to a language tinged with concupiscent mediation, conditions have remained pretty much the same since the time of the early Christians.

Carlyle calls for an assent to the beliefs that he espouses and proclaims, but such assent, he understands, arises from an active engagement in thinking, not a passive receptivity of the ideas that he propounds. Browning engages in an activity that would seem to hold out the best hope for assent: imitation. Inevitably, however, his attempted imitation yields an alternative interpretation, an elaborated mediation. Carlyle seems to have promoted the very thing he had hoped to keep in check or to subdue: the cacophony of voices that constitutes a democracy. Yet

Browning would urge that this very failure ought not be a source of despair; rather, it is distinctly Pauline, and can, for this reason, be a source of hope. But this understanding may be achieved only as one can accept his servitude in language and mediation, and relinquish the belief that language is servant to him.

This Cleon is unable to do, as we shall see. Karshish, the protagonist of Browning's other epistolary monologue--the subject of our final chapter--seems to be better able to do so, owing in significant part to the fact that he is, at least in occupational terms, in a clearly subservient position relative to his boss, Abib. His voice has little individual authority; and this, ironically, turns out to be a blessing. The lack of individual authority enhances the power that the voice exerts in the democratic collective, which for Browning is nothing less than the Logos, the Word.

These two epistolary poems of the 1855 Men and Women volume, then, dramatize, parody, and critique the tradition of the romantic political epistle from within that tradition. In the poems, what Browning seems to have done is extend his countertransferential engagement with the romantic lyric to a similar engagement with the political epistle, envisioning the epistle, consequently, as a type of conversation poem every bit as ironic and susceptible to parodic critique as the romantic lyric.

If, as Judith Stoddart contends, John Ruskin works from within the tradition of the romantic political epistle, and

does so in a manner that responds to and critiques Carlyle, we ought to consider the contribution that Browning may have made to this development, particularly with the two epistolary poems of Men and Women. Stoddart judges that Ruskin's responsiveness "verges on a parody of the Victorian dramatic monologue" (40), and we can recall that Ruskin was intrigued enough with Men and Women that he wrote to Browning:

> Your Ellipses are quite Unconscionable: before one can get through ten lines, one has to patch you up in twenty places, wrong or right, and if one hasn't much stuff of one's own to spare to patch with! You are worse than the worst Alpine Glacier I ever crossed. Bright, & deep enough truly, but so full of Clefts that half the journey has to be done with ladder and hatchet. However, I have found some great things in you already, and I think you must be a wonderful mine, when I have real time & strength to set to work properly.
> (qtd. Tucker 11)

To this, Browning responded,

> We don't read poetry the same way, by the same law; it is too clear. I cannot begin writing poetry till my imaginary reader has conceded licences to me which you demur at altogether. I know that I don't make out my conception by my language, all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be; but by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which succeed if they bear the conception from me to you. You ought, I think, to keep pace with the thought tripping from ledge to ledge of my "glaciers," as you call them; not stand poking your alpenstock into the holes, and demonstrating that no foot could have stood there;--suppose it sprang over there?
> (qtd. Tucker 11)

Years later, Ruskin will lodge an argument, by means of his Fors Clavigera, whose thrust is very similar, as we

shall see, to the argument that Browning makes by means of his epistolary monologues. As Stoddart describes Ruskin's endeavors,

> Unlike Carlyle's pamphlets, Fors Clavigera does not end in a broadly deconstructive moment. Carlyle's insistent probing of the problems of representation proves in Ruskin's letters to be a step toward rehabilitating, not demolishing, personal authority. Where Carlyle worries about linguistic corruptions of essential truths, Ruskin will emphasize the process of mediation. . . . If for Carlyle the epistolary pamphlet foregrounds all too clearly that process, for Ruskin it offers a means of reuniting work and words. The way we act is revealed in Fors to be always contingent on the forms through which we speak. We cannot act, Ruskin suggests, outside the fragmented frameworks of convention. Political participation is inevitably linked to the spectacle of self-representation. Carlyle proclaims the irrelevance of isolated reflection to the conduct of a society; Ruskin makes the constraints and political delusions of the monologic condition exemplary of the drama of communal life. (43-44)

This is very much the contention that Browning registers in the combination of his epistolary dramatic monologues, even if he places the contention in a metaphysical framework.

But to remind ourselves once again of the principal argument of our present work, we must note how this contention of Browning fulfills the desire of Coleridge expressed in that poet's conjuration of the Wedding Guest. Simply put, Browning sees and dramatizes as analogous to the Romantic lyric and conversation poem the political pamphlet and romantic epistle, recognizing in all an ironic claim to mastery over the word (and therefore the Word). He discerns in Romantic "pathology" a testimony to the generally unacknowledged condition of concupiscence that human beings

share and recurrently reinstate through language, and is prompted, because the condition is one shared by all, to engage in and promote an empathic understanding. Such understanding can result in a positive cultural critique wherein the limitations of personal perspective are seen to exert an authoritative testimony to the realization of democracy in the political sphere and to a realization in the metaphysical sphere, as far as Browning is concerned, of the incarnate Logos itself. The transmission of Browning's argument would include a permutation of the poet's metaphysical orientation, with the influence of Darwin after 1859; and the project that Ruskin undertakes in Fors Clavigera, at least as Judith Stoddart sees it, seems to represent this very transmission. "Beginning where Carlyle's Latter-Day Pamphlets ended," writes Stoddart--and where I would insert this: [and arguably influenced by Browning, particularly in his epistolary dramatic monologues]--

> Ruskin showcases the limitations of personal perspective. His method ironizes settled understanding. The paradoxical upshot of Fors Clavigera . . . is that seeing character as process makes constructions of the self more, not less authoritative. For it was the effort to construct, to make representations, that marked the moral truth of human experience in the post-Darwinian era. (45)

In Browning, the empathic understanding sought by Coleridge and the Romantics fulfills Coleridge's desire for the accomplishment of a cultural connection and critique that were beyond the Romantic poet's individual capacity to bring

about.

The fulfillment of Coleridge's desires was not Browning's doing alone, of course: it occurred by means of the dramatic monologue's emergence; and if we would consider that, in "Cleon," Browning assimilates the tradition of the Romantic epistolary tradition to the aesthetic of the dramatic monologue, we might want to amplify a bit--over and above what we have previously noted and implied--on what this genre represented, and so better comprehend the relation of the epistolary dramatic monologues to the genre overall.

The emergence of the dramatic monologue in nineteenth-century Britain marks the conscious awareness of language use as the existential actualizing of the divided subject. The form depicts the human being as one who, in the real or conjured presence of another, tries and endlessly fails to establish an identity as an autonomous, unitary subject.[1] The poem's speaker finds himself compelled, by the real or conjured presence of another, to construct a verbal text whose primary function is that of gaining control over the relationship between himself and his auditor. The nature of this attempt at control may feature orientations, desired by the speaker, as moving away from, against, or toward a union with the auditor, but the attempt necessarily contributes to the dialectical generation of the relationship, and is motivated by relational desire. The circumstance--which may

or may not include the physical presence of the auditor--serves to posit a claim as to the nature of the relationship between auditor and speaker; and it forces the speaker to respond, in language, by seeking escape from the relationship (as in "Ulysses"), by attempting, aggressively, to master and narcissistically control it (as in "My Last Duchess"), or by moving toward utter acceptance of and inscription within it (as in "Andrea del Sarto"). Through the performance of utterance, however, the speaker confronts the fact that he inevitably responds, ambivalently, according to who his audience desires him to be, according to who he wishes to be, and according to who he seems to be, all at once.[2] His utterance, which inevitably fails to achieve any genuine closure, other than a delusionally postured one, constitutes the enactment of a self-fashioning whose ultimate product is never finally realized.[3]

In many of the dramatic monologues, this irresolution seems prompted by a peculiar set of conditions that seemingly forces a character to talk. The speaker tends to find that, under a constraint of time, he is forced to give an account of himself to a physically present "other." The presence of the auditor does not allow the speaker any alternative of evasion by means of physical escape or isolation: under the pressure of immediacy, he finds himself compelled to generate an oral response. The nephews of St. Praxed's Bishop will leave him if he doesn't speak fast, as

will Lucretia leave Andrea; Mr. Sludge must talk fast in order to escape consequences that promise to be malicious, and Fra Lippo will be apprehended by the police if he doesn't speak. The contextual conditions of these monologues place their speakers "on the spot," and one might conclude, as a result, that such conditions are somewhat requisite for the achievement that the poetic form strives to accomplish.

Two of Browning's dramatic monologues, however, dissuade us from reaching such a conclusion, and their unique nature is, by comparison, worth noting. "Cleon" and "An Epistle" are epistolary texts, letters written by the monologue "speakers." As Park Honan has noted, these characters communicate under no constraint of time whatsoever, and so may take as long as they wish to express themselves. They need not be concerned that their audiences will grow frustrated with them, become bored and leave, or interrupt. In writing instead of speaking, the authors of these letters have the opportunity, too, to revise their texts, to re-evaluate and re-consider precisely what they wish to say (Honan 161-65).[4] The control they are able to exert over the communication they would make seems to provide these characters with a means of escaping or of easing the burden of the existential confrontation that the speakers of other monologues are forced to experience. These poems suggest, however, that the extra time afforded the author seems only to prolong his confrontation with the

fact of existential irresolution. It allows the author the opportunity, as well, for more elaborately constructed, subtle forms of verbal posturing.[5]

If the seemingly oral dramatic monologues call attention to the limits of trust we may place in speakers--who, in denial of their existential ambivalence, are inevitably engaged in posturing aimed to mislead their auditors' comprehension of them--these epistolary monologues suggest that we should trust the communication of authors even less, because writers have the time to craft their posturings, to camouflage them to the point that they elude our detection.[6] Given the time, this, insinuates Browning, is what authors do. The implications of such suggestions are profound, given the fact that Browning makes them in Victorian Britain, when readership is so pronouncedly on the rise and is arguably recognized as the most significant means of achieving the end of democratic governance. Antony Harrison has persuasively argued that "Cleon" may well represent Browning's response to the poetic controversies that were being conducted, contemporaneously, in the popular periodicals; but the poem is more far-reaching, I think, than Harrison suggests.[7] In responding to the controversy, Browning comments on the nature and reliability of authorship itself. Harrison convincingly demonstrates that the poem is far more complex a work than critical treatments have traditionally acknowledged, but he does so predominantly in light of contextual and intertextual considerations.

I would maintain that the work features an additional though associated and critically neglected complexity: its representation of the intricacies of authorial posture--intricacies clarified most prominently, for Browning, in the case of Carlyle.

The text of "Cleon" constitutes an epistolary response to a letter from a king, as we have said. The fictional character, Cleon, who is the author of the text, is a citizen of Greece and the subject of one King Proclus, who has requested Cleon's response. Precisely what the request of the king is remains somewhat unclear, as we readers have access to it only through Cleon's reformulation--which is, in itself, rather fuzzy--but we gather that the request is four-fold. Proclus wants confirmation that Cleon has acquired that vast knowledge and artistic skill that has apparently been rumored. Second, he wants to know if such a one as Cleon, who has become so empowered through his amassing of knowledge, is fearful of death. Third, he desires to know if an artist realizes an immortality, through his works, that a king cannot. Fourth, he wants Cleon to inform a messenger as to the whereabouts of St. Paul, that another letter may be delivered to him. Proclus' requests acknowledge a seeming need, an ignorance, and dependance: they are gestures through which a supposedly "All Powerful" king--as Cleon refers to him--relinquishes his authority to that of his subject, who is to lay claim to and exercise that authority through the generation of a

written text. Or so it would appear.

The nature of this authoritative shift is democratic. While Proclus is not requesting, in Cleon, the advice of all his citizens, but of a cultural elite, he acknowledges a reliance on the wisdom of his subordinates, and his written message to Paul insinuates that he seeks the advice of even the marginalized. We don't know, nor does Cleon, who Proclus writes in order to gather his wisdom, but his request constitutes at the very least a precedent with which Cleon is clearly uncomfortable. With all the diplomacy he can muster and enact in words, Cleon admonishes his king for seeking the wisdom of Paul:

> Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew
> As Paulus proves to be, one circumcized,
> Hath access to a secret shut from us?
> Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
> In stooping to inquire of such an one
> As if his answer could impose at all! (343-48)

Presuming that we can trust what Cleon writes here, we would judge that Cleon probably does not believe that the body of knowledge contributed by the Christians or Jews consists in truth; but the tone with which he dismisses Paul betrays a sense of insult on his part, not a mere analytical rejection.

Part of Cleon's annoyance may be attributable to what he perceives as manipulation on the king's part. While the king has seemingly, through his early requests, been yielding his authority to Cleon, the final request after Paul indicates that the yielding is limited. Proclus retains the role of king, controls Cleon's voice by virtue

of the fact that he poses questions, and promises to make use of or reject Cleon's advice as he sees fit. Proclus constructs for Cleon an edifice of sorts upon which the poet may take a posture of authority; but the edifice is collapsible and portable, and the posture is to be temporary. The king's question as to Paul's whereabouts insinuates this, at least for Cleon, and we can infer that the poet may have reason to feel a susceptibility to manipulation. Enough of a suspicion exists as to Proclus' motivation, that Cleon may legitimately wonder if the king values his input at all: a reasonable possibility exists that Proclus compliments Cleon with the questions, with the edifice and the invitation, only that he may gain access to Paul, in which case, he does not value Cleon's advice to the degree that his letter purportedly suggests. So far as we can tell, Proclus postures as a ruler who respects the advice of his subjects, but who may very well be using that posture to manipulate his subjects, to gain knowledge beyond that rendered through the advice, and ultimately to increase his own power and level of authority.

What probably annoys Cleon more than the king's final request itself, however, is the rhetorical flourish with which the request is made. Cleon's letter calls attention to the sequence of the king's various requests, the first of which are complimentary. As Cleon reports, the king's letter arrives at the same time an entire galleyfull of

gifts from Proclus are being unloaded. At the same time, Proclus is effectively paying tribute to Cleon with a lavish number of gifts, he asks that the poet expound on all his artistic accomplishments: a gift of tribute in itself. The next two questions posed by the king render Cleon an authority with respect to concerns over immortality, and are likewise, therefore, flattering. Only when these requests have been made does Proclus make the final one, which does not ennoble Cleon. An intuition of such rhetoric, in turn, calls into question the nature of the king's lavish gift-giving. In the presence of such suspicion, magnanimity acquires an identification with bribery.

But why should an all-powerful king need to bribe or need to employ a rhetorical strategy? If Proclus desires to know the location of Paul, all he should need to do is command Cleon or anyone else to provide him with the information. Proclus' use of rhetoric, then, forces Cleon to consider the king's ulterior motives in writing. Beyond the king's text, there seems to be a hyper-text whose nature Cleon can only guess. The poet does not really have the luxury of gaining the further information that could aid in the development of his speculations: the king is not present to answer the questions that lead to elaboration. This fact points to just the sort of problem associated with writing, namely that it disallows the opportunity for clarification and elaboration. Conducted in the realm of a hierarchical political structure, it can even be dangerous. If an all-

powerful king demands that his subjects respond to his writing, and those subjects must ultimately guess at what the king desires to hear, he poses a considerable threat to them. A wrong guess, in the context of such political structure, may have severe consequences.

As Cleon re-fashions the letter of his king, he indicates that the motivation behind the king's rhetoric might be a means of getting around a humble embarrassment. The king is ashamed of himself for doubting in the hierarchical system that situates him in the position of ultimate power and that regards the Christian message as ludicrous. He is apparently attracted to the spirit of this message--particularly to the promise of immortality it offers--but knows he lacks the means to either confirm or refute its validity. He enlists the help of Cleon to acquire the means. The implications of confirming the validity of the Christian message are that such confirmation simultaneously serves to refute the foundational principles of those governmental and societal structures that recognize hierarchical positions of power, prestige, and authority as honorable. In seeking the verification of Christian truths, Proclus is effectively and symbolically deconstructing the monument to himself that he is in the process of building (26). His longing for immortality compels him to do so anyway, though not without embarrassment. Hence, the rhetorical strategy and the posturing.

This scenario need not, however, be the only one that,

for Cleon, serves to explain the king's use of rhetoric. If it does seem the most likely scenario to us, we must recall that the king's letter is re-fashioned by Cleon. This scenario is the one Cleon desires to indicate as the one he believes, which is precisely what he would want to indicate if the king's rhetoric were motivated not by an interest in the Christian message but by something of a political sting operation. The possibility exists that Proclus wants to discover the extent to which the Christian movement--to which he is, in fact, opposed--has infiltrated his kingdom.

The evidence we have for such a consideration begins with the poem's epigraph, which serves to situate the correspondance, historically, at the time of St. Paul's evangelical visit to Athens. Paul was not well received in Athens, though he implied, as the epigraph indicates, that he found there, in various poets and artisans, a kind of innate inclination toward Christian belief. The fact that Proclus does not know of the saint's whereabouts indicates that Paul has moved on from Athens and probably from Greece. Historically, when Paul left Athens, he proceeded to Corinth, then sailed to Antioch, in Syria. This departure was the last point to which Proclus could likely have traced the disciple. This has significance for us because Browning locates Cleon in the Sporades, on an island, that is, near Crete. The fact that Proclus considers Cleon a possible source of information as to Paul's whereabouts makes sense, then, in these historical terms.

Indeed, there is good reason to conclude, I think--and significantly so, for our purposes--that the poem is meant to take place at the time of Paul's writing of the First Letter to the Corinthians.[8] This would place Paul, geographically, across the Aegean Sea from Athens, in Ephesus. The conditions in Greece at the time bore a resemblance to those that Proclus has, according to Cleon, implied.[9] The themes of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians concern the subjects of Proclus' greatest concerns, too, particularly those of resurrection and immortality. Rumors surrounding the letter's claims regarding these subjects can reasonably be understood as the prompt of Proclus' inquiries. And at least one part of this epistle, has what would sound to a king like a threat of sedition:

> God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's lowborn and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something
> . . . .
>
> (I Corinthians 1:21-28)

In light of such messages as these, we can understand that, whatever stumbling blocks Paul ran into as he tried to establish a faith community in Greece, he did manage to win the faith of Corinth's underprivileged and poor (Bourke 1259). The evangelical effort in Greece met with success because of those citizens marginalized by the political structures, because of the outcasts, that is, the poor, and the slaves.

Cleon discloses the fact that he has received certain of his information about the Christian message from slaves:

> . . . certain slaves
> Who touched on this same isle, preached [Paul] and Christ;
> And (as I gathered from a bystander)
> Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.
> (350-53)

Here, of course, the Greek poet sounds as if he has little positive regard for what such slaves have to offer, but the whole of the poem demonstrates that he is deeply attracted to the likes of such people. We shall examine this issue in greater depth momentarily, but we need to recall that, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes,

> Although I am not bound to anyone, I made myself the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible. I became like a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews. To those bound by the law, I became like one who is bound (although in fact I am not bound by it), that I might win those bound by the law.
> (I Corinthians 9:19-20)

Paul and his disciples could be the very ones from whom Cleon has heard of Christianity. The possibility exists, in fact, that he has or is inclined to become a Christian convert. The point is, however, that even if he has become one, and follows the example of Paul, he is not about to disclose this fact in a letter to Proclus. Like Paul, he would posture as one "bound by the law."

To whatever extent Cleon has given ear to Christian doctrine, he would be guarded in admitting it to the king of Greece, in Athens, where Paul had been rejected by the ruling powers. Cleon's problem, however, is that he does not know how much Proclus has heard, either by way of fact

or of rumor. We can certainly assume that the king has heard the claim made by Paul, spoken to the Athenians in Acts, that Browning alludes to in his epigraph:

> For in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (17:28)

Hearing of such "certain poets," Proclus would probably want to make contact with the poet of his kingdom who is the most highly esteemed. Whether for the purpose of seeing Paul or of crushing the Christian movement, the king would conduct an inquiry into the rumors of the alleged statements, and would certainly ask for information from Cleon. Paul's claim has very likely been the prompt for Proclus' writing. Furthermore, if Cleon has been made aware of Christian doctrine, then he is probably aware of Paul's claim as well; and he is aware that Proclus has probably heard of the claim.

This puts Cleon in a real bind. If he has made the statements Paul claims that "certain poets" have, he could, he knows, be considered by the king both Christian and seditious. If he has not made the statements, but has made no refutation of them, either, then he is inadequately confronting the aesthetic issues of the day, and must no longer be deemed Greece's "laureate." If Proclus is sincerely interested in the message of the Gospel, and Cleon has failed to make the statements Paul claims, then other poets have, and these poets will be held in higher esteem by the king than Cleon will.

The best recourse Cleon has is to demonstrate that he could have been misinterpreted by Paul. If he can claim to have intuited such principles of Christian doctrine as the Incarnation and the resurrection of the body, but to have subsequently refuted them on intellectual grounds, then he can evade any accusation Proclus might make, and he can retain whatever esteem might, in Greece, be his. Indeed, we find him writing that

> Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,
> That he or other god descended here
> And, once for all, showed simultaneously
> What, in its nature, never can be shown,
> Piecemeal or in succession;--showed, I say,
> The worth both absolute and relative
> Of all his children from the birth of time,
> His instruments for all appointed work.
> I now go on to image,--might we hear
> The judgment which should give the due to each,
> Show where the labour lay and where the ease,
> And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere!
> This is a dream . . . (115-27)

And later, addressing himself to the answer of his king's third request, Cleon writes

> When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
> Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
> Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,
> I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
> The man who loved his life so over-much,
> Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
> I dare at times imagine to my need
> Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
> Unlimited in capability
> For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
> --To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us:
> That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
> On purpose to make prized the life at large--
> Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
> We burst there as the worm into the fly,
> Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no!
> Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,
> He must have done so, were it possible. (318-35)

Even if Cleon is a closet Christian, he is being honest here

as he is applying the Divine attributes and influence of the Christian God to Zeus, then is saying that such attribution is invalid. A Christian could honestly do the same.

My concern, I emphasize, is not to prove that Cleon is, indeed, a Christian convert. It is to recognize that we could never know where he stands by means of our reading his written text that has been drafted in the service of the political hierarchy. He claims that the Christian doctrine can be "held by no sane man," but this statement is not necessarily a denial of a kind of insanity. It is, for instance, not much different than Paul's saying, "we preach Christ crucified--a stumbling block to the Jews, and an absurdity to the Gentiles" (I Corinthians 1:23), or his saying "we are fools on Christ's account. . . . We have become the world's refuse, the scum of all . . ." (I Corinthians 4:10, 13).

Cleon cannot, in turn, determine the motives behind Proclus' letter. Ironically, the more informed both of these political dignitaries are about Paul's message, the more confused each is bound to become in attempting to discern the status of "belief" in the other. And we readers share in this confusion: what are we to make, for example, of Proclus' sending gifts of slaves, who are known to be the vehicles by which Christian conversion is realized? The point I would like to make, in any case, is that Proclus' request after Paul creates all kinds of ambiguity for Cleon, and alerts him to the fact of his king's posturing. Since

Cleon cannot know the motivations behind Proclus' rhetoric, he is himself compelled to engage in authorial posturing.

We are first tipped off to this, I sense, by the opening lines of the letter's body, in which Cleon claims to be writing in the present tense not only of the galley's unloading but of his reading of Proclus' letter:

> They give they letter to me, even now:
> I read and seem as if I heard thee speak. (5-6)

Perhaps Cleon is being honest here, but the claim to be writing while he is reading sounds like an innocuous admission of obvious diplomatic posturing in which Cleon is communicating the respectful immediacy of his response.

Far more significant, however, is the evasive posturing that Cleon performs with respect to his consideration of the white she-slave. Traditionally, critics have easily and summarily regarded Cleon's attention to her as a manifestation of the Greek poet's proclivity to engage in his empty hedonistic desires.[10] Such regarding fails to recognize, I think, the nature and profundity of the effect the woman has on Cleon. It consequently fails, too, to recognize the nature and significance of her role in the poem. An erotic attraction is certainly a dimension of Cleon's attraction for the woman, but the whole of his focus on her is far more complex. It is analogous, I would suggest, to the attentions that Thomas Mann's von Aschenbach pays Tadziu. Cleon desires the woman, but he desires perhaps even more to be one with her: to participate in her essence. He longs to be unencumbered by his intellect, artistic maturity, and

position of privilege, all of which have served to distance him from his pure humanity.

Even if he is, in fact, a pagan, Cleon would have some difficulty in straightforwardly confessing such feelings to Proclus, or even in admitting them to himself. A man who has struggled for the whole of his life to be the most educated and cultured of his society would not want to admit, particularly to his king, that the ultimate achievement of his life is the desire to forsake the whole of his development in order to become one in being with a lowly slave. If Cleon is attracted to Christianity or if he is a Christian, on the other hand, he obviously must be hesitant in admitting to Proclus the true nature of his attraction to a representative of the Christain movement. Respond to the king he must, however, and so what is his recourse? He postures. For Proclus, the audience of his letter, he tries to regard the woman as a particularly magnificent gift, from the king, for which he is grateful. He veils the true nature of his desire for her by insinuating that the intensity of feeling he experiences in seeing her is in response to the king's generosity. Among the gifts that Cleon acknowledges, she is listed last: suggestively, that is, as least in importance. Still, the poet can hardly contain the intensity of feeling he has for this

> one white she-slave from the group dispersed
> Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
> Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
> Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
> One lyric woman, in her crocus vest

> Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
> Commends to me the strainer and the cup
> Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine. (11-18)

A break in the text occurs immediately after this line, as if the thought it bears has had excessive emotional weight for the author.

Throughout the letter, the attentions of Cleon keep returning to the woman. Again, we are reminded of the obsessive attentions that von Aschenbach pays Tadziu. Cleon expounds on the magnificence of the king, and anticipates the day of Proclus' festival, when the poet intends to pour a libation in the king's honor. His imaginations conjure the slave, and he fantasizes for Proclus that she will

> narrate thy fortunes, speak
> Thy great words, and describe thy royal face--
> Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,
> Within the eventual element of calm. (39-42)

Pauses and periods of silence--noted here, as elsewhere, with the dash--abound, and indicate that Cleon is checking the flow of his communication. He observes himself approaching the limit of what he wants to write and reveal, and so he stops, then seemingly re-orients himself, and continues. In some sense, then, what follows must be considered an evasion, a misdirection, a posturing. Cleon can claim that he is attempting to address himself to the task of responding to the king's requests, but this does not preclude the possibility that he uses his response as a pretense for evasion. He can be rendering the king's requests complicitous to his evasive efforts. However much he devotes himself to his task, in any case, the slave girl

keeps returning as a pre-occupying dimension of Cleon's thoughts as he writes.

In his response to the king's first request, Cleon attempts to describe what his artistic achievements have been. He speaks here of the ultimate artistic endeavor having to do with a suffusing or a gathering of parts into a consummate whole. The intentional act of the artist is to somehow parallel what seems to be a metaphysical tendency that Cleon intuits. He conceives that his age has been a suffusion of past events, that the magnificent qualities of humankind have been suffused into a whole magnificence of the present; and these metaphysical tendencies--in Browning's time, in a Darwinian era, they would be recognized as evolutionary tendencies, perhaps--find their congruent manifestation in the suffusion of both the various artistic talents of Cleon realized in the present and in the person of Cleon as artist, who recognizes himself as the suffusion of Homer, Terpander, Phidian, and Pericles (139-45). With respect to the suffusing inclination, however, Cleon betrays a deconstructive intuition:

> For, what we call this life of men on earth,
> This sequence of the soul's achievements here
> Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
> Intended to be viewed eventually,
> As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,
> But each part having reference to all,--
> How shall a certain part, pronounced incomplete,
> Endure effacement by another part?
> Was the thing done?--then, what's to do again?
> (73-81)

The catalyst of this intuition is the slave girl.

We begin to perceive this fact as we encounter the

lines immediately following. In explanation of the artist's suffusing activity, Cleon refers to the "chequered pavement" of his residence, and indicates how an artist might make use of such a view.

> See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
> Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
> And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid--
> He did not overlay them, superimpose
> The new upon the old and blot it out,
> But laid them on a level in his work,
> Making at last a picture; there it lies.
> So, first the perfect separate forms were made,
> The portions of mankind; and after, so,
> Occurred the combination of the same.
> For where had been a progress, otherwise?
> Mankind, made up of all the single men,--
> In such a synthesis the labour ends.
> Now mark me! those divine men of old time
> Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point
> The outside verge that rounds our faculty;
> And where they reached, who can do more than reach?
> (82-98)

At the start of his letter, however, Cleon communicates his perception, we recall, that the slave woman is something of an excellent suffusion of all the various white and black slaves.

> one white she-slave from the group dispersed
> Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
> Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
> Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
> One lyric woman . . . (11-15)

The suggestion made here, whether by unconscious means or by deliberate misdirection, is that the slave woman, as the natural suffusion of the humanity in the realm of Cleon's gaze, constitutes a perfection for which he can at best reach but which he cannot artistically or physically capture in any ultimate sense. By reason of the allusion drawn to the girl--through the attention called to the chequered

pavement--we may infer that the "it" in line 88, the "so" of line 90, and the "such a synthesis" of line 94 all have reference to the girl. The reference is, of course, vague, but it must be: it is at once honest communication and evasion. It is indirection, and it is a manifestation of authorial posture.

Through his generation of the written text, Cleon depicts the woman as the pinnacle suffusion of beauty's manifestation, as the living representation of what art seeks to capture. In the passage where Cleon rejects, for Proclus, the notion of Zeus's incarnation, he simultaneously expresses faith and belief in the girl. He attempts to recognize her as something very close to the incarnate divine.

> I now go on to image,--might we hear
> The judgment which should give the due to each,
> Show where the labour lay and where the ease,
> And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere!
> This is a dream:--but no dream, let us hope,
> That years and days, the summers and the springs,
> Follow each other with unwaning powers.
> The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far,
> Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock;
> The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe;
> The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet;
> The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers;
> That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave,
> Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,
> Refines upon the women of my youth. (123-38)

We note, again, that Cleon's authorial construction places the girl last of all in the list of magnificent individual things that humanity <u>does</u> have in place of the empty dream of Zeus's incarnation. The girl is recognized, again, as the culminating synthesis, the excellent suffusion of an

incarnate goodness that is real. If, as could be the case, the girl as slave is a bearer of the Word, a messenger of the Gospel, then Cleon could be saying much more through his indirection than we might first recognize. She could be the means by which Cleon is to undergo conversion, and he may comprehend this. For Cleon, she may be the very embodiment of the Word. We do get a sense of this when he writes that

> Indeed, to know something, and to prove
> How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:
> But knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.
> Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,
> Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.
> I can write love-odes: thy fair slave's an ode.
> (291-96)

Whatever his conversion status may be, Cleon does betray an infatuation with the slave girl, and he does attempt to disguise some degree or dimension of the infatuation. Because of what she represents to him, however, he must be struck by the irony that she is, in fact, a slave. Politically and culturally, she has been designated as one who "lives and moves and has her being" because of the security that the authority of Proclus provides. Cleon perceives how ludicrous that reasoning might be, however, that would claim to exert a control and authority over the beauty and seemingly sacred humanity that the woman embodies. The woman is "enslaved" only by means of the impermanent posture of Proclus' authority. She is a "gift" as well under the exercise of that authority. But what sort of slave or gift is she? Ultimately, she serves to demonstrate what a profound lack of authority Proclus and

Cleon possess. She serves as testimony to the tendencies of authoritative cultures toward ultimately deconstructive endeavors. The great achievement of cultural authority is the recognition of what authority it lacks.

Cleon's infatuation with the white she-slave is, in any case, indicative of something more than the artist's hedonistic character. Considered in light of the poem's implied allusion to I Corinthians, particularly, it indicates at the very least a disposition of heart, in Cleon, that is open to the Christian message. Despite the fact that he admonishes Proclus for seeking knowledge from Paul, Cleon admits that he has gathered what information he has about Christianity from "certain slaves" (350). He listens to "a bystander" (352) to familiarize himself with the tenets of Christian doctrine. The implication of his infatuation with the slave girl is that he demonstrates himself, through it, to be exceedingly vulnerable to the persuasion her words can effect, and the words she carries, the words she embodies, are those of "everlasting life." The girl could, in fact, be one of the "certain slaves" from whom Cleon has heard of Christianity; and she could be the "bystander" who informs him of Christian doctrine. Cleon's conversion may be a <u>fait accompli</u>.

The point is, however, that we are not to know. We are certainly not to know by means of a letter drafted in the service of the political hierarchy. The dialogue of such hierarchy cannot accomodate the concept that promotes the

weak of this world shaming the strong. The correspondance between King Proclus and his highly acclaimed aristocratic aesthete seems to function as a means of the characters' evading the honest communication of their beliefs. It functions as a dialectical process of posturing which promises to breed only mistrust and suspicion within the cultural structure.

Cleon, we should recall, is the product of his culture. He has been provided with education, opportunity, freedom, and privilege, and has, as a result, achieved a great deal. He is to represent, obviously, the best a pagan can be. His culture has, in the figure of Proclus, provided him finally with the gifts of authority and with an authoritative control over (a) beauty. Through his exercise of authority, however, which is the enactment of the text, he comes to demonstrate, knowingly or not, how delusory the claim to authority is, whether expressed through political or artistic means.

In the context of his written, epistolary discourse, Cleon inevitably works himself toward the same awareness that Proclus has, namely that the nature of his authority is largely posture. The king knows that his authority has proven inadequate, or he would not have asked for Cleon's advice. If, in responding to the king's request, Cleon has not fundamentally provided any additional insight, though, then the development of the text is ultimately worthless, according to its own culture's scale of value. It is merely

a posturing that preserves the problematic dynamics of the status quo.

Such an exercise of authority precludes, of course, any openness to the message of Paul.[11] Cleon uses the final 18 lines of his text to dismiss anything Paul of the Christians might have to say. "Their doctrines could be held by no sane man," he claims (353). His dismissal is obviously ironic in that he has intuited and hoped for precisely the things that Christianity affords.[12] It is doubly ironic, however, because he has, through the development of his text, come to an awareness that the exercise of textual closure is mere posture and promises no permanent satisfaction either to author or audience, ruler or subject.[13] He knows, but is compelled by the nature of the text itself, to participate in the posturing anyway.

Ironic, too, is the fact that Proclus has turned some part of his authority over to Cleon. The king seeks advice from a person who is the epitome of cultural product. Cleon is part of a closed system, and is bound merely to verbalize the conclusions that the king has already drawn.[14] Moreover, the relative hierarchical position of Proclus and Cleon call for diplomatic posturing. Cleon cannot be straightforwardly honest about either his feelings for the slave girl, the significance of what the girl represents, or his awareness of his own powerlessness. The cultural structure itself serves to preclude its achievement of growth and happiness.

Another irony may exist beyond the scope of the poem, we should recognize. If Proclus is able to recognize that Cleon's letter achieves only the same conclusion that he himself has, then he will have observed the uselessness of the supposed authority in which he has trusted, according to which he has ruled, and which he has shared. Cleon's textual display may be influential in improving culture after all, but not for the reasons Cleon might hope to suppose.

Still, we must recall that Cleon could be entirely aware of all the irony he generates through his writing. He may be Christian, and may be demonstrating the irony as a means of edifying and instructing Proclus. Like Paul, Cleon could be posing as one bound by "the law" that he might "win those bound by the law." If he were a Christian, he would probably do so. The prospect of Cleon's being a Christian implies the greatest of all the poem's ironies, though, and one that is possible: Both Proclus and Cleon could be Christians. The mechanism by which they communicate within the hierarchical structure, however, prevents both of them, in this case, from laying claim to what they believe. In print, both may be rejecting the message of Paul while in lived existence, both may be embracing it.

Whatever the ultimate intentions of Cleon or Proclus may be, they result in a epistolary effort wherein Cleon comes to acknowledge that the anatomies of political and artistic enterprise are, in important respects, disturbingly

the same. Both politician and poet attempt to make words their slaves, just as the political system of Greece has attempted to make a slave of the white girl in the poem and has attempted to make slaves of the Christians. Such an enterprise is ludicrous, as Cleon recognizes when he says, "I can write love-odes; thy fair slave's an ode."

The political climate of Browning's era demonstrated the point as well--as far as Browning was concerned--by "enslaving" Wordsworth and the evolution of British poetry in its ideology.[15] Browning's writing of "Cleon" may well have been prompted by this perceived turn of events.[16] Antony Harrison is, I would suppose, precisely on the mark when he claims that

> "Cleon" can be understood to serve . . . as Browning's preemptive denial of his own unyielding quest for popularity and poetic supremacy. Not to be positioned to become a 'defector' like Wordsworth, it seems, required an anticipatory acknowledgement that "Most progress is most failure." (Victorian Poets 68)

Harrison suggests that, like Cleon, Wordsworth had, in Browning's view, aligned himself with the political hierarchy and had consequently denigrated not only his own poetic voice but the whole evolution of nineteenth-century British poetry. What happens to the meaning of the word "joy" between its use in the "Intimations" Ode and Cleon's use of it represents the kind of devolution that has occurred in poetry as a result of Wordsworth's "defection." Acknowledging the validity of A.W. Crawford's contention that "Cleon" constitutes Browning's reply to Matthew

Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna," Harrison comments that

> For Browning, the Wordworthian resonances of Arnold's Empedocles must have brought to mind the constellation of issues--literary, philosophical, religious, and aesthetic--surrounding the term joy which, as Browning well knew (having owned one of the first copies of Endymion), was a most important term in Keats's poetry as well. But . . . far more than a conflict between Keats's sensual and Wordworth's spiritual conceptions of joy operates in the language, structure, and argument of 'Cleon.' The term becomes the intertextual locus where historical issues of aesthetic and political ideology, as well as issues of poetic supremacy, intersect to accomplish multiple aims. (Victorian Poets 66)

Recognizing this locus, Harrison goes on to claim that

> Wordworth attained the poetic supremacy of a Cleon only after his 'defection' from the political ideology upon which his early spiritual values first depended. His complacent position atop the tower of fame during the first thirteen years of the Victorian period exposed his actual failure as the missionary of an aesthetic ideology that had profound political ramifications. During his tenure as laureate any possibility that the ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality might continue to be transposed into popular poetry had given way to the solipsistic and hedonistic 'evangelism' of the Spasmodics. (Victorian Poets 67)

"Cleon" offers us more, however, than a fictive depiction of Wordsworth's poetic fate--or Britain's--as it is given over to the service of political enterprise.[17] The poem reveals that the engagement of self in written discourse--particularly as that discourse is prompted by and rendered in the service of political need, as Carlyle felt his own to be--foments a dialectic of authorial posture that in turn engenders mistrust and confusion. The generation of written texts constitutes an act through which authors realize their existentially and interminably divided subjectiv-

ity; and written correspondance exacerbates the anxiety of this realization because it forces closure on a project which fundamentally resists completion. In writing, we strive, through language use, to render words our slaves: through our control and ordering of words, we effect the posture we feel compelled to perform. Doing so, however, brings us to the awareness that, in fact, we are the slaves of words. An engagement in the activity, as Browning had hoped to make clear in Pauline, can bring us to an awareness of our concupiscent condition. To Browning's way of thinking, though, this outcome is not so dismal as it might sound, despite the disagreeable way it may encourage us to feel;[18] and this is the message that the poet hopes to convey, I think, to Carlyle. For Browning, what matters is our reaction to the condition of our enslavement, which must be opposite the denial that Cleon, in his correspondance with Proclus, purports to have. Nor need it be or result in the "broadly deconstructive moment" that Carlyle reaches in Latter-Day Pamphlets: for, like the outcasts of Corinthian society, our slavery constitutes the promise of our liberation; by means of it, we can approach the destiny of our salvific joys.

Notes

1. Langbaum mentions that, in the construction of a dramatic monologue, "the result is to make the outward movement of the poem a device for returning inward, to make the dramatic situation the occasion for lyric expression; so that in effect the speaker directs his address outward in order to address himself, and makes an objective discovery in order to discover himself. No matter how dramatic the dramatic monologue is, no matter how far outward it moves, its development is lyrical in that the speaker does not change moral direction as a result of the circumstances; he rather makes the circumstances a part of himself as he develops inward toward an intenser manifestation of his own nature" (200).

Loy Martin, whose views on the dramatic monologue are of particular interest to us here, says that "in the dramatic monologue, we shall find a form designed to give full force to the ideological desire for subjective unity while it denies, in its formal conventions, the possibility of fulfilling such a desire (22).

2. "What the monologue signifies is the contradiction itself in its discursive unfolding. The material person is always being produced, but it cannot be produced by any process that does not also produce a contradictory idea of

the unitary self. This process of production leaves its traces in a kind of textual discourse that I have been calling 'The Being Written'" (Martin 106).

Antony Harrison mentions that "a dramatic monologue inevitably and spontaneously evokes a subtextual question in most readers' minds: What is the poet as artificer attempting to accomplish by devising this elaborate mode of self-disguise? What values and beliefs does he (really) wish to support, criticize, or propound? And to what end? Because such questioning and traces of anticipatory authorial response to it inhere in the operations of the dramatic monologue, this literary form that on its surface appears determined to suppress ideology, instead complexly draws attention--through its self-conscious elisions--to the subtle ways in which both poet and reader are entrapped in webs of ideology that demand interrogation or defense" (Victorian Poets 44).

3. Langbaum holds that "if it is the whole technique of the dramatic monologue to be thrown off balance, to project circumstances and ideas which cannot stand on their own feet and are not the adequate counterpart of the poem's meaning, it is in order that the whole weight of the poem may fall upon the speaker. It is to establish the speaker's existence, not his moral worth but his sheer existence, as the one incontrovertible fact upon which the poem can rest and from which it can derive the substantial core of its existence; so that the speaker is not just a part of the

poem, another element with the circumstances and ideas, he is the poem" (200).

According to Martin, the dramatic monologue reflects "an unresolved conflict between the desire to be a unified 'true person' in speech and the inevitably fragmentary and interactional nature of speech itself. This conflict is not a new one for Browning in 1855; it has troubled him for many years by then, and it entails special problems for the artist. I think this conflict--or contradiction--provides both the seed and the structure of the dramatic monologue . . ." (34).

Martin claims as well that "[the] struggle between the subject as homogeneous 'true person' and as heterogeneous and 'disappearing' moment of speech or signification gives the dramatic monologue its form, a form that can never resolve the contradiction at its center. But it is precisely this uncommonly open access to the contradictions underlying the Victorian myth of the individual that gives the monologue its special value, its range of reference" (31).

And Tucker adds that "Browning's is an art of disclosure, an art that resists its own finalities" (5). Specifically with respect to "Cleon," Lee comments on the implied existential confrontation when he says that "the significance of 'Cleon' then resides in its inquiry into an ontological problem, the destiny of the finite, concrete person in the bewildering universe. The poem has an

existentialist strain in that it deals with the perennial question whether life is an open road or a blind alley and with the supreme question of 'What am I?'" (58).

4. Honan emphasizes the fact that "in the letter form Cleon may pour out the deepest and most subtle of his profundities: he has time to formulate carefully an entire philosophy, so that its omissions are not in fact accidental ones, or careless ones, as they might appear to be if Cleon were talking, but intrinsic ones, as it were, those arising from Cleon's own inadequacies and limitations and revealing of them. Replying to Protos' letter, he is free to misinterpret Protos, as well. The epistolary audience guides the epistle-writer only by means of his own past words; thus while Cleon follows Protos' letter as he writes his reply, he is able to dwell at much greater length on his own artistic and philosophic accomplishments and at less length on Protos' urgent inquiry about Paulus, for example, than he would if Protos were present" (164-65).

5. "Cleon is drawn out through the presence of an objectified element of his own being, his worldly success--itself a pointless and futile-seeming entity--which pleads to his intellect for a rationale, for some justification in the order of things. It is in offering this rationale as carefully, completely and with such characteristic vanity as he does, and in leaving out of it the things that he does, that Cleon reveals himself. But the very process of self-

identification that occurs--Cleon's seeing one element of his own being in Protos the Tyrannt--is made possible only by the epistolary nature of the situation" (Honan 165).

6. ". . . when a speaker faces a real audience he does not have time for reflection, and this is an insurmountable drawback if he must reflect in order to reveal himself. Moreover he cannot keep on talking if he says anything that would incite his auditor to talk at length; he must hold the floor, mesmerizing his hearers into prolonged and almost complete silence through a swift flow of rightly chosen words. . . . The difficulties were overcome in the epistle, which, in situation, is a kind of hybrid cross between the soliloquy and the normal speaker-auditor relationship in Browning. In 'Karshish' and 'Cleon' the audience compels the speaker to direct everything that he has to say at one man who will 'hear' but not interrupt" (Honan 162).

Honan continues: "What is lost, of course, is immediacy. The epistle-writer is less apt to be carried away--to let truths about himself 'slip' out, to tell self-incriminating things. Written address is more formal than spoken address; and diction, syntax and, generally, style, in the poetic letter will tend to be literary and restricted, and less colloquial, colorful, and spontaneous" (162).

7. In Victorian Poets, Harrison maintains "That Browning was, with 'Cleon,' participating in the ongoing

Romantic debate concerning the true grounds and constitution of joy in poetry and in life at large . . . seems an inevitable conclusion . . . (49). He explains in further detail that "in the early fifties the debate over poetic values and the ultimate value of poetry had fairly raged in the pages of British periodicals and, as we have seen, had engaged such luminaries as Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, Herbert Spencer, and Charles Kingsley, along with the lesser lights, George Gilfillan, and J.M. Ludlow. Browning in fact had entered the debate with his essay on Shelley, and the extent to which the poems of his 1855 volume extend his participation in the controversy has yet to be acknowledged. As Browning had promised Misland, fully a fifth of these monologues (occupying a quarter of the pages of the volume) treat matters of aesthetic and poetic ideology. 'Cleon' itself was composed at the climactic moment of the dispute over the proper subjects, settings, and functions of poetry in the modern age" (59). Harrison informs us that in May of 1854, Aytoun had published "his effusive, parodic review of what was presented as the latest Spasmodic masterpiece, Firmilian by Percy Jones" in Blackwood's. In the summer of 1854, then, Browning wrote 'Cleon.'

In the earlier article "Joy-Hunger" that he wrote with Dodin, Harrison claims that "most commentators have agreed that the central irony of the poem results from Cleon's desparate quest for spiritual fulfillment which is frustrated by his blindness to Revelation, despite his

knowledge of Christ's existence and of Paul's gospel, a system of beliefs, he asserts, which can be held by 'no sane man' (57-58). The commentators to whom he refers include Charlton (21-22), Devane (264), Johnson (97), Lee (58), Priestly (126), and Whitla (22). To this list, we might add Crowell, who suggests that the "central issue" of the poem is that "Cleon, a cultivated Greek, faces death and oblivion in despair, for he has, by arduous study and training in the arts, become superlatively self-conscious and cultivated, a condition which makes death intolerable" (182). Harrison responds by explaining that "all these commentators have missed what must be seen ultimately as the central point of 'Cleon': the speaker's most serious failing is not his blindness to the possibility of spiritual fulfillment, but rather his inability to desire spiritual fulfillment at all" (58). Not until the "'Cleon' and Its Contexts" chapter of Victorian Poets, however, does Harrison begin to fully recognize the complexity of the problems at issue in the poem. His contextual and intertextual considerations encourage him to conclude, first of all, that "Many of [the] verbal ironies cluster around Cleon's misguided use of the word 'joy,' [a word which has the intertextual significance to connect this poem with Wordsworth and Keats] which appears usually in the context of material accomplishments and physical sensations" (64). Secondly, Harrison persuasively claims that "'Cleon' must be read, if read properly, in the context of the Spasmodic

controversy. The poem follows the lead of Arnold's Empedocles [refer to the Crawford article] and his Preface as a corrective response to the intense introspection, the dangerous self-absorption, and the obtuse pretentiousness of much recent Spasmodic verse, poetry extending what was universally accepted as the tradition of Keats. . . . As a serious expose of the poetic and spiritual inadequacies of Spasmodicism, 'Cleon' partially allies itself with the poetry of that school, only to subvert the poetic ideology its writers and George Gilfillan, its most important exponent among the critics, had propounded" (60).

8. Hornecker links the poem to 1 Corinthians by means of (2:14), according to which he concludes that Cleon is a Pauline "natural man." Lee links the poem with the epistle through Cleon's claim, "I know not, nor am troubled much to know" (342) and 1 Cor 14:38-39: "he who does not know shall not be known." (61). Further, Lee links the two when he says that "The irony of Cleon's demand for a sign becomes pungeant indeed, if we recall that St. Paul was exposed to the demand of the Greeks for wisdom and to that of the Jews for a sign, a definite miraculous event to demonstrate that Jesus is really the Messiah. St. Paul knew that Christianity was foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews" (60). Lee alludes here to 1 Corinthians 1:23. Altick's considerations of Karshish's relation to St. Paul are, by association, somewhat revealing as well, but no critic has fully examined the link between what occurs in the poem and

what is occurring contemporaneously in the Christian world. One should, it seems to me, in order to appreciate "Cleon," which Altick refers to, in part, as "Browning's reconstruction of a significant, albeit imaginary, event in the history of religion, . . . [his] satiric commentary on the intellectual and theological forces aligned against traditional Christianity in the nineteenth century" (494).

9. Bourke notes that, "while Paul was in Ephesus . . . he received disquieting news about Corinth. The community there was displaying open factionalism, certain members identifying themselves with, respectively, the teaching of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas and others apparently claiming a relationship with Jesus peculiar to themselves alone. . . . Christian teaching was being interpreted as a superior wisdom for the initiated few, rather than as the divine means for the humble opening of all hearts to the prophetic word of God in Christ. . . . There were also members who, despite their belief in the resurrection of Christ, had accepted the opinion of peripatetic philosophers against the possibility of general bodily resurrection . . ." (1259).

10. In his "Joy-Hunger" article, for example, Harrison claims that "Cleon must be seen finally as an epicurean philosopher, a hedonist and aesthete who is concerned not with the development and fulfillment of the soul as it is normally conceived but with the perpetuity of the body and the expansion of every sensory pleasure man is able to

enjoy" (57-58). With respect to this issue, Harrison does not change his position through the years: "[Cleon] is unable to satisfy his 'joy-hunger' because he conceives of joy exclusively in terms of hedonistic and aesthetic experience" (Victorian Poets 52). Spence comments, "The poem implies that, if Cleon did attend to St. Paul's teaching, he would be repelled by its asceticism and would reject its dogmas. His worldliness and sensuality in no way disturb his conscience . . ." (30).

11. Martin comments that "serious consideration of Christian doctrine might call into question the authority of philosophers and kings, but these matters are beyond Cleon's imagining. Christian doctrine might answer all of his questions and relieve him of his despair, but Cleon cannot know this for the same reason that has produced his confusion in the first place: he proves unable, for the purpose of affirming value, to understand human action and speech in any way not determined by the boundaries of a predetermined hierarchy" (157).

12. Tucker's comments serve as an important additional consideration, even if he is more certain about the reliability of Cleon's expression than I am: "Cleon's grand refusal of Browning's religion is also a refusal of Browning's poetry. Its utter negativity provides one of the clearest insights in all Browning's writing into the correlative importance of creativity, possibility, and the

sense of the future. . . . [Browning] found the best resistance to Cleon's will to closure, the best defense of creativity, possibility, and the sense of the future, in the dramatic deference recommended by Fra Lippo's good angel. Against the formidably hard-headed insistence of Cleon's 'But no!' Browning worked the angelic countercharm 'Not so fast!' He wrote a lifetime of poetry out of the antiphony of these two imperative voices, poetry that survives today because he heeded both voices so persistently, and so inventively orchestrated their discords" (218-19).

13. Tucker suggests that, "Organized as it is in time, the entire poem demands to be read against Cleon's overt intention to freeze time. . . . If Cleon cannot have simultaneity, he can at least have closure as the next best thing. His cunning rhetoric reflects the closural bias of his view of artistic tradition; the privilege of finality is written into passage after passage in which imaginative possibilities are begotten, allowed brief play, and put to death. The strict will to interpretive closure that oversees Cleon's history of the arts also monitors the little histories constituted in the passages and sentences he writes. His monologue presents a glittering, consistently untrustworthy fabric of reductive self-interpretations; and to read it is to unravel the characteristic dramatic patterns that he knits in time" (211-12).

Continuing, Tucker claims that, "For Cleon the 'need,' the 'desire,' the 'joy-hunger,' and the 'want' all answer to a deeper need: his need to identify power with closure, the 'not yet revealed' with the unrevealable, the possible with the present. These necessitarian identities put an end not only to Cleon's imagined 'future state,' but to any meaningful future whatsoever" (217). As Tucker recognizes, then, "Cleon" serves as evidence for the critic's point that "Browning carried on a lifelong affair with the fatal, frightening, yet necessary muse of closure" (29).

14. As Martin points out, "Once a social system of communication has been established, the subject can be represented as having no identity independent of that system. And Browning is concerned to reveal the conservative counterforces that deny value to communicative exchange itself" (150).

15. Harrison maintains that "it was Wordsworth's betrayal of his early political ideology that turned Browning against him. 'The Lost Leader' makes clear both the extent of Browning's admiration for Wordsworth and his anguished disappointment in him . . ." (Victorian Poets 65).

16. We should note Sinfield's contextual consideration as well. He suggests that Browning's epistolary monologues were to serve as commentary on the reliability of "historical documents": "In 'An Epistle' and 'Cleon,' Browning's gift for writing realistic monologues came into the service

of religious controversy. . . . [These poems] took their form from the experiments Browning had made in dramatic monologues in Bells and Pomegranates and, in part, from the nature of the contemporary controversy itself. The Higher Critics had based their destructive analyses of the Christ Myth upon careful scrutiny of biblical texts and other contemporary documents. 'An Epistle' and 'Cleon' purport to be such documents: both are manuscript letters or 'epistles' written by men living soon after the death of Jesus. Browning wants to use this device of creating an 'historical document' with greater elaboration in 'A Death in the Desert' in 1864" (76-77).

17. As Harrison comments, "'Cleon' constitutes [Browning's] serious critique of the inadequate aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual values of Spasmodicism" (Victorian Poets 56-57).

18. It is the outcome that Browning intimates to Ruskin, I think, when he says that, "I know that I don't make out my conception by my language, all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be; but by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which succeed if they bear the conception from me to you" (qtd. Tucker 11). The sense of powerlessness Browning hints at here indicates a condition of "enslave-

ment" to the ineffable infinite, which compulses the poet to honor it--through inadequate finite ways--with a voice of tribute.

CHAPTER TEN

BROWNING'S EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING OF ROMANTICISM: THE STRANGE CASE OF KARSHISH

With the character of Karshish, Browning proposes a manner of living, particularly in relation to language, that is preferable to the kind that Cleon (or Carlyle) has accepted: it is one that affirms the sort of activity with which Coleridge's Mariner conducts himself, even if Karshish may be a degree less compulsive than the Mariner.

Karshish, who lives at a time shortly after Christ's, spends his days gathering material of supposed medical interest--medicinal herbs, compounds, spiders, and information--and reporting his findings back to his boss, Abib, by means of epistolary accounts, of which the poem itself is one. Far from being revered, however, as Cleon is, Karshish is apparently neglected by his mentor: for the twenty-one previous letters that Karshish has written, he has received no reply. Still, referring to himself as "the picker-up of learning's crumbs," he perseveres in his gathering, thus living up to his name, which, as James Loucks has noted, derives from an Arabic word meaning "'one who gathers.'" (127 n. 2)

The dedication that the researcher shows for his work has brought him to an encounter with Lazarus, who has, according to the testimony of Christian witnesses, been

raised from the dead by Christ. For Karshish, Lazarus represents a remarkable medical discovery, of course, if the testimony of the Christians is true. With some sense of urgency and excitement, he writes of his findings to Abib. But his endeavor to do so represents a rhetorical challenge: he must convince Abib to read his letter, first of all, when the boss has apparently not been inclined to do so in the past; and Karshish must persuade Abib to consider seriously the evidence that Lazarus seems to represent, even as such consideration runs counter to all manner of thinking that the scientists have embraced. Browning's poem, then, is the record of Karshish's rhetorical sqirmings as the researcher attempts to write to his boss about his discovery.

We can perceive, easily enough, some resemblance between Karshish and the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge. Each inhabits the periphery of his culture and lacks such a position of authority to readily gain an audience; but each finds himself confronted with Life-in-Death, a seemingly supernatural experience whose telling he can hardly resist. Whereas Coleridge tends to identify with his character, though, Browning <u>observes</u> his character and invites us to do the same. Our encounter with Karshish does little to persuade us of Lazarus' resuscitation as factual miracle--and the factuality of the event is as unimportant as the factuality of the Mariner's tale is for the Wedding Guest--but what we do come to witness is Karshish's struggling to

gather and piece together those narratives or voices that would account for "Lazarus," whatever that "reality" might be.

This struggle is itself, for Browning, evidence of Christ's influence upon human experience, and far more so than any claim of miracle performance; for as a gatherer of voices and narratives, Karshish not only lives up to his Arab name, "one who gathers," but proves himself to be the Arab expression of the Greek "logos." Liddell and Scott describe "logos" to be "a verbal noun of λέγω with senses corresponding to [tell, say, speak]" and with a root meaning "pick up" or "gather for oneself." According to Liddell and Scott, the various general categories of meaning for λόγος range from "computation" to "an inward debate of the soul," to a "particular utterance or saying to the thing spoken of or subject matter." Henricus Stephanus, in Thesaurus Gracae Linguae (1829) Volume 6, notes that λόγος is derived from λέγω, which has the basic meaning "to gather" ("colligo") and then "to count" or "reckon" what has been gathered. Stephanus also specifically mentions the Johannine use of Λόγος to refer to the Son of God. The meaning Stephanus gives for the phrase λόγον ἑαυτῷ δίδομαι, "to consider within oneself," "to reason out" ("Rationem secum inire," "Ratiocinari") is particularly relevant to what Karshish is doing, for in the poem, Karshish is trying to "consider within himself" the meaning and implications of the sign of Lazarus, who has, by the accounts of the Christian

community, been raised from the dead. Karshish has been forced to consider the matter within himself because Abib will probably not, on the basis of the past, respond to him. In the act of writing his letter, Karshish effectively gathers Abib into himself and brings this internalized voice, system of value and interpretation into contact with the voice of Christianity, which has invaded him like the venom of a spider and which flows out of him in the words and images he uses. In the act of writing his letter, he approaches the discovery of his enslavement in words, and he helps engender this enslavement, even as he may, like Cleon, be attempting to master the words himself.

Since Karshish receives nothing but silence and disregard at the hands of Abib, though, he is forced into a condition of realizing, in act, the Logos--not in the traditionally conceived Johannine sense of a metaphysical person, that is, but in the form of an internalized power of human language. The sign of "Lazarus" becomes the open, variable signifier that serves as a site at which Karshish may gather voices together. And the suggestion of the poem is that the Christian community welcomes the gathering one would perform: stripped of the authoritarian restrictions that the history of the Church had placed on such gathering, Browning intimates, the Church would respect "gathering" as the essence of faith.

The poem thus serves, of course, as a criticism of the Church in the nineteenth century: it argues--and challenges

the contemporary Church to recognize--that the Church's credibility derives not from its capacity to put people in touch with metaphysical realities, but from its willingness to accept and celebrate diversities of accounts about things that people cannot understand or explain. The significance of the Christians' story of Lazarus, then, for example, lies not in the truth or fiction of a miraculous resuscitation: it lies in the fact that the sign of "Lazarus" serves as a site of gathering. To the degree that the "gathering" is welcomed in a community, then the alienation of some by the few who would authoritatively close down the gathering would be overcome, and the Logos would be realized.

The figure of Lazarus affords Karshish--and can afford Browning's readers--the opportunity that the Albatross afforded the Ancient Mariner, we can recognize. But we note again: Browning's aesthetic endeavor is different than that of Coleridge. Coleridge speaks to his audience from the lyrical perspective of the Mariner, and he compulsively seeks out an audience who will devote themselves to hearing him, as Tilottama Rajan has suggested. Browning takes the perspective of an <u>audience</u> relative to Karshish, who is like the Mariner or Coleridge. In serving as a devoted reader of such character, he fulfills the desire that Coleridge--and Carlyle, for that matter--has had for an audience. In the process of fulfilling such a role, Browning pays tribute to the Romantic endeavor, but not by revering the poets as prophets: this is what the culture has done with respect to

Wordsworth and Carlyle, in giving them fame; and its giving them fame has tended to make them into Cleons as a result. Browning pays tribute to the Romantic poets by suggesting that their insights into language had the potential of serving as the basis for an important cultural critique. He tends to fulfill Coleridge's desire for a devoted reader who can understand the vatic posturing for what it is, reject it, and accept Coleridge for the deeply human, unsupernatural person he is, who deserves to be revered by society as a human being rather than as a prophet. With respect to Coleridge, Browning might be said to fulfill the role that we, after Freud, have been ready to call countertransference, but whose conceptualization we have felt the need to renew.

Since much of our reasoning here depends on the plausibility of Browning's intention of Karshish's name to bear, in latent fashion, the Greek "logos," though, let us consider the factors that encourage us to conclude as much. First of all, the oddity of the word suggests that Browning selected it with pronounced intention. The poet calls attention to this oddity by placing the name in the first line and providing there as well an indicated definition which, however indirectly, relates the name to the meaning of "logos." Secondly, the subject matter of Karshish's letter is fundamentally concerned with the issue of Lazarus, whose story the reader has previously come to know only through the Gospel of St. John (11:1-14). None of the other

Gospels describes the resuscitation of Lazarus, nor do any of them conceive of Christ as the Logos. So the subject matter tends to situate the reader in the Fourth Gospel,[1] where the Incarnate God, which Browning would have recognized to be present in a human being--even in a pagan Arab--would be comprehended as "Logos."[2] Thirdly, Browning possessed both the knowledge of Greek necessary for the use of the strategy as well as the personality or inclination to use it. As Maynard recognizes, Browning

> had at least the education in the classics of a modern undergraduate concentrator. . . . He would keep up both with Latin and Greek and keep extending his reading all his life. . . . In his letters during the 1830s . . . he sometimes even makes a display, verging on pretentiousness, of his classical learning. (299-302)

Finally, the selection of the name "Karshish"--as infused with "logos"--is one which is entirely consistent with the strategies of the poem as a whole. Indeed, this consistency is the most compelling evidence that Karshish bears, in name, the Christ.

The poem is an epistolary expression which describes an experience of presently incomplete but ongoing spiritual conversion. The dynamic of that conversion takes place in the very writing of the letter, though, as we shall see--not in the encounter with Lazarus before the writing. The epistolary gesture itself--an active use of or participation in "logos"--is the means by which the spiritual growth occurs.[3]

Through the writing of his letter, Karshish engages in

a dynamic which leads to personal integration.[4] The first stage of this dynamic is one in which Karshish projects himself into the position of Abib, his mentor. From this position, Karshish may empirically examine himself in relation to Lazarus. His motivation in doing so is a defensive one: he feels threatened by what Lazarus represents, and he feels ashamed that some part of him is drawn toward Christian belief. Allying himself with Abib, he may reassert his empirically oriented value system and render judgment against the faith-oriented one.[5] Once in the projected position, however, Karshish rejects his inclination toward negative judgment: he comes to sympathize with that very part of himself he had hoped to condemn. This conversion promotes, in turn, a final stage of re-integration and acceptance of self. Such a dynamic--one that encourages human growth as well as an understanding of and appreciation for self--is precisely the sort of dynamic that the Logos of St. John seeks to promote.

The fact that Karshish is unaware of his bearing and of his manifesting the Logos stands as a metaphorical representation of his inability to grasp the Christian truth of the Incarnation. It also represents the central irony of the poem, for Divine life is as close to Karshish as his very being, but he cannot perceive it.[6]

The presence of Christ--of the Logos--in Karshish is not immediately apparent to us, the readers of the poem, either. We must struggle in order to recognize that Christ

is expressed in this human being we encounter, though we must make an effort at "translating" what we perceive. Like this odd medical researcher, we must struggle to recognize the presence and influence of the "logos" that is concomitant with his being. If we are attuned to some basic tenets of Christian spirituality, this should not surprise us, for Christ is to be discovered serendipitously, as he himself informs us, in the very "least of [his] brethren" (Matt. 25:31-46). The "logos" of Karshish calls us to this struggle, and it urges us to a spiritual conversion of sorts. Through the "logos" of the letter, we, too, are gathered; we, too, are to arrive at a new understanding of humanity and divinity: we, too, are gathered into an asymptotic approach to a spiritual conversion. This epistolary gesture stands, then, not only as a contemplative display but as an invitation to contemplation as well.

Karshish's Motivation to Write

In his salutation, Karshish reveals much more of himself to his would-be reader than he intends to. Beyond the facts he provides, he annoys his audience with his verbosity and obviously ingratiating expression.[7] The greeting runs for twenty lines, despite the fact that its writer has previously drafted twenty-one other letters (line 20) and must by now be quite recognizable to the addressee. Karshish demonstrates himself to be the sort of person who

would monopolize conversations and thus keep the focus of his companions' attentions on himself. Seemingly bordering on the neurotic, he simultaneously strives to retain his audience's attention, attracting people to him, while, with an annoying manner, repelling them. The genre he uses to express himself is perfectly appropriate to the task at hand, for he can imaginatively hold forever his listener's attention, as the listener can do nothing to interrupt the outrush of jabber; and he may use whatever verbal contrivance he likes to maintain control over that listener.[8]

As the letter proceeds, we come to recognize that the baroque phrasing does have a purpose. Karshish feels he must demonstrate to Abib that he is in possession of his mental faculties. Only then, Karshish feels, can he communicate what he really desires to. In addition, he must establish a situation in which he retains Abib's attention as well as control of the timing with which he makes his revelations. Beyond this reasonable artifice, however, we still recognize in this Arab physician a nature which is excruciatingly ambivalent.[9]

Karshish is "the picker-up of learning's crumbs," an empiricist and scientist; but he is also "not incurious in God's handiwork," and has an obvious respect for mysteries beyond the capacity of science to explain. He is a pagan Arab and a medical researcher, but he seemingly professes Platonic-Christian conceptions of a transcendent God and a soul. Though he probably does genuinely work hard and trust

that his gatherings are serving to advance his culture's medical knowledge, he is ultimately devoting himself to some almost useless work. He is not so aware of this as we, but in some sense, he must be aware that his findings have really amounted to very little. The findings he describes to Abib cannot, after all, have proven to be very effective. We get the sense that Karshish is and has been busily engaged in a great deal of useless activity.

The expression in the salutation reflects Karshish's condition: for all the energy and bravado and feigned excitement in the lines, he utters only two verbs that suggest his action. The adjectives and participles he uses to describe himself have a notably passive character. He is not actively curious in God's handiwork, but "not incurious." His "man's flesh" he describes, in rather Platonic terms, as having been "Blown up like a bubble," and "kneaded like a paste," according to the whims of a too distant God. Karshish is a scavenger, a "picker-up of learning's crumbs," though he recognizes Abib--who, paradoxically, sits back at home "all-sagacious" of an art that supposedly demands engagement and experience--to be an active "breeder" of whatever skills Karshish possesses. The vagrant Scholar's only actions involve his sending of greetings to Abib and his writing for the twenty-second time. His actions are, in other words, rendered in the service of another, or are performed to win the favor of Abib. Though Karshish is roaming and apparently free, he seems, if not emotionally

dependent on his mentor, then rather vocationally enslaved and unappreciated: for the twenty-two letters Karshish has written, he gives no indication that he has ever received a reply.

The harder we look at Karshish, the better we recognize just what he is hiding beneath the bravado and the verbiage. He is a terribly lonely man. Through his letter, he is reaching out to the one person with whom he has probably built his strongest friendship. Such reaching out is perhaps the most pathetic irony of the poem, however, for Abib is probably quite incapable of responding as friend at all. The implied request of Karshish is that Abib accept <u>on faith</u> his testimony regarding the Lazarus observations. The very foundation of the relationship between the two, however, features a fervent adherence to empirical principles; to relate to each other by means of trust or faith is preposterous.

That dimension of Karshish which is spiritually, supralogically oriented has for years, we suspect, been denied, neglected, and repressed by that dimension which strives to relate to the world in empirical fashion. Having come in contact with Lazarus, however, Karshish feels his spiritually-oriented dimension suddenly stimulated. The effect of this must be utterly terrifying, for it threatens the entire structure of Karshish's life, of everything he has stood for and believed himself to be. In the face of this terror, Karshish writes his letter. In doing so, he seemingly seeks

the support of Abib; but Abib is clearly not present--either physically or emotionally--to lend support, and Karshish must at some level understand this.

Through his epistolary gesture, Karshish is attempting to lay claim to and re-assert the power of his own empirically-oriented nature. With this power, he can adequately confront, he feels, the newly stimulated spiritual nature.[10] The letter serves as a mechanism by which he can stand outside himself, observe himself as object, and conduct an empirical investigation which regards not Lazarus but himself reacting to Lazarus. Through the letter, he not only allies himself with Abib or with what Abib represents, but, in the projectionary act, becomes one with Abib, who, as "other," is able to consider Karshish as object and reject or condemn as necessary.

Karshish's Judgment of Himself

The lines that most directly suggest the merging between the two scientists occur at the time Karshish resolves to tell Abib about Lazarus. After a 74-line procrastinatory presentation of insignificant discoveries he has made, Karshish asks his mentor, "wilt thou know the truth?" Then, two lines later, he proclaims, "Thus then, and let thy better wit help all" (78). All the obsequious verbosity in the previous lines reaches its fulfillment in this imperative, for Karshish is effectively turning the case over to

Abib to judge. Implicitly, Karshish is claiming his own inability to judge. The very next line, however--the line that begins Karshish's revelation of the case--finds Karshish responding to his own imperative: "'T is but a case of mania--subinduced/ By epilepsy . . . " (79-80). He cannot count on Abib's responding: he has written numerous letters and has seemingly received nothing; he is not certain that Abib will ever receive the letter, as he has no positive assurance that the runagate will deliver it; and chances are quite good that Abib would never believe him anyway. Consequently, he simply usurps the role of judge and begins his own empirical inquiry into the case.

At times, as the explanation continues, Karshish slips into the present tense, too, which has the effect of moving Abib out of some potential future event into Karshish's time and space. "For see," says Karshish, "how [Lazarus] takes up the after-life" (107). Such usage is representative of the relativity that time acquires through the epistolary gesture, and such relativity permits the transcendence of self that Karshish strives to accomplish.[11]

At the moment of his writing, Karshish brings the past event of his experience with Lazarus into the present. At the same time, the future event of Abib's reading the letter is brought to the present: Karshish writes as though he is speaking directly to Abib. As we recognized earlier, Karshish's verbosity emphasizes how little the writer needs to be concerned with time: he may take as long as he wishes

to compose his letter. In addition, the letter is a permanent, tangible document: it does not consist of airy utterances which can be understood or forgotten as a person wills. The thoughts and expression are preserved in writing. Such characteristics are the cause, indeed, of Karshish's concern that the Syrian runagate might make off with the letter.

As Karshish enters into the act of constructing such a timeless expression of his thought, he engages himself in a mode of living that inclines him toward the infinite or eternal--the letter, indeed, incarnates the eternal--and to the extent that Karshish can enter into this eternal dimension, he may achieve the unity with Abib he so desires. If the Abib of the future--the flesh and blood being who will read the letter--is brought into the present through the epistolary gesture, however, then the dependence on the actual Abib is, in some fashion, negated. The writing of the letter allows Karshish the achievement of unity without Abib's actually reading the letter.

Karshish's Sympathy

Once Karshish has achieved the transcendence he needs in order to empirically consider and judge himself in light of the Lazarus encounter, he does indeed make his observations, and these constitute much of the letter.

What has most intrigued Karshish about Lazarus, he

recognizes, is the resuscitated man's indifference and apparent inversion of value. Few encounters would so irritate an empiricist as one in which a person remains

> . . . witless of the size, the sum,
> The value in proportion of all things,
> Or whether it be little or much.
> Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
> Assembled to besiege his city now,
> And of the passing of a mule with gourds--
> 'T is one! (143-49)

Still, we sense that Karshish is attracted to Lazarus. Confronting his own empirical doubts--which he does on several occasions under the guise of anticipating Abib's objections--he dismisses each both in reasonably respectable scientific fashion and with considerable emotion: "'Such cases are diurnal,' thou wilt cry. / Not so this figment! . . ." In the position of judgment, he defends his observations and perceptions of Lazarus.

Why is Karshish so intrigued, we must ask ourselves, with this indifferent nature of Lazarus? He seems to feel a connection with Lazarus, an affinity for him, because life has, for the man, taken on a seemingly meaningless quality, as it has for Karshish. While Lazarus' friends describe the details of the mysterious resuscitation, Lazarus, Karshish reports,

> . . . listened not except I spoke to him,
> But folded his two hands and let them talk,
> Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.
> And that's a sample how his years must go.
> (122-25)

Karshish can sympathize with Lazarus and feel bonded to him by virtue of the condition the two seemingly share: boredom.

While Karshish recognizes this common condition, however, he recognizes as well that the causes behind it are quite different and the reactions to it are dissimilar: Lazarus is essentially serene and emotionally tranquil, while Karshish --as his verbosity demonstrates--is anxious. The dichotomy between common feeling and differing reaction makes Karshish all the more anxious.

> "How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness
> Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
> To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
> Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"
> He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
> (221-25).

Karshish is plainly annoyed, but he is also envious. He would like to be in possession of an attitude such as that of Lazarus, where he could transcend the necessity of having to observe and judge, for it is precisely this necessity which has rendered him a "vagrant scholar" who is engaged in isolating, meaningless work and who must reach out desperately and futilely for understanding from a "friend" who is incapable of love.

Ironically, Karshish does possess that detachment of Lazarus which transcends judgment and unifies the disparate valuations of things. He remains unaware, unconscious of his possession, but he uses it. He demonstrates its presence within him through his constructions of analogy and imagery.[12]

Through a gesture, a look given by Lazarus, for example, Karshish is able to recognize a similarity between Lazarus and the teacher of his youth (167-177). He gathers

into one two individual beings, by virtue of a common action each performs. His nominative recognition of Lazarus as an individual or of his teacher as master constitutes an objectifying, isolating, judging, empirical regard. This recognition is transcended, however, by a predicative regard through which Karshish gathers the two individuals into a unity: both individuals "look."

This particular association is neither a simple nor an insignificant one. The "look" through which Lazarus and the master are, in Karshish's perception, unified, is an extremely specific one, which Karshish goes to great pains to point out. He had first received the look from his master, who happened to live in a pyramid. Of course, a pyramid is an Egyptian expression of "tomb" and a testimony to belief in or desire for immortality. The master's apparent familiarity with matters of death and immortality make him resemble Lazarus all the more. Moreover, the occasion for the master's look was one upon which Karshish and Abib had been expressing words of great power and significance but had not understood what the nature of their expression was. The implication is, of course, that Karshish is engaged in the same dynamic with Lazarus: he is apparently expressing Christian truths of enormous significance, but is unable to comprehend that he is doing so.

The linking that occurs between Lazarus and the master happens, in any case, because of Karshish's gathering, unifying, integrating capacities: he, too, exercises the power

of transcending the divisive inclinations to determine "the size, the sum / The value in proportion of all things."[13]

The most astounding display of Karshish's integrating capacity comes, however, with the development of the spider image. Karshish first mentions the spider in connection with a cure for epilepsy:

> And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
> Than our school wots of: there's a spider here
> Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
> Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back;
> Take five and drop them . . . (44-48)

Karshish professedly attributes Lazarus' death-condition to epilepsy, and the spider--like the master in the pyramid and, metaphorically, like Lazarus and Jesus--"watches on the ledge of tombs." Unwittingly, Karshish seems to be gathering Lazarus, his master, and Jesus into an analogical relationship: individual creatures are blended into one by virtue of the fact they "watch" from the ledges of tombs. Only Jesus and the spider, however, may be blended together in that each serves in a curative capacity with regard to epilepsy. Further, as Karshish begins to describe the curative powers of the spider, he is struck dumb. The only other time that this occurs--and, given Karshish's verbosity, such an event is noteworthy--is when he attempts to share the news of Christ's divinity. His common response to both Jesus and the spider serves to link the two. Beyond what Karshish says, we recognize that, as the spider must presumably be crushed to perform its curative function, Christ had to have been crushed to perform the healing of

humankind.[14] We recognize, too, that as Karshish is able to construct this analogy--using what he knows of spiders, through his experience, and associating that knowledge with what he does not know--he can grasp the loving, salvific nature of Christ.

Later, Karshish describes Lazarus as

> . . . [holding] on firmly to some thread of life--
> (It is the life to lead perforcedly)
> Which runs across some vast distracting orb
> Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
> Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet--
> The spiritual life around the earthly life
> The law of that is known to him as this,
> His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.[15]
> (178-85)

Karshish's imagery here is somewhat confusing, due partly to the fact that he refers to an "orb" which a thread runs across and which Lazarus must not "enter." The orb is a sphere, a circle with depth, which is associated with an other-worldly afterlife. I have the sense that, spatially, the orb is to resemble a tomb's concavity but is to signify as well the sphere of a new world. The thread, then, is the tendril of a spider that inhabits the region between one world and the other. The metaphorical setting seems to resemble the setting in which Karshish met Lazarus:

> I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
> Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came
> A moon made like a face with certain spots
> Multiform, manifold and menacing: (291-94)

The two met in darkness, in a place where the earth resembled a lion's mouth. They met under a moon "with certain spots." The images of tomb and mottled spider seem to be pervading the whole of Karshish's perceptions:

analogies, seemingly awaiting discovery, engulf the man. We must recall, too, the words Karshish uses to describe his motivation for sharing the news of Lazarus' resuscitation: "An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!" (67): he speaks as if he had been bitten by a spider.

Unwittingly, Karshish gathers perceptions, ideas, observations, names; and, with words, he places these gatherings into a meaningful order: with words, he constructs images. This sythesizing capacity in Karshish, this inclination, is the very possession that promotes Karshish's movement from judgment against himself--and from his collusion with Abib--to sympathy. The actual break occurs in the context of image constructions. The gatherings of perceptions here are not entirely Karshish's own, however: they are the gatherings of Christian people, gatherings that have become such a part of Karshish's thought processes that they spill out without his recognizing what is happening.

> The man is apathetic, you deduce?
> Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
> Able and weak, affect the very brutes
> And birds--how say I? flowers of the field--
> (226-229)

The words and images of Christianity course through Karshish like a venom delivered by the bite of a spider.[16] Clearly, Karshish has "an itch . . . a sting to write, a tang!" His position of judgment, his alliance with Abib, has permitted him an observation of himself in comparison with Lazarus. Whereas Karshish may be bored, apathetic, and cynical, Lazarus is not. Whereas Karshish stands apart from

and opposed to the flowers of the field--such that he may scientifically, objectively examine them--Lazarus loves them. The man risen from the dead, in his very living and being, in other words, becomes an image. According to Christ's instruction, Lazarus has become <u>like</u> the flowers of the field and the birds of the sky, able to accept the gracious caring and love of God.

Karshish's regard for Lazarus changes. Striving to examine the man empirically, Karshish had been considering him in a nominative fashion, as object. In the course of his examination, the focus shifts, and the scientist begins to consider the man's <u>condition</u>, his mode of being. Only through a perception of an "other" in an adjectival and ultimately predicative fashion can sympathy and empathy be achieved, and this achievement is the ultimate, unwitting, innate goal of Karshish. It is the dictate of the animating Logos within him. Like the literary image, which unifies two unlike things by virtue of a quality they mutually possess--an adjectival element--or an action they perform--a predicative element--a human being comes to sympathize and empathize with another through a perceived sharing of condition and action. Karshish perceives Lazarus loving the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. He perceives the tranquil condition that Lazarus possesses in allowing himself to be cared for and loved by his God. Unwittingly, Karshish perceives that Lazarus is like the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and Karshish <u>acts</u>--he

expresses in words his comprehension of the Christian image--and therefore fully begins to empathize with the Christians themselves. He gives voice to their words and their images.[17]

Unwittingly, as Berens suggests, Karshish becomes a "gospeller," a spreader of the "good news." This fact lends a telling irony to Karshish's statement of resignation as to his letter's fate. Of the runagate, who is to deliver the letter, Karshish says, "he may lose,/ Or steal, or give it to thee with equal good" (299-300). In any case, the "good news" will be spread to people who need to hear it.

Karshish's Empathy With Himself

The final stage of personal integration occurs for Karshish in his postscript. The whole of the letter, which has been an action, a gesture of gathering, reaches its culmination in an experience of the Christian vision. Through the epistolary gesture, an implementation of the Logos and a use of his animating principle, Karshish has discovered the nature of his soul. In the process of writing, he has transcended time and space, has exercised his capacity to blend realities through the construction of analogies and images; and through this process, he has enabled himself to perform the ultimate gathering, in which he is able to hear that "through the thunder comes a human voice" which proclaims "O heart I made, a heart beats here!"

(306-07): God and man are blended in the beating of a loving heart. In this postscript, Karshish transcends what Newman would term "notional assent" and has experienced "real assent."[18] For at least a flash of time, he transcends an objective consideration of the relationship between the human and Divine, and he personally experiences the tenderness of God: nothing else could elicit the expressed awareness of God's exclamation "O heart I made, a heart beats here!"

Karshish's conversion is by no means complete, but he is leaning more in the direction of conversion than he is toward a rejection of the Christian vision.[19] The final sentence--"The madman saith He said so: it is strange" (312)--is deceptive: Karshish labels Lazarus a "madman," and seemingly distances himself from the whole experience by claiming "it is strange." Through the adjective "strange," though--indeed, through the entire sentence in which the adjective appears, both in line 282 and line 312--Karshish links his experience of Lazarus with a medicinal herb, a stimulant. Earlier, he mentions that the encounter with Lazarus has served as a stimulant to Karshish's soul: it has given him the "itch," the "sting to write," the "tang." For those readers of the letter who have not experienced this "tang," the recognition of Lazarus' claims as "strange" shows "appropriate" judgment.[20] Those readers who know the tang recognize the word "strange" to imply something else: Lazarus' message stimulates a person into the fullness of

being. Similarly, Karshish's labeling of Lazarus as "madman" serves to insulate Karshish from the judgment of Abib or from anyone who reads the letter and who has no experience of real assent with respect to the Divine. We recall that Karshish is writing the words we see, and we note that he, not Browning, dignifies with a capital "H" the pronoun referring to Christ.[21] This acknowledgment, a proclamation as certain and as deceptive as the icthys of the early Christians, is testimony to belief in the Divinity of Christ.

Through the epistolary gesture, Karshish has achieved a stage of significant personal integration. He has gathered himself to himself, and has allowed the Logos that is within him to perform its integrative function. In allowing the Logos to emerge from him, he discovers the Logos to be existing in him: the one who gathers discovers that his very living is prompted by the Divine heart beating in his own breast.

In response to the prosopopoeic conjuration established by Coleridge in the person of the Wedding Guest--a conjuration echoed in the Romantic poets' implorings for devoted readers and in Carlyle's Latter Day Pamphlets' deconstuctive moment of despair--Browning, in effect, offers this character of Karshish. The character stands as testimony to Browning's devoted reading of Carlyle, Coleridge, and the Romantics, and to the poet's empathic understanding of these writers who share, like Browning, in "the blight man was

born for," as Hopkins would put it: in concupiscence.[22] Browning conceives that human beings share such a condition, and that this condition renders them blind to the fact that the Logos informs their identity such that they are as ironically perplexed, desirous, and fraught with anxiety as Karshish is, yet capable of a great hope that is to be realized and recognized in the activity of gathering that language is. Through such activity, Browning suggests, the incarnation of the Logos is continually accomplished and affirmed, so long as the gathering, the activity, is comprehended as such by an audience devoted to listening and reading. Even if a gatherer's intended audience cannot hear or will not listen to the questioning, asking, and pleading that a speaker expresses, the text of the gathering, purloined by a runagate or subversively circulated by a rabble disenfranchized from cultural power or convention, will inevitably "flame out, like fire from shook foil."[23] The concupiscent condition that urges the utterance of the lyric "I" and makes known a human's loneliness, anxiety, and fear, stimulates a responsiveness of acknowledged concupiscence in others. It elicits a compassion and an empathic understanding through which the lyric "I" is continually and comfortingly transformed into a lyric "we," chanting its choral questions.

Notes

1. In The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning, William O. Raymond makes the comment that "it must be recalled that in "An Epistle of Karshish," printed as early as 1855, . . . Browning's interest in the Johannine gospel is already evident" (35). An interest in St. John continues for Browning, of course, through his composition of "A Death in the Desert." In "'The Jeweled Bow': A Study of Browning's Imagery and Humanism," Raymond describes Browning's affinity for the doctrine of the Incarnation. He mentions that "the Incarnation of Christ is not only a matter of historical record enshrined in a creed or body of religious opinion. It is an eternal truth verified in his inner and personal experience, and makes the subject of deep and individual reflection." Wilfred L. Guerin and William Whitla also link "Karshish" with the Fourth Gospel.

2. Kingsbury Badger stresses the significance that the doctrine of the Incarnation had for Browning. Badger claims that, for Browning the "revelation of God as Love, then, means the manifestation of Love in a soul or souls of human beings; it means incarnation not in the sense of God's being a supernatural man, for there is no distinction between natural and supernatural, but in the sense of manifestation of God as Love in natural man or men" (80).

3. Michael Berens writes of "An Epistle" that it

"centers on Karshish's articulation of the effect this 'strange medical experience' has had on him--the effect . . . of his soul's response to the gospel of Christ witnessed by Lazarus." While Berens points out the primary significance of Karshish's articulation of the "medical" experience, he does not examine the epistolary dynamic in the fashion I do, nor does he link the process with the "gathering" notion associated with "logos."

4. Roma A. King, Jr. mentions that "Browning's subject [in 'An Epistle'] is actually the development of a soul--that is, the internal process by which a character achieves self-realization."

5. Bennett recognizes that Karshish is a "man divided." On the one hand, he is a man of science, and on the other, Karshish "in his heart desires to believe in Lazarus."

6. Berens mentions, "Though he himself does not know it, Karshish, like the New Testament epistlers, is writing to relate 'the good news'" (43).

7. Richard D. Altick notes that Karshish's style is similar to that we see in the epistles of St. Paul. In this case, as in others, however, "the whole significance of the Karshish-Paul similarities resides in the fact that, in crucial respects, Karshish was <u>not</u> like St. Paul." The motivations for writing are clearly different for the two

men, and Karshish's expression does have an ingratiating character that Paul's does not.

8. Park Honan, more than any other critic I have encountered, considers "An Epistle" as written in the style of a letter (163). Noting that the letter-style has ramifications for what Browning is able to achieve in the poem, Honan makes comments similar to the ones I do here.

9. Guerin recognizes the ambivalence in Karshish; he recognizes as well both that Karshish is in conflict with himself and that he is inclined toward projection.

10. Honan recognizes that, "Thus in his opening salutation to Abib, in his scientific recountings, and in his treatment of Lazarus in the first third of the poem, Karshish has expressed and made clear to himself his own professionalism, he has objectified this element in his character, and in line 102 that professionalism is transferred to Abib; Abib now in effect has taken on one full opposing half of Karshish's own identity; and Karshish is free to see and to express fully the religious essence of his own being" (164).

11. Honan comments on the relativity that time seems to acquire through one's use of the epistolary form (162).

12. Loy D. Martin comments that "Browning's poems . . . continually challenge the Cartesian separation of matter and spirit by recognizing all substance and all mind

as parts of an open-ended, non-static system in time and space" (158). Karshish, in his use of analogy and imagery, effects the challenge to Cartesian dualism that Martin here discusses. Barbara Melchiori suggests that Browning's power of making associations--the power to construct images and form analogies--was attributable, in large part, to the poet's early religious training. The "Victorian tradition of Bible reading chapter by chapter, making the chapter a unit in itself as sufficient unto the day, irrespective of continuity or discontinuity, serves to link together certain episodes, certain verses, even certain words which have otherwise no logical connection. And the fact that as a child Browning must have heard so much Bible reading in this form would allow unconscious associations to take over at the point where consciousness breaks off." I believe that, in "An Epistle," we receive a commentary from Browning regarding just how important such a power is to the progress of one's spiritual growth.

13. We should recognize, at this point, that the word "analogy" derives from "logos." Regarding the word "analogous," Henricus Stephanus (1823) Vol. 5, notes: "Ἀναλογος, ὸ, ὴ, Ad proportionem similis" (col. 5665). Karshish experiences the first stages of conversion precisely because of his capacity to conceive of images and construct analogies; Browning comments on the nature of conversion through his construction of an analogy which compares Karshish with St. Paul.

14. The spotted nature of the spider may call to mind for us the wounds of Christ, of which there are five: the same number that Karshish associates with the spiders--or the Suffering Servant prophesy of Isaiah 53: 5: "But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins,/ Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed."

15. Calling the reader's attention to this passage, Guerin likens the "thread of life" to a kind of tight-rope that Lazarus must walk. Guerin does not make any association, however, between this thread and the spider.

16. See Matthew 6: 19-34.

17. Berens claims that "Browning's purpose in putting the words of the gospel into his monologuist's mouth . . . is to illustrate that Karshish is responding to the truth within his own soul" (47).

18. See John Henry Newman, An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent, 49-92.

19. I am much in agreement with Berens on this point and on his analysis of the postscript (52).

20. Regarding this judgment, we should recall the words of St. Paul in I Cor. 23-24: ". . . but we preach Christ crucified--a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called, Jews and

Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Karshish's use of the word "strange" accomodates the judgment of absurdity that an unconverted reader is likely to apply to the account provided in the letter. Simultaneously, it acknowledges an appropriate sense of awe for a reader who has had a "real" assent experience of a personal, loving God.

21. We should note that, in line 3, Karshish refers to his transcendent "God" with the uncapitalized pronoun "he." In line 305, when Karshish is reaching some awareness of God's incarnate existence, he refers to that God as the "All-Great" and "All-Loving": the labels are capitalized. In line 69, Karshish does capitalize the "Man" referring to Lazarus, but he does so as he recognizes Lazarus having "something in the look of him." I would take this "something" to be the acknowledged presence of the incorporated, incarnate God, for which Karshish feels compelled to show respect.

22. From "Spring and Fall: To a Young Child," line 14.

23. From "God's Grandeur," line 2.

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