COLERIDGE: THE AESTHETICS OF THE FRAGMENTARY AND THE ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

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Recent work on the fragment, prompted in part by the disruption of totalities in contemporary theories of writing and textuality, has returned the fragment to legitimacy in literary studies. Literary critics have begun to hail the fragment as the quintessential Romantic "form"--one which, as D.F. Rauber claims, embodies Romantic ideals and aims more fully than any other. The fragment (in unmistakably high Romantic terms) is said to figure forth the infinite and the indeterminate in a finite, discrete, sequential medium--engaging, furthermore, in an organicist relation with the whole of which it partakes. The fragment, like the symbol or the organic part, is thought to be capable of indicating or implying the absent whole. By identifying itself with the organic part (or being so identified by readers), the fragment even usurps the ideal place of the whole by offering access to its essential nature--access that is, ironically, less materially compromised by the possibility of fragmentation than if it had become a complete whole. In this way the fragment comes to be seen as the most appropriate signifier of sublime, visionary excess--as the best possible representation of the impossibly ambitious work that the mind aspires to but is unable to sustain or carry out.

This study examines the problem of the fragment in Romantic literature and poetic theory, and investigates the reconstruction of "Romanticism" through the phenomenon of the fragment in contemporary literary criticism. The Romantic canon is highly susceptible to reconstruction along "fragmentary" lines since so many of its central texts are fragments in at least one sense. In spite of the broad nature of the problem (a pervasive aesthetic and epistemological difficulty), this study brings two specific areas (romantic aesthetics and current literary criticism) to bear on three major, fragmentary, Coleridge texts: Biographia Literaria, "Kubla Khan," and "Christabel." In each case, arguments are made for or against the "unity" of the work. For Biographia Literaria, these turn on the viability of Coleridge's theory of imagination; in "Kubla Khan," on the relation of the preface to the poem; and in "Christabel," on its truncated two-part structure.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Blake	The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965).

Coleridge

BL	The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 7, Biographia Literaria, (2 vols.), ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).
CN	The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (4 vols.), ed. Kathleen Coburn (and Merton Christensen, vol. 4) (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957, 1961, 1973, and 1990).
Letters	The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (6 vols.), ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71).
PW	Poetical Works. ed. E.H. Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, (1912) 1969).
SM	The Statesman's Manual, in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 6, Lay Sermons, ed. R.J. White (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).
Table Talk	The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 14, Table Talk, (2 vols.), ed. Carl Woodring (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Wordsworth

The Prelude	The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979).
Prose	The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, (3 vols.), ed. W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

(i) Overview
(ii) Survey of Current Criticism of the Fragment in Romanticism: Major Works
(iii) Current Criticism Continued: Minor Themes: The Ruin and the Unfinished
(iv) The Theory of the Fragment, a Theory of Literature
(v) Romanticism and the Theory and Practice of Criticism
(vi) Summary

(i) Overview

> The taste for fragments, we suspect, has become very general; and the greater part of polite readers would now no more think of sitting down to a whole Epic than to a whole ox.[1]

Given recent critical interest in the fragment as a form or phenomenon with particular relevance for the Romantic period, the taste for fragments which Francis Jeffrey observed in 1813 would appear to be animating literary critics and theorists of the late twentieth century. In a general way, this interest reflects an ever-changing set of critical and theoretical preoccupations, and fresh interest in the fragmentary and indeterminate

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1. Francis Jeffrey in a review of Byron's *The Giaour, A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* in The Edinburgh Review, 21 (July, 1813), p. 299. (Reproduced in Donald H. Reiman, ed. The Romantics Reviewed: A Collection in Depth of Periodical Reviews (1793-1830) (New York: Garland, 1972), 11 vols.) A taste for this observation is found in Anne Janowitz's work; she cites it in her article "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric," Studies in Romanticism 24 (Spring, 1985) and in her book England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 11.

components of the written text, while hardly unique to the late twentieth century, can nevertheless be seen to reflect specifically modern literary and philosophic concerns. Romantic poetry has recently been and will go on being reviewed and reread with the problematics of textuality and the inadequacy of language in mind, and the fragment offers itself for such an appropriation as the perfect example of textual deformation--as evidence of the limits of poetic representation. It is perhaps only too obvious, then, that Romantic criticism, whether principally concerned with the fragmentary part or with the organic whole, cannot affect disinterestedness, and reflects a very wide range of aesthetic and philosophic agendas.

Several recent publications attest to this fresh interest, but approach the problem of the fragment from different directions. Thomas McFarland in Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation offers a phenomenological account of fragmented, "diasparactive," forms in Romantic poetry, arguing that such forms reflect the fundamental conditions of human existence.[2] Fragmentation and ruin are presented as emblematic of inevitable mortal limitation and failure. Marjorie Levinson, in The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form, treats the fragment as a specific and intelligible, historically determined form, and investigates the determinants of that form. RFPs (her coinage for Romantic fragment poems) share *myths* rather than *modes* of

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2. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

production.[3] Anne Janowitz relates the poetic fragment to the ruin poem, arguing for a shift from ruin as theme to ruin as structure. Spatial incompletion replaces temporal decline.[4] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue that the essence of Romantic poetry (and indeed of Romanticism) is fragmentary because, as Schlegel has put it, that essence is "to be always becoming and never capable of completing itself."[5] Therefore, the Romantic project is still underway: "Romanticism will always be more than a period... in fact, it has not yet stopped in-completing the period it began" (2).

Thomas McFarland writes that "the 'sentiment des ruines'--an attitude present in all eras but reaching a special pitch of intensity in Romanticism--found in fragments and torn forms deeper meanings and presentiments than in completions" (14). This attitude seems similarly to have reached a special pitch of intensity in recent criticism. We appear to be expressing our own *sentiment des ruines* as we look back at the major (in)achievements of the Romantic era, and the critical positions presented above--albeit in an over-simplified form--contain significant Romantic elements of their own.

I will argue here for a reading of Romantic fragment poems and poetic theory that depends less on Romantic

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3. (Chapel Hill: University of North California Press, 1986).
4. See note 1.
5. Cited by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy in "Genre" Glyph 7 (1981), p. 2; see also The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

discourse for its articulation. Put slightly differently, I would like to examine both Romantic and recent discourses of the fragmentary in order to interrogate that special link observed between the fragment and the Romantic project, and reproduced in critical commentaries. This will entail reading Romantic poetry and theory *through* the critical discourse now in place, although clearly there will be no neutral point from which to view. It will also entail a re-alignment of the fragment with allegorical rather than symbolic systems of signification. If a symbol represents a whole which can thereby be apprehended, although not comprehended, it would appear to have special links to the suggestiveness of the fragment. I wish to argue, however, that since symbolic (or organic, for that matter) wholeness remains an elusive theoretical ideal--subverted in practice by fragmentary results, allegorical in relation to the original conception--parts of wholes (fragments) cannot be so easily discerned. If fragments are evidence of Romanticism *in process*, even they must be subverted by the equivalent of the symbol's allegorical representation, by its own mediation and reception. Further, this moment of allegorical subversion shares significant structural similarities with the sublime.

The final, guiding consideration for this investigation will be the way in which a discourse of the fragmentary is then called upon to illuminate the functioning of the Romantic, poetic imagination. A demystification of the fragment will, ultimately, yield a demystification of the Romantic imagination. In an attempt to be illustrative

rather than comprehensive, and taking into account the necessary limitations of a doctoral thesis, the procedure I have outlined above will be brought to bear chiefly on works by and about Coleridge.[6] The choice of Coleridge is, of course, not accidental, as critics so often comment on the proliferation of fragments and fragmentary forces in his work. As Timothy Bahti has remarked, "He stands as *the* fragmentary poet of English romanticism--perhaps, excepting Hölderlin, of European romanticism altogether--while a more precise overall interpretation of his oeuvre is still lacking."[7] Since this thesis primarily uses Coleridge to examine the fragment in Romanticism, rather than the other way around, no such overall interpretation will be attempted. But it remains my hope that a rethinking of the fragment will at least clarify this debate, so prevalent in Coleridge studies, where so much is too easily assumed.

The procedure advanced for this study will be elaborated and defended at length in Part Two; the balance of the Introduction will examine the broad constellation of issues attaching to the fragmentary. This will include a more detailed discussion of studies of the fragment (as well as the ruin and the unfinished) among which this study seeks a place, with a look at Romantic theory of the fragment, and, since criticism will be both object and subject throughout, with a consideration of relevant critical theories.

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6. The initial conception of this thesis ambitiously included Blake and Shelley; this is a configuration I hope to return to in future versions of this study.
7. "Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and the Fragment of Romanticism" in MLN 96 (December, 1981), p. 1036.

(ii) Survey of Current Criticism of the Fragment in Romanticism: Major Works

D.F. Rauber, in an article published in 1969, is among the first to have called attention to the then-neglected phenomenon of the Romantic fragment by pointing out that Romantic criticism and theory have tended either to refer obliquely to it or to overlook it altogether, considering "the fragment" to be of secondary importance.[8] His article was intended to reverse that trend, and "to lay some foundations for a theoretical treatment of this elusive form by developing a simple model for the fragment and by showing significant connections between the model and important romantic formulations concerning poetry" (212). Since 1969, several critics have built upon his foundation and have worked either with or against his thesis that the fragment is "that form which more completely than any other embodies romantic ideals and aims" (212). Therefore, in any attempt to survey the work which has been done in this area, Rauber's article is an appropriate place to begin.

His argument is based on an admittedly simple and general assumption that the opposition between classical and Romantic literature can be configured or understood by another opposition: finitude and infinitude. This is justified by its currency in critical commentary, and Rauber gives examples from contemporary studies to support this.

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8. D.F. Rauber, "The Fragment as Romantic Form," MLQ 30 (1969).

C.M. Bowra's The Romantic Imagination, for example, relies heavily on the new importance which Romantic poets placed on the imagination, and cites Blake ("This World of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal..."), and Coleridge on the primary imagination "as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (213).[9] The imagination and, indirectly, the infinity criterion are linked to the unfinished poem in E.E. Bostetter's The Romantic Ventriloquists.[10] Bostetter locates in fragmentary poems the "quintessence" of Romantic practice, which is to say, formal evidence of the discrepancy between the ideal, infinite aspirations of the Romantic imagination (which place the poet squarely at the center of his universe), and limited human reality. Thus Rauber extrapolates that the great formal challenge facing the Romantic poet is to devise the poetic means of encompassing "in a finite, discrete, and sequential medium" the embodiment of the infinite and the indeterminate. The fragment offers itself as the perfect solution to this problem, as the "ultimate" Romantic form--"ultimate in the sense that it matches Romantic ideals and tone as fully and completely as the closed couplet matches the ideals of eighteenth-century neoclassicism" (214-15). That the fragment is a finite form, however, supposes that a Romantic poem can only hope to be part of a much larger, infinite poem which cannot ever fully be written. The

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9. C.M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966; first pub. 1950), pp. 3-4.
10. E.E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963; rev. ed. 1975).

fragment is lodged securely on the side of the part, even if it is and must be suggestive of the whole.

Rauber suggests that the Romantic fragment overcomes the anticlimactic tendency to come to an abrupt end by making a virtue of this necessity. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" is famously incomplete because of the untimely entrance of the visitor from Porlock, which rendered the poet's visionary experience unrecoverable. Rauber argues that truncation imposed by external forces is fortuitous because the poem is thus cut off rather than stopped, and therefore it goes on:

> ...because the stop is accidental, the poet can count upon something analogous to the physical principle of inertia; the mind of the reader, caught up in the velocity of the movement, continues along the accidentally interrupted curve, and in an important sense the poem never really ends. (216)

This seems to me to be a highly romantic formulation, one which echoes Romanticism's own self-representations. Very few Romantic fragment poems are cut off by simple accident; in many cases their authors had every intention of bringing them to the close they thought necessary, as Coleridge's sustained efforts to finish "Christabel" illustrate. The example of "Kubla Khan" is rather more problematic than Rauber admits, since Coleridge attempts to close it, to render its final coda formally satisfying (and indeed for many readers the poem is quite finished). Further, the editorial apparatus that claims that the poem is a fragment and that describes its genesis (and apologizes for its arrest) is added rather later, for publication in 1816, when

there is something of an acknowledged "taste" for fragments in the air.[11]

What Rauber neglects to address fully, then, is the question of intentionality and the sense of failure this incomplete formal result evoked in its unwilling practitioners. The essential question Rauber poses, "was Coleridge master of the fragment or did the fragment master him?" (216), is only given a half-answer, for he points out that Romantic poetic theory "was not particularly sensitive to matters of form" (217). By insisting on the "accidental" nature of the fragment as something that just happened and was not consciously planned, Rauber wishes nevertheless to claim for Coleridge a degree of inadvertent intentionality and unexpected success. Romantic failure, the inability to realize what was envisioned, is abundantly evident in the numerous unfinished poems of the period, but the fragment, Rauber claims, is a special case "in which the impossible is made possible largely through accident" (219, n.10).

A fragment may well be part of a whole which is simply absent, but it may also suggest a whole which *cannot* be apprehended, and in this case it would partake of the sublime aesthetics of infinity. Rauber returns to the "Kubla Khan" example, and stresses the importance of the reader's conviction of the existence of the unapprehended whole. This conviction is obtained by Coleridge's addition

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11. Contemporary reception of the fragment, as well as production of the fragment--editorial and publishing decisions--are of no little importance. These issues are addressed in Anne Janowitz, "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric" (cited above), and will be brought up again here.

of prefatory material, his account of the circumstances surrounding his ultimately *distant*, however distinct, "recollection of the whole," and Rauber suggests that if the visitor from Porlock hadn't actually intervened, he would have had to be invented. Coleridge's preface invites us to read the poem he would rather have written, and thus Rauber argues that the poet's claim for wholeness encourages us to continue reading beyond the boundaries of the poem. The fragment brings the reader squarely into the creative equation as it is "a peculiarly potent means of eliciting an active imaginative response" (221). The reader of his essay is called upon to perform a similar function. Rauber considers that his observations may suggest "interesting paths for future exploration" and then refers "to the rather surprising fact that the frag" (221). Here, without any particular irony, the essay comes to an abrupt halt, sending the reader to rifle through subsequent issues of MLQ for clues as to whether Rauber was cut short, or simply stopped.

The confrontation between the fragmentary fact and the idea(l) of texual unity is directly addressed at the other extreme (that is, quite recently and less superficially), by Lee Rust Brown in "Coleridge and the Prospect of the Whole."[12] He examines the source of this "vexed issue of textual integrity" in the legacy of Romanticism, asserting that "the ascendency of 'organic unity' had a price": "the characteristic fragmentariness of the romantic texts." Coleridge is the prime example as his writing--both poetry and prose--"manifests a degree of literal brokenness

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12. Studies in Romanticism 30 (Summer, 1991).

proportionate to the severely difficult status of his ideal of wholeness." The principle issues remain the same, but Brown's analysis will focus directly on the "all important nexus between textual fragmentation and the contrary ideal of textual wholeness": "Through fragments romanticism propounds its ideal of wholeness; yet fragments themselves are evidence of the ideal's capacity to restrict and even forbid perfection of textual wholes" (237). This is an antithetical relationship that Brown claims needs exploring, as it has been overlooked by the familiar approach to the fragment exemplified by, for example, Thomas McFarland.[13]

McFarland opens Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation by suggesting that the study functions as a fragment (in emphasis), in relation to his previous book's whole. Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition focussed on Romanticism's urge to systematize, to discover and create unified, harmonious--in short, organic--wholes.[14] In opposition to "the classifying instinct of the eighteenth century," this urge represents an "intensification of the reticulative need" (xi), and McFarland argues that the existence of this need suggests "that the situation actually obtaining must be the contrary of unity," that is, of things

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13. Brown intends to address the problem of the fragment in Coleridge precisely through this confrontation of textuality and the concept of wholeness, a confrontation which he suggests is "a stage 'prior' to the special instances charted by Levinson" (240). Levinson's "special instances" will be discussed here shortly; as his argument involves the question of symbol and allegory, as does mine, I save direct reference to his main points for Part Two.
14. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

fragmented and architectonically *dis*ordered (xi). In a dazzling series of metaphors, he describes the relationship between the two books as necessarily complementary, this latest one "as the reverse of that coin's obverse; or as the turned identity rendered by an act of mirroring; or still again, as the white field reciprocally definitive of the silhouette that we ordinarily refer to the form of the black outline" (xii). What we are being offered is a levelling of the implications of a part-whole split, a blurring of the *difference*, or (still again), an elevation of the part to the status of the whole--the particle to the level of the reticule--in order to preserve the Romantic canon from disintegration by its own fragmentariness. Over the meandering course of Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, the reader is offered what finally amounts to a holistic survey of the indelibly "diasparactive"--McFarland's coinage for dispersing and fragment-producing--forces at work in literature as in life.

"The phenomenology of the fragment is the phenomenology of human awareness," claims McFarland, and all endeavour participates in a paradox by which, like Pascal's Pensées, it is "achieved by its inachievement" (3). The balance of the opening chapter, "Fragmented Modalities and the Criteria of Romanticism," is spent demonstrating, by example after example, how pervasive the presence of ruin is in Romanticism. He does not, however, underwrite a form of ruin specific to Romanticism--ruin is rather more broadly endemic--which means that this is not a study of ruined literary *artifacts* so much as it is a tour of human

territory whose boundaries (poetic, philosophic, and otherwise) are beset by the phenomenology of the fragmentary. Schiller, Burke and Hegel are offered as representatives of social, political and philosophical ruin; Rousseau's Confessions offer "diasparactive" evidence on the level of an individual life, as does the phenomenon of early death in, among others, Keats and Schubert. Further examples, indeed a colourful canvas of them, are drawn from Hölderlin, Shelley, Byron, Goethe, Schlegel, Novalis, Wordsworth, Lamb, Madame de Staël, and many, many others. The point is insisted upon through endless repetition, so that in this instance, as in many others later in the book, learning and filling become indistinguishable. At any rate, the heart of his argument is here:

> Incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin--the diasparactive triad--are at the very center of life. The phenomenological analysis of existence reveals this with special clarity. Heidegger's twin conceptions of *Geworfenheit* (the sense of being hurled into reality, broken off) and *Verfallen* (the sense within life of its continuing ruin) are ineradicable criteria of existence. In truth, the largest contention of this book can be rendered by Heidegger's formulation that "in existence there is a permanent incompleteness (*ständige 'Unganzheit'*), which cannot be evaded." (5)

McFarland's attempt to uphold two convictions, that the "diasparactive" is a universal and timeless condition, and that it is somehow particularly relevant to Romanticism, seems more problematic than he admits. The Heideggerian formulation that in existence there is permanent incompleteness is itself post-Romantic and reveals an increasing rather than a declining conviction that life in

the here-and-now is a torn and broken affair. Baudelaire in his 1846 essay "The Painter of Modern Life" defines modernity as the experience of life lived in fragments, the swift pace of change fragmenting experience. And surely this is even more true of postmodernity. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari put a new twist on this theme in Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia when they comment that:

> We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some given date...[15]

It is not difficult to see why the Romantic fragment is now so topical, if, as McFarland's study--and the above comments--suggest, fragmentation in Romanticism initiates a debate about the human condition which continues to the present day. There is, however, a serious risk here of oversimplifying intellectual history.

McFarland's contention nevertheless allows him to suggest that the emphasis on dream, or reverie, in Romanticism is evidence of a generalized sense of longing, and that this also implies incompleteness. Or, to suggest that "Blake's three great prophetic poems--"The Four Zoas," "Milton," and "Jerusalem"--are simply studies in the fragmentation of the human psyche" (22). Thus it is no

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15. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 42.

surprise that McFarland's attention is not fixed on individual poems nor even on the *poetry* of Wordworth and Coleridge, but rather on their "whole" lives, and on the destructive dimensions of their life-long interaction. In his following chapters, therefore, McFarland casts his net widely for evidence of "diasparactive" forces at work in the lives of Wordsworth and Coleridge. "Coleridge's Anxiety" offers a psychoanalytic explanation for Coleridge's persistent sense that he was lacking something vital, an "essential something" (127). This explanation has Coleridge abandoned by his mother, suffering from castration anxiety aroused by his domineering brothers, and needing, as a result, substitute father and mother figures--the former evident in relationships with Poole, Wordsworth, Gillman, and the latter informing his connections with his wife, with Dorothy Wordsworth, Sara Hutchinson, and the mothers of his friends. Coleridge's neuroses contributed to the disintegration of his health, his personal relations, to his tendency to concoct grand schemes and yet to procrastinate--in short, to his ruin as a poet. Wordsworth is subjected to similar treatment in "The Significant Group: Wordsworth's Fears in Solitude," as McFarland negotiates the paradox of Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime" (his feeling *for*, but never *with* his characters--as Coleridge put it), and his deep and genuine commitments to human community (145).

A psychoanalytic approach is offered not only as a way of understanding Wordsworth's and Coleridge's individual "diasparactive" dilemmas, but also to articulate the dynamic between the two poets: a dynamic of connection and

dependence which both enables them and, finally, disables them. In "The Symbiosis of Coleridge and Wordsworth," Coleridge's self-doubt results in a masochistic dependence on Wordsworth (as he famously said: "He [Wordsworth] is a great, a true Poet--I am only a kind of Metaphysician"[16]). For his part, Wordsworth is deeply dependent upon Coleridge's philosophic-poetic partnership for the sustenance of his poetic genius. The "diasparactive" breakdown of their friendship is thus largely responsible for the fact that The Recluse and Coleridge's Magnum Opus were never written. This theme is resumed later in "Chapter Four: Problems of Style in the Poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge" in which McFarland examines the struggles and failures of each to find his own voice.

Later chapters deal specifically with Coleridge: Chapter Five examines Coleridge's doctrine of polarity and its European contexts--Hegel, Schelling, Kant, and Boehme (to whom Blake looked for his principle of contrariety)--where the point of the doctrine in all its variations is to conceive of "sundered entities as a reunited whole," thereby witnessing "not to reconciliation but to fragmentation" (338). A further chapter deals with "The Psychic Economy and Cultural Meaning of Coleridge's Magnum Opus"--a monument to ruined endeavour. Two "Landing Places" address wider issues: the first, "Poetry and the Poem: The Structure of Poetic Content," discusses at length the difference between poetry and the poem. "'Poetry,'" suggests McFarland, "corresponds to our intuitive sense of the content of a

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16. Letters, I, p. 658.

poetic act," while "'poem'...corresponds to our perception of its form" (267). McFarland goes on to offer terms of his own to evade the limitations of the content/form dichotomy: *substantia*, *ens*, and *essentia*. *Substantia* designates the words, their patterns and meanings; *ens* is "the interanimation of the sense of self in the poetic statement with the perspective of the outer world; it is the fusion of mind and nature" (273). *Essentia* indicates an "existential" or "metaphysical" awareness, generated not by or from poetic language, but *represented* by it; an expression of the (temporal) doubleness of existence, the now and the then--a full and therefore whole awareness of "the cloven nature of existence"--the nostalgic, evanescent, lyric moment (276-7). The poetic act thus "reveals itself as diasparactive in both structure and function" (280). "The poem, or *substantia*, is a fragment of language--a configuration of words torn out of the vast mine of linguistic possibility" and poetry, as *essentia*, is a "paradoxical attempt to apprehend life's wholeness at the very moment of its fragmentation and dispersal by time" (280). Without the existentialist paraphernalia, this would be a useful account of the uneasy relationship between language and experience.

For McFarland, then, the "diasparact" is not all; it exists always in relation to the pursuit of wholeness. He attempts to establish a dialectic between a notion of the fragment as the failure to achieve wholeness, and an understanding of fragments, or parts, as symbolic indicators of wholeness. Romantic doctrines of symbolism and organicism are seen to address the same problem: they both

endeavour "to adjudicate the relationship of parts to wholes" (26). The symbol is "diasparactive" because (and this is a structure it would seem to share with the sublime) although the symbol or the object-part is present to the mind, it implies or indicates a whole which is not.[17] McFarland finds the symbol's testimony to fragmentation present in the theory of organicism, which held that "the form of a work of art was or should be analogous to the structure of an organism" (35). He draws from Kant: "'the principle, the statement of which serves to define what is meant by organisms, is as follows: *an organized natural product is one in which every part is reciprocally both end and means*'" (40).[18] If parts are only possible in relation to a whole, this would seem to smooth over the problems posed by the ubiquitous fragment, but McFarland asserts that the doctrine of organic form is "a kind of despairing response" to "diasparactive" forces, and that the emphasis is shifted from "an ascendency of a monolithic whole to *a wholeness of the parts*" (41, emphasis added).

The role of the parts is perhaps all we can readily scrutinize, as the whole tends to lie beyond the fact--as if it were a hypothetical construct. Examples from Goethe and Coleridge indicate that for these two thinkers, organic

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17. McFarland invokes Kant: "the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality" (30, n.19). The relationship between the fragment, the symbol and the sublime will be taken up here in the next chapter.
18. McFarland cites Coleridge in comparison: "and what is organization but the connection of parts to a whole, so that each part is at once end and means" (41).

wholeness implies a supersensible entity. Further, if organicism is a *process*, as the doctrine holds, it must be perpetually in a state of achieving and can therefore only gesture toward a whole. McFarland suggests that the organic whole is a *metaphor* and that it, too, expresses Romantic longing. His deployment of a literary device here is telling, if only because his argument consistently overlooks the additional problems posed for Romanticism's pure, free-floating conceptualizations by the mediation of formulation and expression. Language, and particularly written forms (other than in his first landing place) are not considered to contribute to the "diasparactive" dilemma. Although he addresses broad literary concerns--the structure of poetic content, poetry versus the poem, problems of style and so on--we return always to an account of the fragmentary which emphasizes the humanistic, the experiential, and the phenomenological:

> such diasparactions are parallels of human perception itself, and...Romanticism...merely the intensification of certain attitudes inseparable from human experience. "Thou seest not all," writes Byron, "but piecemeal thou must break / To separate contemplation the great whole." (43)[19]

In his concluding chapter or "Second Landing Place"--"The Place Beyond the Heavens: True Being, Transcendence, and the Symbolic Indication of Wholeness"--McFarland draws his conclusions into one phrase: "The desire and pursuit of the whole" (409). This whole is the one true whole, a

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19. Byron is quoted here from Childe Harold, Canto 4, stanza 157.

"*transcendently constituted whole*" which we achieve "only in epiphanies--those of art or those of philosophy and love" (409). As argued in his introduction, the only wholes we encounter in experience "are themselves fragments and can all be subsumed under the categories of *nominal wholes, contingent wholes*, and *wholes of faith*" (409). But if all wholes are so provisional--exactly how fragmentary is the fragment?

In closing these comments on Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, I would like to consider McFarland's reflections on criticism as "a diasparactive process: a tearing apart of a cultural configuration" (55). He describes his book with levity as "a tearing up of and tearing about in torn up things. It is thereby both an examination of and an exemplar for the primacy of diasparactive forms" (55). He recognizes that the act of criticism configures anew: "The opposed conceptions of organic form and diasparactive form are cast into a polar reciprocity by the volume's intent as a process of criticism" (54), and realizes that his work partakes of the problematic forces it seeks to articulate: "In a more general way, the paradox inherent in the relationship of part to whole extends to the structure of the book itself; it is both a series of fragments and a self-asserted whole" (53-4). Its unity is approached through the fundamental disunity of its parts, and this necessity isn't *necessarily* virtuous--it simply reflects the situation that obtains--but it does provoke a meditation on the limits of criticism. In McFarland's case, as indeed

with D.F. Rauber, critical form is cleverly shown to approximate its subject matter.

Of the critical studies of the Romantic fragment to which I referred above, Marjorie Levinson's The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form partakes least of Romantic discourse in its formulations. She positions the concept of "the fragmentary" within "the critical and artistic discourses of the last fifty years," identifying these discourses as "epistemological legacies of the Romantic ideology" (8). While she concedes that the poetic fragment is in no way unique to the Romantic period, she suggests that it "is nonetheless a peculiarly Romantic form" and rehearses the critical assuptions that place it there (5). "Criticism," she states, "tacitly assigns them [poetic fragments] an unusually motivated and expressive condition within the early nineteenth century, or within that age's dominant ideologies of reading and writing" (5-6). The fragment has attained a certain amount of autonomy in Romantic scholarship and "figures in our criticism as an *exemplary* Romantic expression" (6). On the one hand, then, she is forthright about the ways in which critical discourse has played a role in constructing the category of "the fragmentary." But on the other, this knowledge is used to *support* the epochal specificity of the Romantic fragment poem (RFP). Levinson's study explores rather than questions its status, and her chief interest is in the determinants of the fragment as a "form." Levinson indicates that what she would like to add to the discourse already in place about

the fragmentary and the irresolute is an analysis of "formal effect and one that is historically and ideologically constituted" (8):

> while I make no formalist claims for the determinacy of the RFP (nor do I argue the self-consciousness of its production and original reception), I do identify a particular, historically circumscribed configuration.... To describe such a configuration is not, then, to enumerate formal properties nor to construct the idea that organizes a range of actual works, but to offer a "formalized description of changing historical conventions." More specifically, it is to investigate the ways in which certain works, considered collectively, represent their origins, procedures, and interests, and thereby seek to construct their readers. (7)[20]

In Levinson's terms, we must liberate "questions of origination...from the exclusively authorial psychic discourse" in which criticism often frames them, and then we must "approach the fragment poem as a site of ideological impasse and thus to appreciate its historical career" (13).

For the purposes of her study, an RFP is defined as an unfinished poem--either visibly incomplete or so designated in a title or note--"a poem whose irresolution invites assimilation as a formal directive and thus functions as a semantic determinant" (14). Because it is "historically specific," an RFP is "structurally distinct" (13). It is therefore open to formal study and "the exercise," for Levinson, "is to pry apart the poem's special maneuvers and projections from the totalizing constructs in which

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20. Levinson is quoting Uri Margolin, "On Three Types of Deductive Models in Genre Theory" ROZPRAWY 17 (1974):5-19, 13.

criticism, in great good faith and obedient to the rhetoric of the poetry, has framed them" (16). This approach is not a little aggressive: the RFP is conceived "as a form that works its conditions and conflicts in ways that are neither random, unique, nor disinterested" (17), and the result, at least rhetorically, is a curious objectification of poetic impulses in Levinson's commentary--at least at those moments when she accords the fragmentary form motivations that are simultaneously contingent and independent. This sits rather awkwardly with her claim, quoted above, that she does not "argue the self-consciousness of its production and original reception."

Levinson proceeds upon a few "silent premises"--among them, that readers want completion, or resolution, in their engagement with poetry, and that where this is lacking they will pencil it in--drawing from materials at hand, meaning, "in order of exegetical recourse, in the poem, on the page, in the volume, in the canon, and in the life or legend." Further, the incomplete or the irresolute is only perceived as such "against a background or an imagination of completion and unity." Thus, "the poem's irresolution is...discovered by the reader as a determinate or shaped absence" (25). The reader must project the whole in order to conceptualize the part, and thus the reader is of primary importance in this process; in fact, as Levinson will argue in her conclusion, the object of the RFP is to substitute a reading for a writing.[21] Its object is to vex or

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21. The emphasis on *reading* assumes the general ground broken by reader-response or reception theory. However, the theoretical and practical problems of reading are heightened

problematize reconstructive criticism which "risks confusing its object of inquiry with its interpretive devices" (26).

Levinson's reader-critic may, on the other hand, eschew the reconstitutive model and experience the fragment as "pure form," distinguished from "its ghostly perfection" (26). This would mean experiencing the fragment "not as a meaningful isolation of material from a familiar semantic unit but as an autonomously meaningful construction" (26). Such epistemological freedom--in effect, the "undoing of metaphysical closures"--would not, she hazards, have been "available to Romantic readers, nor was it the originary, genetic impulse of the RFP" (26). The "initial perception of the fragment as an organized discourse (a form), and therefore...[the] entire interpretive superstructure, are based on a dialectical knowing of part through whole and presence through absence" (26). Levinson goes on to point out, as I have above, that contemporary Romantic or, more properly, *Romanticist* criticism "perpetuates the organic or Aristotelian dialectics originally activated by the RFP" (26). She claims that "for these reasons, I explore those

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in the case of the fragment, as Tilottama Rajan points out in "The Supplement of Reading," reprinted in The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), "where the written 'text' does not coincide with the hypothetical totality of the 'work'" (15). Lee Rust Brown comments that "in the absence of the signified textual whole," the exchange of propositions that takes place between the reader and the text risks amounting to a series of fragments and fragmentary interpretations. "Since the absent whole represents the promise of a new order of legibility, it appears that the kind of reading occasioned by the fragment would best be termed 'reading *in lieu* of reading'; in other words, we 'read' poetic fragments by speculating about a better, but unavailable, way of reading" (Brown, 241).

part-whole, presence-absence negotiations rather than take up the RFP under the aspect of the avant garde" (26).[22] Later in the book, she disassociates herself from the deconstructive tendencies of her argument: "an antithetical critique need not be a radical deconstruction; the idea is not to negate, trivialize, or undo the genetic myths outlined above, but to use them to figure a difference--ultimately, a difference between the way ideology operates in the world and in bad faith, and the way it can work in a poem and self-critically" (218).

Levinson's hypothesis is that the fragment has been received in criticism as a "creative but controlled act of cognition/completion" and this is evident in a certain consensus she finds in RFP criticism (26). The problem she isolates is that in spite of its consistent responses, scholarship "rarely discovers the assumptions and activities that would explain this consensus" (26). Critics, Levinson claims, approach the problem from the wrong angle and "offer completions by way of explanation, whereas the proper analytic object is the very act of completion and its product" (26), i.e., to reconstruct the reconstruction. "By attempting to describe [although not, it must be noted, subscribe to] the ideal (abstract and extrinsic) wholes which the RFP projects (and which criticism reflects), one may begin to see how the fragment characterizes its disorder, or what it claims to be" (27).

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22. Levinson refers here to Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Michael Shaw, Foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. xx, xxxix, 91.

One of the ways in which the fragment accomplishes its own "characterization," as we have noted above, is through the cultivation or training of its readers. In the second chapter, "Backgrounds," Levinson traces the development of a sympathetic readership and proposes that the controversial success of Chatterton and Macpherson's hoax poems was of no small importance to the genesis of Jeffrey's infectious "taste for fragments":

> For the fragment to figure a literary form, readers had to conceive textual irresolution as a formal fact susceptible to structural and semantic manipulation. The hoaxes, judged to have affected various kinds of irresolution in order to suggest the condition of genuinely antique texts, brought out the rhetorical and thematic uses and thus the potential literariness of the feature. (48)

Levinson describes a readership which was becoming increasingly predisposed to fabrication, to contextualization, and could provide a before and an after--"an antecedent and subsequent context of events or description.... In effect, the reader imaginatively completes the fragment that he may read the meaning of its partiality (that is, *that he may motivate that partiality*)" (49, italics mine). The fragment is thus seen as not only dependent upon, but also *manufactured from*, a sympathetic, participatory reception. And yet Levinson cannot successfully argue the case for a reception aesthetics, or reader-response theory, of the fragment--indeed her basic argument that the fragment is otherwise determinate would seem to contradict such a proposal.

Another way of figuring the fragment which Levinson discusses is through Romantic, but non-literary, perspectives on the Renaissance and classical fragments. Levinson claims that neither the literary fragments in contemporary editions of The Greek Anthology, nor those of The Palatine Anthology, had a significant philological or philosophical impact on the Romantics, but that "the sculptural and architectural remains of ancient Greece and Rome spoke forcefully to the Romantic mind" (28). This was particularly true of second generation Romantic poets and Levinson uses Shelley's thought to illustrate her point, finding that the rubrics of that thought as far as the fragment is concerned, are supported by an uneasy combination of "organicism, dialectical idealism, and skeptical philosophy" (29). The line of this argument will be scrutinized here in Chapter Two, but one of its end points is that the fragment may be figured "as a random but perfect (internally necessitated) element from an organic whole," and that through the successful engagement of the reader/viewer's imagination it *usurps* the place of the whole: "The fragment, construed as a symbol--'type' in the loose sense--of the imagined order which the original work sought to incarnate, enjoys a more intimate, authorized relation to that order than the first and finished work" (31). Like the Coleridgean symbol which is part of the whole which it represents, the fragment represents the finished work "by expressing its essential (ideal, formal) nature in a materially uncompromised fashion" (31). Such a fragment cannot but gesture, thematically and rhetorically,

toward origins and destinies. Out of the remains of Greek civilization, Shelley develops "an epistemological, symbolic, and metaphysical dimension for the condition of irresolution":

> By Shelley's readings, the imperfections of the ancient fragments signify a lost and anticipated perfection--spiritual, social and intellectual. Irresolution--a valorizing sign--confers upon the fragmentary work the character of the infinite, inexhaustible semiotic event. (33)

In spite of the clear force of these statements, Levinson finally asserts that it was the "inauthentic" fragments of Macpherson and Chatterton rather than "authentic" classical fragments which had the greater impact on the cultivation of "reader responsiveness to the aesthetic potential of irresolution" (34). Levinson ends the chapter with a survey of contemporary editorial comment indicating a growing acceptance among publishers of the potential importance of fragments--not only as "literary remains" to be published posthumously, but as the provocative work of poets still very much alive.

Chapters three through eleven, the main body of the book (though perhaps one ought not to use an organic metaphor in this context), deal with a wide range of Romantic fragment poems under four headings: the true fragment ("Nutting" and "Christabel"), the completed fragment ("Kubla Khan" and "The Giaour"), the deliberate fragment ("A Fragment," or "When, to their airy hall"; *The Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, and "Julian and Maddalo"), and finally, the dependent fragment: "Hyperion"

and "The Fall of Hyperion." The true fragment, Levinson's first category, suggests its before-and-after, its prior and future contexts or descriptive states. "Christabel," for example, invites interpretation in relation to what may have and might precede and follow the text as it stands. Its inconsistencies are best explained by reconstructing the poem in this way, and indeed its reviewers did a considerable amount of "narrative guesswork" about the poem's "structurally allusive beginning and end" (77). Levinson argues effectively that this is best accomplished in accordance with the laws of classical tragedy, "rather than by reference to ballad, gothic, or romance norms" (83)--by conceiving of it "as a romantic interval within a tragic action" (84). This is a corrective strategy, however, and finally says little about the determinations of "Christabel" as it stands; the argument reconstructs itself rather than reconstructs the reconstruction.

The completed fragment, the second category in Levinson's schema, "impresses itself as the result of the poet's effort to finish his fragment some time after it was first written and from an antithetical and remedial position" (49). It allows the reader to provide or infer a unifed revision, and thus offers an "experience" of closure. As with the hoax poems, the "completed" fragment is "formally intentionalized" by the discriminations of the reader who is able to perceive within a text "mutually exclusive styles, values, and voices, and then rationalize these polarities through an interpretive act" (50). "Kubla Khan," for example, locates its irresolution internally--

between lines 36 and 37--and appears to have been begun in a mood and mode rather different to the one in which it is ended (97). It "makes its readers connect its separate, antithetical movements and fuse its imagery" and feels complete because it "contains all the elements necessary to a 'written' or achieved poem; it lacks only the interstitial material"--material which, Levinson suspects, "serious readers of the poem have always and unconsciously supplied" (113).

The deliberate fragment, as its name suggests, "makes a virtue of what it would have us believe is a necessity" and renders its imperfection thematically (129). This is the model with which we are most familiar; its fragmentariness is announced in the title, or, typographically. Levinson offers The Triumph of Life as perhaps the best known example--deliberate not through authorial intention but because the poem thematizes the conditions that thwart its resolution. The deliberate fragment "seeks to collapse form and content into a genetic and semiotic simplicity," thus raising questions about literary production (129). This approach may be taken ironically--as Byron does in Don Juan--"to dismantle the myth of organic or necessary form" (130), but the examples Levinson most closely examines are Byron's self-inaugerating poetic epitaph "A Fragment," or "When, to their airy hall," Shelley's The Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson and the inconclusive debate staged between "Julian and Maddalo."

The dependent fragment, occupying the fourth and final category, represents for Levinson "an episode or exercise in

the poet's career" (50). Like the true fragment, its incompletion "appears to be (and often truly is) fortuitous" (50), but it takes its place--from the point of view of the reader--somewhere along a line of canonical development, thus meaning something additional in relation to an earlier or a later work. In the case of Keats's "Hyperion" poems, the reader constructs a notion of the poet's progress that hinges on the order of composition. Levinson's argument in this chapter--and in the next, "The Victorian Paradigm"--revolves around the problem this poses: until about 1925, readers supposed that "Hyperion" was revised from "The Fall of Hyperion," rather than the other way around, and not as two distinct approaches to the same creative problem. Now, we read "Hyperion" as an enabling experiment--enabling Keats to reconceive the poem with greater satisfaction and success as "The Fall." Levinson explores both reception paradigms and the way our readings of the dependent fragments have worked to construct Keats as/and the Keatsian canon.

From here it is but a short step into her concluding chapter, "Meanings and Purposes," in which Levinson observes that the study of Romantic indeterminacy is dominated by a notion that form embodies or symbolizes what experience indicates is factual, and this leads us, in critical practice, into "an investigation of cognitive paradigms" (197)--into the "infrastructures of mental and material activity" (198). These areas are clearly of great interest to Levinson as they are, she claims, explainable by way of "extrastructures" (among them, poetic forms). Her aim in this book has been to "focus the perimeter of a single

discourse, the place where it abuts and is interrupted by a universe of facts and relationships which the work defines as outside and other and seeks opportunistically to organize" (198).

It is this "opportunism" which motivates her claim that "the very success of the RFP in promoting itself as an achieved literary form has, rather perversely, obscured its own historical and thus structural specificity" (198). Romantic criticism has ensured this obscurity through its syncretic impulse to situate the fragment in a poetic program of a higher order (the higher perfection of the organic whole) and has taken on irresolution ("the undoing of metaphysical closures") as a twentieth-century discovery. Put differently, the fragmentary is thus "felt to dis-organize in the interest of re-organizing; it precipitates new totalities which then rationalize or replace its disorder" (198).

It is hardly a revelation to observe that we ascribe different meanings and structures to the RFP than those they initially had or expected to have. Levinson argues rather awkwardly that the fortunes of the RFP "are not unrelated to the projections or mythologies of the form, and these...are related in a precisely inverse ratio to the actual procedures whereby these poems got written" (200). While the readings offered over the course of the book present the fragment as determinate--"an emphatically manufactured artifact"--the RFP forcefully projects the appearance of being disinterested (artless, spontaneous, sincere) and it

is in this projection that Levinson locates "the originary intention of the form" (203-4):

> The RFP should have emerged through this critique not as "dynamic disclosure" (organism, vision, or expressive overflow) but as a motivated assembly incorporating available, even prefabricated materials and units (for example, gothic-tragic; coda-preface) and manipulating these in a determinate and determined fashion over time. (204)

Levinson is more interested here in compositional projections (and their inherent, revealing, contradictions) than in actual productions--myths rather than modes--among them, the visionary, organic, and spatial models, and the compositional dramas that they enact. The effects and projections she encounters "add up to an affective stylistics: Romantic artlessness" (209).

This artlessness is overtly defensive, an attempt to influence if not control the reception of the poet through the poem. "Insofar as the RFP cannot be objectified, determined, hence depleted by any one reading (including the author's), the form prevents the reader from appropriating the poet in a vulgar way, as the provider of definable goods or services" (209). Because of its informality, the fragment "creates an ambience which disarms its readers of their impulse to dissect and, following Wordsworth, thereby 'murder' the poem" (209). The genetic myths of fragment production observed above resist the assumed, determinate stability of the poem as an artifact "produced by the purposeful, methodical, and to an extent, mechanical transformation of content into form," and thus distinguish

both its creator and its ideal audience (211). This resistance to easy consumption promotes poetic longevity: "A work that is never consumed can never be exhausted" (215).

> The great irony of the RFP's critical history is that after Bostetter's respected but virtually unused book, *The Romantic Ventriloquists*, criticism has tended either to situate the fragment poem in some metaphysical *aevum* or to construe its production as a defiant gesture--*épater la bourgeoisie*. This view is prompted, it seems, by our interest in appropriating idealistically Romantic angst and all its expressions. The plain expedience of the RFP has not been addressed. (216)

Exploring this "expedience" has been an important aim for Marjorie Levinson in The Romantic Fragment Poem, and, with chapters on all the "major" Romantic poets, she has covered a great deal of ground, a feat which I make no attempt to duplicate. I have presented her argument at some length because the questions she addresses are central to an historical account of the Romantic fragment; and the ground she has so ably covered will not be recovered here. My interest in the fragment is as textual evidence of the failure of systems of signification, of representation, to adequately present the contents of the poetic imagination. This inevitably engages with the ways in which criticism has situated--and theorized--the fragment but, as stated at the outset, to rather different ends. Levinson's points about critical practice with respect to the fragment, though, are well taken. Rightly, she warns against the urge, in criticism, to "*replace* the work's fractures and conflicts with that ideal consistency it insinuates and we elaborate"

(217). This is a distinction we must maintain if we are not, as far as possible, to be fooled by the work. "It is the *relationship* of conflict to consistency, part to whole, text to poem, writing to reading, that counts in a critical sense" (217). Reading the RFP reflexively allows Levinson "to conceive its irresolution not as the product of a metaphysical part-whole dialectic (that is, with reference to Aristotelian, organic, and visionary ideas of order) but as the form of the diverse materials and intentions that made the work" (218).

(iii) Current Criticism Continued: Minor Themes: The Ruin and the Unfinished

The works by McFarland and Levinson which were so much the object of the previous section constitute the main studies of the fragmentary to date. There are, however, a few studies which treat the fragment tangentially, and a brief discussion of these will enable a preliminary distinction of the fragmentary from the other two elements of McFarland's diasparactive triad: the ruin and the unfinished.

Anne Janowitz has established herself as spokesperson for the ruin in two interesting and articulate works: an early article, "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric," and at greater length in England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape.[23] Certainly the conjunction between the fragment and the ruin is an

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23. Both cited above.

important one; Janowitz addresses it directly in both studies before moving off, in the latter case, into her more specific field of inquiry, that of the ruin.

Broadly put, England's Ruins is based on the rather Levinson-like analytical premise "that poetic purpose is explicable by attending to historically situated manifestations and versions of *topoi* and structures" (vii). Janowitz's study covers the period 1750 to 1820, a period during which she argues that "poetic texts were frequently the site of ruin sentiment conspiring with national aspiration" (5). She explores an emergent link between the image of ruin in its picturesque benignity (from castles to cottages) and a particular notion of "Britishness"--a way of framing history, the past, and the nation: the landscape ruin as an icon of British heritage. She briefly compares the eighteenth-century ruin (paradoxically, both a figure of decay *and* "the image used to authorize England's autonomy as a world power" (2)) with the image of ruin in the 1980s which reflects--more simply but no less acutely--a sense of economic and cultural decline. Unlike the iconic, picturesque landscape ruin, current images of urban decay tend to be critical and oppositional--after the fashion of Blake's Jerusalem--"an anomalous text in the early nineteenth century for locating the site of ruin in the city rather than the countryside" (2).

The intentions that link ruin poetry to "the formulation of a supra-historical Nation" can be spoken of, in general terms, "as a shift from temporal to spatial claims" (7). In tracing a genealogy of ruin poetry,

Janowitz observes a tendency in the late eighteenth century "of de-historicization and de-contextualization," "a shift within ruin poetry away from narrative forms and toward lyrical forms conceived in spatial terms"--thus enacting upon itself a "de-temporalization" (7). She calls this a "privatizing impulse"; a meditation on a ruined castle, for example, need not reflect upon the events of the castle's bloody past, but will reveal more of the history of the individual who contemplates it.

A structural counterpart for such an impulse is located in the Romantic fragment poem--"a ruin for whose central category of temporal decline has been substituted an equally important assertion of spatial incompletion" (7). The fragment poem results from an internalization of ruin that would seem to be "the structural result of the crisis of the immortality-of-poetry *topos*" (read as an artificial rather than "a natural effusion or meditation") in which the inexpressibility *topos* gains the upper hand (10). Building on Levinson, Janowitz suggests that if the range of fragment-poem characteristics is enlarged to include thematic in addition to formal concerns, the "genre" could be situated within the scope of the ruin poem.

> The temporality of ruin--a whole now worn away--gives up poetic space to the shape of a fragment--the poetic incompletion, or part of a whole. The poem that has broken down may become the poem which is not yet finished. The relationship between ruin and fragment can be thought of as a dialectic in which the temporal figure of degeneration, [now] spatialized, generates hope. Memory is superseded by longing. In this way the fragment and the ruin meet and modify one another in the romantic period. (10)

Despite the McFarland-like, expressive-essentialist conclusion, the distinction made between the fragment and the ruin as that difference between a temporal and spatial construct seems initially apt--but finally too simple. Both ruins and fragments exhibit the effects of time and space as she later implies, and yet a fragment is to be a more straightforward artifact--"simply a part of a whole":

> It may be part of a linguistic, temporal whole, or it may be part of a spatial, visual whole. Presented as a part of a temporal whole, the fragment alludes to a poetic unity somehow prematurely stopped. As a part of a spatial or visual whole, the fragment suggests that it is to be the site of a recovery and an immanent completion. (13)

In short, as Janowitz states in her earlier article in which these ideas are initially explored, "the significant alteration of the ruin poem into the romantic fragment is the change from ruin as a theme to ruin as a structure" ("Coleridge's 1816 Volume," p. 25). In England's Ruins, Janowitz situates the fragment "more precisely as one strain within ruin poetry" (13). This motivates her later chapters on Wordsworth and Blake in which she aims "to show the interrelationship of the structural claims of fragments and the thematic ones of ruin within a poetic aesthetic which was conforming to an apparent--that is, a romantic--split between the regions of the public and the private, the political and the aesthetic" (13). Even though the claims of the fragment are arguably *both* structural and thematic, these are the limits placed on the fragment for the purposes

of her study. She will resist the Schlegelian assumption that the fragment is *the* central Romantic genre.

Janowitz is not very clear about the relation between structural and thematic ruin, and their textual expression. Her argument maps a shift from a ruined physical structure, to a structure (presumably textual but also visual, in the case of a painting) in which ruin becomes a theme, and from there back to a spatial structure in the form of a fragmentary poem. This is tidy, but highly constricting. She is not interested in ruin poems which then have the good fortune to become fragments, and yet she has little to say about the first shift in its linguistic aspect, as a move from a physical to a literary structure. Janowitz discusses the relevance of the inexpressibility *topos* to the genre of ruin poetry, but as a theme. It is the possiblity for further "diasparaction" in each shift that I mean to point out.

Give that fragments and ruins have clear links and parallels with each other, and that one cannot properly be thought to pre-date the other, it seems to me fundamentally dubious to argue that the genesis of the Romantic fragment is chiefly within the ruin. It cannot be satisfactorily proven that ruin sentiment and antiquarian impulses are the main determinants of Francis Jeffrey's taste for fragments. On the level of individual poems, Levinson's study makes clear that the factors behind their fragmentation are complex and context-specific. While Janowitz's account is suggestive on a general level, it finally over-rates the importance of the ruin to the fragment. A more potent link

is to be found between the fragment and the poetics of the unfinished.

In the case of the unfinished, as with the ruin, there is enormous conceptual and actual overlap: fragments are often (but not always) unfinished and the unfinished may well partake of the fragmentary. But as Balachandra Rajan points out in The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound, the unfinished is not a variant of the ruin: it is "other" than the ruin (4).[24] The ruin suggests and invites (erstwhile) completion. Contemplation of the ruin, as something that was once finished, "is instigated by the discrepancy between the whole that was and the fragment that is" (4). Its full importance and aesthetic appeal is thus experienced and felt by virtue of a restorative effort and "depends upon a consequential meditation aroused by the relationship between the whole and the part" (5).

The unfinished, on the other hand, should not invite completion. "If it falls short of finality (as The Faerie Queene and The Cantos do) or resists it (as The Triumph of Life does), it should do so because of forces that have been demonstrated to be grounded in its nature and that forbid arrival at a closure even when (as in The Faerie Queene) the gestures accompanying closure are richly invoked" (5). Rajan goes on to argue that "the form of the unfinished is the form of the poem as it is and not some larger form in which the poem participates and to which we are persuaded to annex

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24. Balachandra Rajan, The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

it" (5). The problematic double-bind of a part/whole opposition is clearly visible here. The unfinished is to represent a retreat to one side, to the side of the part ("as it is"), but such a retreat must always be *away from*, and articulation of the one term (part) is only possible in relation to its (now silent) opposite. Rajan's inability to negotiate this impasse is apparent in what follows:

> A poem that is properly unfinished should be less satisfactory if we were to pursue any of the conceivable ways of finishing it. Instead of speaking of its failure to achieve closure we should regard any prospective closure of it as an imminent admission of its failure. (5)

We can only, thus, consider unfinished poems to be parts ("proper" parts) if we simultaneously allow them to be wholes (somehow entire and self-contained).[25]

Rajan registers the paradox implicit in a notion of "the form of the unfinished"--a phrase which "seems to repudiate itself" (5), but points out that this has more to say about the expectations of conclusion to which the conventions of critical discourse lead us, than about the literature itself. These expectations are deeply engrained, and assumptions of closure cannot be readily exchanged for their opposites. Although indeterminacy and openness have

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25. There is an echo here of Schlegel's more famous fragment from The Athenaeum: "A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a [hedgehog]." AF 206 in Philosophical Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow, foreword by Rodolphe Gasché (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; originally published in *Lucinde* and the Fragments, Minneapolis, 1971). All further references to Athenaeum Fragments, Critical Fragments, or Ideas will be given as AF, CF, or I, followed by their respective numbers.

gained a certain foothold in criticism (evident in the current interest in the fragment with which I began), to speak about the fragmentary is still to be constrained by a discourse which, however residually, privileges the authentic whole and dismisses what is inconclusive, incomplete, fragmentary, unfinished or indeterminate as "secondary, residual, and derived" (7). Its dissenting status may be acknowledged, but its independence is not permitted or entertained.

Rajan's study covers a great deal of literary ground--as his subtitle indicates--from Spenser's The Faerie Queene to Ezra Pound's Cantos, with chapters on Marvell, Milton, Byron, Shelley, Keats and Eliot in between. The chapters on the second generation Romantic poets are at the heart of his argument, as although the book presents a strong case for the recurrence of the unfinished and the indeterminate throughout literary history, Rajan concludes that the Romantics have led the way in a process in which the fragment, for example, asserts its independent significance *apart from* incorporation into a systematic whole. He argues that the forces of fragmentation must resist those of systematization on the basis of an independent rather than a derived aesthetic. And yet systematization, in Coleridge for example, was a peculiarly Romantic concern.

Rajan finds that contestation (for example, of genre against genre) and deferral are important factors in forming the unfinished, and notes that Spenser, in The Faerie Queene, even goes so far as to make deferral one of the contesting forces. But for the Romantic unfinished, Rajan

finds an influential paradigm in Milton's Areopagitica. Milton's model--of reconstituted fragments, of the divine image in the self--is here internalized: "Blake's myth of dismemberment and reconstitution can indeed be read as an immense elaboration of Milton's central image" (13). Wordsworth and Coleridge are similarly dubbed "Areopagiticans" in their striving for wholeness, "the whole being given its literary equivalence as the impossibly ambitious oeuvre the mind subscribes to but is unable to fulfill" (13). The fragmentary result derives "both its direction and its dignity" from its position in a larger structure, and so, "For Wordsworth and Coleridge the major form of the unfinished is the entire individual literary endeavour, as it is for Shelley when he invites us [in A Defense of Poetry] to think of literary history as a continuing poem of consciousness" (13-14). Again, this is a model in which fragments take their places within a continuous and everlasting whole: each poem is but a fragment within the fragment that the individual oeuvre (as a whole) represents.

Rajan makes a further (arbitrary but, he says, necessary) distinction between the incomplete and the unfinished, in which incomplete poems demand to be finished and unfinished ones do not, even ought not. According to this schema, "Christabel" is incomplete because there are no inner tensions at work in the poem that justify its ending where and how it does, whereas "Kubla Khan" could be called unfinished because although it announces itself as a fragment, it "has the ring of closure in its final lines"

(14).[26] The crucial difference between Spenser and Milton on the one hand, and the Romantics on the other, is that in the former instance "the major unfinished is justified...[by] its participation in a whole that is to be," but for the Romantics, "the privileging whole is no longer transcendentally guaranteed but is formulated by the very consciousness that seeks it" (15). The only logical escape from the sense of self-division that ensues is, Rajan argues, "to relinquish the fiction of a privileging source" (15).

Out of this impasse emerges a transformational model which enables "the decoupling of the movement from its goal" (16), or, in other words, the disengagement of the fragment from the whole. "The Fall of Hyperion" may now be read as "a transformational poem of self-achieving that is no longer goal-oriented" (16). Both "Hyperion" poems are, furthermore, marked "by an indifference to the strategies of deferral or retrieval which reconcile the overall design to local intractability and by a commitment to undecidability as a vehicle of understanding rather than as a range of disturbances by which understanding is undermined" (298). Shelley's The Triumph of Life is a variation on this theme, and is undecidable because "it is equally accessible to several codes by being equally resistant to all of them" (302). Power again shifts to the fragment as it

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26. Rajan: "It has yet to be demonstrated (particularly in view of an ending which, in its ominous finality, seems to provide several of the satisfactions of closure) that 'Kubla Khan' is a poem truly unfinished, in other words a poem that holds away closure because of undecidable dissensions on which its identity rests" (15). This problem will be addressed here in a later chapter.

disassociates itself from the whole as a privileging source, and contests "that incorporation which was once seen as the natural destiny of the fragment" (16). The Triumph of Life achieves this "by insisting on its givenness, by underlining the resistance of that givenness to decoding and by offering strategies for dealing with its resistance which are then defeated by the poem itself" (16).

Examples such as these from Keats and Shelley underline Rajan's observation (lifted from Bostetter's "virtually unused" book) that unfinished poems represent the poet making "his most determined effort to solve the aesthetic and philosophical problems that confronted him" (160; Bostetter, 6). Bostetter's much earlier study of the Romantics' unfinished poems articulates the problem in a form that more recent studies have not much improved upon. In the poems he chooses (by now familiar choices: Wordsworth's The Recluse, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel," Keats's "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion," Shelley's The Triumph of Life, and Byron's Don Juan), "the problems are left unresolved in the process of being either challenged or tested. In several of the poems an impasse has obviously been reached.... Furthermore, each poem breaks off at a memorably dramatic point--as if a motion picture were abruptly frozen at the moment of critical action" (Bostetter, 6).

Rajan notes that Shelley, in The Triumph of Life, continues somewhat beyond the question mark, "as if to tell us that we must proceed even if we cannot progress" (160). But "it is that haunting question mark which searches the

nature of the Romantic inquiry and admits the impossibility of bringing it to a settlement other than that self-constituting, self-erasing dialogue which is the ongoing justification of the inquiry's right to life" (160-61). It is difficult to see how such an inquiry differs from Rajan's (or our own), other than in the obvious way in which critical studies offer up less equivocal--though equally provisional--conclusions.

The Form of the Unfinished is detailed, learned, and eloquently argued. Its historical range and local depth usefully situate the fragment (in its manifestation in the phenomenon of the unfinished poem) in a wide literary context. Even though Rajan's study carries us well into the twentieth century with its chapters on Pound and Eliot, he claims that Marjorie Perloff's work in The Poetics of Indeterminacy picks up where he leaves off and in this sense the two works are continuous.[27] This is an interesting comment as it brings up another opposition--indeterminacy/closure--which clearly shares some territory with the fragmentary and the complete. But the claim is more interesting for the abyss it opens at our critical feet: Perloff's interest is in a strain of modernist poetics (John Ashbery's "other tradition") which she identifies as an "'anti-Symbolist' mode of indeterminacy or 'undecidability,' of literalness and free play, whose first real exemplar was the Rimbaud of the Illuminations" (vii). This strain is interwoven with, but also in *opposition* to,

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27. Marjorie Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

the Symbolist mode that she claims decends from "the great Romantic poets" to Baudelaire, Eliot and Robert Lowell. This implies, once again, that the poetics of indeterminacy and undecidability are not a Romantic invention, but that they describe twentieth-century conceptual categories. According to Perloff's own claims, her study would appear to be *discontinuous* with Rajan's, in spite of his assertion that "the roots of undecidability go back considerably further" (Rajan, 300)--and his demonstration of it in his discussion of the contest of genres in Spenser and Milton, as well as in his chapter on Marvell. Certainly no literary epoch has an unchallenged claim on the unfinished; this must be equally true of the fragment.

(iv) The Theory of the Fragment, a Theory of Literature

The theory of the fragment, as it is elucidated above all in German Romantic theory, amounts to nothing less than a theory of literature. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy take this up in The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism, in which they seek to discern the boundary between literature and philosophy.[28] Anne Janowitz argued that their study is as Romantic as the ideas they explore; their contention is that the study of the theory of literature in Romanticism must converge with a study of the assumptions governing current literary-critical and theoretical practices. This implies, clearly, that in

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28. Cited above.

their view the Romantic period is continuous with the modern period, and that Romantic assumptions are still shaping theory and criticism. This is not, however, the same as uncritically reproducing Romantic discourse.[29]

The persistence of Romanticism is a productive point to pursue, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's oft-quoted contention that Romanticism "will never cease, right up to the present, to incomplete the epoch it inaugurated" (83)--an echo of Athenaeum Fragment 116: "The Romantic kind of poetry [*Dichtart*] is still becoming; that is its real essence; that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected"--suggests that the fragment may profitably take its place within and as a theory that speaks powerfully to the present. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy state on the jacket of the original French edition of their work:

> Because it establishes a period in literature and in art, before it comes to represent a sensibility or style (whose 'return' is regularly announced), romanticism is first of all a *theory*. And the *invention* of literature. More precisely, it constitutes the inaugural moment of literature as *production of its own theory*--and of theory that thinks itself as literature. With this gesture, it opens the critical age to which we still belong.

They continue with a definition of what is meant by a "literary absolute":

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29. The Romantic construction of Romanticism presents a special problem, one which I alluded to in the overview of this chapter, and which first found its voice in the work of Jerome McGann in The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). This issue will be discussed here in the next section.

> A Poietics [sic] in which the subject confounds itself with its own production, and a Literature enclosed in and enclosing the law of its own engendering, romanticism (ourselves, in sum) is the moment of the *literary absolute*.[30]

The literary absolute is also, then, the moment of the fragment. Insofar as this offers us a useful description of what happens, for example, to Coleridge in the composition of "Kubla Khan," the notion of a subject confounding itself with its own production and of a literature containing and constricted by the very laws of its own creation approximates my argument as it takes shape in a later chapter with respect to the moment of the sublime. The degree to which we then subscribe to a view of the post-modern era as suffused with (this one particular form of) Romanticism would seem, however, highly debatable. Yet their goal is not to establish the contemporary relevance of Romanticism, so much as to argue that, much as we deny it, we still belong to the era opened up by Romanticism; "modernity" has not advanced significantly beyond its central discovery: the disappearance of the unitary, self-present subject (the crisis of the Kantian, transcendental subject, eroded to the point of unpresentability).

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy approach the relation between literature and philosophy (as we might that of the imagination and the fragmentary text) through the problematics of presentation, or Darstellung. This is an old term which has meant various things in the history of philosophy, including the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*

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30. Reprinted in the English translation, p. xxi-xxii (translators' preface).

(in Herder, for example), but, since Kant, is taken to refer to the "rendering of a concept in terms of sense, or a sensibilization" (viii). In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant advances the concept of transcendental schema "in response to the necessity for a 'third term' that could reconcile understanding with sensibility by partaking of the orders of both the intelligible and the sensible" (ix).[31] This reconciling schematism is refered to by Kant in the Critique of Judgement as one mode, along with the symbolic, of intuitive representation. "Schemata contain direct, symbols indirect, presentations of the concept."[32] Both, however, are only approximations, and a more "adequate" presentation of an idea is impossible; symbolic presentation is the most adequate form attainable. Kant insists on this impossibility, on the incompatibility of the ideas of reason with sensible presentation.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy investigate the ways in which Kant's idealist and romantic successors undertake to "reinvest the concept of presentation in such a way as to transform it into the kind of adequate and ever more perfect operation they perceive to be lacking in Kant" (ix). In Romantic theory, this reinvestment results in a model of art "as the aesthetic activity of production and formation in which the absolute might be experienced and realized in an unmediated, immediate fashion":

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31. "Transcendental Analytic," Book II, Ch. 1 of The Critique of Pure Reason, trans. F. Max Müller (New York: Doubleday Books, 1966), see pp. 121-27.
32. The Critique of Judgement, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1928) 1952), p. 222.

> In literature, i.e., in the productive unity of creative formation and critical reflection, the formative power or *bildende Kraft* of the artist extends beyond a presentation of the sensible (beyond the level of representation), and, recalling Kant's concept of the sublime, accomplishes a presentation of what in Kant remained unpresentable. Art realizes an adequate presentation of the Idea, or in other words accomplishes a sensible actualization of the Idea in the realm of the aesthetic. (ix)

Furthermore, Kant's legacy, the crisis of presentation, deprives the subject of its "being-subject"--"of its adequate presentation of itself to itself, reducing the subject to little more than the logically necessary, purely regulatory idea of the unity of its representations" (xv). These two difficulties--the inadequate presentation of the Idea and the subject unpresentable to itself--combine in what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call the "subject-work"--"the paradigmatic model of the romantic subject's auto-production in the (literary) work of art" (xi). The example the translators offer of this in action is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, in which the narrator conceives of his personal perfection by analogy to a work of art, but a work of art that can see itself--so that he would be both artist and the work of art, beholder of himself as a completed picture. Frankenstein, on the other hand, becomes a model of what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call "critical perfecting" insofar as he "accomplishes a fully developed operation of reflection, one that raises the poetic capacity to its highest power, where it becomes capable both of producing itself and of reflecting on and theorizing its own production" (xii). Taken together, the auto-productive

"subject-work" of the narrator and the "critical perfecting" of Frankenstein constitute the structure of the Romantic theory of literature as it is investigated by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy in The Literary Absolute.

Two of the four main chapters of their work deal with the fragment, not only as the *genre* of fragment or aphorism, but as a model of the work--a "productive model of the literary work-subject" (xvi)--that emerges from a certain theoretical Romanticism, that of the Jena circle (the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Schleiermacher, and their journal, *The Athenaeum*).

> The "fragmentary exigency" is the exigency of auto-production, that is, the demand that the literary work organize and produce itself as *organon*, that it *operate* in view of an essential totality and completion. In its fragmentary work, literature is determined as the productive capacity of *poiesis*, and manifests the synthetic totality that lies behind or before each of its particular manifestations. (xvi)

Appropriately, the best-known texts of the Jena Romantics were written in the genre which they were to make famous: the fragment. The fragment incarnates theoretical Romanticism, distinctively marks its originality, and signals its "radical modernity": "Indeed, the fragment is the romantic genre *par excellence*" (39-40). The genre (and the tradition out of which it grew: Montaigne's Essays, Pascal's Pensées, the English and French moralists, for example Shaftesbury and La Rochefoucauld, Chamfort's Pensées, Maximes et Anecdotes) does not include the accidentally incomplete *per se*, but implies "the fragment as

a determinate and deliberate statement, assuming or transfiguring the accidental and involuntary aspects of fragmentation" (41). The fragment involves an essential incompletion, but its "detachment or isolation...is understood to correspond exactly to completion and totality" (43). This is implied by Athenaeum fragment 206: "A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog." The necessity for incomplete completion can get very complicated indeed; as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it later on, "in a way, the fragment combines completion and incompletion within itself, or one may say, in an even more complex manner, it both completes and incompletes the dialectic of completion and incompletion" (50).

In spite of the individuality of the generic fragment, *fragments* are written in the plural. The fragmentary whole is replicated in each fragment: "Fragmentary totality, in keeping with what should be called the logic of the hedge-hog, cannot be situated in any single point: it is simultaneously in the whole and in each part" (44).

> That the totality should be present as such in each part and that the whole should be not the sum but the co-presence of the parts as the co-presence, ultimately, of the whole with itself (because the whole is also the detachment and closure of the part) is the essential necessity [*nécessité d'essence*] that devolves from the individuality of the fragment.... Fragments are definitions of the fragment; this is what installs the totality of the fragment as a plurality and its completion as the incompletion of its infinity. (44)

Fragmentary totality (and partiality) is thus, in this view, organic. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy propose that "fragmentation constitutes the properly romantic vision of the system, if by "system"...one understands not the so-called systematic ordering of an ensemble, but that by which and as which an ensemble holds together [*tient-ensemble*] and establishes itself for itself in the autonomy of the self-jointure that makes its "systasis," to use Heidegger's term" (46). And because the system as such, *itself*, must be grasped "absolutely"--"the fragment as organic individuality implies the work, the *organon*" (46). But its relationship to the work is one of *analogy*, rather than incarnation, and this seems to me a crucial distinction. A part could thus be in an analogous relation to a whole, without partaking of it in the essential sense in which the Coleridgean symbol is "consubstantial" with what it represents.

The Romantic organon, then, is given in and known through the fragmentary. The fragmentary, as Maurice Blanchot (Romantically and somewhat ironically) puts it in an essay on The Athenaeum, portends "the search for a new form of fulfillment that mobilizes--renders mobile--the whole, even while interrupting it in various ways."[33] The fragmentary exigency "does not exclude totality, but rather goes beyond it" (172). The interruption and dissemination of the Romantic work within itself is readable only in what Blanchot calls the "unworking"--[*désoeuvrement*]. "Unworking is not incompletion, for as we have seen incompletion

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33. "The Athenaeum," trans. Deborah Esch and Ian Balfour, Studies in Romanticism 22 (Summer, 1983), p. 171; from L'Entretien infini (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

completes itself and is the fragment as such; unworking is nothing, only the interruption of the fragment" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 57).

The art of the fragment, according to this highly-worked theory and in true Romantic fashion, would seem to reveal, in spite of itself, that the view of the whole and the commitment to unity are elusive ideals. In this respect and many others the theory attached to this "art" is of great relevance to this study. And yet a certain skepticism is in order. Blanchot, for example, comments that in some cases, the practice of writing fragments "often appears as a means of complacent self-indulgence, rather than the attempt to elaborate a more rigorous mode of writing" and "to write fragmentarily is then simply to embrace one's own disorder" (Blanchot, 172).

Fredric Jameson, in Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic is rather more skeptical: "even if one does not consider the Jena Romantics to be charlatans, their self-defeating insistence on the necessarily incomplete nature of all expression is very distant in spirit from Adorno's way of confronting what for him was also a *necessary* dilemma of the representation of 'totality.'"[34] Jameson challenges the incautious evocation of the fragment--"in connection with Benjamin as much as with Adorno, and sometimes vaguely assimilated to the Nietzschean aphorism when not to Schlegel's aesthetics itself" (50). On the one hand one must guard against an

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34. Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic (London and New York: Verso, 1990), p. 261, fn. 20.

"impressionistic" notion of the fragment--one which, for example, envelopes the aphorism though it is so "dominated by an aesthetic of closure"--and on the other, against a simplistic application of the fragmentary to modernity: "that modern thought or experience is somehow 'fragmentary' might be an instructive feature of yet another *Kulturkritik* of modern times, but only if fragmentation is seen as the situation and the dilemma to which modern thought responds, not as one of its general qualities or properties" (50-1). This is perhaps where many commentators on the Romantic fragment have erred. The fragment is not an essential quality of the "text" of Romanticism, or of "Romanticism" itself, but rather a necessary representation of the "dilemma of the representation of totality"--a dilemma to which *Romantic* thought responds.

(v) Romanticism and the Theory and Practice of Criticism

Criticism, as both mode and matter of this dissertation, merits specific discussion in rounding off this introduction ("squaring" might be more appropriate, in the Schlegelian manner of a preface).[35] Criticism is a subject also taken up by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, as it operates in German Romantic theory as a consubstantial form of Romantic autoproduction. The productive determination of Romantic literature is accompanied by a less often discussed *reflective* determination; as Walter Benjamin has observed,

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35. CF 8: "A good preface must be at once the square root and the square of its book."

"the reflective function of 'critical' discourse, is determined by the Romantics as a constitutive element of literature as such" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, xvii).

Criticism, insofar as it serves to complete or perfect the work of literature, responds to the work's demands for infinite or "hyper-completion" [*parachèvement*]--a demand which is "beyond any finite instance of literature (hence literature's necessarily fragmentary presentation of totality)" (xvii). Through criticism--whether immanent and self-reflexive (irony or formalization), or exoteric critical discourse--literature discovers the very processes by which it is constituted and reconstructs its "operative, poetic capacity beyond any illusions of naturality"--thus becoming "more authentically literary than 'primary' literature" (xviii). In Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, criticism is shown to be the "auto-engenderment" of literature, and both are "functions of the same concept of literature"; further, and this is to restate a fundamental tenet of the "romantic disposition," "literature constitutes its own criticism more radically than any extrinsic commentary" (xviii). The self-sufficiency of the (often fragmentary) work of art is the principle subject, here, of the next chapter.

The coextensive functioning of literature and criticism, the giving of form through criticism to the process of forming in the literary work, suggest that form is always essentially lacking: "the necessity of giving form to form actually indicates the absence of Form in all form, and demands that Form be restored, completed, or

supplemented in any given form" (104-5). Coleridge's prefaces, for example, may be seen as gestures toward this end, and evidence of its difficulty--as allegories, even, of its impossiblity. This demand and a certain failure to meet it arguably bear some relation to the Idea and its representation, and illustrate again the fragmentary exigency on the level of writing in literary production. A similar relation may be seen to hold on a larger scale between a literary epoch and the body of criticism which reconstitutes it.

With respect to Romantic criticism, or literary criticism "about" Romanticism, we have already noted the infectious tendencies of Romantic principles and ideals--or "ideologies." Many critics, such as Marjorie Levinson and Anne Janowitz above, have commented on the need to discuss Romanticism apart from the terms of Romantic discourse; they take their lead from Jerome McGann's extensive investigation of this problem in The Romantic Ideology where he argues that "the scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its works are dominated by a Romantic Ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (McGann, 1). McGann offers an alternative drawn from the critical practice proposed by Heinrich Heine, and from the Marxist critical tradition; both offer a means of reflecting on literary critical thought, while the latter supplies a socio-historical method which McGann finds useful in the reading of Romantic works. Criticism which resituates works of Romantic art *historically* permits the difference of those works from those of the present or of any other age to

emerge freely, and lays bare the ideological contradictions that constitute them. McGann's view is that "Romantic poetry incorporates Romantic Ideology as a drama of the contradictions which are inherent to that ideology" and in this way, "Romantic poetry occupies an implicit--sometimes even an explicit--critical position toward its subject matter" (2). Poetry and literary criticism are, of course, both products of ideology, although McGann's Romantic Ideology is less multifarious than is arguably the case.

Romantic criticism and theory are similarly unsuccessful in disengaging themselves from the drama that McGann identifies, and have tended to represent Romanticism in one of two ways: either by restating or repeating Romantic ideology (typified by Coleridge), or by reifying it according to a form of Hegelian synthesis.[36] Coleridge, for McGann, is the archetypal Romantic theorist. His theorizing "searches (in vain) for a systematic reconciliation of its contradictions," while the Hegelian model confers systematic unity and artistic completeness (and thus represents *itself*, idealist philosophy, rather than Romanticism) (47). Coleridge, writes McGann,

> is a *Romantic* theoretician of Romanticism precisely because his theorizing is produced

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36. McGann argues from Coleridge's statements in Table Talk about the theory and method of his endeavour to "reduce all knowledges into harmony...to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame...the whole truth." Table Talk I, p. 248-49 (McGann cited an earlier edition of the Table Talk; indeed, the above statement is cobbled together from different sentences, a page apart). The Hegelian line of Romantic criticism is drawn from his preface to *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, translated as "Introduction to the Philosophy of Art" in Hegel. Selections, ed. and trans. J. Loewenberg (New York: Scribner, (1929) 1957).

> in scattered and unintegrated forms--in aphorisms, fragments, and partial or unfinished presentations. Coleridge's centrality as Romantic ideologue lies in this broken quality of his massive acts of cultural definition. The compass of his prose works is very large, but it rests--it triumphs--in its fragmentation. (46-7)

Hegel's account, on the other hand, "preserves the ideological terms of its subject" and reproduces "an abstract and sentimental Romanticism, the letter and not the spirit of its subject" (47). Where Coleridge's theory is "brilliant, argumentative, ceaseless, exploratory, incomplete, and not always very clear," Hegel's is "speculative and total, [and] represents the transformation of Romanticism into acculturated forms, into state ideology" (48). In McGann's account, Harold Bloom would be a Romantic (Coleridgean) critic, whereas most modern Romantic criticism has sought out Hegelian reconciliations and emphasized "the ideals of creative imagination, artistic autonomy, and poetic wholeness" (48).

But the point of McGann's analysis is finally to disparage these two modes of representating Romanticism, repetition and reification, in favor of a third that is exemplified by Heine in *Die romantische Schule*. This is the historical model outlined above in which the work of art is viewed antithetically and non-Romantically, in which a dialectical encounter or enlightening conflict is staged between discordant materials, between the past of the work and the present of the critic. This approach is "secondary in its critical position, dialectical in its procedures, and historical in its orientation" (50); it is only possible if

"the historical uniqueness of subject and object is carefully preserved" (56). Historical criticism is, for McGann, "the completed form of criticism" (56), much as criticism was, for Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the completed form of literature.

The importance of criticism as both object and mode of study has been greatly clarified by McGann's cautionary tales. I am, need it be said, anxious neither to repeat nor to reify, and yet my procedures do not fall neatly into his third category. Within a more philosophical than historical framework (although the thrust of McGann's argument is implicitly accepted here), I wish to consider fragmentation as a particularly revealing condition of literary representation generally, and Romantic self-representation particularly. The contribution of criticism to what follows can be summarized quickly. First, Romantic literary criticism (both of its time and of ours) constitutes a screen through which we view (read) "Romanticism"--inescapably, and more or less capably. Second, working from analogical levels of referents and interpretants, the relation of criticism to the work, like the textual fragment to the idea that produces it, can be loosely described as interpretive and therefore allegorical. What relation could this then bear to the intrinsic, or "consubstantial," connection between criticism and the work identified by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, and could it obtain without necessarily partaking of the symbolic in the Coleridgean sense, where "consubstantial" represents, however concretely, what nevertheless remains mystified? These are

issues to be worked out in (indirect) relation to the fragment as such.

(vi) Summary

Recent work on the fragment, prompted in part by the disruption of totalities in contemporary theories of writing and textuality, has returned the fragment to legitimacy in literary studies. Such a recuperation is hardly surprising in the case of English Romantic literature, since so many of its canonical texts are fragments in at least one sense: Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," and "Christabel," Wordsworth's "Prelude"--intended as a preface to his unwritten "Recluse"--Keats' "Hyperion," and "The Fall of Hyperion"--Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" (cut short, ironically, by his death)--to name only the most obvious. The Romantic canon is thus highly susceptible to reconstruction along "fragmentary" lines.

Literary critics, in the last twenty or so years, have begun to hail the fragment as the quintessential Romantic "form"--one which, as Rauber claimed, embodies Romantic ideals and aims more fully than any other. The fragment (in unmistakably high Romantic terms) is said to figure forth the infinite and the indeterminate in a finite, discrete, sequential medium--engaging, furthermore, in an organicist relation with the whole of which it partakes. The fragment, like the symbol or the organic part, is thought to be capable of indicating or implying the absent whole. By identifying itself with the organic part (or being so

identified by readers), the fragment even usurps the ideal place of the whole by offering access to its essential nature--access that is, ironically, less materially compromised than if it had settled into a complete whole. In this way the fragment comes to be seen as the most appropriate signifier of sublime, visionary excess--as the best possible representation of the impossibly ambitious work that the mind aspires to but is unable to achieve. (Appropriating this problem for slightly different ends, deconstructive textual criticism would find this state of affairs to be inevitable.)

In its new role as apologist for the failure of Romantic ideals to materialize, and exemplar of the postmodern textual condition, the "fragment" reveals not only how persistent a problem it organizes (a typically aesthetic epistemological problem), but how problematic a term the "fragment" is. Two distinct and unexamined usages are apparent. The familiar use of the term "fragment" in literary criticism reveals classical assumptions: that the fragment is just a part (detached, broken, incomplete, residual etc.) which can be identified with a whole that it suggests or presupposes. Or, on the other hand, the "fragment" evokes a radical theory, like that examined by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, which puts the very possibility of a whole into question. Rodolphe Gasché, in his foreword to the new edition of Friedrich Schlegel's Philosophical Fragments, characterizes this distinction as pre-Romantic and Romantic, where Romantic refers chiefly to the theory of the fragment enacted, if not elaborated, by Schlegel and

Novalis (and pre-figuring certain aspects of postmodern theory) (p. vii-ix).

I suggest that the English Romantic fragment has not been particularly well-served by this distinction: lacking a sophisticated theoretical apparatus, it is usually interpreted along classical, organicist lines and--unless it is being pressed into the service of deconstruction--has not convincingly and systematically benefitted from the insights of continental theory. In fact, the relevance of a theoretical view of the fragment has been emphatically denied. Levinson, for example, asserts that because there was no *theory* of the fragment as such in English Romanticism, there is nothing to be learned from German (for example) thinking on the matter. Never mind Coleridge's historical role as a conduit for German thought into English intellectual life; never mind the possibility that one arrives, indirectly, at an implied theory of the fragment through theories of the artistic whole. But the principal difficulty is apparent in a footnote to The Literary Absolute in Lee Rust Brown's earlier mentioned article, where he says that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy assist us in distinguishing between the "fragmentary mode" of Coleridge and that of Novalis, Jean-Paul, and the Schlegels. For, "whereas the Germans relied on fragmentary form as an effective mode of presenting an active and dialectical subject which has become unpresentable in terms of any completed text, Coleridge insists that his fragments have full meaning *only* in regard to a literally completable systematic text" (Lee Rust Brown, 245, fn. 10). While it is

true that Coleridge does not relinquish his belief in the possibility of the whole (and does not claim to invest his fragments with that possibility), the epistemological conditions remain the same. In the wake of The Literary Absolute, the question of parts and wholes has become severely problematic--if not explicitly for Coleridge, then certainly for us (as Brown's interest in the problem only reveals).

Is there no other way? Would a more radically philosophical approach to the fragment change the way it has been framed by conventional literary categories, and by an uneasy alliance of Romantic aesthetics and modern criticism? And would such an approach prove relevant for canonical English Romantic fragment poems such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel"? Moreover, does Gasché's distinction between classical and Romantic fragments sustain and/or illuminate this problem in terms that might be useful here? These are additional questions I wish keep in mind over the course of this thesis as I suggest that a reconfiguration of (continental) theory and (English) practice--situated by the problematic of the fragment--is not only relevant but necessary.

The foregoing sections of this Introduction have revealed at length my specific interest in recent critical appropriations of the fragment, coupled with a sense, in some cases, of their complicity with the objects of their study. This complicity I characterized at the outset as in sympathy with Romantic aesthetic theories of organicism and

symbolism in the way that they negotiate what one might call, echoing Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, the Kantian crisis of presentation. The fragment recovers dignity through its necessary relationship to what it failed to adequately render sensible. Or, in Levinson's case, through a combination of historical determinacy and critical focussing. It is that moment of failure, quite simply, that primarily motivates this study--with its complementary interest in what we, as critics and readers, have made of that failure. Thus this introductory chapter has been largely concerned with setting out the parameters for a criticism of the fragment through a "tour" (of a sort) of the critical and, to a lesser extent, the theoretical territory in its current state. The next chapter marks a return to a full engagement with my own argument--attention to the former rather than the latter consideration. My general proposition, as I suggested at the outset, is to consider the fragment as allegorical in relation to its moment of failure, and its moment of failure as analogous in structure to the sublime.

PART TWO: ROMANTIC AESTHETICS AND THE FRAGMENT

CHAPTER 2: ORGANICISM, SYMBOLISM AND THE SUBLIME

The purpose of this section is in many ways continuous with that of the introduction: to establish a fresh basis for a discussion of the fragmentary in Romanticism and current Romantic criticism. Paradoxically, my procedure will involve re-treading less-than-fresh paths: eighteenth-century aesthetics and in particular the theory of the sublime. The difference in the argument I wish to make will emerge from the juxtaposition of these paths and the route chosen through them.

To posit briefly the conclusion to which the chosen route will lead requires, in the first instance, a restatement of my point of departure: dissatisfaction with the ways in which the critical discourse of the fragmentary in Romanticism serves to replicate conventionally Romantic explanatory paradigms for the functioning of the poetic imagination. *Conventionally* Romantic because such paradigms depend on a classical conceptualization of the fragment that allies it intimately with symbolism and organicism (referred to as "organism" by some critics, such as Thomas McFarland) --both staples of Romantic aesthetic theory. In the next chapter, I propose to consider the fragment instead as more closely related to *allegory*, as a system of signification that, especially in modern thought, brings us back to questions of writing and interpretation from the quasi-mystical, transcendental realm of the Romantic symbol (a realm of which allegory, it must be said, traditionally

partook). The purpose of this chapter is to work through the first of these moves: to examine the place the fragmentary now occupies in theories of organicism, symbolism, and the sublime.

There are innumerable commonplaces which attempt to describe or explain the shift that is generally thought to have taken place with the advent of Romantic aesthetics. The work of art as a beautiful imitation of nature is supplanted by a refocussing of attention on the artist (imitator) as creator such that the moment, or act of formation, takes precedence over the formal end product. The representation of the world in the work is supplanted by an interest in the relationship of expression uniting the artist and the work of art. Increasingly, the work of art is said to posit an arbitrary, autonomous whole of its own, in rough accordance with a natural model. The pendulum swings from mimesis to idealism (or expression), sometimes uneasily, sometimes attempting to attain both at once.

Tzvetan Todorov, in Theories of the Symbol, uses the example of Karl Philipp Moritz's Schriften zur Aesthetik und Poetik as a text that speaks for the shift sketched above; for Todorov, Moritz represents something of a transitional figure.[1] Indeed several of the distinctions suggested above that radically attempt to recast the role of the artist as producer and art as production, or construction, are

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1. Theories of the Symbol, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). Todorov's references to and translations of Moritz, which I use, are from the *Kritische Ausgabe* edition (Tübingen, 1962).

credited to Moritz by A.W. Schlegel (although Todorov points out that Shaftesbury, if one would like an English example, and Herder had already exploited the analogy between the divine Creator and the activity of the mortal artist (148)).

The regulating idea behind Moritz's aesthetics is the concept of totality, or what he calls the beautiful. The beautiful object is autonomous and complete in itself, in its *uselessness*, whereas the useful (incomplete) object depends on use for its completion--its ends, the attainment of its goal, are outside itself. This is an idea we see later on in Kant's aesthetic judgement of the beautiful as purposiveness without purpose; the question "what is it for?" cannot be asked of the beautiful object. The goal of art is to be found within the artistic experience--in the Kantian free-play of the imagination--rather than in an external or transcendent world. The mind becomes its own means and end; it becomes autotelic. Furthermore, in Moritz, the beautiful object, like (in theory) symbolic language, is intransitive. The relevance of this for our purposes emerges: given the participatory nature of the incomplete object, it is clear that the fragment has no share in myths of autonomous self-sufficiency, in unity of purpose, but is inescapably part of a temporal, teleological process upon which it depends for its ultimate (but endlessly deferred) completion. Although Coleridge, for example, would have the fragment function as a symbol of the timeless, independent whole of which it would partake, it is nevertheless indelibly historical, revealing something of the moment of its production while seeming, also, to conceal

that moment, to transcend any trace of compromise. The fragment's sublime claims collapse: its end, literally speaking, is within itself because its ends are too far beyond itself.

Moritz offers a second definition of beauty, now commonplace, in which beauty arises from the harmonious relation of its parts. It is his synthesis of this idea with the former that Todorov claims is really new. Because the beautiful object is not in any sense necessary, its parts must be necessary, both with respect to each other and to the whole they constitute. Moritz: "seeing a beautiful object, I must feel pleasure uniquely for its own sake; to this end the absence of external finality has to be compensated for by an internal finality; the object must be something fully realized in itself" (Todorov, 157). Echoes of a Schlegelian theory of the fragment are heard here, but Todorov points out that Moritz's terminology is unstable: "sometimes he opposes the absence of ends to the presence of finality, sometimes he opposes internal and external finalities" (157). The important link turns out to be that of internal coherence with a notion of external intransitivity--internal purpose coincides with the presence of a "systematic character."

In the process of making art, then, art becomes superior to nature; the realization of art in itself transforms external finality into internal finality. "The artist must seek to replace the end, which in nature is always exterior to the object, within this object itself, and thus render it fully realized in itself. Then we see a

whole where before we saw only parts with divergent purposes" (158). This concentrated signifying capacity renders artistic language untranslatable and unexplainable. The need for explanation in a work of art would indicate imperfection, since the work of art should constitute its own adequate description through the harmonious interplay of its parts--a description which cannot be repeated in any other form. Such intransitive signification is achieved by art, but cannot be rendered in (other) words. The claim is advanced (of which Coleridge would surely approve) that "signification in art is an interpenetration of the signifier and the signified; all distance between the two is abolished" (162).

Yet it is a generic feature of every sign that it refers to something beyond itself. Similarly, the reciprocal determination of parts among themselves and with the whole point to an epistemological impasse: how can we know the one when such knowledge depends upon and implies a knowledge of the other? Schelling articulates this contradiction precisely: "Since the idea of the whole cannot in fact become clear save through its development in the individual parts, while those parts, on the other hand, are possible only through the idea of the whole, there seems to be a contradiction here."[2] One might compare this to Coleridge on the two axioms underlying the idea of organic form: "The first of the axioms is: In every true whole, the whole is prior to its parts; the second: The parts

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2. System of Transcendental Idealism, trans. P. Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 228.

constituting the whole are necessarily prior to the whole thus constituted. It is clear that both in the term Whole, and the term Parts, there must lurk a double meaning."[3] Indeed, it is this ambivalent, double determination (whole-as-part, part-as-whole) that inflects apprehension of the fragment.

Coleridge's suspicion is undeniably well placed. It seems to have fallen to other discourses--knowledge, interpretation, criticism--to formulate a way out of the "hermeneutic circle" described above. If nothing further can be said *by* the perfect work of art in its moment of becoming, of its production, all consumption of the product can hope to say is something *about* that work, to reconstruct that productive moment in another form. That form is ultimately allegorical in relation to the (impossibly symbolic) moment of the work of art; Moritz's beautiful object does finally, like allegory, like every sign, require something beyond itself. In this sense, a fragment may be more productively thought of as a *commentary* on, rather than a necessary part of, the work of art that failed to materialize. It would thus function by analogy to the recuperative act of interpretation--representing rather than presenting, to borrow a Kantian distinction--representing, in itself, the impossibility of the *im*mediate.

With respect to the fragment, however, the theories of organicism and symbolism sketched quickly above merit a more

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3. See above, Introduction; McFarland, p.52.

detailed consideration. When Coleridge writes in "Religious Musings":

> 'Tis the sublime of man,
> Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves
> Parts of proportions of one wondrous whole!
> (lines 126-28)

he is, quite clearly, making a claim for a fraternity of men bound into diffuse one-ness in God.[4] It is in fact the super-added presence of God in all "that doth make all one whole" (l. 131). In the absence of God as an organizing principle, the disengaged individual part has surely fallen. When this organic model is applied to literature and specifically to the critical discourse of literature about itself, it is easy to see how the incomplete, the fragmentary, could be regarded as an indication of profound failure--revealing an utter lack of internal organic coherence. But it is precisely such failure, in the Romantic period, that reveals the ultimate untenability of a theory of organicism--something of a paradox since Romanticism is often explained by its apparent subscription to such a theory. Significantly, the fallen fragment is recuperated in Romantic theory as symbolic evidence of necessarily incomplete organic processes, and therefore as a new sort of suggestive success.

Coleridge uses the theory of organicism as an ideal explanatory model for natural phenomena, and for the interconnected relationships between man, nature, and God. It became common among theorists of his day, particularly in Germany, to apply an organic model to the unfolding of human

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4. PW, pp. 113-14.

history, so that change, as M.H. Abrams has put it, "instead of a meaningless Heracleitean flux, is conceived to be the orderly emergence of inner forms, and is held to constitute the very essence of things."[5] The same is true of the historical development of art: each new advance, claimed Friedrich Schlegel, "unfolds out of the preceding one as if of its own accord, and contains the complete germ of the following stage."[6] By extension, the organic becomes a useful model for the literary critic to judge works of art by: as a paradigm for the balanced relationship between parts and wholes in the ideal work of art, the theory has been in circulation since antiquity.[7] Thus Coleridge was able, in concert with other Romantics (in particular, German Romantic theorists), to adapt a notion of the literary text as an autonomous or internally coherent organism into a transcendental system of idealist poetics. Certain difficulties accompany such an elevation of the textual to trans-historical status: it allows for the emergence, as Juliet Sychrava has pointed out, of an ambiguity "between the verbal and the existential, even the biological, domains."[8] More than an ambiguity--rather, an utter disregard for the difference.

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5. The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 219.
6. Ueber das Studium der Griechischen Poesie in Jugendschriften, I, 145; Abrams, p. 219.
7. See, for example, Gian N.G. Orsini, Organic Unity in Ancient and Later Poetics (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975).
8. Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 51.

Some of the problems posed by the theory of organicism emerged here in my introductory comments on Thomas McFarland's work on Romantic "diasparaction." He pointed out that since the organic is finally a model for a process, it must always necessarily be in a state of achieving and can therefore only gesture toward a whole, rather than actually embody one. Sychrava breaks this down into an uneasy combination of process and product, which in its turn conflates two conflicting models of the poem (as a finished, objective artifact, and as a living record of subjective experience):

> Romantic aesthetics sustains a double perspective on to poetry. It is at once a *process* ("Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry...it is always becoming...it can never be completed") and a *product*, an organic whole ("an object of nature that wants to become an object of art"). This is how an account of poetry as subjective experience--creative or critical--was combined with an account of the poem as object.[9]

Yet eternal process renders arrival at a final product impossible. Certain epistemological problems arise: how, for example, can there be a reliable conception of a whole in the absence of an experience of a whole, when such wholes are, as McFarland claimed, only provisional, contingent, or hypothetical? How can a fragment, as we have seen, be identified as such unless there is a clear conception of a whole from which it has broken away?

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9. Sychrava, p. 51; her own quotations are from Friedrich Schlegel's aphorisms.

The Romantic theory of symbolism, intimately allied with organicism (symbolism and organicism both theorize a relationship between parts and wholes), is frequently summoned to explain how, at least within the realm of aesthetics, such epistemological problems can be smoothed over. The symbol, particularly in the Coleridgean schema, is akin to the organic part. It functions like a synecdoche, insofar as it is the present part that indicates an absent whole. Furthermore, it has a special, motivated relationship with that whole, like the organic part which Kant, and Coleridge after him, claimed is "reciprocally both ends and means."[10] Coleridge, in The Statesman's Manual, thus insists on a link between the representative and the semantic functions of language:

> True natural philosophy is comprized in the study of the science and language of *symbols*. The power delegated to nature is all in every part: and by a symbol I mean, not a metaphor or allegory or any other figure of speech or form of fancy, but an actual and essential part of that, the whole of which it represents. (SM, 79)

But as McFarland put it in his exposition of the theory of symbolism's limitations, because the symbol's full referent is, by definition, absent, all that is real or readily available is the "diasparact," the symbol itself. He claims that this would be true of any theory of the symbol:

> In every symbol, the mind proceeds from the contemplation of a fragment of reality to the apprehension but not the comprehension (to

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10. See above, p. 21.

> use a distinction favored by Coleridge and Kant before him) of a larger entity, which in direct proportion to the grandeur of its putative wholeness eludes all conceiving. (27)

In spite of the essential elusiveness of the symbol, Lee Rust Brown argues that the fragment is the only *intelligible* form of the symbol--that "whole" texts could never be, properly speaking, symbolic. Examining the peculiarities (rather than, he claims, an idealized construction) of Coleridge's theory of the symbol, he suggests that "given its claim to a particular sort of poetic semiosis," the fragment fits Coleridge's definition "insofar as the unity it enunciates is the whole poem of which it is a part."[11] The difficulty, I suggest, is with both the nature of that enunciation and with the status and location of the "whole."

In McFarland's insightful analysis, the larger awareness supplied by the symbol turns out to be *less* comprehensible than the "diasparactive" symbol. This must also, then, be true of the fragment where the whole is, necessarily, an elusive (or even absent) conception. The indirect representation of the universal provided by the particular is as a "living and momentary revelation of the *Unerforschlichen*," the impenetrable (McFarland, 31). It is highly significant that however grand the claims for the

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11. Lee Rust Brown, pp. 238-39. He continues: "the coincidence of the theory of the symbol with the literal appearance of the poetic fragment [might be expressed] in the following theorem: a textual object qualifies as 'symbolic' if the reality it signifies happens to be the textual matrix from which it has been excerpted" (239). It is only in this way that the fragment could maintain its show of semiotic continuity. My argument, as the balance of this chapter and the analysis of the sublime will show, is that the fragment evinces a basic semiotic *discontinuity*.

symbol become, they are nevertheless contingent upon the undermining resistance of the symbolized content: the incomprehensible, the impenetrable. This resistance must speak for the impossibility of those claims, and yet, as the claims get grander, this resistance offers increasingly essential support for the symbol's necessarily mysterious workings. It is as though the theory, in Romanticism at least, remains unperturbed by its contradictions. Goethe:

> Symbol transfers the appearance into the idea, the idea into an image, in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unattainable, and, even if expressed in all languages remains in fact inexpressible.[12]

And from the inexpressible, it is but a short jump to include infinity among the symbol's integral attributes. As suggested by both D.F. Rauber and McFarland above, the mechanics of incompletion ultimately partake of the logic of infinity--which in turn suggests a relationship between symbolism and the sublime.

Insofar as the symbol is a partial expression of the inexpressible and infinite whole, it would at first sight appear to share a common structure with sublimity. The sublime is also an attempt to represent (project, apprehend) limitlessness through the limited. McFarland again:

> The sublime, in other words, is the perception of very large fragments, such as mountains, with the accompanying awareness that this largeness implies still larger conceptions [that can have no such

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12. Maximen und Reflexionen, quoted in McFarland, p. 30.

> objectivization and therefore cannot be compared]. The sublime is, so to speak, an implied comparison in which only the diasparactive object exists. (29)

For McFarland, however, the sublime is a negative symbol in that it turns the mind inward "to become aware of the unboundedness within itself, whereas the symbolic awareness seeks unboundedness within the implications of the object" (30).

In Edmund Burke's treatise of 1757, the emphasis remains firmly placed on the object (although his implicit interest is in how sublime and beautiful qualities in objects, people, and natural phenomena impress themselves--in a Lockean sense--upon the imagination).[13] Although much of Burke's enquiry seeks out the objective conditions that produce sensations of the sublime in the viewer, he treats both objects and their images, or representations in the mind, as equal contributors to his empiricist aesthetic system. Extrapolated from observation and memory, Burke's classifications are affected (even in his enquiry) by the vagaries of context and experience--as he himself admits--and so risk becoming distinctly unsystematic.[14]

Commentators credit Burke with emphasizing, for the first time, the irrational and violent aspects of sublime experience. Many producers of Burke's sublime effects, such as terror, obscurity, vastness and infinity, were quickly

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13. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, rev. ed. 1987). For an account of the development of theories of the sublime over the course of the eighteenth century, see Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960).
14. See, for example, pp. 129-31.

absorbed into eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse, and, as they draw their importance for the fragmentary from the operations of the imagination, these sublime effects will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four. In terms of literal--if organic--fragments, Burke observes, in familiar terms, that the sublime in its infinite aspect can be experienced in an unfinished object:

> Infinity, though of another kind, causes much of our pleasure in agreeable, as well as of our delight in sublime images. The spring is the pleasantest of the seasons; and the young of most animals, though far from being compleatly fashioned, afford a more agreeable sensation than the full grown; because the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more, and does not acquiesce in the present object of the sense. In unfinished sketches of drawing, I have often seen something which pleased me beyond the best finishing; and this I believe proceeds from the cause I have just now assigned. (77)

The infinite or the unlimited is akin to creative incompletion (like the organic part) in an object and engages the imagination of the beholder accordingly. A rudimentary explanation of the sublime power of the fragmentary is often advanced along these lines.

Burke centers his investigation of the psychology of the sublime on the objects or conditions which induce *sensations* of beauty and sublimity. However Kant, some years later, approaches the question with greater philosophical rigour and attempts to adapt Burke's subjective sensations into a system of greater universal applicability. In the third Critique, the aesthetic experience is formulated by a movement from the perception

of an object to the response it *typically* evokes. Where Burke conflates the aesthetic object and its representation in the mind, Kant emphasizes the lack of identity between the object and its mental image, and diminishes the role of affect in aesthetic experience. Indeed, the status of the mental image is of primary importance.

Where Burke's classifications incorporate an assortment of items (ambition, loud sounds, colour), some of which occupy more than one category, Kant restricts the sublime to nature and to natural causes, to "crude" nature. One of several key propositions in Burke which Kant retains, however, is that of limitlessness: "the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality."[15] Unlimited unity, or unified limitlessness, again suggests the epistemological problem posed by the part and the whole, and locates an anxiety about the relationship between the particular and the general that Frances Ferguson, in a recent book on the sublime, claims is "*the* characteristically aesthetic epistemological problem."[16]

Pleasure, so central to Burke's account of sublimity, is characterized by Kant as indirect and negative, "being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more

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15. The Critique of Judgement, p. 90.
16. Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 31.

powerful" (Kant, 91). The experience of the sublime brings to consciousness discord between the imagination and reason: the imagination is overwhelmed, and reason, intervening to return order to the mind, confirms itself through this very failure of the imagination. Its power to do so provides the "discharge all the more powerful."

The sublime is nevertheless of secondary importance to Kant largely because, unlike the beautiful, it does not indicate finality in nature--"but only in the possible *employment* of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature" (93). It is merely "an attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature" and this "makes the theory of the sublime a mere appendage to the aesthetic estimate of the finality of nature, because it does not give a representation of any particular form in nature, *but involves no more than the development by the imagination of its own representation*" (93, emphasis mine). This last point seems to me crucial as it suggests how the sublime could be important (disruptive) with respect to the written text. In making the representation of imaginative experience and objective experience incommensurate, the constraints upon representation, and hence upon the literary work, become apparent. Poetry registers but cannot resolve this crisis in representation. Kant's dismissal of the sublime is, perhaps, a repudiation of the inevitable.

These issues are taken up by Thomas Weiskel in <u>The Romantic Sublime</u>. He isolates two dimensions of unattainability in Kant's formulation: "the imagination's

inability to comprehend or represent the object comes to signify the imagination's relation to the ideas of reason" while in the case of the beautiful, "the natural object itself comes to signify." In the sublime it is "a *relation* to the object--the negative relation of unattainability--[that] becomes the signifier in the aesthetic order of meaning."[17] "'Unattainability' (*Unerreichbarkeit*) is regarded as a 'presentation' (*Darstellung*): indeterminacy signifies" (28).

As Weiskel points out, "the sublime comes to be associated both with the failure of clear thought and with matters beyond determinate perception." The function of the sublime is "to legitimate the necessary discontinuities in the classical scheme of signification and to justify the specific affective experience which these discontinuities entailed" (17). In semiotic terms, this would amount to a disruption between idea and word--the "difficulty" (a notion shared by Burke, Kant and others) overcome through the experience of the sublime (for example in the apprehension of vast objects) "is the affective correlative of a semiotic discontinuity in the inexplicable passage between one order or discourse and another" (17). In thinking of literature in terms suggested by this model, Weiskel cites and embellishes Paul Goodman's more recent definition of the sublime as the "actual experience of a tendency of combinations to break [fragment] the aesthetic surface"[18]--a

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17. The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1976) 1986) p. 23.
18. Weiskel is quoting Paul Goodman from The Structure of Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954),

formulation which thoroughly upsets a Longinian emphasis on organic continuity and draws instead from the Kantian moment of the sublime in which "the surface is broken, the discourse breaks down, and the faculties are checked or suspended: a discontinuity opens between what can be grasped and what is felt to be meaningful" (21).[19]

In a later chapter on the logic of terror, Weiskel looks at the mental processes of Kant's dynamic sublime and finds that "we perceive again that the intentional structure of the negative sublime as a whole implies the conversion of the outer world into a symbol for the mind's relation to itself" (85). This lack of a necessary grounding in the outside world, in the object, suggests that if pushed, Kant's analytic of the sublime ceases to be about aesthetic judgement--and Weiskel suggests that this is why "the subsequent tradition of idealist aesthetics--in Schiller, Hegel, and all their epigoni down to Herbert Marcuse--ignores the sublime and propounds the notion of the beautiful as the union of the sensible and the ideal" (85).[20] The lack of necessary grounding of the sublime in

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p. 276.

19. This is not unlike the tension in the symbol between the world of the senses and the world of ideas, which Gadamer discusses in Truth and Method (Second, revised edition; New York: Crossroad, 1989). Rather than dissolving this tension, as it purports to do, the symbol "points up a disproportion between form and essence, expression and content" (78). This disproportion, which is also a vacillation, is essential and peculiar to the symbol. This is what enables it to signify beyond its material, sensory appearance; it at once enables and disables a Romantic theory of the symbol.

20. This is not, strictly speaking true: Schiller theorizes a great deal on the sublime and Hegel devotes a section of his Aesthetics to "The Symbolism of the Sublime." See Hegel, G.W.F., Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Granted,

the object also suggests that it can *no longer* be thought to partake of the structure of the symbolic. In thinking of the sublime as a *negative* or inverted symbol, or of the experience of the sublime as a symbol for the workings of the mind as Weiskel does above, the relationship deemed symbolic is really one of analogy rather than identity or consubstantiality--and therefore not symbolic at all, in the strict sense proposed by the Romantics and Coleridge in particular.

The apparent formlessness of the sublime is taken up by Derrida in "Parergon."[21] He points out that since Kant there cannot be an object in nature that is, properly speaking, sublime; sublimity finds its place within ideas of reason, and "it therefore refuses all adequate presentation":

> But how can this unpresentable thing present itself?.... We must ask ourselves this: if the sublime is not contained in a finite natural or artificial object, no more is it the infinite idea itself. It inadequately presents the infinite in the finite and delimits it violently therein. Inadequation (*Unangemessenheit*), excessiveness, incommensurability are presented, let themselves be presented,...as that inadequation itself. Presentation is inadequate to the idea of reason but it is presented in its very inadequation, adequate to its inadequation. The inadequation of presentation is presented. As inadequation,

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Hegel's sublime is unlike anyone else's. As Paul de Man has put it, "the moment Hegel calls the sublime is the moment of radical and definitive separation between the order of discourse and the order of the sacred"; it is the "absolutely beautiful"; see de Man, "Hegel on the Sublime" in Displacement: Derrida and After, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 144.

21. The Truth in Painting, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: The University of Chigaco Press, 1987).

> it does not belong to the natural sensible order, nor to nature in general, but to the mind....the principle of the sublime must therefore be sought in ourselves who *project* (*hineinbringen*) the sublime into nature, ourselves as rational beings. (p. 131-32)

The sublime disrupts its own presentation so that the inadequacy of that presentation is presented. In addition to the absence of formal integrity, the sublime is plagued by its fundamental impossiblity: not only does the sublime experience represent impossibility inadequately, it is therefore itself impossible. And yet the sublime is not completely undone, it remains representative of a certain problematic within the domain of the mental image.

This problematic has an obvious place in the written representation of the mental image. It would be clearly wrong to imply that every fragmentary poem comes about because of the overwhelming sublimity of its content (although it does begin to look like this at the end of the eighteenth century), but by thinking of the process of textual breakdown as somehow analogous, we readily see that the fragment--like the sublime--no longer fits, as McFarland would have it, in the realm of the symbol. The fragment evinces the *discontinuity* between idea and word that Weiskel remarked between sensation and idea in the natural sublime. In "Parergon," Derrida goes on to discuss this break with symbolism:

> In breaking with symbolism, the internal infinity becomes inaccessible and inexpressible. Its presentation can no longer be symbolic (in the Hegelian or Saussurean sense of the term, which implies participation or analogical resemblance between the symbol and what it symbolizes).

> The content (the infinite idea, in the position of signified and no longer of symbolized) destroys the signifier or the representer. It expresses itself only by marking in its expression the annihilation of expression.... More precisely, form, the act of forming (*Gestalten*), is destroyed through what it expresses, explains, or interprets. (132-33)

Not only is a notion of the *form* of the fragment revealed to be oxymoronic, any notion of form is devastated by its own formative processes. Presenting this argument here brings with it an obvious danger--the argument of *this* text, by implication, being so undone (a thesis of fragments on fragments), or rendered conceptually untenable.

Without finessing the implications of the deconstructive critique, I nevertheless wish to reiterate what must amount to a very Kantian argument. The sublime presents us with an intriguing paradox: the suprasensible Idea refuses all representation, but this refusal is nevertheless experienced through the sublime. Even though representation fails us, we are left with an idea of the sublime object's magnitude, with some presentiment of the Thing that we are denied. The unrepresentable dimension is thus presented negatively. As Slavoj Zizek succintly puts it in The Sublime Object of Ideology, "the gap between phenomenon and Thing-in-itself, is abolished in a negative way, because in it the phenomenon's very inability to represent the Thing adequately *is inscribed in the phenomenon itself*--or, as Kant puts it, 'even if the Ideas of reason can be in no way adequately represented [in the sensuous-phenomenal world], they can be revived and evoked

in the mind by means of this very inadequacy which can be presented in a sensuous way'."[22]

> We have no reason to fear that the feeling of the Sublime will suffer from an abstract mode of presentation like this, which is altogether negative as to what is sensuous. For though the imagination, no doubt, finds nothing beyond the sensible world to which it can lay hold, still this thrusting aside of the sensible barriers gives it a feeling of being unbounded; and that removal is thus a presentation of the infinite. As such it can never be anything more than a negative presentation--but still it expands the soul. (Kant, 127)

Although the representation of the sublime is negative, it partakes of the logic of representation even while pushing its limits. Hegel's critique of the Kantian sublime is quite subtle, and yet very Kantian. The sublime moment remains dialectical, the inadequate presentation is not only the only one possible, but also the most appropriate; the problem lies in Kant's presupposition "that the Thing-in-itself exists as something positively given beyond the field of representation, of phenomenality; the breakdown of phenomenality, the experience of phenomena, is for him only an 'external reflection', only a way of indicating, within the domain of phenomenality, this transcendent dimension of the Thing which persists in itself beyond phenomenality" (Zizek, 205). For Hegel, there is nothing, no Thing, beyond the field of representation, of phenomenality. "The experience of radical negativity, of the radical inadequacy of all phenomena to the Idea, the experience of the radical

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22. The Sublime Object of Ideology (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 203.

fissure between the two--this experience is already *Idea itself as 'pure', radical negativity*" (205). Kant's Thing-in-itself is really nothing *but* radical negativity--"the negative experience of the Thing must change into the experience of the Thing-in-itself as radical negativity" (206). From the notion of the sublime, finally, one must "subtract its transcendent presupposition" and "limit ourselves to what is strictly immanent to this experience,...to the negative self-relationship of the representation" (206).

The existence or nonexistence of the Thing-in-itself beyond representation must be, for the moment, set aside--but certainly not forgotten. We, too, must subtract the "transcendent presupposition" of the fragment and consider only what is "strictly immanent"--in this case, its representation of a negative self-relationship with a whole. Our concern is with the fragmentary and/as inadequate representation, and although the question "representation of what?" will come often to mind, I wish to consider the fragmentary as evidence of the radical negativity of the sublime, but also as a representation of negativity that is nevertheless written and read. The sublime moment, as we have seen, is subject to representation and interpretation, and this is where the link with allegory emerges. I use the term allegory to indicate an interpretive mode. In the breakdown of the semiotic relation noted by Weiskel above, another semiotic relation needs to intervene: an interpretant replaces a referent. Furthermore, allegorical signification can be seen as an analogue of writing itself--

a production of meaning out of fragments quite detached from a trans-historical system of organic totality.

CHAPTER 3: ALLEGORY AND THE FRAGMENTARY

To understand allegory as an effect of interpretation is to speak of both allegory and interpretation in very broad terms. It is also to acknowledge the impact of Saussure's linguistics on twentieth-century notions of referentiality. If the sign is arbitrary, interpretation can arguably take priority over reference. This possibility inflects Paul de Man's reading, in "Semiology and Rhetoric," of C.S. Peirce's definition of the sign:

> He insists, as is well known, on the necessary presence of a third element, called the interpretant, within any relationship that the sign entertains with its object. The sign is to be interpreted if we are to understand the idea it is to convey, and this is so because the sign is not the thing but the meaning derived from the thing by a process here called representation that is not simply generative, i.e., dependent on a univocal origin.[1]

The interpretive process through which meaning is ascribed to a text takes the form of critical commentary, and as Northrop Frye states in Anatomy of Criticism, "it is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of

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1. Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 8-9. C.S. Peirce trichotomizes the linguistic sign into icon, index and symbol, and each division has a temporal correlative: an icon to past experience, index to the present, and symbol--in a move which recalls infinity as an attribute of the symbol--to the future. See Collected Papers, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, (1933) 1960).

poetic imagery."[2] My intention is not so much to argue with de Man for the priority of that process, as to emphasize the allegorical operation of interpretation, and to tease out a link between allegory and the referential status or function of the fragment.

We need first to consider what is meant by allegory, or perhaps what *can* be meant by allegory as the term, like "symbol," has had a long and somewhat varied history of use. From its etymology, the Greek *allos* (meaning other) and *agoreuein* (to speak), comes its general meaning: to speak otherwise, to say that something is what it is not.[3] Hence its reputation for obliquity and obscurity, and hence its implication in the mystificatory system of the transcendental (some of this allegory shares, interestingly, with the sublime). Earliest uses of the word, in Quintillian for example, define it as a continuous metaphor (Whitman, 265); an allegory is a sustained fiction in which one set of literal, narrative elements stand in for or continuously refer to a simultaneous or structurally parallel set of events or ideas (which could be natural, historical, moral, philosophical, and so on).[4]

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2. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 89.
3. For a detailed and fascinating treatment of this etymology, of the way in which the two parts of the word conflict with each other at their source, see Appendix I, "On the History of the Term 'Allegory'" in Jon Whitman, Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).
4. See "Allegory" in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger et al., (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965; revised edition, 1993). The revised entry, written by Jon Whitman, reflects recent thinking on the problem of allegory--that is, interprets it broadly to explicitly include the aspects I emphasize here, such as its identification of the "general tensions

As allegory posits *both* a divergence and a correspondence between actual and apparent meaning, it tends to be in conflict with itself. If the divergence between what is said and what is meant is great, the allegorical correspondence becomes less tenable, and the inverse also holds true: the more obvious the correspondence, the less divergent (and therefore the less allegorical) the fiction becomes with respect to the truth it otherwise speaks. This conflict is particularly apparent in interpretive allegory, one of two major allegorical traditions--and present in the other, allegorical composition.[5] The problematics of the fragment suggest a link with those of allegorical interpretation and the uneasy divergence/correspondence model, rather than with the rhetorical emphasis of allegorical composition. Reading an allegory is, as Angus Fletcher points out, an inferential process: "...the essence of interpretive allegory, is a natural response to any fiction that is elliptical or enigmatic in any way."[6]

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attributed to literary language--from the aspiration of works to express the 'inexpressible' (F. Schlegel, Gespräch über die Poesie, 1800) [a quality claimed for symbol, as above] to the liability of narratives to betray conflicts in their own value systems (de Man, 1979)" (p. 31).

5. Jon Whitman, in the text mentioned above (fn. 3), articulates this distinction as follows: "Insofar as the emphasis is placed on *saying* other than what is meant, allegorical theory and practice is largely a grammatical or rhetorical matter, concentrating on the *compositional* technique of creating an allegorical text. This is the focus of one of the two traditions of allegory, allegorical composition. Insofar as the emphasis is placed on *meaning* other than what is said, allegorical theory and practice is largely a philosophic or an exegetical matter, stressing the *interpretive* technique of extracting meaning from a text already written. This is the focus of the other tradition of allegory, allegorical interpretation" (264).

6. Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 86.

Insofar as a fragment is conventionally felt to be symbolically representative of a whole truth, it would appear to have little in common with the individual and abstract elements which comprise an allegory. Here, however, a neat correspondence is not sought: a fragment is not necessarily part of an allegory that remains unfinished, but could be allegorical in relation to the truth that eludes it. Many canonical allegories, for example The Faerie Queene, are indeed unfinished. Fletcher argues that progress in allegorical fiction, its ritualistic dimensions, can go on *ad infinitum* as there is "no inherent 'organic' limit of magnitude" (174), and he points out later that all analogies are incomplete and incompletable, and allegory simply records this analogical relation in a dramatic or narrative form; "by definition there is no such thing as the whole of any analogy" (177). Hence the possiblity that allegory is *itself* inherently fragmentary. At the very least, allegory emphasizes fragmentation, and makes the fragment *more* fragmentary, as it reveals the abyss between the singular and the general that the rhetoric of the symbol attempts to bridge or conceal. A symbolic reading of the fragment would have it coincide with its origins and abolish all distance between reference and referent; according to an allegorical reading, the fragment represents an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate that distance. Allegory, says de Man, "designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to

coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference."[7]

These arguments--Frye's, Fletcher's, de Man's--have helped to shape the re-evaluation of allegory that has taken place in recent decades. This re-evaluation has been a necessary corrective to Coleridge's famous categorical denunciation of allegory in favour of symbol. Indeed, the familiar opposition between these terms is largely a Romantic invention. Gadamer points out in Truth and Method that as "the aesthetic opposition between allegory and symbol--which seems self-evident to us--has been philosophically elaborated only during the last two centuries...that the question to be asked is rather how the need for this distinction and opposition arose" (Gadamer, 72). Both terms were used interchangeably before the end of the eighteenth century--by Winckelmann, for example--and indeed both words have something in common (both stand for something else; in both cases meaning is not a product of the material appearance or sound, but of something beyond it). Current usage of these terms remains inflected by their transformation in Romantic aesthetic theory, in which symbol became "the coincidence of the sensible and the non-sensible" and allegory, "the meaningful relation of the sensible and the non-sensible" (74). This transformation

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7. "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, second, rev. ed. 1983), p. 207. The temporal associations of the terms allegory and symbol are also explored by Jon Whitman in "From the Textual to the Temporal: Early Christian 'Allegory' and Early Romantic 'Symbol'," NLH 22 (1991).

must be traced before a modern theory of allegory may be seen to be relevant. Tzvetan Todorov, in Theories of the Symbol, outlines in some detail the shift in interest, semantics and value from allegory to symbol; what follows is a selective sketch.[8]

Todorov argued that until 1790, symbol was roughly synonymous with terms like allegory, emblem, and hieroglyph, or else it designated arbitrary and abstract signs such as mathematical symbols--rather like the abstract designation allegory came to be criticised for. Kant is accredited with reversing the usage of "symbol," shifting it from the domain of abstract reason "to the intuitive and sense-based manner of apprehending things" (Todorov, 200). Kant's contrast of the symbolic and the schematic (indirect and direct representation) theorizes the symbolic in such a way that its metaphysical, theological inexhaustibility is revealed (see Gadamer, p. 75). Schiller adopted this new usage and communicated it to Goethe through their correspondence.[9] Gadamer observes that it is in this correspondence that this new concept of the symbol is to be found and examines the passages in question (76). Goethe, however, is credited with first articulating a clear distinction between symbol and allegory, and Todorov examines texts written at different stages of Goethe's life to illustrate the range of oppositions that come into play.

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8. See Todorov, pp. 198-221.
9. Patricia A. Ward, in "Coleridge's Critical Theory of the Symbol" Texas Studies in Language and Literature 8 (1966), traces in some detail this development in Schiller, and suggests that it was probably through Schiller that Coleridge, given his reading of Schiller, evolved his early concept of the symbol.

The two terms come to be differentiated on several levels. First of all, allegory is transitive and symbol intransitive. In allegory, there is direct and instantaneous passage between the allegorical sign and knowledge of what is signified, whereas the symbolic sign retains its opacity. As we saw in the previous chapter, it depends on a certain resistance to reductive interpretation. Both signify, but the symbol is synthetic, speaking to both perception and intellection, while allegory speaks to intellection alone. Because allegory signifies directly ("its perceptible face has no reason for being save to transmit a meaning"), it only designates and does not represent. Because it is present first of all for itself, signifying only indirectly, the symbol first of all represents, and then has a potential capacity to designate as well (201).

Both symbol and allegory propose a relation between the particular and the general. In allegory, the poet seeks the particular instance for the universal case; using the particular as merely an example of the general, the particular thus signifies the general. In a symbol, on the other hand, one is to see the universal in the particular: the symbol represents only the particular, but in grasping it fully, the general is seized upon as well--a union of particular and general is achieved. Schelling writes in 1802 of the demand (satisfied by the symbolic understanding of mythology) for "absolute artistic representation: representation with *complete indifference*, so that the universal *is* wholly the particular, and the particular is at

the same time wholly the universal, and does not simply mean it."[10] To express the universal in this way is the proper task of the poet, and the true nature of poetry. Indeed the symbol, notes Gadamer, "is opposed to allegory...as art is opposed to non-art" (75).

Broadly speaking--summarizing, again, in terms of the debate--the symbol is a motivated, natural sign, immediately comprehensible to all. As a sign, allegory is arbitrary and therefore conventional and unnatural; it requires initiation, it needs to be learned. It is unmotivated, functional, utilitarian, transitive, and valueless in itself. Allegory as concept is perceived in opposition to symbol as idea. Allegory is expressible because its meaning is finite, while symbol is fundamentally inexpressible because it is infinite and inexhaustible. Meaning is thus completed, ended, or dead in allegory, but active and living in the symbol. In Schlegel, symbol is identified with the imagination which reconciles opposite or discordant qualities, but allegory only with arbitrary association (therefore making it a product of fancy); this later influences Coleridge's distinction between allegory and symbol, and informs his dissociation of fancy from the imagination. The interestedness of the value shift from allegory to symbol is noteworthy, for it divests allegory of its history--divests allegory of its own theological and transcendentalist tendencies (discussed here at the outset) and reinvests them in the symbol. Allegory is demystified

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10. Schelling, Philosophie der Kunst (1802), Sämmtliche Werke, part 1, V, p. 411; quoted in Gadamer, p. 77.

and symbol mystified (only to be de-mystified in turn in the late twentieth century); some additional reasons for this value shift will be considered below in discussing Walter Benjamin's redemption of allegory from relative insignificance.

Coleridge's denunciation of allegory is hardly surprising in this context, and even less surprising when his certain familiarity with the context is taken into account. The Kantian terms in which Goethe makes his distinction clear find corresponding terms in Coleridge. Goethe:

> Allegory changes a phenomenon into a concept, a concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept is still limited and completely kept and held in the image and expressed by it....[while symbolism] changes the phenomenon into the idea, the idea into the image, in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in the image, and will remain inexpressible even though expressed in all languages.[11]

Coleridge:

> Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol...is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in

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11. Cited by Wellek in A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955-), I, 211; Goethe, Maximen und Reflexionen, ed. M. Hecker (Weimar, 1907), nos. 1112 and 1113. It should be pointed out that Goethe's theory of the symbol remains "classical" compared to the "romantic" rethinking of the symbol undertaken by Schelling and Schlegel.

> the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. (SM, 30)

The essential points set out above distinguishing symbol from allegory are contained or implied in these crucial passages--indeed, Coleridge's Statesman's Manual passage is the *locus classicus* for the distinction in the English tradition, and will be taken up here at length. In short, allegory is viewed as a fanciful, conceptual matter. The symbol is both a fusion and representative of the ultimate, infinite reality of the universe, and this idea is evolved not only through familiarity with Goethe and Schiller, but perhaps more importantly with Schelling and Schlegel. Patricia Ward points out, in defense of this latter point, that Coleridge read Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature (1809) during his 1811-12 lecture series, and that Coleridge's significant pronouncements on the distinction to be made between symbol and allegory date from after 1811.[12] The influence of German Romantic thought on Coleridge does not, however, need to be argued again here. As Patricia Ward also points out, Coleridge's early conception of the symbol, apparent in "Religious Musings" and in his early poetry (such as "The Eolian Harp," "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," and so on), is consistent with his later theory. In these poems, says Ward, nature is expained as "symbolic of the infinite, not the infinite itself" (26). His interest in things that, as he puts it,

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12. "Coleridge's Critical Theory of the Symbol." See esp. pp. 24-6.

"counterfeit infinity" reveals the same subtle distinction between representation (analogy or likeness) and identity. Any hint of a dichotomy, however, gives way to a Coleridgean synthesis of polarities: the symbol is the harmonizer *par excellence* of discordant qualities, and the imagination, thus, inherently symbolic: "[Imagination] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual with the representative..." (BL II, pp. 16-17).

It is interesting, then, that Coleridge's overt pronouncements on the symbol are actually few and far between. Wellek claimed, furthermore, that the implications of his theorizing are not thought through--that Coleridge "rarely draws the consequences."[13] But it is more intriguing that in his own criticism he invokes allegorical principles with great frequency. This is especially true of his lectures of 1818, which examine the allegorical texts of Dante, Spenser, and Bunyan. In this context, Coleridge defines allegory in surprisingly favourable--or at least neutral--terms:

> We may safely define allegoric writing as the employment of one set of agents and images with actions and accompaniments

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13. Wellek, Modern Criticism, II, p. 176. Douglas Brownlow Wilson, on the other hand, argues that "regardless of the sparsity of the term itself in his applied criticism, Coleridge's governing principles, the very assumptions behind his literary judgements, stem from his idea of the symbol." "Two Modes of Apprehending Nature: A Gloss on the Coleridgean Symbol" in PMLA 87 (1972), p. 42. This is undeniably true, but I think that Wellek's comments, reiterated by Patricia Ward, are meant to be comparative: Coleridge never becomes an enthusiast for the symbol *per se* in the same way that Schlegel and Schelling do in Germany.

> correspondent, so as to convey, while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses, or other images, agents, actions, fortunes, and circumstances, so that the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination while the likeness is suggested to the mind; and this connectedly so that the parts combine to form a consistent whole.[14]

At the very least, Coleridge is ambivalent. While, on the one hand, he insists that allegorical forms are unable to sustain interest (he would seem to have difficulty even calling an allegory that he respects an allegory, opting, for example, to call Dante's work "quasi-allegorical"--indeed he assimilates the works of Dante, Bunyan and Spenser to the symbolic), on the other he admits that good allegory overcomes the limits imposed by his definition and approaches something like organic unity. In good allegory, the imagination can be brought into play, thus freeing allegory from the dichotomy that places it on the side of Fancy and the mechanical understanding.

Readers of Coleridge have perhaps been over-dependent on the famous 1816 passage from the Statesman's Manual for an overall assessment of his thinking about allegory, and it is worth bearing in mind the context in which that passage occurs. Coleridge is writing about scriptural language and its proper interpretation, defending it as a living truth animated by the workings of the imagination against a mechanical exegisis that would reduce it to mere meaning. Biblical language, the language of the Hebrew poets, is the language of the symbol. "Symbol" and "allegory" correspond,

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14. Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor (London: Constable, 1936), p. 30.

then, to competing systems of signification, where symbol indicates a superior (poetic) mode of writing and interpretation. While, in a sub-category, these terms refer to literary devices deployed in specific poems, I should emphasize that it is in this broader sense that they are used here.

John Gatta, Jr., in "Coleridge and Allegory," also points out our dependence on the Statesman's Manual dicta, and sets out to review *all* of Coleridge's pronouncements on allegory in an attempt to see "whether these fragmentary statements, confusing and contradictory though they often are, can be harmonized into some pattern consistent with Coleridge's central aesthetic and philosophical assumptions."[15] He finds these statements less consistently negative than one might expect, but concludes that allegory is nevertheless found wanting when measured against Coleridge's standards for imaginative art. Allegory, through a necessarily pre-determined pattern of correspondences, tends to hamper the work of the imagination. Symbol allows for the unconscious expression of general truth where allegory must be spoken consciously. And yet something about allegory remains attractive--its historical associations, religious uses and philosophical potential.

These distinctions are, of course, familiar. Gatta's contribution is to problematize a twentieth-century view of Coleridge that hails him as a fellow-symbolist well-met, and, more importantly, to argue that Coleridge was more

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15. "Coleridge and Allegory," MLQ 38 (1977), p. 63.

temperamentally inclined toward allegory "than his theories of organic form and consubstantial symbolism might at first seem to allow" (75). These latter reflect only one pole of his thinking, the other revealing a disposition keen on dualistic structures and "desynonymy," on binary oppositions as the first step toward dialectical unity. In allegory's inherent binary structure, in its conceptual doubleness, Coleridge "could instinctively recognize a correlative to his own interior dialectic" (75). Even the terms "symbol" and "allegory," says Gatta, could be seen to resolve themselves according to such dialectical reasoning into unity through polarity, into a third, synthetic term. But Coleridge does not push them so far, and would, I suspect, rather invoke the reconciling qualities of the symbolic as his "third term." Gatta proves finally what we already suspected: that symbol and allegory are slippery terms that ought not to be used reductively, and that even Coleridge admits of their problematic affinity. As Humphrey House asserted in his Clark Lecture on "The Ancient Mariner," "all allegory involves symbolism, and in proportion as symbolism becomes developed and coherent it tends toward allegory."[16]

The common figural ground of these two terms is argued by John A. Hodgson in "Transcendental Tropes: Coleridge's Rhetoric of Allegory and Symbol."[17] His approach is, as his title suggests, rhetorical--as Coleridge's is rhetorical. Hodgson argues that while Coleridge's elevation of symbol

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16. Coleridge: The Clark Lectures, 1951-52 (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), p. 93.
17. In Allegory, Myth and Symbol, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981).

over allegory is derivative, his tactics are novel. These tactics involve a return to basic rhetorical figures: "He not only revives the classical and Renaissance notion of allegory as extended metaphor, he also initiates a parallel association of symbol with synecdoche as a means of discriminating the two modes" (273). Hodgson focuses in particular on analyses of allegory and metaphor in Coleridge's later work (for example, Aids to Reflection).

By raising questions which Coleridge himself would raise in later writings, Hodgson argues that the Statesman's Manual passage is "very possibly his most evasive and misguided" (279). His argument is supported by Coleridge's own qualifications and revisions. One simple question posed is, how free from abstractness will Coleridge's symbol be? Part-for-whole relationships become *more* abstract as member-for-class synecdoches, and Coleridge clearly means to be inclusive when he writes of the "translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General." Hodgson illustrates this with one of Coleridge's own examples from Aids to Reflection: "the instinct of the ant-tribe or the bee is a symbol of the human understanding [since] the understanding in itself, and distinct from the reason and conscience, differs in degree only from the instinct in the animal" (Hodgson, 280). Similarly, one might ask if allegory must be arbitrary. Hodgson shows that the images Coleridge uses to illustrate allegory's abstractness--shadows, echoes, reflections--undermine his argument. A shadow may be insubstantial, but it *is* necessarily determined by the

object that casts it. "And if an allegory might thus relate determinedly to the concept it represents, the seeming antithesis of allegory and symbol begins to suggest instead the ambivalence or reciprocity of a common signifying gesture: symbol will be to allegory as light is to reflected light, or alternatively as light is to a shadow cast from it by some object" (280). Moving one step further, Coleridge's famous definition of the symbol is shown to be corrupted by discursive allegory, by the introduction of a metaphoric figure of light: "But the translucence, the ultimately transcendent light, simply allegorizes this very quality of intelligibility..." (282).

Jerome Christensen also argues convincingly that "Coleridge's metaphysical symbolism is transgressed by a discursive allegory" and that "the allegorization of the relation of symbol to allegory is not a feat that originates with the criticism of Paul de Man" but is already inscribed and thematized in Coleridge's work.[18] In "Kubla Khan," for example, the symbolic locus of the poem is interrupted by prefatory material: in the presence of this material, the poem is no longer permitted to speak, or to speak only, for itself. In the "Ancient Mariner," the marginal gloss functions as a supplement: the poetic work of art fails--according to the idealist aesthetic standards with which we began--to constitute its own adequate description. The text, once thought to be self-sufficient, becomes a pretext for commentary: "Whether or not the poem was or could have

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18. Jerome C. Christensen, "The Symbol's Errant Allegory: Coleridge and His Critics" in ELH 45 (1978), p. 644 and 642. See especially pages 640-645.

been a translucent screen for the projection of an epiphany, the addition of the prose inscribes a site of and for writing" (645). The allegorical function of this gloss with respect to the poem becomes clear. "By affixing a gloss to his symbolic text Coleridge has reintroduced the conditions of arbitrariness, mechanical association, and temporality that he is most concerned to suppress" (645). The marginal gloss provides, in effect, an allegory of the poem, and an allegory of writing. This cannot be construed as a simple case of theory subverted by practice, an overdetermined preference for symbol subverted by the uncanny operation of allegory, "because the theory of the symbol is already *as* theory incipiently allegorical" (655).

Just as Coleridge's pronouncements in the Statesman's Manual are the locus for Romanticism's highly-charged distinction between allegory and symbol, Paul de Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality" has set the agenda for a modern reconsideration of allegory in literary theory. Even though Jerome Christensen, for example, attempts to discredit de Man's arguments as already made by Coleridge himself and, moreover, as subscribing to the very terms he deconstructs (i.e. treating Coleridge's theory of the symbol symbolically--as though it were self-sufficient and not itself constructed by a network of textual (allegorical) relations), it is unlikely that his own essay could have been written without the ground apparently broken by "The Rhetoric of Temporality."

Paul de Man seizes on the ambiguity manifest in Coleridge's Statesman's Manual, noting that Coleridge fails

to sustain his own opposition, and argues that the prevalence of allegory "always corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny" (de Man, 206). The specific ambiguity de Man identifies is in Coleridge's very characterizations of symbol and allegory: Coleridge criticises allegory for its insubstantiality, and then praises symbol for its "translucence" rather than, as one might expect, for its material, organic density. The symbol becomes a reflection of a material unity *not* present in the material world--so that it *too* must be insubstantial--while allegory is denounced for its own reflective properties. De Man attempts to show that "symbol" has been substituted for "allegory" "in an act of ontological bad faith" (211). In order to show this de Man is, of course, substituting "reflection" for "translucence."[19]

The issue of temporality seems, however, to offer something new. In order to be understood, the allegorical sign must, necessarily, refer to another sign that precedes it. Meaning is therefore generated out of the allegorical sign only through "the *repetition* (in the Kierkegaardian sense of the term) of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority" (207). Writing, in which sign follows upon sign in a temporal unfolding, and in which the unmediated, pure presence of the sign is proved untenable,

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19. This move on de Man's part is critiqued at length by Robert Brinkley and Michael Deneen in "Towards an Indexical Criticism: on Coleridge, de Man, and the Materiality of the Sign" in Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric, eds. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990). See pp. 279f.

is thus indelibly allegorical; symbolic writing is, strictly speaking, impossible.

Where the symbol postulates identity, then, allegory designates distance. The priority of the symbol evinces a Romantic self-mystification which readers and critics must see through, so that "the dialectical relationship between subject and object is no longer the central statement of romantic thought, but this dialectic is now located entirely in the temporal relationships that exist within a system of allegorical signs" (208). Allegory, in its discovery of a temporal "predicament," demystifies "an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality [or the human subject and nature] could coincide" (222). It must be remembered that the "pseudo" dialectic between subject and object, in which many commentators locate the main Romantic problem, originates "in the assumed predominance of the symbol as the outstanding characteristic of romantic diction, and this predominance must, in its turn, be put into question" (198). The answer to this question is, of course, allegory; the main Romantic "problem" must be located elsewhere.

De Man refers only obliquely to his debt to Walter Benjamin for his argument, mentioning The Origin of German Tragic Drama as part of a general trend that reconsiders traditional forms of rhetoric.[20] In Germany, he notes, this trend "often takes the form of a rediscovery and

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20. Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (London and New York: New Left Books, 1977).

reinterpretation of the allegorical and emblematic style of the baroque" (de Man, 187, fn.1). The importance of Benjamin's work considerably transcends its contribution to baroque studies--a point de Man might have made--but the relocation of allegory in the baroque is significant. Gadamer argues that allegory became "aesthetically suspect" at the moment when art "freed itself from all dogmatic bonds and could be defined as the unconscious production of genius" (Gadamer, 79). Gadamer aligns allegory, properly, with rational, dogmatic tradition--"with the rationalization of the mythical (as in the Greek Enlightenment), or with the Christian interpretation of Scripture in terms of doctrinal unity (as in patristics), and finally with the reconciliation of the Christian tradition and classical culture, which is the basis of the art and literature of modern Europe and whose last universal form was the baroque" (79). The breakup of this tradition, marking the end of an elite readership, spelled the end of allegory.

Because of what Benjamin identifies as an anti-baroque, neo-classical prejudice, "the authentic documents of the modern allegorical way of looking at things, [which is to say] the literary and visual emblem-books of the baroque" are largely unknown and allegory goes on being denounced "as a mere mode of designation" (Benjamin, 162). He observes that "even great artists and exceptional theoreticians, such as Yeats, still assume that allegory is a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning" (162). It is not, however, a simple case of allegory disappearing or waning in the rise of idealist

aesthetics. As John McCole succinctly states it in his Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition, "its genuine intentions had been removed from view by being defined out of existence."[21] This repression, remarked Benjamin, "was all the more inclined to a silent settlement in that it was non-conceptual, profound and bitter" (Benjamin, 161).

Benjamin, on the other hand, after his own philosophical and historical investigation of allegory that leads principally to the baroque, argues that allegory "is not a playful illustrative technique, but a form of expression, just as speech is expression, and, indeed, *just as writing is*" (162, emphasis added). More than a form of outward expression, though, allegory is also an intuition, an inner experience of a sudden revelation of mortality and impermanence. It exposes the truth of the world, as Bainard Cowan points out, more effectively than "the fleeting glimpses of wholeness attained in the Romantic symbol."[22] Indeed the symbol's fleeting glimpses *falsify* human history and experience by falsely transfiguring transience and suffering.[23] No mere complement to the symbolic, allegory is a way of being and knowing: Benjamin uses terms such as "the allegorical way of seeing," "the allegorical attitude"; as such, it has serious cultural and ontological implications.

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21. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 132.
22. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory" in New German Critique 22 (Winter, 1981), p. 112.
23. McCole has a long treatment of this point, pp. 136-38.

Part of the problem is the "sentimental twilight" that has descended over the philosophy of beauty since the end of "early" Romanticism, with its "illegitimate talk of the symbolic" (Benjamin, 160). The only genuine notion of the symbol, argues Benjamin, is the theological one, because it is presented as a mystery to the soul, rather than the intellect.[24] In the misguided, illegitimate, version of the symbol--"a romantic and destructive extravagance"--"the unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence" (160).[25] The symbol thus claimed to express experience self-sufficiently--atemporally, immediately, spontaneously. Rather than rehabilitating allegory in opposition to this idea by reversing the terms yet again, Benjamin launches an offensive, arguing for the untenability of the notion of a unitary symbol, limiting it to the presentation of a *momentary* totality. For the intellect, "the symbolic unity of immanence and transcendence is an unfulfillable claim, by reason of an unbridgeable gap that exists between the realm of the ideas...and the world of phenomena" (Cowan, 111). Thus the symbol's claims are made

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24. To the considerable extent that Coleridge's definition of the symbol remains theologically inflected, it retains its power. As will be clear in what follows, the function of symbol is not so much lost as resituated by allegory.
25. This latter point would seem, observes Benjamin, to have occasioned the "in depth" examination of artistic forms that makes for complacent art criticism. Indeed, the concept of allegory that Benjamin elaborates has been taken by some--Adorno and Habermas, for example--as the key to understanding modern art. See The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 208.

in bad faith, "because it is born out of the very consciousness that--for the first time as a widespread cultural phenomenon--experienced the pervasiveness of that gap" (111).[26] The "symbolic" can only find a place within allegory as the isolated expression of a nostalgic impulse to close the gap.

Out of a long list of detractors, Benjamin finds a few theorists who have had a more penetrating view of allegory. Görres:

> I have no use for the view that symbol is being, and allegory is sign... We can be perfectly satisfied with the explanation that takes the one as a sign for ideas, which is self-contained, concentrated, and which steadfastly remains itself, while recognizing the other as a successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas which has acquired the very fluidity of time. They stand in relation to each other as does the silent, great and mighty natural world of mountains and plants to the living progression of human history. (165)

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26. Here in the introduction, above, McFarland was seen to argue that the idea of the symbol was, rather, the *most* authentic response to this negative awareness. However, McFarland's defense of symbol against Benjamin and de Man is nowhere more vociferous--if not to say desperate--than in his essay "Involute and Symbol in the Romantic Imagination" in J. Robert Barth and John L. Mahoney, eds., Coleridge, Keats and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990). He charges them with a distortion of symbol's historical and cognitive context. Nothing, as the course of this chapter so far reveals, could be less accurate (Benjamin is only too astute, historically speaking, when he comments on the extravagance of the Romantic symbol). It is disappointing that a critic of McFarland's stature can so willfully miss the point: that the very notions of historicity and cognition *are themselves* at issue wherever symbol and allegory are discussed.

The importance of temporality is made explicit here, and facilitates a formal distinction between symbol and allegory:

> Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape.... And although such a thing lacks all 'symbolic' freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity--nevertheless, this is the form in which man's subjection to nature is most obvious and it significantly gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing... (166)

While the theosophical aesthetic of the Romantics sought out the symbolic immanent in nature, Benjamin finds first nature, and then history, to be intensely allegorical. "It is by virtue of a strange combination of nature and history that the allegorical mode of expression is born" (167). Nature, from the baroque point of view, serves the purpose of instruction: "it is the emblematic representation of its [own] sense, and as an allegorical representation it remains irremediably different from its historical realization" (170). History is rather a subset--subordinate to the victorious, "transfixed face of signifying nature" (171). The "movement from history to nature...is the basis of allegory" (182).

The allegorical has, as we noted at the outset, certain antinomies. Any thing *can* mean anything else; in the profane world, details are unimportant, but that which

signifies allegorically can, by this power, be elevated to the sacred. Allegorical content is thus dialectical ("the profane world is both elevated and devalued"), and it is so in form too: allegory is both convention and expression--"and both are inherently contradictory" (175). Similar antinomies "take plastic form in the conflict between the cold, facile technique, and the eruptive expression of allegorical interpretation"--where the solution is again dialectical and lies in the essence of writing (175).

Benjamin opposes hieroglyphic to alphabetic script. Hieroglyphics are the script of sacred complexes, in which words aspire to combine in one inalterable complex. These hieroglyphics of the baroque are spatial and tend toward the visual--unlike the linear, temporal character of alphabetic script. "It is not," writes Benjamin, "possible to conceive of a starker opposite to the artistic symbol, the plastic symbol, the image of this organic totality, than this amorphous fragment which is seen in the form of allegorical script" (176). Benjamin is arguing for a living language that acquires a looseness and vitality with respect to what it represents through means *other* than the symbolic. "Whereas romanticism inspired by its belief in the infinite, intensified the perfected creation of form and idea in critical terms, at one stroke the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing" (176). Allegory presents, above, an "amorphous fragment"; "in the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune" (176). To this theory of allegory

attaches a certain notion of fragmentation--chiefly as temporal decline, and as an effect of writing.

Benjamin explores these ideas through *Trauerspiel*, an obscure and neglected stage-form--literally sorrow play--of the baroque. These plays, royal martyr dramas, were characteristically melancholic, emblematic, and melodramatic laments which nevertheless reveal something that speaks to a modern sensibility. As George Steiner points out in his introduction to the English translation, the study of the baroque "anticipates and helps grasp the dark present" because "eras of decline resemble each other not only in their vices but also in their strange climate of rhetorical and aesthetic vehemence" (24). *Trauerspiel*, unlike tragedy, develops from history rather than myth, and "the allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel*, is present in reality in the form of the ruin" (177). This is one context for Anne Janowitz's study of the ruin: "In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting" (177-78). History assumes the guise of irresistable decay rather than transcendence and, insofar as this is an allegorical process, allegory is revealed to be an anti-aesthetic principle: "Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (178). The link between allegories and ruins is through erosion, the effects of temporality and finitude. In the case of the ruin, this is easily grasped, but the effects of allegory on thought are less clear. History, nature, and the work of art all reveal the unworking of an allegory that tends

toward decay and fragmentation rather than toward totalization and fulfillment of meaning.[27] Allegory would seem to represent ruin, as "what is sensibly apparent (*sinnlich*) [in allegory] is not the idea, but the absence of the idea" (Hillis Miller, 364). This very absence is its most present significance: "The obscurity, fragmentariness, and arbitrariness of allegory all signify the absence of a fulfilling event; this absence, in turn, serves to invoke that event with a greater urgency and a desperate faith" (Cowan, 119).

Nature, in Benjamin, is given an allegorical physiognomy, suggesting the need for personification--an embodiment of what is inanimate or dead--but it is the essence of allegory to expose this embodiment, or projection, and reveal the disjunction. Writing is the means by which this devastation is made apparent: "In allegory, writing and personification reveal, bring out into the open as *Scheinen*, the eternal disjunction between the inscribed sign and its material embodiment" (365). This has certain implications for criticism. In works like the *Trauerspiel*, the outer form has died, but "what has survived is the extraordinary detail of the allegorical references: an object of knowledge which has settled in the consciously constructed ruins. Criticism means the mortification of the works...not, then--as the romantics have it--awakening of

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27. J. Hillis Miller, in "The Two Allegories," M. Bloomfield ed. Allegory, Myth and Symbol (cited above), offers two theories of allegory. One is deconstructive, the other metaphysical or religious; they are contradictory and co-present in any use of allegory--in allegorical works, as well as in any theory of allegory. This idea is pursued chiefly in Yeats.

the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones" (182).

The theory of allegory pursued in The Origin of German Tragic Drama goes considerably further than a theory of interpretation, or an epistemological necessity--the basis for this chapter at its inception. Benjamin theorizes the relationship of script to voice, writing to history, the dead to the living, and art to civil society in a state of decline--indeed art to itself--so that Gadamer's observation that symbol "is opposed to allegory as art is opposed to non-art" takes on additional relevance. Modern allegory *is* non-art, *is* in conflict with art, as it is evidence of how, in an era that despairs of religious transcendence and in which "things lose their immediate relationship to intersubjective, evident meanings," art becomes "problematic to itself, to the extent that the genuine esthetic principle of rounded, closed, *symbolic* totalities of 'beautiful semblance' are accessible only to artistic epigones."[28] The implications for aesthetics, and the relevance for a counter-symbolic argument are self-evident. Here, in addition, and as elsewhere in Benjamin's work, the problematic is the decline and disintegration of community.

The "modern" era in question begins with the baroque and includes the romantics, as well as ourselves. Indeed Benjamin argues that "there is an affinity between the romantic genius and baroque spiritual make-up in the field of the allegorical..." (187). He quotes Novalis:

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28. The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, p. 208.

> Poems, merely fine-sounding and full of beautiful words but without any meaning or coherence--no more than a few verses of which are comprehensible--[are] like fragments of the most heterogeneous objects. True poetry can, at most, have an allegorical meaning as a whole, and its effect can, at most, be an indirect one, like that of music etc. (187-88).

It is no accident, writes Benjamin, that the allegorical is thus related to the fragmentary--"the technique of romanticism leads in number of respects into the realm of emblematics and allegory" (188). Invoking Jean Paul, "the greatest allegorist in German Literature," Benjamin suggests that "a genuine history of the romantic style could do no better that show, with reference to his works, that even the fragment, and even irony, are variants of the allegorical" (188). Even taking a more general, trans-national, view of Romanticism, allegorical readings of the fragment (or of the problem of *fragmentation*) promise a fruitful departure from the dominant approach of organicist/symbolist aesthetics.

CHAPTER 4: THE ROMANTIC IMAGINATION AND THE PASSAGE OF THE SUBLIME

The importance of the imagination for the Romantic period has never been underestimated. In fact, it is more likely that the opposite holds true. Wordsworth himself pointed out that the term had been "forced to extend its services far beyond the point to which philosophy would have confined [it]."[1] By subsequent commentators, the imagination has been hailed as the quintessence of Romanticism, as a central principle upon which the entire movement depends--a common denominator for all its divergent projects. James Engell, for example, in The Creative Imagination, writes that "Romanticism grew around the imagination in the manner that a storm masses around a vortex, a central area that differs in pressure from the surrounding space."[2] Furthermore,

> The attracting and unifying force of the imagination made Romanticism in the first place. Without that force the period would have become something radically different, its poetry and thought fragmented and disappointing. (4-5)

Beyond any doubt, speculation on the imagination was an impelling force in late eighteenth-century thought, one which found its expression in a radically new poetics. And

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1. Prose, III, p. 81. Wordsworth continues: "The word, Imagination, has been overstrained, from impulses honourable to mankind, to meet the demands of the faculty which is perhaps the noblest of our nature."
2. James Engell, The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 4.

yet Engell, while repeating the orthodox view of Romantic unity, strangely avoids the obvious: Romantic poetry and thought *is* fragmented and, when one considers the prospect of a completed "Christabel," a continued "Triumph of Life," or even "The Recluse," it is also, one might hazard, disappointing. In face of the evidence, Engell's desire to banish the fragmentary from the province of the imagination raises the possibility of a significant link between the two.

The possibility of that link is the subject, or at least one subject, of this chapter, and I approach it chiefly through the theory of the sublime. As Thomas McFarland has pointed out, the term imagination shares the numinous aura that surrounds other terms: originality, genius, but also symbol, "organism," and the sublime--terms which have been important to this discussion so far.[3] If the presence of the fragment can be shown to establish (and to reveal) the limits of those terms--in effect, to penetrate that aura--it may prove useful in interrogating the "Romantic" imagination. This is especially so since the imagination has been, of all those numinous terms, integral in reconstructing the failings of the Romantic poet: poetic representations *of the imagination* tend to fall short because the activity of the imagination is conceived, for

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3. Thomas McFarland, "Imagination and its Cognates: Supplementary Considerations" in Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today, ed. Christine Gallant (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 15-16. See also his Originality & Imagination (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

example, as consummately, if not structurally, symbolic and sublime.

In the first chapter of The Romantic Imagination, Maurice Bowra argued in what are now familiar terms for the imagination as a powerful, liberating force. The Romantics, he wrote, "saw that the power of poetry is strongest when the creative impulse works untrammelled, and they knew that in their own case this happened when they shaped fleeting visions into concrete forms and pursued wild thoughts until they captured and mastered them."[4] It may be that the occasional failure of the unrestrained imagination to bring forth concrete representations under the full control of the poet only contributes to this myth of poetic production. Clearly this unfettered approach would be risky, tending to the fanciful and fictitious as much as to the discovery of profound truth. For the Romantics, of course, any such tendency toward fancy was quickly countered by a theory of the imagination which was rigorously philosophical (and indeed which carefully distinguishes mere "Fancy" from the Imagination). The imagination must have profound religious and metaphysical dimensions. On the one hand, it is a re-enactment, even a partaking, of divine creation which fully realizes man's spriritual nature (as in Coleridge's theory of primary imagination). On the other, the imagination is a means of discovering a transcendental order and thus stands "in some essential relation to truth and reality" (5).

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4. (Cited above), p. 2.

These claims for the imagination naturally assumed a special significance for poetic theory; indeed, these claims are made on behalf of poetry. In chapter fourteen of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge concludes that the nature of poetry approximates a definition of poetic genius (the questions "what is poetry?" and "what is a poet?" being very nearly the same), and that the imagination must be its central, regulating principle:

> The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. (BL, II, 15-16.)

Imagination, Coleridge goes on to say, is the very soul of poetic genius, and in its exercise the poet engages with the spiritual world, both discovering and representing its harmonious truths. Because the poetry (the means of discovery) is fully synthesized with its materials, this representation appears, at least to Coleridge, to be non-problematic.

Thus it is the job of the poet to penetrate and represent the nature of things--to articulate an ulterior reality. For Blake, the imagination gives access to a sort of real behind the real, as the reality it reveals is "the divine activity of the self in its unimpeded energy" (14). Thus he equates imagination with divine vision: "'One Power

alone makes a Poet: Imagination, The Divine Vision'" (14).[5] The imagination discovers what the familiar world hides; visible, living things are the symbols of the unseen, the language of the invisible. The poet is the seer who renders this "language" transparent to others.

Blake's full position on the imagination is too complex to be treated in detail here. His statements do, however, illustrate what is at stake. In "A Vision of the Last Judgement" he writes:

> This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal.... All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination. (Blake, 545)

Coleridge shares Blake's assessment of the visionary importance of the imagination, emphasizing its eternal and infinite aspects in his definition of the primary imagination: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (BL, I, 304). For Wordsworth too, the limitlessness of the imagination is empowering: "even in poetry it is the imaginative only, viz., that which is conversant [with], or turns upon infinity, that

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5. This is from Blake's annotations to Wordsworth's Poems of 1815, and specifically, from p. viii of the Preface where Wordsworth lists the "powers requisite for the production of poetry." Blake, p. 654.

powerfully affects me--...limits vanish, and aspirations are raised."[6]

Much of what the imagination is to accomplish is expressed in the familiar terms of unity, of organically connected part-whole totalities, but with a decided emphasis on totalities so absolute that they exceed all attempts to delimit them. This aspect of the imagination is virtually indistinguishable from the experience of the sublime, and I will return to this shortly. In Coleridge's terms, for example, the main problem with the fancy and the faculty of the understanding is that they are unable to "represent totality without limit" (SM, 60). "Reason," on the other hand, "is the knowledge of the laws of the WHOLE considered as ONE.... [it] is the science of the *universal*, having the ideas of ONENESS and ALLNESS as its two elements or primary factors" (SM, 59-60). The shift to reason is noteworthy here because, in the moment of the sublime, the imagination gives way to reason, giving rise to the possibility that reason rather than the imagination corresponds to Coleridge's synthetic power--but this will be important later.[7] Reason and Imagination both strive, in different

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6. From a letter to Walter Savage Landor, Letters, ed. de Selincourt, vol. I, pp. 134-35; reprinted in J. Spencer Hill, ed., The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 69.
7. J.R. de J. Jackson discusses ambiguities in Coleridge's use of these terms in his Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969). He argues that in Biographia Literaria, Reason (infinite) is akin to the primary imagination, and the organ of Reason (which must be finite), to the secondary imagination. Or, Reason is Reason and Imagination is its organ. See chapter five, "'Fancy' Restored to Dignity." The final point of this argument is not so much to reinterpret the Coleridgean imagination as to reconsider its impact on interpretations of the fancy. Shelley, however,

ways, for full comprehension and apprehension of the infinite, but man is said to exhibit a natural tendency toward reason, as "Reason first manifests itself in man by the *tendency* of the comprehension of all as one. We can neither," Coleridge continues, "rest in an infinite that is not at the same time a whole, nor in a whole that is not an infinite" (SM, 60).

As the imagination is, generally speaking, the site for the positing of an idealized totality, and the faculty above all others which contains and synthesizes, the problematic persistence of the fragmentary in Romanticism, understood as an affront to the coherence or total intelligibility of the theory of imagination, begs to be addressed. In a much larger sense, this problematic is age-old, as writers from Longinus to Benjamin (and certainly beyond) have been interested in what Neil Hertz has called the sublime turn, that is, "a recurrent phenomenon in literature, the movement of disintegration and figurative reconstitution."[8] According to a familiar argument apparently supported by Coleridge's theory, the imagination must fragment in the interests of reunification. Barbara Hardy comments in "Distinction Without Difference: Coleridge's Fancy and Imagination" that the imagination "dissolves or dissipates because the artist can neither copy nor assimilate in

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gives clear priority to the imagination, and will call reason *its* organ.

8. Neil Hertz, "A Reading of Longinus" in The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 14.

wholes: the whole is an obstacle to selection and change, and destruction is the first step in recreation."[9]

The imagination, as we know, is supposed to make the invisible world visible, and another ready explanation is that it can *only* do so through its parts. Bowra subscribes to this view, suggesting that "the powers which Wordsworth saw in nature or Shelley in love are so enormous that we begin to understand them only when they are manifested in single, concrete examples" (Bowra, 10). This amounts to nothing more than the organicist postulate of knowing the whole through the part. "The essence of the Romantic imagination is that it fashions shapes which display these unseen forces at work, and there is no other way to display them, since they resist analysis and description and cannot be presented except in particular instances" (10). The particular, however, is not being interrogated for its own truth, but rather for the whole truth. In this way we are to apprehend something, some fragments perhaps, of the poet's original vision. But like the sublime, does not this presentation present, first and foremost, the impossibility of presentation? And what exactly is this impasse between the imagination and the fragment that the sublime describes so well? Is the fragment, in the final analysis, only a symptom (or the allegorical residue) of an overdetermined identification of the sublime with the activity of the imagination? Many more questions might arise around this constellation of terms, but let us reconsider the theory of

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9. Reprinted in The Romantic Imagination: A Casebook, p. 137.

the sublime as it pertains to the functioning of the idealized Romantic imagination.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the sublime became more clearly seen as an attribute of subjective experience, rather than arising from the material qualites of an object, for example, an object in nature. The sublime is to be recognized as proper to the mind, in the way that Wordsworth may be thought to register the *dis*association of the imagination and nature in his poetry (this argument will be considered later in this chapter); in spite of the poet's investment in nature as the source of inspiration, the imagination is found ultimately to be proper to the self. (One might also think of Coleridge's despair, expressed in "Dejection: an Ode" that "I may not hope from outward forms to win/ The passion and the life, whose fountains are within." (PW, p. 365, ll. 45-6).)

The main economy of the sublime is familiar from Chapter Two. As Kant claims in the third Critique, the experience of the sublime is one of limitlessness, or at least a *representation* of limitlessness, with an implicit apprehension of totality. The imagination, seeking this apprehension, "striving...towards progress *ad infinitum*" (Kant, 97), is overwhelmed. While the imagination is faced with its limits, the faculty of reason is able to recover itself, indeed confirm itself, through this very failure. Reason, after all, demands *absolute* totality, and thus the sublime must be "a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason" (91). In a dialectic of gain and loss, the affirmation of reason is clearly compensatory.

The sublime, however, is of secondary interest to Kant; it is, he says, only an appendix to the theory of taste--representing, appropriately, what remains unincorporated, perhaps resists incorporation, into a total aesthetic theory. This is because while the beautiful indicates finality in nature (which is to say, where it should be), the sublime discovers it only "in the possible *employment* of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature" (93). As noted above, it is merely "an attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature" and this "makes the theory of the sublime a mere appendage to the aesthetic estimate of the finality of nature, because it does not give a representation of any particular form in nature, but involves no more than the development of a final employment by the imagination of its own representation" (93).

In the moment of the sublime, the imagination can only represent *itself*--and through its failure, it represents itself negatively. Again, though, the experience is redeeming. As Kant points out, "this thrusting aside of the sensible barriers gives [the imagination] a feeling of being unbounded"; it presents the infinite (however negatively), and thus "expands the soul" (127). But to feel, if only for a moment, unbounded, is a different matter entirely from the totalizing impulse so often invested in the Romantic imagination. Kant makes it clear that the imagination *cannot* have access to a whole: "For here [the example is St. Peter's in Rome] a feeling comes home to him of the

inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the idea of a whole within which that imagination attains its maximum, and, in its fruitless efforts to extend this limit, recoils upon itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight" (100).[10]

While we are moved (transported, perhaps) by the sublime, and enjoy a certain emotional satisfaction in having our imaginative faculties not only expanded but finally overwhelmed, the experience is still marked by a fundamental ambivalence. Pleasure, so important in Edmund Burke's account, is here acquired at a high price. While the beautiful, for Kant, is associated with the furtherance of life and thus with a "playful imagination," the pleasures of the sublime are indirect and negative. Brought about by a moment of blockage followed by one of powerful discharge, the emotions associated with the sublime "seem to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination" (91). Indeed death itself is frequently, if only from a safe distance, at issue in the out-maneuvering of the imagination. Moreover, the sublime may present an *outrage* to the imagination, and thereby be all the more sublime.

As both the sublime and the imagination appear, reductively, to be flawed modes of presentation, and modes, above all, that represent their incapacitation for all to see (the fragment being, provisionally, just another symptom

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10. Other translations use "sink back" instead of "recoil," but the trace of horror present in "recoil" seems to me apposite. See, for example, a much improved new translation by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987).

of the main flaw), one might reflect a moment more on this crisis in presentation, and recall Derrida's observation in "Parergon" that the sublime refuses all adequate presentation, and disrupts its own presentation so that the inadequacy of that presentation is presented. But where, one might ask, does this leave the reader of Romantic poetry? The importance of the representational model supplied by the sublime, with its troubled reenactment of aspirations and limitations, its dialectic of deprivation and redemption, is not to be underestimated. Nor, on the other hand, can it be easily appropriated, for as Derrida made only too clear, it "always already" implies its disintegration. And yet, the economy of gain and loss so central to the sublime, provides a way of understanding the compelling numinousness of terms such as symbol, imagination, and so on, not least because that numinousness is expressed by the breakdown, the untenability, of those terms. Paul Hamilton, among others, has seized on the aesthetics of the sublime as *the* "contemporary theoretical expression of the Romantic poet's dilemma."[11] He points out that "the Romantic poets often describe the failure of poetic vision as a necessary part of the definition of the vision itself. The point is not that such visions are delusions, but that they are artificial" (165-6).

Many poems or passages of poems could be summoned to speak to this dilemma, but the one I have chosen for its exemplarity--exemplarity not just for this chapter but for

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11. Paul Hamilton, Coleridge's Poetics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 165.

the aesthetic concerns guiding this entire section--is the Simplon Pass episode from Book Six of The Prelude. The episode recounts a crossing of the Alps, and my reading returns to two well-known factors: first, that the crossing took place before Wordsworth was aware of it, and second, that the incident, with its thus *subsequent* visitation (or perhaps invasion) of the awful power of Imagination, was recorded (constituted or reconstituted) during the composition of the 1805 Prelude (in 1804)--that is, some fourteen years later. It is noteworthy, with respect to composition, that the Simplon Pass episode and surrounding verse are essentially an assemblage of fragments--brought together here, but in some cases published on their own (for example, "Descriptive Sketches" of 1793, and "The Simplon Pass" of 1799).[12]

The narrative circumstances surrounding Wordsworth's disappointment are well-known. When their path breaks off abruptly at the edge of a stream, Wordsworth and his companion choose the wrong path, one that ascends a "lofty mountain." After an hour's climb, they are informed that

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12. This history is traced by Max Wildi in the second part of his essay, "Wordsworth and the Simplon Pass" English Studies 43 (1962). Moreover, as Keith Hanley has pointed out, the order of key events shifts and in the earliest manuscript version of the poem, the crossing episode is followed by the first version of the Cave of Yordas simile (later moved to 1805, VIII, 711-27) and then at some distance by the passage on the confrontation with the imagination. In the final 1805 version, this confrontation immediately follows the crossing, then moves into the description of the Vale of Gondo. See "Crossings Out: The Problem of Textual Passage in The Prelude" in Romantic Revisions, ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

they must re-descend to the spot which had "perplexed" them, and take up another road further along the stream:

> ...our future course, all plain to sight,
> Was downwards, with the current of that stream.
> Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear,
> For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds,
> We questioned him again, and yet again;
> But every word that from the peasant's lips
> Came in reply, translated by our feelings,
> Ended in this,--*that we had crossed the Alps*.
> (1850; 584-91)

Famously, the crossing was over before it had even begun (exposing, as Rebecca Comay has pointed out, the indeterminacy, the "already past-ness" of all such crossings).[13] All the more interesting, then, that Wordsworth seems to have let the crossing pass without comment, at least until the composition of The Prelude's second major draft in 1804. While we cannot speculate on his oral account of the Alps crossing after the fact, no known written comment on the scale of the Prelude version exists before the poem "The Simplon Pass" in 1799 (1804,

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13. Rebecca Comay, in her forthcoming On the Line: Reflections on the Bad Infinite (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press), reads Wordsworth's missed crossing as part of a sustained reflection on crossings and boundaries as such, as, in effect, a crossing "beyond" crossing: "For the crucial crossing, it turns out, is not the crossing of the Alps at all, but rather the crossing between one order and another: from the sensible to a supersensible faculty of mind; from a world of finite sense to a world of infinite longing; from what Wordsworth (with Kant) calls 'nature' to a realm of noumenal destiny." Andrzej Warminski takes up a related problem in his "Missed Crossing: Wordsworth's Apocalypses" in MLN 99 (1984). He looks, though, at Book Five, the book of books, and the three central stories (Boy of Winander, the drowned man, and the Dream of the Arab) as "stories of the breakdown of the analogy between the mind and Nature, books and Nature--stories of missed crossing and double crossing" (991). The problematic of "crossing" is thus rich with implications for a reading of The Prelude.

according to Darbishire and de Selincourt). As Max Wildi remarks, a few scattered passages of "Descriptive Sketches" refer to the trip, but none to the crossing itself.[14] Wordsworth's letter to Dorothy, written three weeks later (September 6, 1790)--where one would expect him to be at his most revealing--is conspicuously unforthcoming. He comments only that "the impressions of three hours of our walk among the Alps will never be effaced." Describing the shores of Lake Como, Wordsworth comments merely that "it was impossible not to contrast that repose, that complacency of spirit, produced by these lovely scenes, with the sensations I had experienced two or three days before, in passing the Alps."[15]

It is even more remarkable then, that when recuperating such a difficult--perhaps traumatic--moment, Wordsworth bursts exuberantly into his famous proclamation on the Imagination. The economy of the sublime has clearly taken over: loss is recovered as gain, defeat as triumph--recovered, that is, in what Comay aptly refers to as "the layered hindsight of composition." Sublimity is found, finally, in the *written* rather than in the physical passage, such as it was:

> Imagination!--lifting up itself
> Before the eye and progress of my song

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14. Max Wildi, "Wordsworth and the Simplon Pass" I, English Studies 40 (1959) and II, English Studies 43 (1962). See II, 366-68.
15. The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. E. de Selincourt; second edition, revised by C. Shaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) I: *The Early Years 1787-1805*, p. 33-34. This silence is frequently noted by commentators; see, for example, Alan Liu, Wordsworth: The Sense of History (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 9.

> Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
> In all the mights of its endowments, came
> Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
> Halted without a struggle to break through,
> And now, recovering, to my soul I say
> 'I recognize thy glory'. In such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
> There harbours whether we be young or old.
> Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
> Is with infinitude and only there;
> With hope it is, hope that can never die,
> Effort, and expectation, and desire,
> And something evermore about to be.
> (1805; VI, 525-542)

Wordsworth is brought to a halt, arrested, "usurped,"[16] and his apprehension of the "invisible world" only partial--accomplished by flashes of sense, and accompanied by the characteristic overstraining and collapse of the imagination. Only upon recovering can he label his experience a visiting "of awful promise," which, by virtue of exceeding his grasp, will remain eternally imminent--beyond full cognition. In the 1850 version, even the term Imagination is deemed inadequate--"the Power so called/ Through sad incompetence of human speech" (592-93)--in a sublime collapse of language which, while clearly commenting

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16. Liu makes a fascinating case for the correspondence of Wordsworth's use of "usurpation" with actual historical conditions (the "sense" of history that Imagination conceals is precisely such a correspondence), reading it against the backdrop of 18 Brumaire, of Napoleon's usurpation of control of the Directory in 1799. A climate of astonishment, and the language of the sublime pervade contemporary accounts of Napoleon's campaigns; he became, as Scott recognized in his biography, the "master-spirit" of the age (30). In 1804 then, as Liu concludes, "any imagination of an Alpine pass would remember the military 'genius' of Bonaparte" and "it seems natural that Wordsworth's halt 'without a struggle to break through'...should lead to the 'banners militant' toward the close" (28). While both Napoleon and the Imagination share "pure spirit," Napoleon is purged, the spoils and trophies of war eschewed, in favour of the rewards of the imagination.

on the process of composing the earlier version, also laments the difficulty of adequate presentation. Wordsworth's sense, expressed also in the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" for his 1815 Poems, that the imagination *as a term* has been overstrained (the observation with which I began) reflects, in his estimation, the unfortunate "poverty of language."[17]

In Geoffrey Hartman's often misunderstood analysis of this passage, (misunderstood because it seemed to dethrone nature from its privileged place in Romanticism), the "difficulty" is in large measure provided by the imagination itself. The whole episode reveals a double-consciousness--that is, a new, supervening consciousness, a new interpretation of the "event" usurps the poet's mind. In the ecstatic passage that follows ("I was lost;/ Halted without an effort to break through" 1850; 596-7), Hartman remarks that the "usurping consciousness produces its own rush of verses, becomes its own subject as it were, and so retains momentarily a separate existence. Wordsworth calls this separate consciousness 'Imagination.'"[18] This is, of course, rather strange as normally the imagination, and especially the Romantic imagination, is supposed to vitalize and animate. Here, however, "the poet is isolated and immobilized by it; it obscures rather than reveals nature; the light of the senses goes out. Only in its secondary action does it vitalize and animate..." (17). In short, it

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17. Prose, p. 81.
18. Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987 (first pub. by Yale University Press, 1964)), pp. 16-17.

constitutes *for itself* the moment of blockage characteristic of the sublime.

This moment of halting, however quickly overcome, is present "at the source of many Wordsworth poems" and by focussing on that moment, and particularly on the poem "that is at once its overflow and masking," Hartman hopes not only to identify that moment precisely, but also to discover "something significant about the relation of poetry to the mind" (17). The supervening consciousness, otherwise known as imagination, turns out to be consciousness of the self raised to an "apocalyptic pitch," and its effects are always the same: "a moment of arrest, the ordinary vital continuum being interrupted; a separation of the traveller poet from familiar nature; a thought of death or judgement or of the reversal of what is taken to be the order of nature; a feeling of solitude or loss or separation" (17-18). In the Alps episode, the poet comes "face to face with his imagination"; the story is again told "of a failure of the mind vis-a-vis the external world," but the failure is doubly redeemed: first, by the satisfactorily sublime views Wordsworth later encounters in his crossing, but more importantly "one might say, across the gulf of time, his disappointment becomes retrospectively a prophetic instance of that blindness to the external world which is the tragic, pervasive, and necessary condition of the mature poet." In 1790, "rebuffed not by nature's presence but rather by its strong absence," Wordsworth discovers what now overwhelms

him: "the independence of imagination from nature" (39-41).[19]

In Hartman's trajectory, the moment of apocalypse in which the poet confronts "the productive power of his own imagination" is followed by "a renewed awareness of nature accompanied by the sense that it is nature that leads him beyond nature."[20] The trajectory, summed up again in "Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness" as "nature, self-consciousness, and imagination" turns upon itself as the last term involves "a kind of return to the first."[21] On the one hand, the imagination recognizes its fundamental separation from nature, indeed its need to transcend nature; on the other, of course, its expression springs, and its springs are fed, from meaningful contact with nature. The imagination moves the poet by means of nature, and not the other way around.

The disjunction between the imagination and nature is thus supported precisely by the theory of the sublime; Hartman's trajectory is itself not unlike the movement leading to the moment of the sublime, where incommensurability intervenes. Certain facts of the matter begin to come clear: Wordsworth's actual experience, his passage, is ultimately about passage. Not about passage to a limit, not, in itself, a sublime passage (there was, after all, no nature there)--the crossing of the Alps is rather

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19. cf. Blake: "Natural Objects always did and now do weaken, deaden, and obliterate Imagination in Me." Blake, p. 655 (annotations to the Preface to Wordsworth's Poems of 1815).
20. Romanticism, ed. and introduction by Cynthia Chase (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p. 6.
21. Reprinted in Chase, ed., Romanticism, p. 50.

written into a passage on the sublime. It is reinscribed, explicitly, as *literature*.[22]

The rhetorical sublimity of Wordsworth's account is noteworthy, to say the least, in light of the history of the theory of the sublime in the eighteenth century, when interest in Longinus's treatise waned in favour of an extra-literary notion of the sublime. More precisely, as Neil Hertz observes in "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime," rhetorical elements of that treatise were selectively appropriated "as modes of extra-literary experience."[23] Hertz points out an absorption of the notion of difficulty (a particular and important concept for rhetoric) into "the experiential notion of blockage" (48). Earlier theorists had used terms such as "astonishment" and "difficulty"; they wrote of being "baffled," or "checked," but not of being, even for a moment, absolutely blocked (see p. 46). The metaphor of blockage, it must be noted, draws strength from the literature of religious conversion (the experience of being, one might say, completely turned around). "Difficulty," moreover, suggests an invigorating stimulus to the activity of the mind, while "blockage" would

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22. On the absence of the sublime experience--on non- rather than just negative presentation, see Lyotard, in "The Sublime and the Avant Garde," where he discusses the importance of privation in Burke's Enquiry, indeed shows that its "major stake" is to show that "the sublime is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening." Terror is associated with various privations, and "what is terrifying is that the *It happens that* [a reference to Lyotard's rehabilitation of Barnett Newman's "The Sublime is Now"] does not happen, that it stops happening." Art, which steps in and distances the menace, thus intensifies rather than elevates. The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 99-100.
23. The End of the Line, p. 48.

seem to raise the very question of the mind's unity. Hertz suggests that these shifts, this absorption, works in the following way: "The translation of 'difficulty' into 'blockage' and the submersion of the rhetorical sublime so that its figures function as a sort of experiential underwriting both seem like strategies designed to consolidate a reassuringly operative notion of the self" (48). Moreover, the "integration of awareness" supplied by the natural sublime "is achieved by a passage to the limit that carries the notion of difficulty to the point where it turns into absolute difficulty, a negative moment but nevertheless a reassuring one" (49). This is not far from the degree of emotional satisfaction provided by the sublime in Kant's theory.

The passage, in Wordsworth, back to rhetoric (perhaps a passage from natural to intellectual blockage; from, in Kantian terminology, the dynamic to the mathematical sublime) has not received much explicit attention, although commentators routinely note that the sublime usurpation of the poet's mind by the imagination takes place at a considerable temporal remove. Toward this end, Warminski observes that "if the passage loses its way in the re-pre-sentation of a future past, it is not least of all because it is itself divided and dis-appointed by a gap or discrepancy between the rhetoric of experience...and the rhetoric of...rhetoric."[24] Distinguishing the sublime from

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24. P. 990. He continues: "The gap is, once again, a gap between experience and reading." At the time of writing, Wordsworth recognizes "that his imagination had read the 'literal climb' as a figure (its 'emblematic quality') which itself *pre*-figures ('a revelation proleptic') the experience

the sublime, as it were, in this way, allows Wordsworth's self-dramatization to emerge. More importantly, of course, it raises questions of writing--of self-inscription, of the *re*inscription of sublime passage as autobiography, and of the potentially allegorical nature of the whole process.

In the drama played out in the sublime scenario, there remains some ambiguity. Does Reason--or Ethics--rush to the rescue because of cognitive distress, or as Hertz suggests, "can we see that distress as slightly factitious, staged precisely in order to require the somewhat melodramatic arrival of Ethics" (or Reason) (50).[25] This question is directly addressed by Thomas Weiskel, who construes the sublime "outside the presuppositions of idealism" and replays it in modern, psychoanalytic vernacular (50-1).

In the mathematical sublime, as Kant proposes, the imagination feels its deprivation, but there is delight in

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he was to recount." In sum, he reads "a figure of figure, reads reading." But "in what sense [*of* what sense, we might ask] can the gap of reading (reading)--its missed crossing--still be a measure?" (990).

25. Similar questions are asked by Paul de Man in "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant": "What could it possibly mean, in analytical terms, that the imagination sacrifices itself, like Antigone or Iphigenia--for one can only imagine this shrewd and admirable imagination as the feminine heroine of a tragedy--for the sake of reason? And what is the status of all this heroism and cunning, which allows it to reach apathia, to overcome pathos, by ways of the very pathos of sacrifice? How can faculties...be said to *act*?...We are clearly not dealing with mental categories but with tropes and the story Kant tells us is an allegorical fairy tale. Nor are the contents of this tale at all unusual. It is the story of an exchange, of a negotiation, in which powers are lost and gained in an economy of sacrifice and recuperation." Reprinted in The Textual Sublime: Deconstruction and its Differences, ed. H. Silverman and G. Aylesworth (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 104-5.

the awareness that it has been sublimed into a higher determination, that of reason. Kant: "In this way, it gains an extension and a might greater than that which it sacrifices. But the ground of this is concealed from it, and in its place it *feels* the sacrifice or deprivation to which it is subjected" (Kant, 120). Why, one might ask, can't the imagination share fully in the pleasure generated by reason? "Why this talk of concealment and sacrifice?" (Hertz, 51). Has the imagination been "entrapped" by reason, humiliated by reason for reason's own ends? "The real motive or cause of the sublime," as Weiskel suggests, "is not efficient but teleological; we are ultimately referred not to the failure of empirical imagination," but to reason's reasons for exacting it. "The cause of the sublime is [thus] the *aggrandizement of reason at the expense of reality and the imaginative apprehension of reality*" (Weiskel, 41).

Given the role of repression in the sublime, a Freudian reading of this scenario is apparent: the moment of the sublime is the moment "in which the mind turns within and performs its identification with reason" (Weiskel, 94). The sublime passage reinscribes the Oedipus complex; Reason takes up the position of the superego, "that agency generated by an act of sublimation," (Hertz, 51), in an identification with the model of the father. Now there may be forms of excessive identification that cannot be, in Derrida's phrase, brought back home to the father, and there is sublime excess, no doubt, already disturbing this formulation, but it presents us nevertheless with an altered

passage to the imagination, a passage already passed over and over. One need only recall, after all, that the Oedipus complex is the origin of all rites of passage.

But perhaps it would be more accurate to conceive of this identification as a passage *away* from the imagination, insofar as the sublime describes, for Weiskel at least, a passage between imagination and symbol. This is, of course, the passage to writing, by which The Prelude as a whole is "an attempt to negotiate the strait leading from remembered images, and from the power of mind to which these images continue to testify, to capable speech" (172). The notion of poetic imagination is thus summoned to "gloss over the mysterious gap between a power of perception and a power of articulation or composition" (172-73)--a gap very much at the heart of Coleridge's theory of imagination, which is the subject of the next chapter. Weiskel finds however, implicit in this passage from imagination to symbol, "a confrontation with symbolicity" and observes that *resistance* to this process seems to be an important part of what Wordsworth calls imagination (175).[26] Significantly,

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26. Weiskel makes his point with an analysis of Wordsworth's spots of time and finds that their "renovating virtue" lies in a process whereby "the ego returns, in retrospection, to the liminal place where 'some working of the spirit,/ Some inward agitations' still are active." This liminal place is, of course, the place of the visionary, but "visionary salience is itself a dialectical response to the order of symbol. The symbol--the image as symbol or signifier--is glimpsed, and the power of the subsequent visionary state depends upon the repression of the signified, which reappears, as by a profound logic or economy, in the protective domain of things seen." This continued repression of the signified is integral to the process by which the imagination is revived in and through the spots of time. In this way, in this passage from imagination to symbol, the spots of time dramatize a redemptive, a "saving," resistance. "This resistance *is* the imagination--

moreover, the visionary, as a liminal concept, may be seen as "a moment not before but *after* the threshold has been recrossed in retreat" (185).

Weiskel pursues this line of thinking beyond Simplon Pass itself and into Gondo Gorge. He suggests that Wordsworth's remembered disappointment--"*that we had crossed the Alps*"--is really "a screen memory drastically inflated (if not created) in order to block the emergence of the deeper, more terrifying and traumatic memory of Gondo Gorge" (200). The theory of the negative sublime brings us, in any event to this pass: "the sensible imagination (here the mental eye of retrospection) is checked in an experience of exhaustion or terror" and "an 'identification' with the higher power--ultimately with the Godhead--is required in order to cross the threshold into the domain of the supersensible, and this identification requires the suppression or turning against the narcissistic self-consciousness associated with perception" (201). Kant's theory makes it possible to locate the terror "precisely at the threshold of the supersensible--*sublimen*, as the etymology oddly (and no doubt fortuitously) confirms: the ego is terrified into annihilating its sensible portion" (201).[27] Wordsworth, remembering or perhaps retreating to his earlier disappointment, and thus displacing or

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a higher, 'visionary' seeing whose very intensity, either as salience or as 'redundant energy,' occludes the symbol" (185).

27. For a fascinating etymological account of the history and use of "sublime," and a disentangling of its roots from those of "subliminal"--a clarification which might in fact undermine Weiskel's point--see Jan Cohn and Thomas H. Miles, "The Sublime: In Alchemy, Aesthetics and Psychoanalysis" in Modern Philology 74 (February, 1977).

"usurping" the threat, could nevertheless confirm his consciousness of self.[28]

As this self-consciousness, in the moment of the Imagination, is "mounting in dialectical recoil from the extinguishing of the self which an immanent identification with the symbolic order enjoins" (202-3), the question, the necessity, of originality is raised. The imagination must rise "like an *unfather'd* vapour" (emphasis added) so that it originates *itself*, without reference to a greater power. In this way, the imagination does not evade but rejects the Oedipus complex (203). The gesture is illusory, but it provides the imagination with a saving fiction which "founds the self and secures the possibility--the chance for a self-conviction--of originality" (203). This passage is thus often read as Wordsworth's attempt to negotiate the strait, the passage, of literary influence.

The power of the imagination turns out, in spite of the apparent gap between the two that Weiskel points out, to be the power of language. In passages of The Prelude, as in the dejection poems, the movement from loss of hope to withdrawal from nature represents, in fact, a basic condition of possiblility: the power of language and mind over history and nature. This observation is at the heart of de Man's main criticism of Hartman as he states it in

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28. Weiskel's analysis thus complements Hartman's by exploring the dialectical status of consciousness "not only with respect to Nature but also with respect to the symbolic order of Eternity" (213, fn. 19).

"Time and History in Wordsworth."[29] In Wordsworth, he remarks, "the restoring power...does not reside in nature, or in history, or in a continuous progression from one to the other, but in the persistent power of mind and language after nature and history have failed" (69). Against personal or historical dissolution, the imagination asserts the saving possibility of reflection: "The imagination engenders hope and future [sic], not in the form of historical progress, nor in the form of an immortal life after death that would make human history unimportant, but as the persistent, future possibility of a retrospective reflection on its own decay" (69). De Man finds this sense of the imagination as loss redeemed through present consciousness to be confirmed in the following passage:

> I was lost;
> Halted without an effort to break through;
> But to my conscious soul I now can say--
> 'I recognize thy glory': (1850; VI, 596-99)

The key relationship is thus between imagination and time, rather than nature. "The power that maintains the imagination, which Hartman calls nature returning after it has nearly been annihilated by apocalyptic insight, is time" (72). Time, then, too, as the necessary moment for reflection before writing begins.[30]

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29. Paul de Man, "Time and History in Wordsworth," reprinted in Chase, ed., Romanticism.
30. On the problem of temporality, an interesting argument is made by Rudolf Makkreel in "Imagination and Temporality in Kant's Theory of the Sublime" in The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 42 (Spring, 1984), where he reconsiders the imagination's relationship to time in Kant. The imagination's aesthetic powers of comprehension are enabled by a condition of regress which annihilates the condition of time (or, at least, negates mathematical or

The turn to writing, the (rhetorical) sublime turn to which I suggested we return, turns out to be, as suspected, an essential point of the passage. The turn from psychoanalysis (still caught--with Weiskel--as Mary Jacobus points out, within the "Romanticism as self-consciousness" school of criticism epitomized by Hartman[31]) to writing, to self-inscription, can be figured as the passage from symbol to allegory. The passage on/into Gondo Gorge is the place where this supposition, which draws from the previous chapter, may be tried out. What happens, after all, beyond the sublime passage of Simplon?[32] No sooner are the Alps uncrossed than are we plunged into a perplexing new passage whose sublime difficulty for interpretation has not passed unremarked.

Where Thomas Weiskel read Wordsworth's account of the descent into the Vale of Gondo (or "Gondo Gorge") as an instance of profound imaginative trauma, Mary Jacobus argues instead that it is "a willed attempt to overcome anticlimax" (Jacobus, 7). While this doesn't sound very far from other aspects of Weiskel's argument, Jacobus's chief concern is for the question of writing: autobiographical writing (self-inscription) and, or rather *in*, the landscape of the sublime. Where Weiskel's readerly or negative sublime

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linear time), and allows for "comprehending as a whole what is normally apprehended as temporally discrete" (303).

31. Mary Jacobus, Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference: Essays on *The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 16.

32. For a reconstruction of Wordsworth's actual journey, with maps and photographs of the Gorge and other important geographical features which appear in the poem, see Max Wildi, cited above.

raised the spectre of the extinction of individual consciousness and threatened the autobiographical endeavour, Jacobus suggests that the crossing of the Alps and the descent into Gondo "could be read as a symbolic representation of another crossing--that of an autobiographical poem's turning on itself at its midpoint to reflect on the peculiar status of autobiographical inscription, and, in so doing, on the impossibility of autobiographical self-encounter" (6). This movement must bear some relation to Weiskel's observation that the visionary is operative in retreat, after the threshold has been "recrossed": Jacobus is pushing his argument one vexed step further along--from self-consciousness to self-inscription (a writerly, perhaps, rather than a readerly sublime).

Wordsworth's missed encounter, his misreading of the landscape in Simplon Pass, bears directly on the representation of Gondo Gorge, as Weiskel has shown. Jacobus remarks that the moment of failed revelation was initially figured by "death-dealing inscription" in the Cave of Yordas simile before its displacement to Book Eight. It is on the evidence of this simile, which meditates on "the difference between the saving blindness of vision and the deathly fixity of the written page," that Jacobus concludes we should read the passage as a "willed attempt to overcome anti-climax." Moreover, we must recognize the presence of death in the (dead) letters left after the withdrawal of the subject from the visionary moment, as "inscription--any inscription--spells the death of the writer." The whole of

Book Six may be seen to both show and attempt to evade "the limits and condition of autobiography"; it does this "by putting a divine face on landscape, thereby erasing the mark of the autobiographer's death, that is, his writing" (7).

In a literal sense, of course, the writing only too clearly remains. Jacobus is responding to the immediacy of the passage, a passage, as critics have remarked, unlike any other in the whole of Wordsworth's poetry. It is a powerful instance of the natural sublime, a moment of natural sublimity for which there is no blockage of language. Or rather, it is the landscape itself that speaks ("The rocks that muttered close upon our ears--/ Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside/ As if a voice were in them,..." (1850; VI, 630-32)). Usurpation of the mind by the imagination appears to be followed by usurpation of the landscape, for the vale is possessed of an other-worldly quality.

Proceeding with the narrative, dislodging their melancholy and disappointment, Wordsworth and his companion hurried downward into a narrow chasm, where "brook and road/ Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy pass":[33]

> And with them did we journey several hours
> At a slow pace. The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
> And in the narrow rent at every turn
> Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,

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33. 1805; VI, 553-54; "pass" becomes "strait" in 1850.

> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light--
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.
> (1850; VI, 623-640)

In spite of the disturbing power of the natural world in this instance, it is the written-ness of the landscape (figures, types, symbols), as Wordsworth experiences it, that is so intriguing. We are faced, again, with the passage of the sublime, but with rather different consequences, with less protective distance, indeed with death. While the experience of the landscape is immanent within it, where appearance is to be found in disappearance, visibility recovered in invisibility, and presence in the absence suggested by the "hollow" (1805) rent, the paradox of arrested organicism (the blossoms on one tree, the stationary blasts of water that does not fall, etc.) speaks powerfully of the silence, the total effacement of what one might call the autobiographical writing subject. The landscape threatens a *disarticulation* of meaning; the descent speaks again, and more forcefully, of a fundamental rupture between landscape and the imagination; the poet fails to find his destiny within infinitude.

The crossing of the Alps was found to be, after all, a literary experience--if only of an empty or unwritten text. In the language of the Cave of Yordas passage, the scene came to be "Exposed, and lifeless as a written book" (1805; VIII, 727), whereas, as Jacobus observes, the Vale of Gondo "reverses in a compensatory fashion, the trajectory of this earlier passage, so that we are left with ferment ('tumult

and peace')." Writing rescues writing, "reanimating the dead page with intimations of a meaning that always exceeds it, making the definite indefinite and indeterminate." Jacobus suggests that the passage through Gondo might be an attempt to replace the negative sublime of the earlier crossing (where there was an excess of signification) with what Weiskel calls the poet's sublime, a rhetorical sublime where there is an excess of meaning. This capacity to invest with/through writing is of course reassuring in the face of evidence that "one's very imagination, or at least its sublime aspect, is not only textual but textually-produced" (15).

This reassurance is intensified in the Vale of Gondo through Wordsworth's recourse to prosopopoeia. The unreadable types and symbols are given a face, a countenance that exceeds inscription. They contribute, thus, to sublime writing, to a writing of the sublime, but they remain curiously emblematic, reminiscent of the death-life of the emblem in Benjamin--enigmatic and allegorical. To read this passage allegorically, to read in effect, the passage from passage to passage as itself allegorical, may prove to be an essential part of the passage back to rhetoric, or poetry. This suggestion seems, initially, obvious as "passage" implies the allegorical intervention of temporality; to bring out its full resonance requires a brief reprise of key Benjaminian themes.

Allegory, as we have seen, enacts for Benjamin "an extraordinary crossing of nature and history" (The Origin of

German Tragic Drama, 167).[34] Wordsworth's representation of Gondo Gorge could not be closer to an allegorical experience in which the observer "is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* [death's head] of history as a petrified, primordial landscape" (166). The uncanny, paradoxical stillness of the gorge's tumultuousness--in spite of its astonishing immediacy--depends on the passage, rather than the suspension of time, as the march into eternity of the final line--"Of first and last, and midst, and without end"--makes clear. At issue in this landscape is Wordsworth's self-awareness--time-bound in the transient here-and-now. Allegory, as Benjamin continues, "is the form in which man's subjection to nature is most obvious and it significantly gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual" (166). This goes straight to the heart of the allegorical "way of seeing, of the baroque, secular account of history as the Passion of the world, a world that is meaningful only in the stations of its decay." Gondo's decaying and yet transfigured face, like "Characters of the great Apocalypse," replay, one might say, the Passion of nature, and intimate mortality yet again. "The greater the significance [of the world in decline]," Benjamin continues, "the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature [or being] and significance" (166).

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34. "Extraordinary crossing" is John McCole's more evocative rendering of this passage; cf. Osborne's "strange combination."

This "jagged line of demarcation" describes Wordsworth's trajectory through the Alps: his personal negotiation of nature and meaning under the constant threat of annihilation in and through the sublime. The jaggedness of this line reinvokes the indefinition of his crossing, the crossing and re-crossing of the threshold of visionary experience, the saving movement of passage. Against the grain of symbolic aesthetics and its belief in the infinite, "at one stroke the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing" (176). Allegorical transformation is not only a matter for intellectual perception; dead letters, perceived allegorically as signs, "strike notes at the depths of one's being"--remarks Cowan--"regardless of whether they point to heaven, to an irretrievable past, or to the grave."[35]

The convergence of allegory and the sublime has been remarked upon by Angus Fletcher ("anything sublime is inherently allegorical").[36] And, as de Man suggests, the story Kant tells us of the sublime amounts to an allegory.[37] Both betray a fundamental ambivalence: allegory, as

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35. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," p. 110.
36. Fletcher, p. 248, fn. 44. Convergence does not, however, imply identity or interchangeability between the two modes. Their commonalities point to a certain shift from one to the other: when for example, in the late Renaissance, the notion of the sublime first began to gain a foothold, allegories on the scale of Spenser and Bunyan cease to be written. Fletcher accounts in his fifth chapter for the direction taken by allegory in the eighteenth century; this is too large an issue to do justice to here. I wish to point out, again, the importance of the relation between allegory and the sublime over that perceived between the sublime and the symbol.
37. An "allegorical fairy tale"--see above, fn. 25.

discussed above, on the question of meaning, that is, toward its own doubleness, or polysemousness; and for the sublime, ambivalence is among its primary emotive characteristics. Difficulty or blockage which, on the one hand, overstrain the faculties in the experience of the sublime, correspond to the notion of a "difficult ornament" (or obscurity) in allegory--to an overburdening with meaning of the kind Wordsworth encounters in the landscape of Gondo Gorge--as though nature, itself under the influence of the sublime, overflows and begins to write (sublimed into signification).[38]

In closing, in passing on, so to speak, I would like to make a few comments on the problematic association of the imagination with the sublime, and the possible place of the fragment therein. Chiefly, in the economy of the sublime, the imagination gives way to reason and so must relinquish its totalizing aspirations. It is perhaps best understood not as a coherent faculty of mind, but as a moment in a passage, a process of mind described by the sublime turn. While the imagination and the fragment seem to occupy some of the same space by converging in the sublime, by

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38. Steven Knapp takes up a related issue in his study Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1985). Personification is only one aspect of allegory, but it connects revealingly with the sublime, largely on the question of agency. To experience the sublime is to project an unattainable ideal through a "perfect, self-originating agency that no one really expects or wants to fulfill"; it is thus "programmatically ambivalent: it demands a simultaneous identification with and dissociation from images of ideal power." Personified agents exemplify this ideal by being totally saturated by what they thematically represent, coupled with a reflexive awareness of this condition--a self-conscious preoccupation with the allegorical grounds of its being (3).

presenting similar difficulties of presentation, the fragment remains characteristic of a post-imaginary realm--as an allegory, an emblem perhaps, of the passage. And if the imagination is, ultimately, sublimated into reason through the sublime, what is its fate, but to represent a perpetual disruption, rather than enact a totality--and to usurp, rather than to abide or inhabit the natural world?

PART THREE: COLERIDGE

CHAPTER 5: *BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA* AND COLERIDGE'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION

Biographia Literaria is not, in any simple sense, a "fragment"; nor, on the other hand, is it a text that exudes finality and conclusiveness in its self-presentation. Its presumed origin as a preface to Sybilline Leaves, a preface which grew to at least twice the length of its intended book (two volumes to its one), inverts, perhaps subverts, the conventional as well as the *ideal* relationship between preface and book elaborated by Schlegel (by being, if it retains any essential relationship at all, only the square of its book--a prose frame which may focus a reading of the poems). This status as over-grown preface contributes to the reader's sense that Biographia Literaria has no *necessary* end, and could indeed have been much longer.[1] Even within its current bounds, however, it has several missing, or rather unwritten, parts: most significantly, the chapter preceding Coleridge's definition of Imagination and Fancy, of which he states only the "main result," and the detailed prospectus for that missing material, which the reader was to find at the end of the second volume (BL, I, 304). Moreover, it has clear fragmentary elements which unsettle Coleridge's (and the reader's) attempts to sew its arguments together--most brilliantly, perhaps, the theory of imagination itself.

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1. The problem of the preface *as such* is one of the subjects of the next chapter.

As a result, profound difficulties are associated, almost as a matter of course, with reading Biographia Literaria as a coherent text. These difficulties, and the persistent problem of "unity," are the main focus of this chapter. Initially, the question of unity will be taken up in general terms, and then will subsequently be addressed through one particular aspect (square-root?) of the problem: Coleridge's theory of imagination. Its significance for the following discussion is at least two-fold. The theory is itself an integrative one which, like most Romantic theories of the imagination, seeks a correspondence between the ideal world we project and the world of representations we inhabit. Coleridge's theory is thus taken up as both a site and a strategy for unifying the "whole" of Biographia Literaria. These strategies, remaining fatally bound by binary oppositions suggested by Coleridge himself, are, on the whole, unsuccessful. Upon examination, however, the theory *itself* does not "hang together" well, and can be understood as an instance of the many disintegrative forces at work in the text.

Implicitly, I will argue that the relationship of primary to secondary imagination, rather like symbol to allegory above (that is, rather deceptively, and this will again mark a crucial, interpretive shift), bears on the problems of organization and representation posed by the fragment. The terms "fragment" and "symbol" are so often summoned to conceal the very break or gap from which they are constituted, and this is arguably the case with "imagination." In spite of the central place Coleridge's

theory of imagination holds in his text as a "synthesizing faculty," that theory nevertheless exists, as Tilottama Rajan points out, "in the gap between assertion and experience" (Rajan, 105). Instead of the theory itself, we are given a two-paragraph representation that barely conceals the abysmal argument, strategically interrupted, from which it sprang. It is above all a "liminal" theory, thus sharing in the unpresentability, or negative presentation, of the sublime.

The apparent fragmentary, disjointed quality of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria has been, from the point of view of reading and interpretation, either the text's best friend or its own worst enemy. Predictably, its detractors have argued that it does not "hang together" well, that it remains a collection of unrelated and unassimilated fragments. John Wilson, writing in Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine, represents this position at an extreme:

> Considered merely in a literary point of view, the work is most execrable. He rambles from one subject to another in the most wayward and capricious manner; either from indolence, or ignorance, or weakness, he has never in one single instance finished a discussion; and while he darkens what was dark before into tenfold obscurity, he so treats the most ordinary common-places as to give them the air of mysteries...[2]

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2. Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine II (October, 1817) in Reiman, ed. The Romantics Reviewed (cited above). Later, he adds: "Mr. Coleridge has written copiously on the Association of Ideas, but his own do not seem to be connected either by time, place, cause and effect, resemblance, or contrast, and accordingly it is no easy matter to follow him through all the vagaries of his Literary Life." Contemporary reviews seem to have been especially savage, taking advantage of the autobiographical character of Biographia Literaria to attack the integrity of

Its idiosyncracies, thus, exceed the structural and the formal. Considerable uncertainty persists about the original conception of the work Coleridge called his "immethodical miscellany" (BL, I, 64)--as either autonomous work or over-grown preface--and the confusion has undoubtedly been enhanced by irregularities in Coleridge's execution. Some of the text's additional inconsistencies and cavalier oversights have been cogently reassembled by Jerome Christensen:

> The problem of plagiarism has commanded most critical attention, but numerous local promiscuities have embarrassed or irritated readers of the Biographia since its publication; among them: the notorious "letter from a friend" in Chapter XIII, which aborts the promised elaboration of the theory of the imagination; the occasional attribution of *sententia* to sources where they cannot be traced; the unsettling enrichment of the language by capricious coinages; puzzling, often alarming leaps in logic or obliquities in argument; a suspiciously flagrant figurativeness; the disturbing gusto displayed in the use of footnotes to crack jokes, explore etymologies, or open entirely novel areas of inquiry.[3]

Christensen asserts that there "seems to be no suitable explanation for such errancies" (120), and indeed, the casual incoherence of Biographia Literaria is more often taken up by critics as a problem of method.

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the man along with his ideas, not to mention the text itself. With the exception of Wilson's review, critics seemed satisfied to perceive the contents as "sketches" or "opinions" (often passing over the metaphysics entirely), and were thus relatively unconcerned with the cohesion of the whole *per se*.

3. Jerome Christensen, Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 120.

On the other side of the debate, one finds equally predictable arguments that at least some of its flaws are the very things for which Biographia Literaria should be praised. Kathleen Wheeler makes just such an argument: "Its hybrid, mixed genre, its autobiographical basis, its style, its mixing of philosophy, criticism and 'literature' (fiction, narrative), its unmethodical and miscellaneous content"--its "flaws" are the very criteria Schlegel advances for the truly modern work.[4] Moreover Coleridge himself, reflecting on the conversational mode of a superior mind in his essay on Method, offers his own analogy for digressive progress, finding "...in each integral part, or (more plainly) in every sentence, the whole that he then intends to communicate. However irregular and desultory his talk, there is *method* in the fragments."[5]

Wheeler takes up this cause at length in her Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.[6] She describes its growth, over more than thirteen years, into a "fragmentary miscellany," an "original genre which achieved a synthesis of the whole man in his philosophical, poetic, critical, psychological, religious and personal

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4. "Coleridge and Modern Critical Theory" in Christine Gallant, ed., Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today (New York: AMS Press, 1989), p.94.
5. "Essays on the Principles of Method" in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. 4, The Friend, (2 vols.), ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969) I, p. 449. Coleridge's statements on method have proved useful for critics trying to make sense of his critical theory and practice--see, for example, J.R. de J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism (cited above). Jackson brings these principles to bear on Biographia Literaria, but without advancing a unifying scheme for that work.
6. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

strivings" (ix). Thus, Biographia Literaria can be seen as an organic organization of Coleridge's diverse "parts," *and* as a synthesis of the text's own parts. This synthesis, or underlying order must, however, be discovered by the reader; as certain parts are either missing or suppressed, this work is a restorative uphill climb. As Coleridge points out in the letter to himself of Chapter Thirteen, "You have been obliged to omit so many links, from the necessity of compression, that what remains looks...like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower" (BL, I, 302-3).

To seek the all-encompassing view from the metaphorical tower top would constitute, in Wheeler's terms, an "active" reading of Biographia Literaria. Where a passive reading would discover only "diversity and miscellany," an active reading finds "a submerged level of discourse" which figures forth the Biographia's underlying method and, therefore, its unity (155). It would seem that the true (complete) text, and the central issues it organizes, are brought forth--and not simply constituted--by a dialectical exchange with a reader. From Wheeler's point of view, simply factoring in the experience of the reader weakens the argument that the work lacks unity and consistency; and it is clear that Coleridge intended to put the reader to work.[7]

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7. There ample room, here, for rebuttal, as Coleridge would never have elevated the reader in this way. As Paul Hamilton rightly points out, Coleridge "presents difficulty in *Biographia* as a means of enhancing his own philosophical authority, not as an incentive for the reader to take over and start producing his own text." Coleridge's Poetics (cited above), p. 21. Moreover, the emphasis on reading actually *compromises* one's reading of the text in a crucial way, insofar as "the redemptive activity required of the reader's supplementing imagination also eclipses the philosophical effort of *Biographia* itself" (18). Modern

Several other critics have contributed to the view that order, or at least method, underlies Coleridge's waywardness. As McGann has put it, "Coleridge's 'mosaic' or 'marginal' or 'miscellaneous' manner of composition is precisely what is needed, in his view, if one is to execute a truly methodical and theoretically sound critical operation."[8] Catherine Miles Wallace argues, with Wheeler, for an order which derives (in spite of indefensible lapses) from the indisputable power of Coleridge's critical thinking.[9] McFarland, in Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, attempts to make visible "the elements that might fuse into his unorthodox and disingenuous mode of composition: on the one hand, the sense of understanding and insight into problems that baffled lesser minds..., and on the other, the humiliation before his neurotic incapacity to perform the mere busy work necessary to body forth his insight."[10] Christensen is similarly astute but perhaps

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theories of reading, Hamilton concludes, "try to reconstruct the unity of *Biographia* as ironic gesture or poetic trope by deconstructing its declared aim of producing and exemplifying discursively a theory of imagination" (20). While that reconstruction/deconstruction is in some ways the subject of this chapter, Hamilton cautions again that to emphasize the moves Coleridge makes as rhetorically or poetically astute is to devalue it "as a philosophical project in its own right" (20).

8. Jerome McGann, "*Biographia Literaria* and the Contentions of English Romanticism" in Frederick Burwick, ed., Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: Text and Meaning (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1989), p. 234.

9. The Design of *Biographia Literaria* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).

10. (Cited above), p. 29. Writing here on the problem of plagiarism, McFarland continues: "We may then be able to see in, say, the translations of the Biographia--a book, as Stephen notes, 'put together with a pitchfork'--a kind of intellectual promissory note." (The internal reference is to Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library, III (New York and London, 1894), p. 335.) Indeed, McFarland speculates that

more cautious, taking care to distinguish "mosaic" from "marginal," arguing that Coleridge's method "is not mosaic composition but marginal exegesis, not philosophy but commentary."[11] To conceive of Biographia Literaria as a mosaic composition is to catalogue Coleridge "as just another emblematic figure in philosophy's great picture book" (104).

By now, the terms of the debate will have an all-too-familiar ring. Other texts in the history of letters have presented similar difficulties for readers: a fragmentary superfice which one reconstitutes according to an already-posited natural totality. In some cases, this natural totality is given by the writing subject, particularly in autobiographical texts such as Biographia Literaria--or Montaigne's Essais, to which Coleridge's text (specifically, the authorial and critical discourse surrounding it) bears an interesting resemblance. Montaigne says of his essays: "my ideas follow one another, but sometimes it is from a distance, and look at each other, but with a side-long glance....It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I."[12] Both texts thus invite strategic readings that would, for example, unify them according to their temporal development--and read their inconsistencies as the products of discrete moments in Montaigne's/Coleridge's intellectual

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Coleridge's borrowings "so honeycomb his work as to form virtually a mode of composition" (28).
11. Christensen, p. 105. This last comment resonates with my argument above that the fragment can operate as a commentary on a greater work that failed to materialize, with its implicit suggestion of an allegorical structure.
12. The Complete Works of Montaigne, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 761.

life. The obverse of this would be to allow the disorder of the autobiographical subject *itself* to constitute an order, to accept what Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction describes as "the consistently inconsistent portrait of the author himself, in his character as writer."[13] The "Coleridge" of Biographia Literaria would thus be something of a fictional construction, a product of the reader's imagination when faced with the text. Again, unity is the result of a reading, and moreover, the implication of an authorial persona is itself an interpretive strategy, a "reading" elaborated by the text.

The two main strategies for unifying a text such as Biographia Literaria mentioned so far--where unity is either conferred by the reader or by the autobiographical writing subject--are brought together by Tilottama Rajan in The Supplement of Reading. These must, after all, be seen as part of the same hermeneutic context (a context which would, one must point out, apply to *any* text). Rajan also invokes a Schlegelian model, arguing that Biographia is best approached as an example of "symphilosophy"--"a combination of philosophy and literature in which the text includes an account of its own genesis and a reflection upon itself" (Rajan, 104). Instead of sorting these elements into a conventional structure of "preface, text, and notes, Biographia interweaves them so as to place metastatement within a self-reflexive structure" (104). We are thus

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13. Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 226. It is interesting that Booth discusses Montaigne in relation to Tristram Shandy, where the self-portrait is always disruptive rather than unifying.

obliged to read the text in three ways: referentially (for its literal content), hermeneutically (for a reconstruction of "what it has not quite succeeded in saying"), and reflexively ("because of the way the hermeneutic elements complicate themselves") (104). Reading Biographia as basically a conversion narrative (from Hartley to post-Kantian idealism), Rajan remarks that "the confessional nature of the text excuses the fact that it does not quite cohere as an act of logical or narrative representation" (105). Its grounds of persuasion are *affective*, "logic being no more than a gesture made in the voluminous philosophical apparatus" (105). But then, this is perhaps just a return to a reading elaborated by the author's appeal.

On the whole (so to speak), the anxiety surrounding the reception of Biographia Literaria suggests that the very possibility of a unified "book" is at issue. Indeed, as Christensen points out, this possibility is in some sense the subject of the text itself. It explores the chiastic premise that, as we have seen, the text's unity derives from the integral consciousness that produces it, while that integral consciousness is deduced from its production of a unified text. Moreover, the Biographia "flirts recklessly with the idea of the book, as though unity were not an anchoring reality but a floating object of desire and as though the desire for unity involved a lapse from the mental and moral integrity which the book supposedly incarnates." Christensen thus suggests that "the theme of the Biographia is its test as book" (121). This focuses, once again, the

conceptual obstructions encountered by an anxious obsession with wholeness.

Since superficial unity is so obviously lacking (and its absence perhaps over-emphasized), readers of Biographia Literaria have sought coherence in other ways, and many of these ways lead more or less directly to Coleridge's theory of imagination. The unifying strategies discussed so far, it turns out, implicate the imagination in crucial ways. Reading the text according to its subtitle--"Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions"--presents, as we have seen, one option. Catherine Miles Wallace argues that its principal design feature is precisely this "fusion of personal history and philosophic argument" (Miles Wallace, 8). For Coleridge, "the pursuit of philosophic questions and the discovery of identity have been a single process," and these two aspects are thus "inseparable": "They are polar opposites informing the Biographia's design; *their unifying or originating power is Coleridge's idea of imagination*" (9, emphasis added).

As Miles Wallace points out, this fusion reflects, in part, Coleridge's commitment to "the ideal unity of poetry and philosophy" (8). Similarly, Wheeler argues for a structural unity in the two volumes of Biographia Literaria on the basis of this attempted unification. Between the two volumes, as between poetic and philosophic concerns, she asserts that there is a "distinction" rather than an absolute division to be observed, and that once again, the common underlying principle is the imagination (126). In

the distinction between primary and secondary imagination, and the fancy--in effect, the last page of volume one--"the design and content of the Biographia are crystallized" (127). The division of the imagination into primary and secondary is particularly seen as a structural principle for the whole work, insofar as it articulates a relationship between perception and the work of art. The imagination is the natural subject matter of the Biographia, in the first volume as part of an investigation into perception, and, in the second, into the nature of art. Not only is the structural unity of the two volumes thus preserved, but, insofar as the primary and secondary imagination are said to fashion their own materials ("They reorganize and recreate the substrate, which is not matter but dynamic, progressive activity"), its *content* is also indicated (128).

Reductively, this would amount to saying that an imaginative text about the imagination and its products can have it both ways, and can claim to be unified on these grounds alone. In a footnote to the above passage, Wheeler pushes the possible analogies of Coleridge's tripartite structure of the imagination even further: "The threefold distinction has the advantage of acting also as a sign for dialectical progression and polarity or the reconciliation of opposites, so that the reader is always reminded of the existence of not only the thetic text, volume one, or the antithetic, volume two, but of the prothetic or transcendent unity of both, as the higher *imagined* third." The text becomes the fulfillment of its own perceived philosophical formula, as "Coleridge realizes on a practical level the

results of his speculations in metaphysics: he presents in the structure of the Biographia the apparent duality of experience, and then shows the essential homogeneity as well as the means by which the appearance of duality is overcome" (203, fn. 38). The imagination, thus permeating the whole work, is to be identified more by its own work than as mere subject matter.[14]

Attentive readers, however, will realize that Coleridge's famous--if brief--passage outlining his theory of imagination is more often read and puzzled over on its own, as a fragment detached from the whole of Biographia Literaria, than it is summoned--rather dubiously--to exemplify that text's profound unity. It would be well to look more closely at that theory before proceeding much further. The passage is so well known as to barely require its rehearsal here:

> The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still

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14. A more nuanced treatment of the fundamental asymmetry of Biographia Literaria's two parts is advanced by Tilottama Rajan. In the first part, Coleridge occupies the position of author seeking sympathetic readers; in the second he takes up the position of reader--undertaking a "divinatory" reading of Wordsworth. "The two parts of the Biographia can be treated as complementary so that the text, as a theory and an enactment of reading, reaffirms the commitment in Coleridge's biblical hermeneutics to a unitary interpretation through sympathy and divination" (Rajan, 106). However, the unsettling conflation of "sympathy" and "divination," and the contradiction between the two "readers" of the two parts as authority is displaced and the very distinction blurred, reveal a fundamental uncertainty about concepts of reading in Biographia.

> as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.
>
> FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

There has been no shortage of commentary on this passage, and no end of speculation as to its sources, its significance, and its ultimate value. All of this, in some way, attests to the fragmentary qualities of the passage.[15] Ironically, it is generally agreed that Coleridge advanced the theory as a synthetic strategy, one which would make sense of a particular set of difficult oppositions: being and knowing, preconsciousness and consciousness, perception and representation--oppositions also accounted for, in part, by his distinction between symbol and allegory. Thomas McFarland, in his major essay "The Origin and Significance of Coleridge's Theory of Secondary Imagination," argues that the central issue for Coleridge is finding a means of "systematic connection," "a means of connecting poetic,

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15. Jerome Christensen attributes this surfeit of critical attention to the mutual incompatibility of text and criticism, citing Chapter XIII of Biographia as "one of the classic places where criticism not only must recognize its incapacity to explain the text fully (an easy, often pious, confession for criticism), but the incapacity of the text to satisfy criticism" (174).

philosophical, and theological interests"--and so, above all, a means of connecting "the inner world of 'I am' with the outer world of 'it is.'"[16]

The primary imagination can best be understood as an internalization of this "it is." It possesses a store of images and perceptions in order, as Jean-Pierre Mileur claims, "to regenerate them as its own products so that they may be seen as confirmations of the mind's sense of its own existence."[17] For Coleridge, however, this existence must be identified with the existence of God, and embody--if in finite form--the infinite expression of divine being. The creative richness that results from this identification implies that "this richness is the finite fragment intimating the generative richness of God's higher order" (6). The primary imagination is thus more than mere sense perception, and, in spite of the greater attention paid to the secondary imagination, it is clearly of greater, or at least prior, importance.

The primacy of the primary imagination is emphasized by Jonathan Wordsworth in his "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being," where he traces Coleridge's theory through his native English tradition (Akenside, Hartley, Berkeley) rather than through German idealist philosophy, about which there is now very little argument. Wordsworth

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16. In Geoffrey H. Hartman, ed., New Perspectives on Coleridge and Wordsworth, Selected Papers from the English Institute (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 201. (Reprinted in Thomas McFarland, Originality and Imagination, cited above.)
17. Jean-Pierre Mileur, Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence (Berkeley, L.A., and London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 6.

finds Coleridge's thinking to be (also) consistent with a particular strain of English thought, in which the imagination represents a progression upward, in an ascent of being, where (as in Berkeley) "the uppermost naturally leads to the deity."[18] He concludes that "the primary imagination at its highest is the supreme human achievement of oneness with God; the secondary, though limited by comparison, contains the hope that *in the act of writing* the poet may attain to a similar power" (50; emphasis mine).[19] If the theory of the primary imagination is to identify, in Coleridgean terms, a (perhaps symbolic) correspondence between Man and God in the natural world, the role of the secondary imagination--the creative representation of that correspondence--is to render that connective tissue more identifiable and apprehendable to a third party. If one can only hope to gain this understanding through writing (or arguably through other art forms), literary critics naturally have a stake in the claims of the secondary

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18. Jonathan Wordsworth, "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being" in R. Gravil, L. Newlyn and N. Roe, eds., Coleridge's Imagination: Essays in Memory of Pete Laver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 30.
19. A less theological version of this two-part structure is present in Kant, when he remarks that "the imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature." The Critique of Judgement, 176. In the exercise of the imagination, Kant continues, "we get a sense of our freedom from the law of association (which attaches to the empirical employment of the imagination), with the result that the material can be borrowed by us from nature in accordance with that law, but be worked up by us into something else--namely, what surpasses nature." If art surpasses nature, one may surmise that, after all, the secondary imagination supercedes the primary.

imagination. Little wonder, then, that it has been the object of so much attention.

The previous chapter stressed the importance of the imagination for Romantic thought, and identified some of its salient features. This importance is sufficient to account for a prevalent urge to sub-divide the imagination's functions in order to make it *more* comprehensive--an all encompassing faculty--but I would like to pause briefly on this new notion of the imagination as initiated by Kant, as it had decisive implications not only for the history of idealist philosophy, but also on English Romantic thought.[20] The possible existence of a secondary imaginative function is a natural enough consequence of a productive (rather than mimetic) theory of the imagination. Its synthetic powers (*Einbildungskraft*), its capacity to both formulate and transform, became the essential precondition for knowledge of the world. It was not only possible but necessary to reconsider the ontological and epistemological bases of thought, and, moreover, to rethink the function and scope of art and aesthetic judgement. The inner finality characteristic of the beautiful, the "purposiveness without purpose" discussed above in Chapter Two, is discovered in and through the "free-play" of the imagination, while the imagination's precise constraints are encountered and

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20. This is, of course, to state the obvious. And Kant's "intiation" of a radically new conception of the imagination in the Critique of Pure Reason was dependent on preceding tradition (Cartesianism, empiricism) and on his reading of Hume who, Kant famously claimed, roused him from his "dogmatic slumbers." A competent account of these moments in the history of the imagination is to be found in Richard Kearney, The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

exercised in the experience of the sublime. How a divided imagination, split into primary and secondary functions, may ultimately hinder the realization of such claims, may indeed reflect unbridgeable gaps within a "total" theory of the imagination, remains to be seen.

Thomas McFarland, in the essay mentioned earlier, seeks the sources of Coleridge's theory of secondary imagination in its German precedents. He finds it most convincingly in Tetens, who had also influenced Kant's theory of imagination (which in turn had influenced Coleridge--indeed, one might say that Coleridge's theory combines Kant's new language of perception with the old language of the Fall, or more simply, that Coleridge's theory only lacks Kant's restraint on theology). Tetens's theory, which is a total theory of the activities of representation, has, like Coleridge's, a threefold structure. It begins with a faculty of perception, which produces "original representations out of the sensations within us" (a faculty like Coleridge's primary imagination--a constituting power--but rather more secular) (McFarland, 209). He next describes a faculty under the name of "fancy," a power of reproducing, or re-representing, those initial sensations after their cessation. To these two faculties, familiar to all contemporary theories of the mind, Tetens adds a radical, new entity: *Dichtungsvermögen*. This third term accounts for the ability of the mind not only to reproduce and alter previously existing ideas and sensations, but to create new ones:

> The psyche is able not only to arrange and order its representations, like the curator of a gallery of paintings, but is itself a painter, and invents and constructs new paintings.
>
> These achievements belong to the *Dichtungsvermögen*, a creative power, whose sphere of activity seems to have great scope....It is the self-active fancy...and without doubt an essential ingredient of genius.[21]

Teten's third term corresponds to Coleridge's theory of a productive secondary imagination. Coleridge, too, is attempting to provide new (if occasionally borrowed) terms for an old and persistent, as well as widely-acknowledged aesthetic problem: the ontological status of artistic representation. For Tetens as well as for Coleridge, clues are to be provided by a precise understanding of the activity of the creative imagination.

Critics have also attempted to synthesize the problems posed by Biographia Literaria through the question of language. The most convincing version of this argument is made by Paul Hamilton, who approaches the text's self-division (but not the question of the imagination *per se*) as a problem that Coleridge had the indirect means to solve. Coleridge's philosophy of language, and particularly his theory of "desynonymy," is shown to have the potential to bring a healthy theoretical perspective to critical practice, and thus to articulate more productively the breach at the heart of Biographia Literaria.[22] In a very

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21. Cited in McFarland, pp. 209-10; from Johann Nicolas Tetens, Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwickelung (Leipzig, 1777); Volume I, p. 24.
22. See Hamilton, pp. 10-12. The "integrity" of Biographia Literaria is the specific subject of his first chapter,

different spirit, however, and bearing more directly on the problem at hand, the question of language has been applied to the problem of the tripartite imagination, where it is seen as an exemplar, or analogy, for problems of reference and representation--problems that language can then solve by means of symbolic communication. This is an argument that can be articulated in the compelling terms of Coleridgean oppositions--the incommensurability of discursive and intuitive knowledge, and the inadequacy of language in face of the ineffable--and thus comes to bear on our discussion insofar as the status of representation is once again at stake.[23] Undoubtedly, Coleridge grants the imagination the power to transcend the epistemic constraints of ordinary language and everyday experience. In Coleridge's theory, the thought and the thing can cohere, and the mind can raise itself up toward the divine.

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although subsequent chapters confirm Hamilton's claims by examining in detail the relevant philosophical contexts, Coleridge's theories of language, his practical criticism--moving toward a consideration of the same set of problems (which one might reductively sum up as poetics and politics) in later texts such as On the Constitution of the Church and State.

23. Robert Essick, in "Coleridge and the Language of Adam" in Frederick Burwick, ed., Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (cited above), remarks the traces of *Coleridge's* linguistic theory in his theory of imagination, noting that "the division between imagination and fancy reasserts that ancient division between Adamic and lapsarian language, between motivated and arbitrary signs, with which the ideal language projectors, Boehme, and Coleridge himself all began--and struggled in vain to overcome" (72). Indeed, all the essays in the volume in which Essick's appears address the rupture between text and meaning in Biographia Literaria, a tension which Coleridge, it is said, considers to be inherent in language--insofar as language reflects the structures and habits of the mind (see Burwick's introduction, x-xii).

Poetic language, perfused with imaginative insight, can seize the essence of intuitive knowledge. This is, of course, what makes Coleridge's poetic theory *seem* so essential to his philosophizing about the imagination. Gyung-Ryul Jang argues (along the linguistic lines just alluded to) that the burden of Coleridge's theory has more to do with poetics than with philosophy, and that it is the mistake of critics to mistake his emphasis and treat the theory as a failed piece of philosophical speculation.[24] It is important to pause here and address this matter, as the two main readings of Biographia Literaria are aligned along this fault-line: either the text is read as the definitive criticism of Wordsworth's poetry, or as an attempt to elaborate a philosophical theory of the imagination with reference to Wordsworth's poetry. As Christensen points out, both readings, teleological in character, are much the same and respond to Coleridge's intention, stated at the outset, to settle "the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction: and at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real *poetic* character of the poet, by whose writings this controversy was first kindled, and has since been fuelled and fanned" (BL, I, 5). More fundamentally, Christensen points out, "both readings agree on the need for and presence of a generative origin in the Biographia which certifies its ideal wholeness and ultimate intelligibility" (Christensen, 122).

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24. "The Imagination *Beyond* and *Within* Language: An Understanding of Coleridge's Idea of Imagination" in Studies in Romanticism 25 (Winter, 1986).

Both readings may "agree" on this need but it is doubtful that it is finally accommodated. These readings are frequently found to be in competition with each other and, more seriously, to exceed their common purpose in mutually conflicting ways. This becomes especially clear in discussions of Coleridge's theory of the imagination: while the origin of his theory was an attempt to account for the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry, his speculations quickly became too broad to apply to just poetry. Too much for poetics and insufficient for philosophy, the theory becomes difficult to read coherently. Coleridge's originary motives and his final destination cease to effectively inform each other.[25] Even though, as the thrust of Paul Hamilton's argument reveals, this need not have been the case (and it has had the unfortunate result of fostering the misguided notion that "theory" and "practical criticism" are polarized pursuits), there is nevertheless something revealing about this incommensurability--revealing insofar as it

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25. The "gap" between philosophical and aesthetic speculation on the one hand, and "practical criticism" on the other (a gap which the text and many of its readers claim to bridge), is remarked upon by Stephen Bygrave in "Land of the Giants: Gaps, Limits and Audiences in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria," Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832, ed. Stephen Copley and John Whale (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). He suggests that Coleridge had an ideological interest in maintaining that gap, which "can be theorized historically in terms of Coleridge's movement away from the Christian Commonwealth radicalism of the 1790s to a much more conservative use of the same discourses" (38). Bygrave is perhaps taking his cue from Hamilton, who suggests that Coleridge's "repression of the argument from desynonymy in *Biographia* in favour of the ill-fated transcendental deduction" may be accounted for by Coleridge's "increasing anxiety about the specific political form which radicalism supported by his poetics in method and conclusion might take" (Hamilton, 5).

reformulates a "perennial problem" (Hamilton, 13) that a poetics of the fragment must also address.

In spite of interpreting Coleridge's theory as primarily a treatise on (poetic) language, Gyung-Ryul Jang's argument appears to be inspired by this very "disinformation"--that is, it depends on the gap in order to make the bridge. Gyung-Ryul Jang singles out the missing chapter or link in Coleridge's philosophical preamble to his theory (justified in the letter from a "friend," and furthermore, *not* replaced by the promised "detailed prospectus" BL, I, 304), and attempts to restore it within a literary (or linguistic) context. This missing link is, in effect, the distance between the primary and the secondary imagination--between the projected scope of metaphysical speculation and the constraints of theoretical formulations. Gyung-Ryul discusses philosophical reasons for this missing link, but also proffers its possible connection with Coleridge's poetic theory.

Since poetic expression secures "the essence of intuitive perception" (517), it would appear that Coleridge comes up with the theory of secondary imagination as a way of solving the problems inherent in the theory of imagination as a whole. Speculatively, it would seem that the secondary imagination is necessary to provide access to the primary imagination, and that such access is necessary precisely because of its impossibility. In accordance with an argument like Gyung-Ryul Jang's, the primary imagination must, by definition, be impenetrable and inaccessible, that is, it must exist outside language (in an intuitive rather

than a discursive field). Poetry, and therefore the secondary imagination, is presented with a difficult task: it must not only transcend but presuppose language--"we cannot help but say that the poetic imagination must both negate and entail human language" (517).

If the theory of primary imagination represents Coleridge's attempt to articulate an intuitive, transcendent imaginative faculty, the secondary imagination, operating of necessity within language, "is essentially the *conscious* working of the poet's mind to verbalize the ineffable experience" (517). While in the case of the primary imagination "the elimination of the conscious will is prerequisite to [its] effective working," the poet's conscious will must play an active role in any verbal shaping undertaken by the secondary imagination (517). Lest it seem that these functions are fundamentally divergent, we should recall that Coleridge intended them to differ in degree rather than in the kind of their agency. And lest it seem that the constraints on the secondary imagination have been over-emphasized here, we should consider that we find freedom (and thus exercise conscious will) in these very efforts to "dissolve, diffuse and dissipate" our own "ontological and epistemological boundaries" (518). As Coleridge commented, "freedom expresses that highest perfection of a finite Will, which it attains by its perfect self-determined Subordination to Reason."[26]

Dissolution, diffusion and dissipation remain, however, effects of the secondary imagination (and therefore, for

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26. Notebook 26 (1825-6) ff. 31-31v; Gyung-Ryul Jang, 518.

Gyung-Ryul Jang, of language). Attempts to make the theory of imagination overcome its internal divisions flounder, to my view, on this very point as the most common means of narrowing the gap between primary and secondary imagination (or between a poetics and a philosophical discourse of/on the imagination) is through "symbolic" language; the dangers of an unexamined notion of the symbolic have been explored at length above. "Symbolic" is what most commentators seem to mean by "poetic" language, but this maneuver needs further investigation. For Gyung-Ryul Jang, for example, as for Coleridge, the potentially devastating effects of the secondary imagination are evidence of its "essentially *vital*" working, and the struggle to idealize and unify is in effect a symbol-making process (519). J. Robert Barth, in The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition, makes the symbolic nature of the imagination one of his main points: the primary imagination can thus be seen as "the act of perceiving symbols" and the secondary imagination as the act of "making symbols." In both cases, the activity is essentially religious--"a finite participation in the infinite creative act of the supreme symbol-maker, the supreme symbol-perceiver, just as creation itself is... the supreme symbol."[27]

Coleridge states earlier in Biographia Literaria that "an IDEA, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be

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27. The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 12. Barth goes on to argue that the religious act in question is, at bottom, an act of faith, which signals for us--once again--that the concept depends on "something" that is constantly in dispute.

conveyed but by a *symbol*" (I, 156). Coleridge's views on the symbol are familiar to us from the later Statesman's Manual passages ("Imagination....that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*" SM, 29). The problematic nature of the symbol is, however, acknowledged by what follows in the Biographia comment: "all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction" (BL, I, 156); that is, the symbol operates beyond logical deductions and verbal constructions at the same time as it is regulated by them.

Symbols, thus dependent on their communicability, can only be understood by those capable of penetrating them. Coleridge goes on to reflect on the nature of symbolic communications: "Veracity does not consist in *saying*, but in the intention of *communicating* truth; and the philosopher who can not utter the whole truth without conveying falsehood, and at the same time, perhaps, exciting the most malignant passions, is constrained to express himself either *mythically* or equivocally" (BL, I, 157). Or perhaps fragmentarily, or even *allegorically*, as allegory has come in for criticism on precisely this point: that it communicates indirectly and requires an initiated audience.

The difficult presentation of Coleridge's idea of imagination is taken up by Miles Wallace. The imagination, she rightly points out, is "the title of an idea whose

symbolic forms include poetry" and if we are to grasp this idea, then "the Biographia cannot limit itself to 'deduction and conclusion'"--an expository method inadequate to the idea. "These cannot bring the reader to what J. Robert Barth, SJ, calls a symbolic 'encounter' with the idea of imagination--not the theory, but the idea that the theory can only describe paradoxically" (Miles Wallace, 10-11). This offers yet another evasive argument for Biographia Literaria's resistance to easy reading: the text can only be *read* symbolically.

Wheeler also argues that the primary mode of imaginative presentation is symbolic. Furthermore, she ushers in the symbol/allegory distinction to support the split between Imagination and Fancy--again, using one opposition to further articulate another. This solution addresses the problem of finding a mediating faculty which "would keep alive the idea in the expression of it, and could create *conductors* for the truths or ideas of reason" (Wheeler, 144). "Reason," she elaborates, "is the source of ideas and the 'faculty' of contemplating them in their spiritual being, while imagination acts to embody those ideas in the sensuous, the result being symbols" (144).[28] The disintegration of imaginative powers into Fancy has a correlative in the slip from symbol into allegory, as it too

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28. In "Coleridge's Theory of Imagination: A Hegelian Solution to Kant?" in David Jasper, ed. The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism (London: Macmillan, 1986) Wheeler returns to this problem, arguing that the imagination is "the activity of embodying the ideas or truths...of the reason into symbols" and, moreover, that "the imagination is itself a symbol of reason" (32-33).

mistakes images and abstractions for ideas, "and the literal for the metaphorical." The relation of understanding to reason is, likewise, reductive, as "it assumes that what cannot be *comprehended* cannot be *conceived*; hence ideas are beyond its grasp" (144).[29]

Jean-Pierre Mileur also takes up the apparent similarities between symbol and secondary imagination, but moves quickly beyond the self-evident. "Symbol seeks to embody in the world the qualities of consciousness while maintaining a degree of distinction between them by emphasizing the degree to which the relationship remains figurative" (Mileur, 21). Mileur does not mean that symbol is a figure in the tropological sense, but that understanding is itself figurative. Thus, Coleridge's symbol can be seen as "an epistemological category coming into being--a category of mediation" (21). This is a familiar proposition in a more precise form, but as I argued in an earlier chapter, symbol is a necessarily mediated form of mediation. In his full argument, Mileur suggests that Coleridge addresses the problem of the intelligibility of symbol when he examines both revisionary relationships

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29. Wheeler concludes this chapter with a discussion of the way in which Imagination and Fancy recede in Coleridge's later work, in favor of Reason and Understanding. She suggests that this was so because Coleridge "never again, moreover, made poetry the explicit and exclusive topic of discussion in relation to the operation of the faculties" (145). This would correspond, also, to a shift from the writing of poetry to the writing of philosophy. Wheeler also finds the distinction between Reason and Imagination unclear, and concludes that the Imagination is an intermediate faculty whose representations also represent the ideas of reason. She quotes Coleridge from Anima Poetae: "imagination is the laboratory in which the thought elaborates essence into existence" (141).

between poems, and "the status of textuality as a mode of apprehension" (22).

In The Statesman's Manual, Coleridge coined the term "tautegorical"--significantly, in the context of his discussion of "symbol"--to indicate repetition with difference. The echo, or repetitive function, of the secondary imagination with respect to the primary is in some sense tautegorical. It extends and transforms while it repeats, and therefore has revisionary powers. Thus Mileur argues that "the primary metaphor between primary and secondary imagination is that of the original and its revision" (7). This metaphor offers yet *another* approach to reading Biographia Literaria: "Coleridge's definition of imagination is properly (and literally) central to Biographia Literaria because it internalizes at a level prior to consciousness itself a revisionary relationship between text, pretext, and context that is everywhere apparent in the undertakings of 1815-18" (9); but while the metaphor itself confers unity, it serves equally to describe certain discontinuities between primary and secondary imagination.

Coleridge's theory, for example, requires a certain distance, or dualism, in the mind which allows it to "contemplate its own contents as part of an objectified self that is experientially distinct from the controlling, artificing will" (7). Even though the primary imagination must function prior to the exercise of conscious will, it is nevertheless "of the self and not of the external world."

Furthermore, "distinguishing self from the conscious will, primary imagination thus becomes a principle of self-abnegation, a suspension of will, guaranteeing consciousness of its own literality" (7). Thinking, as a form of revision, guarantees identity.

Fancy has no part in this process, as it receives its materials "ready made from the law of association." When Coleridge states that it has "no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites" he means, in Mileur's terms, "this quality of being possessed by the immalleable and self-sufficient materials of perception." This is not, Mileur continues, "an inherent attribute of the counters but of the faculty that lacks the power to transform impressions and thus becomes their prisoner" (7). Like the secondary imagination which is displaced from the "original act of perception/creation in the primary imagination" (8), the fancy is in turn displaced from the whole field of imagination--and presents a chosen alternative to it.

The displaced position of the secondary imagination, however, presents certain difficulties which reflect the impossibility of knowing the whole through the part. The very inaccessibility of the primary imagination, located at the origin of consciousness, means that "any attempt to apprehend it is *already* well within the realm of consciousness" (8). Therefore the secondary imagination, fated "to exist perpetually in the already-begun," must posit or project its "pretext," or the earlier moments of the process in which *it* is held prisoner, from the obvious limitations of this very belatedness. This clearly

represents a sublime straining after the unapprehendable; but the struggle is also an honourable one, for it "redeems the will from the trivial arbitrariness at the heart of mere fancy" (8). There is also, of necessity, a rupture between the primary imagination and its analogue, divine creation: where one is finite, the other is eternal. The inaccessibility of the primary imagination to consciousness thus echoes the impenetrability of the infinite by the finite. As Mileur puts it, "what Coleridge's definition of imagination does then is to name as its own peculiar place this break in the chain of being, this fundamental discontinuity determining the belated, revisionary nature of consciousness" (9).

The fragment (the problems it organizes, and the ideal knowledge it suggests) must also find its place in the very "break" it, like symbol, is so often summoned to conceal. Its co-presence with the operation of the imagination is nowhere more evident than in Coleridge's attempt to define the imagination in concrete terms, that is, nowhere more evident than in the disintegrative effects of the theory on the whole of the Biographia Literaria, and of the elements of the theory upon itself. One observes, for example, a certain antithetical thrust in the movement from primary to secondary imagination, and from imagination to fancy. In the descent, reminiscent of the fall, from the automatic functioning of the primary imagination to the implication of the will in the secondary imagination to the matter of choice in the fancy, one senses ambivalent values: at the

"lower" end, the denigrated fancy conceals a preferable state of affairs ("choice"), and at the top, the primary imagination oscillates between *its* givenness (its materials being, as it were, always already there), on the one hand, and its constitutive, originative function on the other. Perhaps this antithetical thrust is best expressed, in true Coleridgean fashion, by a metaphor--by Coleridge's water insect in Chapter VII. At one moment actively winning its way against the current of the stream, and at the next "yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion," the water insect is "no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking" (BL, I, 124).[30] But as these forces must function simultaneously in the primary imagination, the implications clearly become contradictory. Both active and passive, the imagination is a *middle*, rather than a total, state. Hovering in this necessarily unfixed way, it ultimately refuses clarity.[31]

It is clear that if the theory of imagination is to serve as the unifying model for the entire text, then the communicability of the Biographia Literaria as a "whole"

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30. Cf. Kant's comment that in the sublime, the mind is set in motion by the alternation of attraction and repulsion (The Critique of Judgement, p. 107).
31. These final comments echo Coleridge's own relections on Shakespeare's "conceits," which are generated by an "effort of the mind, when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites and qualify contradictions, leaving a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between images. As soon as it is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination." Shakespearean Criticism, 2 vols., ed. T.M. Raysor (Second edition; London: Dent, 1960), II, 103.

depends on the communicability of that theory. I would argue, and have shown, that both text and theory present problems that cannot be so neatly resolved. Just as allegory, in the previous chapter, resisted oppositional denunciation, so the fragmentariness of Biographia Literaria does not succumb readily to the language of "symbolic" communication. Coleridge, with his faith in such transcendental ideals as symbol and imagination, nevertheless, and perhaps in spite of himself, exhibits a certain urge to disorder which (like the fragment) only serves to make his claims all the more pressing. This dynamic is precisely the one observed in Benjamin's theory of allegory in Chapter Three where, as Bainard Cowan remarked, "the obscurity, fragmentariness, and arbitrariness of allegory all signify the absence of a fulfilling event; this absence, in turn, serves to invoke that event with a greater urgency and a desperate faith."[32]

In moving toward a conclusion, I would like to return to the question of unity in the terms raised at the beginning of this chapter. Montaigne famously comments in his Essays: "I speak my meaning in disjointed parts [*par articles décousus*], as something that cannot be said all at once and in a lump" (Works, 824). Translated more literally as "unsewn items," Montaigne's *articles décousus* enrich a notion of fragmentation (or here, perhaps just 'ragmentation), and complicate a facile distinction between

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32. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," p. 119.

superficial and underlying order.[33] The term "unsewn" identifies ambiguities that "fragment" shares, namely, a double indication: either something once sewn together and now taken apart, or something that has never been sewn together with something else--that is, has always been "unsewn." This problem in Montaigne is pursued by Steven Rendall in a seamless article called, naturally, "In Disjointed Parts/Par articles décousus," but it could easily serve to describe a certain tension in the term "fragment" which we have already had occasion to observe.[34] Like the fragment, the unsewn operates "in a double semantic field, standing at a point of articulation between unity and disunity, indicating an empty space between elements that have/have not been connected." Further, "it [the *décousu*] subverts the opposition between part and whole, and thus resembles words like 'supplément,' 'pharmakon,' and 'entame,' of which Derrida has written that they 'resist and disorganize' the binary oppositions of logocentric metaphysics '*without ever* constituting a third term, without ever occasioning a solution in the form of speculative dialectics' which would reestablish a unitary *Logos*" (76). As Derrida elaborates, "the *pharmakon* is neither remedy nor poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the

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33. On the false opposition between surface and depth (or, the new depthlessness of the postmodern), see, for example, Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), particularly chapter one, the well-known essay from which the volume takes its name.
34. Steven Rendall, "In Disjointed Parts/Par articles décousus" in Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., Fragments: Incompletion & Discontinuity (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1981).

outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside, nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc....Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either/or..."[35] And, as I suggested above at the end of the introductory chapter, the fragment is neither--that is *either*--part or whole. It does not, cannot, settle on either side of the opposition; and, because it depends on this very ambivalence to be at all meaningful, it cannot settle into a third term: it cannot become something else.

It is precisely the sort of dialectical speculation disparaged by Derrida--trapped in its own ultimately binary logic--that so marks the attempts to unify Biographia Literaria discussed above. Triadic schemes such as Wheeler's that attempt to solve the problem abstractly or structurally, although they respond to a problematic initiated by Coleridge himself, don't offer anything new. Nor, finally, does the fragmentary/unity opposition, as an opposition, settle the matter at all helpfully. While it would seem that the only way beyond this stand-off is a certain deconstructive skepticism, one might additionally observe that Coleridge himself suggests some alternatives.

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35. For Derrida's full argument--which includes a fascinating discussion of the etymological relation of *coudre* to the Greek *hymen*--see Positions (Paris: Les Editions de minuit, 1972), pp. 58-59. English translation by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 42-43.

In Table Talk, he describes the genius of Shakespeare as follows:

> Shakespeare's intellectual action is wholly unlike that of Ben Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher. The latter see the totality of a sentence or passage, and then project it entire. Shakespeare goes on creating, and evolving B. out of A., and C., out of B., and so on, just as a serpent moves, which makes a fulcrum of its own *body* and seems forever twisting and untwisting its own strength.[36]

This is no unapt metaphor for the intellectual action of *Coleridge* in the composition of Biographia Literaria. Not only does it defend the absence of an explicit or superficial unifying thematic structure, it also accounts for the positive gains to be had from movements which could only be described as self-thwarting, as Coleridge twists and untwists *his* own strength. Moreover, the model he proposes is unconventionally organic insofar as there is no fixed, essential center to project in every move; the emphasis on linearity and consequent moments of brilliant insight, dependent for their brilliance on precisely this consequentiality, suggest a fundamentally allegorical model.

The problem of perpetual motion (the text spinning just slightly out of authorial control), which such terms as the *décousu* identify, is arguably just what Montaigne and Coleridge have in mind when they urge, strategically, that their pronouncements must be unfolded progressively--in Montaigne's "something" that cannot be said "all at once and in a lump," and in Coleridge's speculations about method, that essential first principle of philosophical

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36. Table Talk, I, p. 464.

understanding. Coleridge argues that the very origin of the term (from the Greek, a way, or path of transit) implies "progressive transition." Method thus requires continuous transition as much as continuous transition requires "a preconception." "The term, Method, cannot therefore, otherwise than by abuse, be applied to a mere dead arrangement, containing in itself no principle of progression" (The Friend, I, 457).[37] Coleridge has in mind a dynamic order given by the powerful resources of a methodical mind which must, by definition, be under its full control. The repeated emphasis on progressive revelation declares, however, that a different--decentered and fragmented--model of the imagination may be in action.

Biographia Literaria, in the final analysis, refutes organic method. Although it embraces notions of growth, process, and active productivity integral to organic form, it nevertheless lacks a controlling central structure and a strict location of the essential. It thus amounts to an affront to the aesthetics of symbolism which, along with the organic, has a (hidden) tendency toward dualism. The terms, or perhaps the *method*, Coleridge chooses to emphasize the vitality of the imagination are closer to an allegorical dynamic--not, of course, as an abstract and dead arrangement, but as the progressive, if not radical, method

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37. Other provocative reflections on method would include Benjamin's "Methode ist Umweg" (method is a digression), in On the Origin of German Tragic Drama, p. 28. This is for Benjamin, as it would be for Coleridge, a legitimate procedure for uncovering "truth." In both cases, the theological basis for the term would spare them from Gadamer's counter-suggestion that truth is exactly what *evades* method (Truth and Method, p. 417f).

for discovering truth promoted by Benjamin where the fragmentary finds a natural home. Not, then, as externally grounded and arbitrary, but as a necessary and insightful, internally-generated process. More accurately, the inevitable binary having inserted itself yet again, one should remark: neither allegory nor symbol, but, simultaneously, *either* allegory or symbol.

CHAPTER 6: "KUBLA KHAN": PREFACE AND POEM

In Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's The Literary Absolute, the radical theory of the fragment in German Romanticism is characterized as playing out a dialectic of incomplete incompletion.[1] The fragment's essential nature is captured precisely by an undecidability between partiality and wholeness, by the way in which both part and whole are implicated/not implicated in each other--and therefore by the fragment's fundamental irresolvability. Readings of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" have been, in turn, characterized by a persistent playing out of the part/whole opposition. The poem has been assailed with competing claims of its wholeness, its partialness, its partial wholeness. Because its status as fragment is so much debated, the poem can be said to display the essential ambivalence of the fragment.

Clearly it is not the poem itself but its relation to the preface that makes this so. Generations of critics and readers have found the poem formally satisfying in spite of, or perhaps because of, its enticing, but partial, articulation of visionary experience. The poem can be read, conventionally, as the symbolic part of an unapprehended and promising whole. But Coleridge himself unsettled such complacent reading by the addition of the preface for the poem's first publication in 1816. Superficially, "Kubla Khan" has become a fragment poem because Coleridge says so and thus establishes the conditions for its reading. It is

1. See discussion of this text in my Introduction, above.

clear that Coleridge is not simply fabricating an elaborate apology for the poem's alleged incompletion, but is rather responding to tensions already present in the self-presentation of the poem.

Above, in the introduction, I criticized an unproblematized use of the term "fragment" in literary criticism. The implications of that argument were that "fragment" and "totality" have come to define the limits of an ultimately *false* opposition, and that the terms may be seen more profitably as *non*-contradictory--non-contradictory because it is not a case of either/or, but rather, both/and. "Kubla Khan" exemplifies the irresolvability of the fragment as either part or whole since this problem is apparent on several levels: it is at work *in* the work, it guides Coleridge's reading and presentation of his work, and it represents a major preoccupation for literary criticism. These points will be pursued here in three related areas: first, the dynamic of what one might call the "intervention" (for example, Coleridge's self-addressed letter in Biographia Literaria, the preface to "Kubla Khan," and the figure of the man from Porlock); second, the problematic of the preface in general; and finally, the problems posed for interpretation by the relation of preface to poem in "Kubla Khan."

i) Interventions

Jean-Pierre Mileur points out an obvious similarity between Coleridge's gloss to "The Ancient Mariner," his

preface to "Kubla Khan," and the letter from an imaginary friend that prefaces his theory of imagination in Biographia Literaria. All three are instances of "textual revision," instances of Coleridge's "reluctance to let the text speak for itself"--instances of "the confrontation between Coleridge and his text spinning out of itself revisionary pretexts and contexts, grasping at an ever-elusive immanence" (Mileur, 10). The equivocal nature of marginalia is similar, insofar as the original text becomes an occasion, or a pretext, for semi-internal commentary.

As with any such intervention, any commentary within a text, the question of the relationship between the two is indeed vexed. The writer is performing the function of both writer and (internal) reader and is, most problematically in the case of "Kubla Khan," both "agent and recipient of revelation" (13).[2] In the case of the letter, Leslie Brisman has commented that Coleridge seems to be speaking in his own "more child-like and friendly" voice, but that this voice "of practical judgement is a lesser voice, a sensible Understanding in distinction from a higher Reason."[3] This lesser voice conceals a failure of intellectual will. Mileur, however, argues that rather than representing an interruption in the operation of Reason, the letter "substitutes for the flow of philosophical rhetoric the

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2. By internal reader I refer to the author's subjective self-reading--a reading without objective distance, perhaps in some ways a blind reading--rather than to a posited *ideal* reader, although in Coleridge it has been often observed that he projects, embeds, elicits and shapes an ideal reading in and around his texts.
3. Leslie Brisman, Romantic Origins (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 36; see Mileur, p. 12.

point of realization... that restores the rift between Coleridge the philosopher and Coleridge the man" (12-13):

> The letter, like the gloss to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and the preface to "Kubla Khan," bespeaks a self-alienation, a failure to recognize himself in what he is writing or has written. In at least one of its functions, the attribution of the letter to a friend reflects the degree of Coleridge's self-alienation. (13)

Brisman notes a similar rift in the *person* from Porlock, who represents the person, rather than the poet, in the person of the poet (Brisman, 32).

The intervention occasioned by the letter from a friend, like the theory of imagination embedded uneasily in Biographia Literaria, is both disruptive and mediating: one could say that it disrupts in order to mediate or mediates by means of disruption. The preface to "Kubla Khan," while also a disruptive mediation, intervenes through repetition rather than suppression of the text to which it points, and thus presents a slightly different problem. The case of the letter, however, merits further consideration here--not only as a link between the previous and the present chapter, but as an illustrative intervention in its own right.

Like the preface to "Kubla Khan," the letter represents "a sustained attempt to redefine the grounds of an experience by creating a sense of the alien and strange" (Mileur, 14). The writer of the letter describes his sense of intellectual disorientation, and represents his feelings with an analogy: it is as though, accustomed to light, airy chapels, he had found himself suddenly in a dark, windswept

gothic cathedral where that which he supposed to be substance faded into shadow, "while everywhere shadows were deepened into substances" (BL, I, 301). The analogy aptly describes the transformation and reversal effected not only by the disrupted movement of Coleridge's argument, but the dialectic of presence and absence initiated by the letter itself.

The text of Biographia Literaria, as Spivak has argued, "looks forward to its promise [the future texts it prefaces, such as the Logosophia] and backward at its failure, and in a certain way, marks its own absence: autobiography by default, prefaces grown monstrous."[4] Coleridge's self-addressed letter could be thought to perform a similar function as, in Spivak's terms, "a writing reminder of a gap" (4). The argumentation that the letter supplants is perhaps only suppressed, as the rhetoric of the letter suggests its existence elsewhere: the writer of the letter, at least, has had the privilege if not the pleasure of perusing it. As a consequence of the letter, Coleridge "contents" himself with publishing only the "main result," saving the chapter *itself* for a future volume. In a back-and-forth movement reminiscent of the metaphorical water-insect, Coleridge both withholds and anticipates (in a non-existent prospectus) the body of his chapter. Using the rhetoric of "too much and yet not enough," he invokes its presence by declaring its absence.

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4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 4.

The main result is, of course, Coleridge's theory of imagination; the narrative *obturateur* in this case is, as Spivak suggests, the letter from a "friend." This gesture is "about as far as possible from 'the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'" (5). The letter, that is, replaces entirely the organic development of an argument one might expect to find leading to Coleridge's celebrated conclusions about the power of the imagination. These futile attempts to stop the gap only enhance the fragmenting effects of Coleridge's theory upon his text, as I argued above in Chapter Five.

Coleridge's intervention in Chapter XIII of Biographia Literaria, insofar as it amounts to "a written message to oneself represented as being an external interruption" (Spivak, 5) bears at least superficial resemblance to the untimely entry of the man from Porlock during the "composition" of "Kubla Khan." Whether this entry was a real historical occurence, or a Coleridgean expedience, matters little in the final analysis; the man from Porlock makes his mark, both cutting short and defining the structure of the poem. In both cases (and to some extent in the preface, but this will be discussed as a special case shortly), the interruption marks a momentary internalization of exteriority: inside and outside elide.

It may seem that Coleridge seeks external reference points at moments of uncertainty about the project at hand (nor should this be seen necessarily as weakness). Much has been made of the person on business from Porlock. David Perkins, for example, suggests that he is made to intervene

in order to halt an imminent transgression in which the poet usurps the divine creative function[5]--a case, perhaps, of the primary imagination becoming too primary. This is the most interesting of a list of more pedestrian possiblities which, like Sara's reproving glance in "The Eolian Harp," all serve somehow to curb the poet's poetry. Perkins suggests a need for the poet to "reestablish everyday, rational consciousness, to end the solitude of the poet and associate him again with ordinary human beings" (106); in short, to smooth all disturbances. The man from Porlock has come to represent the end of poetry, or more specifically, a stone cast on the smooth surface of visionary, poetic inspiration. Leslie Brisman goes so far as to suggest that his entry "might be called a primal scene of interruption," where Porlock is the serpent in the garden of poetic paradise--a place of original and immediate inspiration.[6] Mileur argues that the overdetermined presence of Porlock indicates (just as preface and poem both designate) "the loss or absence of the Word" (87). Insofar as the preface reveals a "discontinuity between poetic identity and discontinuous visionary utterance," the interruption of the man from Porlock "represents identity's defense against its own contingency, and against the defining power of utterance as a revelation of that contingency" (85).

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5. "The Imaginative Vision of *Kubla Khan*: On Coleridge's Introductory Note" in J. Robert Barth, S.J., and John L. Mahoney, eds., Coleridge, Keats and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990), p. 106.
6. See Brisman, esp. pp. 30-37.

Kathleen Wheeler, in her chapter on "Kubla Khan" in The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry, proposes that the man from Porlock may be "a personification of a faculty of the mind."[7] A faculty that represses and censors would seem to belong *habitually* to the persona of the reductive, literal-minded reader; "it belongs to the poet only as an interruptive agent" (39-40). Wheeler's argument emphasizes a model of creative reading: the "reductive reader" implied by the personae of the preface (both its writer and the man from Porlock) is ironized *if* key elements of the preface--the dream, the "psychological curiosity," the claim of the poem as fragment--are understood metaphorically.

It is, therefore, not at all clear that the appearance of the man from Porlock in the preface to "Kubla Khan" embodies an anti-poetic or anti-aesthetic force (antithesis, perhaps of the Abyssinian maid). Regardless of the effects of his intervention, he is as often perceived as a very creative invention indeed (as in Wheeler, for example). Nor can it be claimed that his entry is ultimately responsible for the fragmentary status of the poem. Responsibility shifts, rather, to the inhibiting forces everywhere present that such an intervention only typifies. Moreover, the entry of the man from Porlock is only one part of the narrative of the poem's genesis. For example, the poet's profound sleep during which the "vision in a dream" allegedly takes place is easily as important for

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7. The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 39.

understanding the poem as the fact that the recording of the vision was interrupted at all.

The poem itself, as a whole, may be taken as another level of intervention insofar as the creative activity of the poet is an *act*. Wheeler observes that "Kubla Khan" "depicts the tremendous desire of the human psyche to create objects and send them out into the world" (Wheeler, 35). Making (explosive, often fragmenting, creativity) is everywhere present in the poem, "but at the same time as the poem expresses the force and primacy of this making instinct, it also seeks to understand its origins, its conditions for success, its degeneration and its recurrence" (35). The devising of the man from Porlock, which serves, in Wheeler's terms to "split the self of the author" or to personify his ego, can be seen as an instance of "thingifying." And yet, making visible that very process of making has the effect of *de*thingifying: "[the] origins [of things] are shown to be in the creating mind, not in an external substance" (35).

Wheeler brings her conclusion to rest here, but it is necessary to add that the elements of degeneration and repetition she observes are an effect of the lapses and limitations of the creating mind. One may be reminded here of the threat posed to the secondary imagination, or pure poetic function, by the derivative fancy. The poet's interventions, frequently against that very threat, tend also to make it real. In this way, the act of the poem (in addition to the activity of the poet) is as much a *self*-

inhibiting force, thus requiring a prefatory explanation--in turn, perhaps, a self-inhibiting force.

Interventions do not, then, occur only as external interruptions, fabricated or real; they are more frequently internally-generated, arriving in the form of negligence or forgetfulness, as failures of memory or of the will, as admissions or representations of sublime difficulty. As an aside (or perhaps an intervention) one might note that the question of the identity of a poem so affected, indeed the very possibility of a stable poetic identity, is raised. The problem of the overt intervention as discussed above may be seen to focus a broader problem. One might say that the intervention, apparently external, reveals an internal lapse. Which poem are we reading: the one on the page before us or the one projected around it?[8] If a fragment of a poem claims to represent (or "symbolize") a whole poem, can it also claim to *be* a poem? Coleridge, after all, publishes "Kubla Khan" "rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed *poetic* merits." No one has claimed, certainly not since Saussure, that the poetic text could or should be identical with all the meanings it may be thought to signify. This disassociation is merely *confirmed*, or configured anew, by the fragmenting effects of the intervention.

If the signified text is never exactly the same as the text before us, how much more true this must be of the fragment, where the "whole" text is signified in absentia.

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8. The problems unique to the projected text will be taken up here, with respect to "Christabel," in the next chapter.

But the problem, I suggest, is not so much that the poem must relinquish its status *as poem*, but rather that it cannot sustain its claim to being the *same* poem. Not only does the fragment raise issues of poetic identity, it also typifies an ambiguous relationship between the poem and its extra-poetic surround. As I will argue in this chapter, "Kubla Khan" does not suffer *as a poem* because it is a fragment, but the addition of the preface compounds (rather than simply adds to, or even clarifies) a complex of representational and interpretive difficulties that its fragmentary status makes impossible to ignore.

ii) Prefaces

The problematic of the preface, so illustrative of the dynamics of parts and wholes, fragments and totalities, has been aptly typified by Schlegel: "A good preface must be at once the square root and the square of its book."[9] Schlegel's aphorism, with its gallant invocation of absolute integration, suggested an ideal model where distinctions between inside and outside, before and after, could be collapsed if not ignored. It is precisely this unifying structure, a totalizing tendency the preface shares with the book, which Derrida, on the other hand, *disseminates* in his preface on prefaces, his preface--"Outwork" [Horslivre]--to the three essays which make up (or *will not have* made up)

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9. CF 8; cited above, p. 59.

Dissemination.[10] Derrida begins, famously, with the assertion:

> This (therefore) will not have been a book. Still less, despite appearances, will it have been a collection of *three* 'essays' whose itinerary it would be time, after the fact, to recognize; whose continuity and underlying laws could now be pointed out; indeed, whose overall concept or meaning could at last, with all the insistence required on such occasions, be squarely set forth. I will not feign, according to the code, either premeditation or improvisation. These texts are assembled otherwise; it is not my intention here to *present* them. (3)

And yet (because) presentation is precisely what is at issue. While stating the convention of prefaces--to *squarely* set forth the work's ultimate meaning--Derrida goes straight to the heart of the impossible space the preface occupies.

As Barbara Johnson points out in her own "preface," the translator's introduction, the preface plays on its untenably paradoxical nature as an instance of "anticipatory retrospection" and "internalized exteriority." Situated "both inside and outside, both before and after the 'book' whose 'bookness' it both promotes and transgresses, the preface has always inscribed itself in a strange warp of both time and space" (xxxii). Derrida remarks on what his preface should contain ("A *preface* would retrace and presage here a *general* theory and practice of deconstruction..."). It would "announce in the future tense ('this is what you are going to read') the conceptual content or

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10. Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 3.

significance...of what will *already* have been *written*." In relation to the already written (past but present) text, the foreword "recreates an intention-to-say after the fact,..." (7). A similar double-bind has been noted above in Coleridge's simultaneous witholding and anticipating his missing chapter in Biographia Literaria. The preface thus functions in the manner of an intervention, making present *and* absent what is to follow. Having anticipated everything, it cancels the need for the main text--eliminating, at the very least, the necessity of reading on. At the same time, the "*pre* of the preface makes the future present, represents it, draws it closer, breathes it in, and in going ahead of it puts it ahead. The *pre* reduces the future to the form of manifest presence" (7).

This is, as Derrida argues, "an essential and ludicrous operation," and for several reasons. Writing as such, for one, doesn't "consist in any of these tenses (past, present or future insofar as they are all modified presents)"; moreover, such an operation would be confined to "the discursive effects of an intention-to-mean"; and, most problematically, reducing the text to a "single thematic nucleus or a single guiding thesis" would also eliminate the "textual displacement that is at work [under dissemination] 'here'" (7). The impossibility of the preface is, in spite of the fact that we do it all the time, "the impossiblity of reducing a text as such to its effects of meaning, content, thesis, or theme." *Because* we do it all the time, Derrida suggests that "we shall call it the *restance* [the fact or

act of remaining or being left over]--of a sort of writing that can neither adapt nor adopt such a reduction" (7-8).

Derrida, needless to say, is not writing a preface. He will not answer the questions he has raised, at least "not finally in the declarative mode." But he will allow that "*Along the way*...a certain *protocol* will have--destroying this future perfect--taken up the pre-occupying place of the preface" (8).[11] For the preface is indeed open to pre-occupation. Like "forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles, prologues, and prolegomena," prefaces, it would seem, "have always been written...in view of their own self-effacement" (9). At the end of the preface, the *pre* must cancel itself out, "the route which has been covered must cancel itself out," but this subtraction nevertheless leaves a trace, "a mark of erasure, a *remainder* which is added to the subsequent text and which cannot be completely summed up within it" (9). There remains, in the prefatory function, an inherent, persistent, and insurmountable contradiction.

In light of the "impossibility" of the preface, several questions must be raised: do conventional prefaces--subservient, pre-representing the future argument *in sum*--actually exist? And what kind of prefaces, after all, are

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11. It would be impossible to "sum up," or state simply, what Derrida has in mind "here." One might say that Derrida is enacting throughout his own text (rather than stating) the radical upheaval initiated by a theoretical reevaluation of the nature and function of writing (as opposed to speech where, in any case, loss of presence has "always already" begun). Many Derridean issues--the absence of presence, of the *im*mediate, of the self-presentation of meaning (logocentrism)--which bear forcefully on the question of representation are and have been explicitly relevant here in the case of the fragment.

Coleridge's? The first of these questions may be referred to the problem of the fragment in the supposed classical sense of a "part." Above, in the introductory chapter, I argued that the category of "part" was untenable without a double-edged reference to "whole"--that is, that a part could not but partake of the tension inherent in the fragment when its implications are fully apprehended. The preface, like the fragment, shares a certain reversability of status with its "whole" text. This reversability is at play in Schlegel's dictum that the preface must be both square and square root, but the point is that the preface, by nature, resists reduction to a totalizing, geometric formula. The remainder, the *restance*, remains.

Coleridge's "prefaces" provide interesting instances of this incommensurability between the part, the prior, the explanatory, and their "whole" signifying contexts. By "prefaces" I mean chiefly Biographia Literaria, where the alleged preface totally *pre*occupies, or usurps, the place of the text,[12] and the preface to "Kubla Khan." These prefaces, which may be seen as excesses and/or extensions of the "text" itself, reveal that the form and function of the preface is already under considerable strain. In "Kubla Khan," the case at hand, the question of the preface casts a long shadow over the poem; indeed the presence of the preface raises difficult questions about the meaning of the poem which can only be stated by referencing the preface.

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12. As Spivak points out, it is only "because it failed in its self-effacing task" that it became "a full-fledged book," containing, within it, "its own failed preface" (Spivak, 4).

iii) Preface and Poem

The preface to "Kubla Khan" bears, most obviously, an editorial relation to the poem as it represents an intervention of the author as editor of his own works. And it is precisely this editorial relation that both masks and establishes the preface's essentially *literary* relation to the poem. Coleridge, as is well-known, wrote the preface for the poem's first publication in 1816 (his motives for doing so will be considered here later), and it has posed editorial problems ever since. Subsequent editors have, in some cases, suppressed it entirely and anthologized the poem on its own; in other cases, printed only part of the preface (usually leaving off the first paragraph and the conclusion); in still other cases, the preface has been reduced to a (rather lengthy) footnote.[13]

The importance of the preface for any reading of the poem, particularly a reading of the poem as a fragment, need hardly be argued. The preface (so much a literary, self-

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13. Irene Chayes, writing in 1966, comments on the "quiet downgrading" of the prefatory note that she observes in the previous two decades of Coleridge criticism. She attributes this to the discovery of the Crewe MS and a simpler, more factual account of the poem's genesis, and suggests that critics began to suspect that the 1816 preface represented yet another example of "Coleridge's 'self-justifying memory' in the face of accumulating unfinished projects." "'Kubla Khan' and the Creative Process," Studies in Romanticism 6 (Autumn, 1966), p. 1. Internal quote is from Elisabeth Schneider's Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953). Since 1966, we may observe the pendulum of critical fashion swinging in favour of the preface; without it, my argument would not be possible.

conscious fiction in its own right)[14] has far-reaching effects on the poem: in describing the genesis of the poem, it establishes the conditions for its reading; in identifying and/or re-enacting key themes such as the power of poetic vision and the loss of inspiration, the content of the preface further complicates those themes.

Superficially, "Kubla Khan" becomes a fragment poem because the preface says as much. But as suggested above, it is the close connection between preface and poem that makes it apparent that Coleridge is not simply, or only, providing an explanation for the poem's relative incompletion; rather, he is responding to tensions, or difficulties, raised by the poem itself. And far from resolving those tensions, I will argue that the preface, and particularly the combination of preface and poem, demonstrate the impossibility of any such resolution. This impossibility is, finally, coherent with Coleridge's problematic identification of the poem as a fragment.

Coleridge's addition of the preface is not, in the context of his poetic works, without precedent. Many other poems contain brief prefatory notes, or epigraphs, that inform or guide the reader. Clearly, for Coleridge, at least in practice, the poetic work of art does not

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14. This is so, chiefly, as a third person narrative account of potentially fictional events. Wheeler comments: "The creation of a persona (or perhaps more than one) in the preface lends the prose a literary-fictional quality which is not out of keeping with its general style; its Gothic evocation of summers, ill-health, lonely farmhouses on Exmoor confines, anodynes, travelogues, sleep and dreams, visions, [etc.]..." (22). Chayes also finds the preface to be highly literary.

necessarily constitute its own adequate description; his framing devices and internal commentaries reveal a lack of confidence in the absolute communicability of the work of art (or at any rate *his* works), fragment or otherwise. And yet considerable controversy attaches to the preface to "Kubla Khan." How one accounts for Coleridge's decision to write the preface directly informs one's view of the poem as either fragment or whole. This is, I would suggest, a false opposition, particularly in the case of "Kubla Khan," and I propose to examine some of these standard accounts in order to make my case.

Many reasons are advanced for the writing of the preface, few of them flattering. Some critics, McFarland is the best example, find it an expression of Coleridge's embarrassment or lack of confidence about the poem. This is suggested by the delay in publishing the poem (a delay of nearly twenty years after its initial composition); moreover, as McFarland points out, Coleridge "anxiously attempted to deflect judgement by saying that it was incomplete--though it seems about as fully terminated as any poem in the language."[15] Elisabeth Schneider also suggests that Coleridge creates the prefactory fiction to mask his shame and evade responsibility: "For the fragmentary state of this poem, however, a marvelous origin and the man from Porlock could bear the blame and serve as a natural shield against criticism, while Lord Byron's admiration and the description of the fragment as a "psychological curiosity"

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15. Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, p. 225.

might justify its publication."[16] Geoffrey Yarlott also claims that Coleridge's motive was, in part, self-defence--he was "anticipating the charge of obscurity which the poem's acknowledged imperfection of organization would produce."[17] Mileur considers the preface as part of the revisionary context of 1815-1817--indisputably an attempt to influence the way the poem is read.[18]

David Perkins, on the other hand, advances another, more positive, justification for the preface. In his view, Coleridge wished "to impose a 'plot' upon the poem and to invoke appropriate formal expectations" (Perkins, 101). The addition of a plot is to compensate for an internal lapse: without the explanation advanced by the preface, the poem "would consist of two separate passages, the second referring in some lines to the first but not continuing from it" (101). Broadly put, this two-part structure is shared by certain examples of the greater Romantic lyric (Keats' "Ode to Psyche," Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind") in which "the first part, the 'odal hymn,' postulates a 'challenge, ideal, or prototype that the poet hopes to reach or transcend,' and the 'second part, proceeding from that challenge, consists of' a concluding 'credo,' a 'personal expression of hope or ambition'" (101-2).[19] Because "Kubla Khan" fails to integrate two such parts, Perkins suggests that Coleridge solves the problem by superimposing the

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16. Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan, p. 27.
17. Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 128.
18. Vision and Revision, p. 2.
19. The slightly confusing internal references are to W.J. Bate, Coleridge (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 78.

narrative of a plot: "By writing the introductory note he both explained the structure and converted the poem into the dramatic enactment of a story" (102). The story is, of course, spun out of Coleridge's reading of Purchas and the effects of the prescribed anodyne. The preface, while suggesting a certain unity, invites us to locate the interruption occasioned by the visitor from Porlock, and identify the scattered fragments. The theme of lost inspiration is thus represented as it occurs.

The final section of the poem, lines 37-54, are inferred by Perkins to be outside the vision. They are mediate and nostalgic, thus written subsequently. The subjunctive tense (could/would/should) disappears, Perkins points out, after line 49, with the effect that the reader "half-forgets" the wishful thinking and "glories in the sublime poet they describe as though he were present." While the poem does not end positively from a logical or grammatical point of view, Perkins maintains that it ends triumphantly for the imagination, "*as though* the dome were rebuilt" (103, emphasis mine). "In this respect the conclusion develops a possibility given in a different tone in the introductory note through Coleridge's self-quotation from "The Picture," which had promised that the 'visions will return' and 'the fragments...unite'" (103).

It is perhaps self-evident that the preface, and indeed the preface and poem together, serve to frame and shape a narrative--thus putting themselves in the service of commentary, just as the commentators discussed above have projected additional narratives around this frame by

speculating *ad infinitum* about the real motivation for the addition of the preface. Again, though, one must take into account the lack of a clear fit between the given narrative frame and its fragmentary contents. Coleridge may attempt to solve his difficulties by adding a narrative plot structure, as Perkins suggests, but the attempt serves equally to underline those difficulties.

The composition of the expanded preface (to replace the brief note in the Crewe manuscript) represented Coleridge's most substantial revision of the poem for publication. Changes made to the poem itself were, as Marjorie Levinson points out, minimal, and suggest "the author's general concern to liberate the poem from its historical and literary sources: Purchas and Milton."[20] The effect of such changes was to introduce ambiguity where once there was specificity. The new *preface* therefore has revisionary implications for the whole poem--further confirmation, if more were needed, that the two parts must be read together. This is, then, an appropriate place to examine that relationship in more detail.

The preface both echoes and repeats important structural and thematic aspects of the poem--at once interpreting and, in turn, requiring further interpretation. In spite of the clash of genres ("plain" prose for the preface and sublime verse for the poem) and disparate locations (a lonely Somerset farmhouse versus the exotic

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20. The Romantic Fragment Poem, p. 100.

Xanadu), a similar scene is played out.[21] At center stage is the character and activity of the poet. In the preface, the poet's activity is the result of chance, of a drug-induced slumber overcoming him while reading Purchas his Pilgrimage. Once the slumber ends, the poet must hasten "instantly and eagerly" to pen and paper, in order to record his "distinct recollection of the whole" (ll. 23-5). The fragility of this operation is, of course, exposed by the untimely entry of the visitor from Porlock.

Coleridge illustrates the dispersal of the vision with a passage from another of his poems, "The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution" of 1802. The lines he excerpts (91-100) describe the fragmenting of a surface of a stream, so that the charm produced by the reflection (in the poem, of a fair maiden) is broken. The downcast youth (beholder of this vision, thus a reflection of the poet), is urged to stay, with the promise that the fragments of the dispersed vision will re-unite and again become "a mirror." While Coleridge uses these lines to describe the loss of his own vision (he claims that "with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast"), he admits that in his case there was, "alas! [no]...after restoration of the latter" (ll. 31-4). Nor, for that matter, had there been in the case of "The Picture," where the return of the stream's smooth reflective

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21. Other superficial but interesting contrasts are made by David Perkins in his earlier mentioned article, p. 99. In addition to the ones I've mentioned, these include the difference in scene and tone, historical time, and realistic *versus* romantic modes.

surface revealed only that the fair maiden had in fact fled. Coleridge's wishful or idealistic revision must be referred to "Kubla Khan," the poem, and to the possiblity of its eventual restoration, a possibility which remained alive: "Yet from the still surviving recollections in his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him. ...but the tomorrow is yet to come" (ll. 45-48).

The poem itself (like the preface) begins with a description of the contents of the dream. The first stanza details the Khan's paradisal pleasure-ground with its dome, its sacred river, and its caverns. The reader then descends into the Romantic chasm of the second stanza with its mighty, fragment-producing fountain. The reader descends, that is, with Alph, the sacred river, which having meandered five miles "with a mazy motion" (l. 25) now reaches the measureless caverns and (apart from being "momently" flung up as a fountain) sinks "in tumult to a lifeless ocean" (l. 28). While this first part of the poem presents as immediately as possible the contents of the "dream," its movement, or descent might be said already to represent the working of the imagination on the material of the vision. This, in part, is what is meant by Chayes when she suggests an analogy between the sacred river and the mind: the first two stanzas generally, but the sacred river in particular, "dramatize a mental process and its effects within a mind" (Chayes, 7).

Coleridge's use of the river is an example of "Romantic nature description at its best"--that is, it figures forth a

relationship of "mirror-like reflection and affinity between external nature and the human mind" (6). That mind and nature might thus commingle is conventional Romantic theory, but it becomes more interesting when one becomes a substitute for the other--when, for example, the power of natural forces (waterfall, fountain) replaces lost inspiration. Chayes does not pursue the implications of this analogy very far. She remarks how the total landscape of the first two stanzas present, in cross-section, not only the content of the vision, but "a pictorial diagram of the operation of the dreamer's mind during the whole experience" (7). However, the descent into the recuperative efforts of the poem's second part, already figured in this diagram, is not exploited.

The creative activity of the Khan is in considerable contrast with the efforts of the poet in the preface. Where one creates by decree, by simple verbal utterance, the other labours with "pen, ink, and paper" to arrest his vision before it slips away. The passionate, if hypothetical, terms in which Coleridge revives the poetic function in the third stanza (or second part) of the poem register this disparity by presenting an inspirational ideal--a model of the poet possessed by his vision, in an *immediate* relation to his creation. Thus it is not at all surprising that Coleridge emphasizes the delirium (however more or less daemonic) of the poet in the preface. To do so both amplifies the problematics of failure, and allows for closure by thematically framing both preface and poem as a unit. This effect is especially interesting since it is

this final passage, with its celebration of the power of the poet, which is felt to be a satisfying conclusion to the poem *as it stands*, and which is thus felt to render the preface unnecessary.

Further analogies between preface and poem are remarked upon by Kathleen Wheeler.[22] Looking at the basic structure of the poem, one observes that the first part (lines 1-36) offers an account of the poet's dream, and the second part (the final stanza), a meditation on its recovery; this two-part structure is also present in the preface. The last portion of the poem, often referred to as an epilogue, is thus (like the preface as a whole) distinct from the main body of the poem. Both preface and epilogue refer to part one of the poem and maintain a certain aesthetic distance from it. Both preface and epilogue attempt to make constructive sense of a prior experience: in the preface, the "author" is trying to build a poem (to put it bluntly) and in the epilogue, the poem's narrator "would build that dome in air,/ ..., those caves of ice!." In keeping with a common change in register from a representation of immediate experience to its mediation and reception, both preface and poem begin in the descriptive third person and then shift into the first person. Finally, I would suggest, in their respective second parts, both preface and poem express ambivalence about what has been achieved: Coleridge's self-quotation from "The Picture," while implying the possiblity of a restored "Kubla Khan," rehearses, as we have seen, a

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22. Many of the following observations are made in her chapter on "Kubla Khan" in The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry.

moment of loss; and in the second part of "Kubla Khan," the triumph of the imagination is couched, logically and grammatically, in the conditional.[23]

The above sketch of the thematic and structural echoes reveals beyond any doubt how closely integrated preface and poem are. While preface and poem thus appear to present a unified front, we nevertheless perceive profound disjunctions--disjunctions perhaps typified by that infinitely deep romantic chasm, and by the poem's irreconcilable oppositions, by its successive scenes of fragmentation and division, by the dialectic of fragmentation and totalization present in both preface and poem. David Simpson accounts for this divisiveness by characterizing the poem as a "careful structure of recession and diminishing perspective which is overlain and dialectically complicated by successive heightenings of imaginative perception and coordination."[24] Levinson rightly identifies the poem as a palimpsest, where "some readers see the original configuration, others see the shape limned over the original" (Levinson, 104). This doubleness, or *montage* of "vision and revision," can be ascribed to the distance between original composition and its later recontextualization (this is Levinson's primary concern).

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23. Chayes also comments on the general structural parallel, noting "a double movement in time, by which poetic composition of one kind occurs in the past but in some way is imperfect, and poetic composition of another kind is planned for the future but remains unachieved." "'Kubla Khan' and the Creative Process," p. 3-4.
24. Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p. 91.

In addition, it may be seen to exemplify a more general process of vision and revision in Coleridge's work of that period (as in Mileur). Again, I suggest that the disjunction itself represents the principal *difficulty* of the fragment.

It is not surprising that discussions of the poem turn so frequently, so predictably, on the question (in Timothy Bahti's terms) of partiality and meaning.[25] The problem of the fragment must be approached, as Bahti points out, structurally and hermeneutically rather than thematically, but even so one quickly ends up in a revealing struggle between fragments and wholes for priority. The battle-lines were, of course, drawn early on. Not only did reviewers find fault with nearly everything about the poem, disappointment in Coleridge's broken promise as a poet was bitter indeed.[26] "Kubla Khan"'s fragmentary status was either cause for outright dismissal (as Hazlitt famously complained, "The fault of Mr. Coleridge is that he comes to no conclusion"), or, occasionally, open lament ("Still, if Mr. Coleridge's two hundred lines were all of equal merit with the following which he has produced, we are ready to admit that he has reason to be grieved at their loss.").[27] Interestingly, no critics claimed to have apprehended the

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25. Timothy Bahti, "Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and the Fragment of Romanticism" (cited above).
26. Josiah Condor, writing in the Eclectic Review: "In what an humbling attitude does such a man as Coleridge present himself to the public, in laying before them these specimens of the rich promise of excellence, with which sixteen years ago he raised the expectations of his friends,--pledges of future greatness which after sixteen years he has failed to redeem!" 2nd ser. V (June, 1816).
27. Hazlitt, The Examiner (June 2, 1816); reviewer unknown, Literary Panorama, 2nd ser. IV (July, 1816).

visionary whole of "Kubla Khan" through its existing, scattered fragments.

"Organic" readings of the poem were perhaps a specific feature of the early twentieth century. In any event, vestiges of this trend are to be found in current criticism, where critics often claim, as Levinson puts it, "that the poem possesses a special kind of unity and/or/in that it engages its reader in a particular mode of reception, one that mobilizes the poem's scattered parts into a working whole" (Levinson, 102). Even those who are skeptical, Levinson observes, of the "cult of the fragment"--where unity is extrapolated from even the most fragmented of texts--cannot resist the urge to project whole meanings around the expanse of "Kubla Khan." Here, for example, R.H. Fogle: "...'Kubla Khan' is in the most essential sense a complete work, in that it symbolizes and comprehends the basic romantic dilemma, a crucial problem of art."[28]

A second group, which Levinson identifies as "compromisers," places greater emphasis on the fragmentary

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28. R.H. Fogle, "The Romantic Unity of 'Kubla Khan'" in his The Permanent Pleasure: Essays on Classics of Romanticism (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 45. Other critics in this camp, which Levinson lumps under the category of "partisans"--those who feel Coleridge expresses, and thus achieves his imaginative ideal (or at least a "determinate resolution")--would include: John L. Lowes, The Road to Xanadu (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927); Geoffrey Yarlott, Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid (cited above); Kathleen Coburn, "Coleridge Redivivus" in C.D. Thorpe, ed., The Major English Romantic Poets (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957); Elisabeth Schneider, Coleridge, Opium, and "Kubla Khan" (cited above); and John Shelton, "The Autograph Ms. of 'Kubla Khan' and an Interpretation," in Review of English Literature 7 (1966). To this list one might add: Humphry House, Coleridge: The Clark Lectures, 1951-52 (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953); Carl Woodring, "Coleridge and the Khan" in Essays in Criticism 9, (1959).

elements and internal tensions of the poem, but judges these to be, nevertheless, well within the service of a productive creativity.[29] Elisabeth Schneider would in fact be better placed here, with her common-sense observation that the poem reads like "a fragment with a poetic postscript" (indeed the very two-part structure is "fatal to the unity of the poem") (252, 249). For her, as, I would think, for many other readers, the poem only sounds complete insofar as it is brought "to an end beyond which it could not be continued," rather than in a fully aesthetic sense. The second part of the poem thus terminates rather than fulfills the first part; it does not fundamentally alter, or erase the effects of, the presentation of the earlier stanza.[30]

Levinson completes her critical dialectic with an important third group, which she calls "syncretists." These critics read the poem's parts differently--separately and against each other. They distinguish the second part of the poem from the first, reading it as a metacomment on the poem's narrative first movement. This interpretive strategy requires the agency of an active reader who, "instructed by

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29. Here, one would note George Watson, "The Meaning of 'Kubla Khan'" in Review of English Literature 2 (1961); Alan Purves, "Formal Structure in 'Kubla Khan'" in Studies in Romanticism 1 (Spring, 1962). Purves, incidentally, puts Schneider and Lowes in his own category of pro-fragment critics; Levinson adds Fogle, who I have placed above. These categories, not surprisingly, reveal their diagnostic limitations.

30. Schneider suggests, I think rightly, that "the fragment as it stands perhaps carries within itself the seeds of its own early collapse" insofar as the texture of the opening is "exceeding rich and concentrated for...a long poem. The author could hardly sustain it, one feels, and if he could the reader could not." Comparing the density of the opening to "Lycidas," Schneider questions whether any poet, let alone Coleridge, "could have continued it without producing either anticlimax or surfeit" (252).

the metacomment, determines the nature of Coleridge's poetic program" (103). The poem is thus, once again, complete--"it realizes its formal intention--an idealist interest--insofar as it involves the reader in the syncretic act which draws the work's multeity into unity" (104). Although she is not explicitly named, Kathleen Wheeler would fall squarely into this third group.

Levinson aligns her own analysis with that of Elinor Shaffer's, which, while in many ways unique, would seem still to belong to the second category of compromisers.[31] Shaffer famously described "Kubla Khan" as a "collapsed epic," a sketchy fragment of Coleridge's intended epic work on the fall of Jerusalem--where what remained was "a kind of symbolic summary of its entire action and significance" (95). It was, Shaffer confirms, "indeed a fragment of a vast intention; and yet a whole poem" (95). Levinson, who regards "Kubla Khan" as a "completed" fragment is similarly satisfied with a compromise position, and addresses herself specifically to the problem of why Coleridge failed to narrow the distance between the original and the super-imposed "Kubla Khan," why he "failed to homogenize his divided utterance" and allowed traces to remain of "the conflict played out through the poem's two stage composition process" (Levinson, 105). She observes, finally, that the poem *feels* so complete because it does indeed contain all the necessary elements for its completion, and "only lacks the interstitial material," which, in any case, "serious

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31. "Kubla Khan" and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

readers of the poem have always and unconsciously supplied..." (113). We return to Bostetter's "simple and sensible" conclusion that the apparent imperfection of "Kubla Khan" may be ascribed to "both a personal failure on Coleridge's part and the failure or deficiency of an aesthetic ideology" (113).[32]

As the conclusion to which one must inevitably be drawn is characterized as obvious, simple, and sensible (reason intervening yet again at the sublime limits of the imagination), one begins to wonder how helpful a term "fragment" really is. It suggests, on the one hand, that all things are possible, while stumbling over its ultimate impossibility: remaining, finally, reducible to nothing by commonsense skepticism. The fragment/totality question is taken up rather more rigorously by Timothy Bahti in his earlier-mentioned article, "Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and the Fragment of Romanticism." He speculates that "Kubla Khan" may be taken not only as a part of the totality of Coleridge's oeuvre, but also as a part of the whole of Romantic poetry (containing, as it does, the commonplace characteristics and themes of European Romanticism); but this speculation is entertained only to be abandoned as fruitless. Bahti's repositioning of the question is,

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32. Levinson discusses this deficiency precisely as an ideal that "offers no assistance to the poet who loses his vision," and comments that the "particular shaping vision" *itself* that Coleridge seizes on "exacerbates the problem of suspension, cessation, or desertion" (113). Ultimately, reading "Kubla Khan" as a completed fragment "exposes its organicism, its spontaneous expressivity, and its escapism as a terrible tyranny" (114).

paradoxically, a function of its inescapability--a pervasiveness in which criticism is deeply implicated.

Bahti does an admirably thorough job of examining and exposing the endless play of "self-reflecting notions of part and whole, fragment and totality" in the language and structure of the poem (1038). In the first stanza, several dichotomies and oppositions are established and split apart, and this process is repeated in subsequent stanzas. Bahti isolates for particular attention the following: "the dichotomy between the infinite and the finite, and more precisely, that between the outside and the inside ('girdled round' and 'enfolding'), and that between the hyperbolic and the defined" (1039). As a scene of fragmentation, the second stanza splits apart such oppositions (the fountain, for example, "Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst/ Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail," ll. 20-21). Rapid part/whole inversions are expressed through such terms as "amid" and, of course, "fragment," and Bahti observes that "this fount of the fragments is also the origin *of the poem itself*. For," he continues, "as this sequence of divisions develops further--whereby a part within a whole becomes a whole for yet another part--these categories (of a part of something within a whole, a fragment as part of a pre-existing totality) invert themselves" (1040). Examining the successive scenes of instantaneous fragmentation and chiasmic inversion, Bahti concludes, with the production of the sacred river, that "the poem and its first strophe begin 'amid' the second strophe; they spring out of, or take their origin from, the fragmented fountain" (1040). In spite of

the greater complexity of Bahti's line-by-analysis, the inevitable question is raised: "does this not...mean that this origin-as-fragmentation perpetually remains just that, fragmentation, never achieving a fluid continuity?" (1040). And when harmonizing and symmetrical moments occur--the anti-strophe, perhaps, of the repetitive "amids"--"Is this fragmentation annulled and elevated (*aufgehoben*) precisely here into a new totality of symmetrical opposites?" (1041). To halt the analysis here would be to remain firmly in the mire of the previous critics. Bahti, however, steps outside a *thematics* of fragmentation, and addresses the question of rhetoric--one part of what I have referred to above as the self-presentation of the poem: "For in spite of all the symmetries, repetitions and apparently totalizing tendencies, the self-reflexive rhetoric is itself also a place of fragmentation" (1042). The full implications of this remark will be taken up shortly.

The preface is, of course, not only a rhetorical *tour de force*, but a key factor in the fragment/unity debate, as, until it was taken seriously, the problem of the "fragment" of "Kubla Khan" was largely overlooked. Critics have observed that the addition of the preface, in emphasizing a disjunction, disrupts an apparently complete poem--a self-destructive poetic act. On the other hand, the revisionary effect of the preface is seen to turn the poem from an achieved, finite artifact into an open-ended fragment symbolizing an infinite array of meanings beyond itself--a vote for creative possibility. But most critics now,

according to David Perkins at least, discredit the accuracy of the prefatory account of the poem's composition.[33] They doubt that it was composed involuntarily and that it was interrupted by the man from Porlock.[34] Perhaps most significantly, the claim that the poem is unfinished is consequently undermined. In view of the self-conscious literariness of the preface, a literal-minded assessment of its truth content is, though intriguing, less than relevant. What *is* crucially important is that we may, as Lucy Newlyn points out, reject "the myth of inexplicability" advanced by Coleridge.[35] Ironically, these very elements which seemed to confirm the poem's mystified, symbolic status, may be reconsidered as key elements in an allegorical (or allusive) reading. Newlyn observes that this recasting of the poem provides "a basis for claiming that the Preface is not so much an account of the poem's origins as a myth of origins parallel to the poem itself" (233). The choice of the term "parallel" suggests a distance or disjunction--between the text and its ghostly ideal--similar to the one I have been at pains to establish (and to collapse) here through a notion of the fragment as an allegory of displacement,

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33. See, for example, Norman Fruman, "'Kubla Khan': The Legend and the Facts" in Tradition et innovation: littérature et paralittérature (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1974).
34. Richard Holmes, for example, investigates this question carefully in his recent biography. Coleridge: Early Visions (London, Sydney, Auckland, and Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), Chapter 7.
35. *Paradise Lost* and the Romantic Reader (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 233. For Newlyn, the poem finds its feet as a fundamentally allusive text. Milton's Paradise Lost is implicitly alluded to throughout "Kubla Khan"; in the creative struggle re-enacted by Coleridge, Milton is made into "an instance of imagination that is at once rivalrous and unrivalled" (233).

rather than an indicator of identity or belonging. "Kubla Khan" becomes an imprecise analogy (perhaps an emblematic sketch) rather than an enactment of the creative powers of the imagination.

Bahti's analysis of the poem's "rhetorical" status supports this suggestion in interesting ways. Close to the beginning of his article, he points out that Coleridge, in his preface, describes the composition process as a case of "the images [rising] up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort." "Parallel" is perhaps intended to mean that the expressions arose simultaneously, but even Coleridge's formulation leaves room for a temporal lapse. Significantly, the expressions *correspond* to images *as* things. The triadic relation is already metaphoric, but moreover, "there was and is no *reference* except for reference to the metaphoric in itself." Bahti continues: "The appearance of images is the *semblance* of things, and the parallel appearance of words is the *correspondence* to this 'first' appearance" (Bahti, 1038). This "chain of metaphoric reference" is distinctly allegorical although Bahti does not, at least not yet, point this out.

An allegory of the poem, and its mirror symmetry, are present in the preface--on the one hand in the image of the poet's failed attempt to recover his vision and, on the other, in the restoration of the surface of the mirroring pool in the excerpt from "The Picture." Bahti notes that after the interruption, Coleridge claims only to retain

"some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision," which means that "he fell from the 'distinct whole' into an allegorical, more exactly, an aenigmatic part, for 'dim' here indicates, almost like a technical term, the realm of the allegorical" (1045). (Recall here Coleridge's comment in a letter to Richard Sharp that the imagination is a "*dim* analogue of creation.")[36] The obscure and abstract aspects of allegory are conspicuous here; "The 'lines and images' left behind indeed point to the destroyed whole, but the movement from part to whole--from letters and words to purport or meaning--remains allegorically dimmed: Coleridge remains within a partial hermeneutic of the aenigma with written fragments which are supposed to signify a 'whole meaning.'" One would want to note, additionally, the implications for reading and/or commentary: "And when one stands (or has fallen) in an aenigma or allegory, the understanding of it remains similarly aenigmatic or allegorical" (1045). In case of "Kubla Khan," this allegorical affliction affects Coleridge as cipher of his own vision as much as it does the reader of his poem.

The attempt to access a literal origin for the vision of "Kubla Khan" is similarly problematic. After the vision comes recollection and representation (or, after the images, their verbal representation and narration), so that the vision disperses in what Bahti suggests amounts to an allegory of rhetoric. As recollection fails the Author of the preface, and as he "frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to

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36. Jan. 15, 1804. Letters, II, p. 1034.

him,"--the significant phrase "originally, *as it were*" signals that the origin, such as it was ("as if"), was already metaphorical and not literal. "Words are to be literal ('correspondent') images of the original images, but since these 'originally' original images are already figurative ('as it were') expressions, the representational words of the poem are also always already unliteral, not wholly themselves, but rather rhetorically doubled and divided." Thus, Bahti concludes, "if one begins from 'metaphoricity,' one is already in a fragmented allegory of rhetoric" (1047).

Bahti's interest in the allegorical aspects of the poem's rhetoric puts a new spin on an old theme, as Schneider, in 1953, was already arguing that the fundamental thrust of the poem was allegorical rather than symbolic. Indeed, she tactfully ridiculed the outlandish symbolic readings that had been attaching to the poem by, quite simply, emphasizing that Coleridge's poetic practice was never explicitly symbolic in the way such readings assumed.[37] One need only recall Coleridge's insistence on the *translucence* of symbol to realize that concealed symbol was, as Schneider puts it, "foreign to his habit of mind" (Schneider, 256). His habit was, rather, "to expound his interior meanings outright" and where he conferred special significance on, for example, aspects of nature, he tended to make it apparent (254). Since, according to Coleridge's

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37. Schneider invokes here the readings of Robert Graves, Maud Bodkin and Wilson Knight. Knight, for example, attached elaborate symbolic significance to virtually every aspect of the poem (see Schneider, pp. 253-54).

famous definition, a symbol must "enunciate" and "render intelligible" the reality it represents--that is, must be clearly expressed rather than implied--Schneider, after analyzing this problem in the more obviously "symbolic" poems, concludes that "this open symbolism, with its obvious reference to the moral world, is the only kind we are sure Coleridge practiced" (256).[38] Schneider finds, not surprisingly, that symbolic interpretations have not succeeded in solving the problems that the poem *really* presents.

The primary tension of "Kubla Khan" is of course within Coleridge's urge both to expound and enact the poetic process. In Bahti's terms, this tension is expressed as a conflict between production and pronouncement, between the narration of a performance and the performance of a narration, or, again, between performance and *judgement* where there is a misalignment between "the possiblity of a representation and the preceding judgement upon this possibility."[39] While it may be possible to treat "Kubla Khan" as an allegory in the most literal sense,[40] it is my

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38. Here, Schneider observes that there was little, if anything, in Coleridge's attitude toward poems such as "Kubla Khan," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel" to suggest that they contained hidden meanings. With regard to "The Ancient Mariner," Coleridge himself observed that the poem had more moral content than cosmic significance (259).
39. Bahti, p. 1048. This crisis "of the separation and differentiation...between judgement and meaning" is "as such...the *critique* in the middle of literary criticism itself" (1048).
40. One way of doing so might be to follow up Fletcher's analysis of the daemonic in allegory. Although he does not make this connection (and indeed reads the fragment rather as the symbolic representative of a whole) the daemonic aspects of "Kubla Khan" are studied at length by Charles I.

view that the poem's allegorical quality emerges from this conflict, a conflict compounded if not constituted by the matter and manner of the preface.

In addition to symbolic *versus* allegorical formulation, the nature of the conflict has been spelled out as an analogue of the subdivided imagination.[41] It is, to understate the matter, a widely held view that "Kubla Khan" is a poem about the creative imagination, which in turn raises the question of how the poem's own subdivisions correspond to those of the imagination.[42] Anne Janowitz, arguing for the poem as a generic fragment, notes that the poem could *only* be an index of the power of the primary imagination.[43] Janowitz notes ironically that, although presented as a fragment, the poem "has been eulogized as the perfect poem of the Secondary Imagination" (34).

Other critics are more, one might say, incisive--cutting up the poem's parts to fit the theory exactly. By this logic, George Watson observes that the first part of the poem is matter-of-fact, and therefore fanciful, while the second part presents, at the very least, a program for

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Patterson in "The Daemonic in 'Kubla Khan': Toward Interpretation" in PMLA 89 (1974).

41. The problematic connection between these two models has been addressed above in Chapter Five. With respect to "Kubla Khan," it is important to note that although Coleridge's famous definition of the imagination was articulated only once and some time after the composition of "Kubla Khan," the two texts appeared in print within a year of each other.

42. McFarland has listed examples of this at great length in "The Origin and Significance of Coleridge's Theory of Secondary Imagination" p. 230, fn. 37. He cites Watson, Bate, Suther, Bloom, House, and Virginia Radley--all variously making this claim.

43. "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric," p. 34.

the imagination at work.[44] Irene Chayes similarly finds the descriptive detail of the first stanza to be the work of "the arranging and ornamenting fancy" (Chayes, 8). But the reconciling and mediating power of the imagination is responsible for the "reconciliation of opposites" that is seen to take place in the poem as a whole--largely through the agency of the fountain (which Chayes feels corresponds to the primary aspect of the imagination) and the river, which embodies the aspect of the secondary (see Chayes, pp. 10-13).

Kathleen Wheeler uses the same metaphoric relation more carefully, using it to account for two different models at work in the poem: the landscaped architectural gestures of the Khan against the irrepressible romantic landscape of the chasm. The Khan, using the raw materials of nature, engages in the secondary activities of art and culture. The sublime natural forces of the counter-example "are analogues of the unconscious mind creating its nature for itself" (Wheeler, 33). This commentary is nothing if not an allegory, and it could be refigured, as it was above, as an example of the distinction between fancy and the imagination. Here too, the Khan's measured, mechanical construction is analogous with the fancy whereas the natural imagery of the second stanza "combines both the idea of the truly artistic mode of construction according to organic principles, and the idea that art mirrors nature as an organically unified and naturally produced whole" (33).

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44. George Watson, "The Meaning of 'Kubla Khan'" in Review of English Literature 2 (1961), pp. 21-29.

While in such a model the "fragment" is readily conflated with the whole, the threat of disintegration and of the fall, a descendental tendency, is again insidiously present. For Wheeler, the overlapping of these two allegories is not accidental:

> It suggests that the activity of secondary imagination has a further, ominous aspect to it. It can degenerate from the creation of new metaphors and symbols into a faculty manipulating fixities and determinates, or it can be mistaken for such a faculty. (34)

The ambivalence of the landscape that Wheeler describes expresses this very threat: the movement through the far side of imagination into fancy and memory.[45] Significantly, the representation of the loss of imagination at the heart of the poem (or its demise into fancy), is repeated in the preface and in the poem's epilogue, thus doubling, or redoubling, the threat.

The ambivalent, antithetical thrust at work in Coleridge's definition and identified in the previous chapter is again apparent--and not only in the form of an inevitable descent. The activity of the Khan, for example, is taken as exemplary of the work of fancy; at the same time, however, it is seen as an example of spontaneous

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45. The importance of time and, especially, memory, have been underemphasized here. Eugenio Donato, in "The Ruins of Memory: Archeological Fragments and Textual Artifacts" MLN 93 (1978), reflects on the question of memory and representation, on the imagination and repetition. The imagination gives form to our (necessarily) repeated recollections, but what Hegel refers to as "secondary memory" "is nothing but an archeological cemetery populated by funerary monuments"--a metaphor which Donato argues "is in fact an allegorical emblem for the mode of signification of the Romantic literary text in general" (584-85).

composition where the absence of a ruling conscious will--while evoking the blind associationism of fancy--also captures an essential aspect of the primary imagination with its preconscious creative activity. Here, the model of automatic writing, of the dreaming poet, introduces new complications. One of the problematic effects of Coleridge's preface stems from the suggestion that the poem is composed *immediately* from a dream. This is perhaps a suggestion that cannot be taken literally, but it is nevertheless intriguing for the way it figures the poetic process.[46] While inspiration suffers the degenerative process of recomposition, the dream is made subject to secondary revision and other effects of "dream work" now so familiar to us from Freud, and this shift also becomes a possible exemplar for the interaction of primary and secondary imagination. One should perhaps consider the associational (and therefore fanciful) nature of dreaming on the one hand, against its involuntary (and hence primary) aspect, on the other.

The implications of this analogy are considered by Lucy Newlyn. She links Coleridge's claim to have written the poem unconsciously, "a claim to have a direct transcription of God's word," with Milton's claim that "God dictated

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46. Whether or not "Kubla Khan" was dreamt cannot be absolutely determined, and nor is it entirely relevant: as an account of a dream, however "immediate," "Kubla Khan" is always already displaced and fixed by its literary representation. John Beer observes that the poem exhibits "the arbitrariness and reductive economy of much dream work," as well as its overdeterminedness. "The Languages of 'Kubla Khan'" in Gravil, Newlyn and Roe, eds., Coleridge's Imagination, cited above; see pp. 220, 252. Not to belabour an obvious point, these are characteristics which may be shared by the written text.

Paradise Lost" (Newlyn, 233). "If this claim is translated into the terms of Biographia Literaria, it is like claiming that the primary and secondary imagination can be dissolved." A hierarchical system is thus suggested ("with writing one step behind imagining, and imagining one step behind God"), only to be undermined by the preface where an ideal conflation of these activities is proposed.

Clearly, Coleridge's claim that the poem was composed in and/or from a dream serves to represent the poem as an idealized, integrated, symbolic whole. Ironically, these are the very qualities which the preface (in its mere presence as well as it literal content) disclaims. "Kubla Khan," we have seen, springs forth from this problematic gap. In a way it presents itself in the manner of a negative presentation; like the negativity of the sublime, its fragments represent the unrepresentable by representing it negatively: Coleridge's account of his "vision in a dream" is made possible and compelling precisely by what it *cannot*, or was not able to, include. Both preface and poem, then, function according to the sublime economics of gain-through-loss. But there is more: dreams are, after all, inaccessible--translatable only by dim, allegorical analogues.[47]

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47. The full significance of Lamb's fears is all too clear: "but there is an observation Never tell thy dreams, and I am almost afraid that Kubla Khan is an owl that won't bear day light, I fear lest it should be discovered by the lantern of typography and clear reducting to letters, to be no better than nonsense or no sense." Letter to Wordsworth of April 26, 1816. The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb, (3 vols.), ed. E.W. Marrs, Jr. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), III, p. 215. The nature of "vision," for which Coleridge apologizes in his preface, and for which the

The fragment insinuates itself alongside the theosophical hierarchies with which readers and critics have approached "Kubla Khan," and finally contradicts them (says something other, recalling the tendency of allegory--*allos*--to speak otherwise). The reformulation of the poem through the preface suggests the haunting presence of a parallel text--the allegory of the poem as fragment, the allegorical signifying mode of all fragments. Nor may this be construed as a fall--from the Word into language, from the imagination into fancy, or from visionary wholeness into fragmentation. For the poem is experienced not only with both extremes in view, but more precisely in the ambivalent space between those extremes. The shift effected by the fragment is, once again, from either/or to both/and. The result of this is not, it must be emphasized, an all-encompassing indeterminacy, for the problem of the fragment of "Kubla Khan" is finally quite specific. The intervention of the preface, which responds to the foregrounded fact of the fragmentary poem, in turn foregrounds (permanently) the hermeneutical and structural difficulties of the "whole" project--*permanently* because once those difficulties, and the consequent distance between preface and poem, are established, they cannot be eliminated or ignored.

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fragment speaks, is not only that it must remain unapprehended, but that it must be seen blindly.

Postcript

According to the logic of sublation, the postface provides the truth both of the preface (always stated after the fact) and of the entire discourse (produced out of absolute knowledge). The *simulacrum* of a postface would therefore consist of feigning the final revelation of the meaning or functioning of a given stretch of language.[...]

But the simulacrum can also be play-acted: while pretending to turn around and look backward, one is also in fact starting over again, adding an extra text, complicating the scene, opening up within the labyrinth a supplementary digression, which is also a false mirror that pushes the labyrinth's infinity back forever in mimed--that is endless--speculation.[48]

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48. Dissemination, p. 27, fn. 27.

CHAPTER 7: "CHRISTABEL": THE FRAGMENT, THE FEMININE AND THE UNCANNY

With the addition of "Christabel" to the discussion, we are, in the Derridean terms of the Postscript--as if this final chapter risks being little more than a postscript to the entire thesis--pretending to look back while in fact starting over. We add an extra text and open up a "supplementary digression." The risk of producing a "mere" (as if it could be avoided) supplement, a repetition or re-arrangement of the key issues attaching to the fragment (to allegory, to the sublime, to the imagination), is considerable. And yet the poem, it must be asserted, raises some new and difficult questions at the same time as it re-presents familiar problems.

The similarities between the two texts, "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan," are many. First of all, there is their juxtaposition with "The Pains of Sleep;" all three poems were published together in a slim volume of 1816--as a fragment, perhaps, of a proper book.[1] More significantly, both poems share a distinctive (and disjunctive) two-part structure, prefaced by a lengthy prose note describing the history of the poems' composition, engaging the thematics of

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1. The implications of this juxtaposition are discussed by Anne Janowitz in "Coleridge's 1816 Volume: Fragment as Rubric," cited above. She argues that "Christabel"'s locale, adjacent to two other fragments, makes the poem's incompletion a generic rather than an accidental feature (33). "Both 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan' justify their generic status as fragments by the integral connections between their structural incompletions and their thematics of incompletion" so that "There is, in effect, a reciprocal relation of support between the volume as a generic site and the poem's thematic and formal generic affinities" (35).

fragmentation, and alerting the reader to the author's intention eventually to complete the work. In the early published version of the preface to "Christabel," Coleridge stated that "as, in my very first conception of the tale, I had the whole present to my mind, with the wholeness, no less than the liveliness of a vision; I trust I shall be able to embody in verse the three parts yet to come" (PW, p. 213). The differences between the two works, however, are highly significant insofar as "Kubla Khan" explicitly projects the existence of a potentially comprehendable whole, where "Christabel" does not: "Christabel," as many readers have observed, is more radically detached from a completing context. Nevertheless, it is the similarities that make the differences all the more plain: the more decisive absence of a "whole" context for the fragment, the clear *inorganicity* of the part, make the poem a more radically fragmentary fragment (to reinvoke Gasché's taxonomy of the fragment).

This interplay of similarity and difference (exactly how fragmentary is *this* fragment?) inflects many attempts to understand "Christabel," and is reflected in contemporary as well as current reception. Coleridge's readers readily identified "Christabel" as a "romantic fragment" and described the poem's effects with the language of the sublime: "For ourselves we confess, that when we read the story in M.S. two or three years ago, it appeared to be one of those dream-like productions whose charm partly consisted in the undefined obscurity of the conclusion--what that conclusion may be, no person who reads the commencement will

be at all able to anticipate."[2] Hazlitt, writing in the Examiner, conceded that while the poem contained parts of great beauty, "the effect of the general story is dim, obscure, and visionary."[3] While the first reviewer thus responds to the pure partiality or particularity of the poem, Hazlitt, with the terms "dim, obscure and visionary," identifies the allegorical aspect of the generalized whole.

As with "Kubla Khan," there is the prevalent theme of disappointment, of broken promises--implicit even in the broken-ness of the poem itself: "but we fear it is from some lurking distrust of his best resolutions, that he has been tempted to mar the strong interest which his wild romantic tale would otherwise have excited, by thus communicating it in piecemeal."[4] Josiah Condor, writing in the Eclectic Review, suggests that while the general effect upon readers will be one of disappointment ("the reader is obliged to guess at the half-developed meaning of the mysterious incidents, and is at last, at the end of the second canto, left in the dark, in the most abrupt and unceremonious manner imaginable"), the fragment will none-the-less "be found to take faster hold of the mind than many a poem six cantos long." This sublime gain-in-loss is implicit in the comparison of the poem "with a mutilated statue, the beauty of which can only be appreciated by those who have knowledge

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2. Critical Review, 5th ser. III (May 1816), reviewer unknown.
3. June 2, 1816.
4. Literary Panorama, 2nd ser. IV (July, 1816), reviewer unknown.

or imagination sufficient to complete the idea of the whole composition."[5]

The problem is exacerbated by the fragmenting of the fragment, i.e., the fragment of "Christabel" is itself composed of fragments.[6] As the reviewer in the Literary Panorama feared, "to extract parts from such a *morceau* is to reduce what remains to a mere nothing."[7] Not only does the poem risk unintelligibility, its fragmentary condition bespeaks its crucial fragility. Its meanings are elusive and sublime--perhaps tenuous--and the reviews consistently express the poem's sketchiness. The impossibility of getting a full grasp of the poem is the direct and (aesthetically) appropriate result. Indeed modern readers, sensitized by the cult of the fragment, have argued that the poem derives its power from these fragmentary, momentary qualities.[8] But the poem is more than just sublime in the now familiar sense. While its external truncation invokes a familiar sublime aesthetic, its internal disjunctions and ambivalences emphasize the psychological rather than, or in addition to, the aesthetic character of sublime experience, and introduce different terms with which to discuss the problems posed by the fragmentary "Christabel." The sublime

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5. 2nd ser. V (June, 1816).
6. Cf. Harold Bloom's comment that "'Christabel' is more a series of poems than it is a single fragment." The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 206. E.H Coleridge, in his edition of Christabel (London: Frowde, 1907), had already commented that the poem was not just a fragment, but a "sequence of fragments" (17).
7. See above, fn. 4.
8. See for example, Richard Holmes, Coleridge: Early Visions (cited above), p. 287, where he argues that the poem could not have survived completion.

aspect of the fragment has been shown to have clear links with the indeterminate and the incommensurate; these features turn up in "Christabel" in new guises: in the anomalous, the preternatural and the uncanny.

Critics invariably remark on the oddly anomalous (unexpected *and* unnameable) qualities of the poem. Under the weight of an unspecifiable distortion, the events and descriptions often suggest a liminal state: neither one thing, nor, quite, another. The poem begins, for example, in the middle of the night, between the realm of owls and that of crowing cocks--on the verge, thus, of dawn. It takes place "a month before the month of May"--a curiously dislocated way of saying, in effect, between winter and spring (but during neither). A thin grey cloud "covers but not hides the sky" (l. 17). Indeed the narrator's mode of questioning ("Is the night chilly and dark?/ The night is chilly, but not dark" ll. 14-15)--of asking, stating and retracting or qualifying--aptly represents the slightly abnormal or anomalous status of his narration. Often, unworldly or irrational factors intrude: Geraldine's swoon on the threshold of the castle gate, the flaring up of the dying brands as they pass, with steps "That strove to be, and were not, fast" (l. 113), the impotence of the characters, as in a dream, to carry out their desires, or, in Christabel's case even to speak--as though natural agency has been usurped along with straightforward articulation. The importance of the preternatural, as what Bate straightforwardly describes as outside the ordinary course of experience, or "inexplicable by ordinary means," must be

taken into account here.[9] Geraldine--as a preternatural force in the poem--may be seen as a being *in potentia*, hovering between mortality and immortality, "able to attain concrete existence only through the mind of a human being" (68). Coleridge had intended to affix an essay on the preternatural to "Christabel"--in its place we have the casual-seeming preface. Coleridge's emphasis on preternaturality (rather than the supernatural with its overt moral symbolism) would have surely reflected a desire to render the poem as immediately as possible, to shake off representation in favour of presentation:[10] to make entrancement, for example, "speak" for itself.

Critical commentaries, to which I shall soon turn, often discuss these factors when they discuss the poem's disjunctions and displacements--of which its truncation is perhaps the supreme expression. As with "Kubla Khan," critics emphasize the poem's continuity or discontinuity--with or without regard to its fragmentation. Many of the most successful readings of the poem address the issue of gender, not only on the level of thematics and narration, but with repect to genre and form. Less often mentioned, however, are the uncanny qualities of the poem, which cross all the above categories: Christabel's feelings of repulsion and distress, the doubling of characters (Geraldine with Christabel, Sir Leoline with his erstwhile friend Lord Tryermaine), the seemingly compulsive repetition of conditions and poetic effects. The uncanny will be taken up

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9. Walter Jackson Bate, Coleridge (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 66.
10. Or so, at any rate, speculates Bate, pp. 66-7.

more fully at the end of the chapter; here, suffice to say that the main task will be to assess the relationship of the (above) factors which figure fragmentation (in critical discourse and in the poem) to the final, fragmentary form of "Christabel."

I.

Papering over the gap or gaps that keep the fragments of the fragment together is, beyond doubt (to invoke another aspect of interior decoration), a subtle question of framing.[11] Framing, that is, by Coleridge, his readers, and ourselves. It would be well, though, to begin by considering that not only is this a question of critical framing, but one of projection, since--insofar as they can be kept apart--the outside of the frame is as crucial as the inside. Because "Christabel" is so radically fragmentary, the outside could be, as it were, anywhere. Impenetrable with respect to its ending(s), attempts to explain or justify the poem's fragmentary form are often accompanied by speculation as to how the poem would or could continue. Even though Wordsworth, as Bate observes, "maintained that Coleridge never had any definite idea for the ending," the source of these projected endings is Coleridge himself, who persistently claimed to have the poem entire in his head.[12]

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11. On the problem of framing *per se*, see Derrida, "Parergon" in The Truth in Painting (cited above), esp. pp. 61-7.

12. Bate, p. 74. Some skepticism has been voiced about Wordsworth's authority on this point, most significantly by B.R. McElderry, Jr., in "Coleridge's Plan for Completing *Christabel*" Studies in Philology 33 (July, 1936). His

Two of these possible endings come to us from James Gillman. In the first, "the story of Christabel is partly founded on the notion, that the virtuous of this world save the wicked." Christabel "defeats the power of evil represented in the person of Geraldine" on behalf of her lover who is "exposed to various temptations in a foreign land"--for whom she must, thus, suffer and pray.[13] A third possible ending, suggested by Derwent Coleridge, similarly proposes that Christabel's sufferings are vicarious and that the "holy and innocent" are made into instruments to bring their loved ones "back to the ways of peace." In this version, Geraldine is "no witch or goblin, or malignant being of any kind, but a spirit, executing her task with the best goodwill..."[14]

These two projections make Christabel and her sufferings the main narrative focus. Gillman, however, is also the source of a more detailed account--one which, while plausible, has been dismissed as excessively vulgar and trivially gothic:[15]

> Over the mountains, the Bard, as directed by Sir Leoline, "hastes" with his disciple; but in consequence of one of those inundations supposed to be common to this country, the spot only where the castle once stood is

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skepticism derives most convincingly from the circumstances surrounding Wordsworth's statement, which was made to Coleridge's nephew in 1836, two years after Coleridge's death. The general thrust of his article is to defend Coleridge on the question of whether or not he had worked out the ending as reported by Gillman--a question to be taken up here shortly.

13. The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1838), p. 283.

14. As quoted by E.H. Coleridge in his edition of Christabel (cited above), p. 52.

15. See, for example, Humphry House, p. 128.

> discovered,--the edifice itself being washed away. He determines to return. Geraldine, being acquainted with all that is passing, like the Weird Sisters in Macbeth, vanishes. Re-appearing, however, she waits the return of the Bard, exciting in the mean time, by her wily arts, all the anger she could rouse in the Baron's breast, as well as that jealousy of which he is described to have been susceptible. The old bard and the youth at length arrive, and therefore she can no longer personate the character of Geraldine, the daughter of Lord Roland de Vaux, but changes her appearance to that of the accepted though absent lover of Christabel. Next ensues a courtship most distressing to Christabel, who feels--she knows not why--great disgust for her once favoured knight. This coldness is very painful to the Baron, who has no more conception than herself of the supernatural transformation. She at last yields to her father's entreaties, and consents to approach the altar with this hated suitor. The real lover returning, enters at this moment, and produces the ring which she had once given him in sign of her betrothment. Thus defeated, the supernatural being Geraldine disappears. As predicted, the castle bell tolls, the mother's voice is heard, and to the exceeding great joy of the parties, the rightful marriage takes place, after which follows a reconciliation and explanation between the father and daughter.[16]

Christabel's passive sufferings and her timely rescue in this account are, on the surface, inconsistent with the implication in the other two versions that she must actively combat evil. Nor, many claim, do these narrative twists and turns follow necessarily from the two existing cantos. Perhaps, as Paul Magnuson suggests, this last plot summary is "a fabrication produced for Gillman years after Coleridge finished the second part."[17] It is noteworthy, though, that all three endings attempt to make sense of the function of

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16. Gillman, p. 301-2.
17. Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), p. 96.

Geraldine, and that the third continues the movement of Christabel's increased enslavement which is already the main feature of the two existing parts.[18]

Although there is a general tendency to dismiss these phantom endings, the attempt to defend them (made most strongly by McElderry) clarifies an important issue: *how much do they matter*? McElderry makes a strong case for Gillman's extended ending, showing precisely how it could logically and effectively follow from the two existing cantos. Indeed, if these latter were reduced to a prose summary (an experiment he undertakes to great effect), they would sound as untenable and sensational as the proposed ending. It follows, then, that Coleridge could, with his great skill, have persevered without any considerable obstruction and completed the poem. McElderry uses this conclusion to make his case for the Gillman ending, but the evidence also points the other way: since Coleridge did *not* complete "Christabel," one might more accurately conclude that a paralyzing force must be coming from within the poem. Like the steps "that tried to be, and were not, fast," the poem, so to speak, tried to be but was not finished. As Coleridge reiterated in Table Talk, and as McElderry acknowledges, "The reason of my not finishing Christabel is not that I don't know how to do it; for I have, as I always

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18. Derwent Coleridge's suggestion that Geraldine executes her task with "the best goodwill" (although her apparent expressions of pity for her victim disappear in Part II), becomes ironic in Bostetter's reading of Geraldine; he suggests she is a sadistic incarnation of Coleridge's own struggles with laudanum, which in his letters and notebooks is characterized as "a force external to himself which under the cover of a specious appearance of good maliciously entraps him" (Bostetter, 124).

had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could not carry on with equal success the execution of the Idea--the most difficult, I think, that can be attempted to Romantic Poetry--I mean witchery by daylight."[19] The precise nature of the difficulty involved, and the disruptive mechanics of this uncanny paralyzing force--as the principle problem when the poem's unity is discussed--are of primary importance to the poem's fragmentary status.

Even in the presence of actual material suggesting an ending, no one has ever tried to argue that "Christabel" is, like "Kubla Khan," really a whole. Indeed there is considerable consensus about the fragmentary state of "Christabel" and its implications for readers. (There are, however, strategies for applying a coherent *meaning* to the poem, but this will be addressed as a different issue). Humphry House, for example, after arguing vociferously for the wholeness of "Kubla Khan," comments that "Christabel" is "an entirely different matter: for not only is it inescapably a fragment, but the two parts differ so much from each other, that they scarcely seem to belong to the same poem."[20] It is perhaps the mystification of *all*

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19. Table Talk, I, 409-10 (1 July, 1833); McElderry, p. 443-44, cites the passage as 6 July and the final clause as follows: "...the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one." Although this is a common rendering of a well-known comment, I have changed it in accordance with Carl Woodring's edition of 1990 for The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

20. House, p. 122. House comments that this disjunction would be self-evident even if Coleridge had not, as usual, pointed it out in a preface, and that it primarily reflects the chronological break in the composition (with Coleridge's trip to Europe intervening), and the move from Somerset to the Lake District.

readers that leaves critics all the more ready to admit at least one sort of interpretive defeat: "But it is all fragmentary and finally unsatisfying because it leads up to a mystery that is both incomplete and clueless" (House again, p. 125).

In spite of greater consensus on the fragment question, with "Christabel" as with "Kubla Khan" we frequently encounter the critical commonplace that its meanings are to be sought extra-textually--"in relation to an unrealized textual whole," and that this is something we agree to, tacitly, as readers.[21] Marjorie Levinson's reading of the poem is apposite here. "Christabel" falls into her category of a "true" fragment, one which "invites us to interpret what is there before us with reference to what might precede and follow the truncated text," but Levinson argues that this should be undertaken with reference to classical tragedy, rather than "to ballad, gothic, or romance norms"--the three most common generic ascriptions for the poem (Levinson, 83).[22] As she points out, Coleridge's readers and reviewers responded to "the tragic or classical

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21. Lee Rust Brown (cited above), p. 238.
22. This contention is not too far from what other critics have supposed might be an attempt to exploit gothic and romance conventions more rigorously than was usual in popular literature. Perhaps, Levinson suggests, "the 'subtle and difficult idea' Coleridge said he hoped to realize through 'Christabel' involved the romanticization of a tragic action, and the moralization, so to speak, of romantic elements" (84). Levinson's contention, though, has several implications for criticism: "once we conceive the fragment's formal context as that of tragedy," there follows a "reevaluation of the work's dramatic structure" in which Christabel's story becomes "incidental" to Leoline's (88). Crucially, "the structure and associations of tragedy preclude certain critical findings": namely, that Christabel is to be read as a romantic heroine (86).

dimension of 'Christabel': its visual immediacy, its dramatic procedures, its choral commentary, its stylized and abstract emotional candor, its metrical allusiveness" (82). The comparison of the poem to a mutilated statue, noted above, invoked a classical sense of the fragment which could not *but* be fundamentally tragic, and, as Levinson remarks, "tragedy always looks or feels like a true fragment" insofar as the observer's attention is directed "to what has passed and to what is to come" (85). Significantly, the classical fragment turns out to be quite radical: once a tragic structure is intimated for the "romance fragment," it follows that "Coleridge supplies an economy of action which he elucidates without diminishing the poem's apparent infinity, a function of its radical indeterminacy" (96). Interestingly, the poem retains its sublime suggestiveness in spite of Levinson's strong case for a very specific dramatic context.

In the case of "Christabel," however, it could be more readily argued that these meanings are sought intra-textually, since critics, working with the text as it is and not as it might be, find plenty from which to construct a comprehensive reading of the poem. Succumbing to the paralysis outlined above, readers must and do remain--perhaps obsessively--fascinated by the same subtle problem that prevented Coleridge from moving on. But if there is widespread agreement about the fragmentary status of "Christabel," it is nevertheless noteworthy that where the lines of the fragment have been drawn--how, in effect, it has been framed--has changed a great deal. As Levinson has

pointed out, early readers tended to view the poem as a "coherent fragment truncated at either end"--hence the intense interest in its unwritten cantos.[23] We, on the other hand, are more interested in the poem's "internal fissures," and "situate 'Christabel''s significant ruptures between the two parts, and between these and their respective conclusions" (Levinson, 77). Indeed, fragmentary incoherence is present on many more levels, impeding the poem's progress on several fronts. Levinson's continued interest in the extra-textual coherence of "Christabel" is, in fact, exceptional in recent criticism.

The divided structure of the poem has invited comparison of the two main parts. In addition to the obvious differences in the time and place of composition, and the considerable effects of those intervening years, other--often related--differences are frequently noted. Commentators often remark that the first part is particularly static and atmospheric, while the second is more concerned with narrative action. H.W. Piper, for example, observes that "the first part is a comparatively static confrontation of two figures that invite symbolic interpretation: the second has a good deal of varied action."[24] With this shift, and its correspondent change of language, comes, for Piper, a decline in the quality of the

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23. The imitations, parodies, mock continuations--and much else--are amply documented by Arthur Nethercot in The Road to Tryermaine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1978).
24. "The Disunity of *Christabel* and the Fall of Nature" in Essays in Criticism 28, (July, 1978), p. 216. As the title implies, Piper's main argument is that the poem explores "nature's underside."

verse: "the mingled vision of the first part has become two separable parts in a conventional opposition" (225). Holmes, on the other hand, suggests that the two parts are more of a piece, as they present "night and day versions of the same inexplicable trance"; the power of *both* parts derives from "a haunting suggestiveness of atmosphere" (Holmes, 287). In any case, there is "minimal dramatic development": action in the second part is threatened but tharted (Bracy's dream, for example, delays and then finally moves the action off-stage) (287-88). But while many critics emphasize the disunity of the poem (and important differences within it), most offer at least a strategy for a unified reading. Levinson suggested a home for the fragment within tragedy. A.J. Harding, alternatively, suggests that "Christabel" may be comprehended by considering its mythopoeic dimensions.[25]

While the poem's disunity poses certain problems, Harding argues that it may effectively be read as an example of Romantic mythopoesis--more in line with Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" than with The Monk. The connection with Blakean mythopoesis is made from the following factors: the poem "depicts a strangeness in human experience; and instead of moving forward to an easy resolution, it ends with the dominant image of a human soul in its temporally divided and speechless state, as if recognizing that a miraculous hair's-breadth escape would be at best a weak palliative" (213). Harding argues that the

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25. "Mythopoesis: the Unity of *Christabel*" in Gravil, Newlyn, and Roe, eds., Coleridge's Imagination (cited above).

poem's lapses and disjunctures are roughly analogous with the polysemous procedures of myth, asserting that mythical thought works through opposition and division toward resolution--resolution achieved by "the introduction of a third, anomalous category: the *revenant*, the incarnate god, the virgin mother" (210). In the case of "Christabel," one might say that division and opposition (bodied forth in problematic sexual and familial relationships) is manifested in speechlessness, in an inability to speak because of inward disunity.

Harding relates this division to the experience of the "praying self: an experience corresponding to Wordsworth's sense of treachery and desertion in the place /'The holiest that I knew of...'" (211-12). The discovery of "treachery and desertion within the self"--not so much as a moral truth as a truth about the disconnectedness of speech "from willed thought and meaning"-is redescribed in "The Conclusion to Part II" where the unintentional contradictions again bespeak an essential thwarting of the self. Harding suggests that Coleridge may recognize here a reflection of his own state of paralysis; embodied in the Christabel-Geraldine exchange are consequences "fatal to poetry itself: to be forced into silence, robbed of the power of utterance, is equivalent to the complete loss of 'poetic space,' the power of projecting from the self an answering and reciprocally self-confirming otherness, the power to affirm Being as the ground of the self" (216-17).

While it initially seems plausible to state this awareness in terms of myth, these terms recede in importance

from Harding's argument. Mythopoesis involves opposition, and so describes some aspects of the conflict between Christabel and Geraldine, but it has little to say about the peom's central impasse. Harding comments on the problems posed by Coleridge's own capacity to "freeze" the action through narrative interjection (largely in the form of speculation on past causes and future consequences). The paradoxical importance of these interventions is that they "almost too strenuously underline the fact that the hold which the poem exerts on a reader derives in large part not from the sense of narrative expectation...but from the intrinsic power of a central, heart-stopping image" (209). In many cases, narrative resolution fails to "neutralize" the effect of such images. It would seem that this dynamic similarly affects "Christabel" criticism: we come away from Harding's article more convinced by his comments on speechlessness and poetic utterance than by the overall argument for a mythical structure. In fact one may already suspect that the implications of the "heart-stopping image" have a great deal more to do with Benjaminian allegory than with Romantic mythopoesis.

Harding has borrowed much from Jane A. Nelson's "Entelechy and Structure in 'Christabel.'"[26] Nelson explicitly adopts structuralist paradigms. Initially, she elaborates Greimas's argument that "'narrativity' exists prior to its manifestations in linguistic substance or other languages such as those of dream or cinema," which, when applied to "Christabel," could be seen to identify the

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26. Studies in Romanticism 19 (Fall, 1980).

emergence of "narrativity significantly closer to non-literary myth" (378). According to this argument, "the figures and actions of manifest narrative remain characterized by the initial binary semic oppositions from which they are generated" (379).[27] Her second major borrowing is, inevitably, from Lévi-Strauss, whose observations about mythical thought were made use of by Harding: mythical thinking "always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution."[28] Such "thought" is a process by which a mediating term is sought for irreconcilable extremes in human experience. Mediation, generally, comes in the form of a third category of the anomalous or the irrational. In "Christabel" this category is, arguably, more apparent than the extremes it attempts to reconcile, and Nelson notes that "Christabel" is "a poem of anomalous terms,....a poem of 'middle,' often disturbingly liminal terms..." (386). But the attempt at joining, union or reunion, that most engages her is that which is to overcome sexual division: the "familial and sexual" (echoes of Harding again) oppositions and incestuous crossings are seen primarily as a way of exploring the logical (im)possibility of the desire for reunion (a manifestation, after Greimas, of a pre-literary narrative). Coleridge's failure to advance upon this "ancient" problem (where incest is the only solution to the original absence of suitable

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27. See A.J. Greimas, "Elements of a Narrative Grammar," trans. Catherine Porter, Diacritics 7, No.1, 1977, pp. 23, 33.
28. Nelson, p. 385; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in his Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobsen and Brook Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 221.

sexual partners) is mediated, though, by his evocative presentation of the problem in "The Conclusion to Part II" where she argues that oppositions of gender and generation unite in the figure of the child.[29]

For Nelson, then, the mythical model, or rather process, offers a way of seeing "Christabel" whole. Because Coleridge was able to present the narrative problem coherently in his culminating image, Nelson claims that there was no longer any need to continue the narrative and that the poem is, finally, "complete" (her closing statement, 393). Indeed, to insist on reading the poem as a fragment is, in effect, to normalize it. Several objections and observations may be made at this point, as once again we are left with a "heart-stopping" image in the form of the dancing child--perhaps an emblem for the poem's essential narrative conflict. But what can it mean for the poem to present itself in this fashion? For Harding and Nelson, the poem *presents*, and must be understood, by falling back upon myth. To read such a fall--from a posited, primal narrative scene--is, however, to arrange the fragments of "Christabel" into an allegory for (pre-lapsarian) reading and

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29. This argument is made at length (see esp. pp. 391-93), and I cite it as an example of a unifying interpretive gesture rather than for its particular merits. Interestingly, Bostetter has pointed out that these lines ("A little child, a limber elf,/ Singing, dancing to itself") have not been found in any of the manuscripts of the poem, but come from a letter to Southey of May 6, 1801, where Coleridge writes of his outbursts of temper at Hartley (Letters, II, p. 728). Perhaps Nelson is taking her cue here from Bostetter, who observes that these lines "seem to stand as some kind of obscure comment or cryptogram on the meaning of the poem, perhaps even a clue to the ultimate resolution." The Romantic Ventriloquists (cited above), p. 128.

interpretation. Lévi-Strauss pointed out (as Nelson acknowledges in a footnote) that "mythical thinking" produces multiple and recurrent themes, and never develops any one of these to completion: "there is always something left unfinished"--"Myths, like rites, are interminable."[30] So, as Fletcher argued, are allegories. The reader is thrown back upon the fragmentary state of the poem--but not as a simple moment in a straightforward dialectical shift between apprehension, comprehension and their sublime failure. If the tension between experiential or polar contraries produces an anomalous mediating category, so might the space between the fragment and the whole (which has been characterized here as ambivalent and, like the sublime, a fundamentally *unoccupiable* space).

Other critics, it should be noted, have made effective use of the poem's disintegration without making it, *faute de mieux*, a strategy for a negatively-achieved unity. Mileur, for example, uses the curious relation of "The Conclusion to Part II" to the body of the poem (like the preface of "Kubla Khan" to the poem) as another powerful instance of the "alienation of the poet from his poetry," which becomes "the central fact of poetic creation" (Mileur, 61). This alienation is played out, or proceeds from, Christabel, who fails to recognize the aspects of herself (bodied forth in Geraldine) which contradict "an established self-image of

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30. The Raw and the Cooked, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969 (first pub. 1964)), p. 6; Nelson, p. 385, fn. 16. Nelson concedes that the child is necessarily an unstable mediator, but argues that it provides closure anyway by virtue of "presenting an appropriate mediation of the opposites in the poem."

innocent virtue" (61). Just as Christabel "vacillates between treating Geraldine as another person and as an extension of herself," the poem "vacillates between a moralistic and a psychological treatment of the relationship between the two women" (61-2). From a psychological perspective, there is a correspondence between the extent of Christabel's repression and the daemonic aspect of Geraldine, and between the strength of her repression and subsequent powerlessness.[31] Christabel's resistance to self-recognition is, in this view, precisely what allows Geraldine to preempt her powers of speech--indeed her power to represent herself at all. And yet this is not just a battle for supremacy between two aspects of the same self; Geraldine's predation (the exact motives for which--as with the actions of all the characters--seem "hopelessly obscure or simply irrelevant") invites, perhaps demands, differentiation from Christabel on moral grounds (62).[32] Mileur remarks, though, that it is difficult to distinguish this moralism from "merely another tactic of repression." This is an important difficulty since it is called to account for the poem's incompletion: "It is precisely the difficulty of containing the psychological questions raised

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31. Edward Strickland has commented, as Mileur notes, that the contradictory nature of Geraldine's character (angel or demon?) caused Coleridge's confusion about possible endings, or at least accounted for the variation in those proposed endings. "Metamorphoses of the Muse in Romantic Poesis: 'Christabel'" in ELH 44 (1977), pp. 648-49. Mileur finds this important because it expresses "Coleridge's ambivalent relationship with his own muse" (62, fn. 1).

32. Mileur comments, as others have, that this "inaccessibility of a causal center or source of motive" is what thwarts any attempt to turn the poem into a romance narrative.

by the poem within the bounds of moral judgement or of identifying any point of view not implicated in the problem of psychological contingency that gives the poem its dark vision and dooms it to incompletion." The disruptive effects of "psychological contingency" preempt the attempt to normalize the poem, "to establish the ontological priority of a narrative, natural, or even personal order" (63).

The nature of this disruption is expressed, in Mileur's account, by the abrupt departure from the tone and focus of the poem in "The Conclusion to Part II," which represents Coleridge's own comment on his poem. The passage signals a "giving up" on the irresolvable problems staged in the poem, and this signalling takes a form akin to a "word-surprise" during psychoanalytic treatment, where the patient says something not only unexpected but often in apparent contradiction to his intention. Coleridge refers indirectly to this phenomenon in his reflections on the perversity of intense feeling--a "genuine eruption of psychological contingency into everyday life" (64). In the analytic situation, the analysand immediately disclaims this intrusion (hence the surprise), but the disclaimer is seen by the analyst as a revealing evasion to be explored on its own terms in the patient's life history. Taken together, the phenomenon of the word-surprise and the problem of psychological contingency suggest "not only that the self is fragmented but that the fragments do not communicate except indirectly." Thus "it is not through nature or any other inherent order [for instance, a symbolic order] that we mean

what we say but through interpretation." The analyst's attempt, against the grain, to discern or "to posit a unified intention or identity behind the diverse, even contradictory, manifestations of behaviour" is thus as vexed as the attempt to interpret a fragmentary text (65).

Mileur argues that not only is this problematic expressed in the content of the conclusion, but it illuminates the relationship between the conclusion and the rest of the poem. The conclusion confronts the poem as "an utterance for which the poet is undeniably responsible but which contradicts his understanding of his own intention" (66). The attempt, in the poem, to narrativize psychic conflict raises the question of whether or not such conflict *has* a proper form. Ultimately, "the narrative undertaking is defeated by the effects of its necessary allegorical reification of the elements of conflict into two different characters" (66)--a reification that not only dominates but perhaps also suffocates the poem. "Christabel," with the addition of the conclusion, provides us with a particularly defensive "revision-by-context." A similar revision was apparent in "Kubla Khan" (and, in Mileur's argument, in the gloss to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner") where Coleridge also confronts the poem "in the manner of the analyst seeking the intentional context, the life history, which will make the word-surprise intelligible as an action" (66-7). In the case of these poems, Mileur observes that "poetry is in danger of becoming the vehicle of contingency, largely due to Coleridge's inability to find a poetic form--an order--capable of incorporating it." The implications of

this, now familiar, are that the poem is no longer being considered as a "self-explanatory, self-sufficient utterance" (67). The fact that the poem is a fragment only emphasizes the need to consider it as an anomalous manifestation.

Many readers of the poem address the issue of fragmentation or disjunction through the analogous observation that there is something unbridgeable--a gap--at the heart of the poem, and, rather than posit a crossing, they use it to critical effect. This gap, which figures something inexplicable or unrepresentable, an anomalous or unnamable manifestation, is often fixed on Geraldine--if not on her explicitly enigmatic function in the poem then on the mystery implicit in the description (or lack of description) of "her bosom and half her side--/A sight to dream of, not to tell!" (ll.252-53). Hazlitt makes much of the lines Coleridge omitted here, citing an early manuscript: "Behold her bosom and half her side--/*Hideous, deformed, and pale of hue*."[33] He finds these suppressed lines to be essential for making "common sense" of the poem's two parts, and suggests that it is precisely *because* this is so that Coleridge left them out.[34] Hazlitt was, perhaps, prescient in seizing upon

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33. From his review in the Examiner (cited above).
34. This self-thwarting act, Hazlitt remarks in the Examiner, is "a greater psychological curiosity than even the fragment of *Kubla Khan*." Hazlitt, some suppose, wanted Geraldine to bear unambiguously the traditional marking of a witch, perhaps only to safe-guard his reading of the poem as fundamentally "disgusting." As Andrew Cooper points out, this comment--as motivated as that of which he charges Coleridge--shows that Coleridge's instincts in dropping the line, and thus retaining an essential ambiguity, were probably right. See "Whose Afraid of the Mastiff Bitch?

this absence as significant. Richard Rand has taken up Geraldine's mysterious mark as a deconstructive *entrée*--not so much into the text of "Christabel" as into the complex relation of textuality and signification of which the poem is an example. The reader's (or critic's) attempt to interpret Geraldine's disfigurement is rebuffed, as the signifier itself--the mark--vanishes behind inferred significations. The mark, thus, signifies something which it cannot communicate (its effect on Christabel is, of course, speechlessness)--producing, in the de Manian sense, an effect, or allegory, of reading.[35]

Gothic Parody and Original Sin in *Christabel*" in his Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 211, fn. 7. In this alleged suppression, however, there is an interesting psychoanalytic issue in play. As Spivak remarks: "The critic who has attended to the main texts of the new psychoanalysis has learned that any act of language is made up as much by its so-called substance as by the cuts and gaps that substance serves to frame and/or stop up: 'We can conceive of the shutting [*fermeture*] of the unconscious by the action of something which plays the role of diaphragm-shutter [*obturateur*]--the object *a*, sucked and breathed in, just where the trap begins.'" In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, p. 3, citing Jacques Lacan, "Analysis and Truth" in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), pp. 144-45. This remark is made with regard to Biographia Literaria, where she discovers in that text's "logical and rhetorical slips and dodges" something of a "narrative *obturateur*" (3). If this can be argued of *Biographia*, how much more apt (though problematic) might it be in the case of an explicitly fictional narrative text like "Christabel," where the gaps function like an ever-shifting and many-sided frame?

35. Richard A. Rand, "Geraldine" in Robert Young, ed., Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader (Boston: Routledge, 1981). Rand explores the mark in Derridean terms as, in addition to a sign, a seal and a signature. Geraldine "herself" may also be seen, or rather read (by the other characters as well as ourselves) as a text (a poem). By exploring Coleridge's "tropology"--largely in other poems--Rand argues for an implicit deconstructive argument in Coleridge's rhetorical discourse.

Robert Schwartz, in a similar vein, figures the gap as that which is beyond articulation. He points out that aspects of the poem, especially Coleridge's early descriptions of the scene ("Is the night chilly and dark? / The night is chilly, but not dark."), imply the existence of "a supernatural level of perception" that ordinary language cannot capture. The ambiguous negation of the above question, like the cloud that covers but does not hide the sky, is perhaps the only way to depict a fundamentally unapprehendable state. The particular quality of the darkness suggested by Coleridge's curious questioning, for example, implies a state "expressible only as the difference between two empirically definable ones" (i.e., dark and not dark).[36] The momentary effect of proceding by simultaneous suggestion and negation is to evoke a representation of the unpresentable.

The vague suggestion of otherworldliness becomes increasingly explicit as the poem continues, so that further descriptions in turn continue to conceptualize a significant gap. As Schwartz says, "in conceptualizing the gap between these polar states the reader defines the boundaries of a world of things that is not an amalgam or reconciliation of opposites, but rather a state which is defined by what we know to be the difference between the opposites" (32). This paradoxical knowledge, an essential dynamic of the fragment, persists so that the suggestion of opposites results in peculiar and unexpected inversions.

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36. "Speaking the Unspeakable: The Meaning of Form in *Christabel*" The University of South Florida Language Quarterly XIX/1-2 (Fall-Winter, 1980), p. 31.

To suggest that the gap is unbridgable is still to conceptualize the problem in terms of binary oppositions (one side/the other side, visible/invisible, speakable/unspeakable, and so forth). Levinson suggests, though, that the poem resists dialectical resolution: "By keeping the tragic dimension implicit, Coleridge inhibits his reader from adopting contradiction as the work's organizing principle, and thus from naturalizing the poem (and one's response to it) through some notion of irony or dialectic." She refers chiefly to a binary of her own inference, that of tragedy and romance, and comments that the poem's most offensive quality may well have been its "formal monstrosity: its failure to *present* its structural binarity" (Levinson, 85).[37] Later, regarding Coleridge's "polar procedure," she speculates about the effects of his "decision to suppress one term of his opposition by fragmenting the poem" (93). This implies that the fragment results in relation to a thwarted dialectic--confirming again that the fragment does not come into being through a dialectic of part and whole, unity and completion, but is, if anything at all, a radical impediment to such resolution.

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37. Romance, it should be noted, is not opposed to tragedy; conventionally, it is comedy that is tragedy's binary "opposite."

II.

The fascinating psycho-dynamics of "Christabel," figured chiefly by the perplexing relationship between Geraldine and Christabel, has invited feminist readings.[38] The most pertinent of these, here, bring psychoanalytic observations to bear on the problem of form (and thus implicitly raise the question of the feminine and the fragmentary). The complexities of gender and genre are explored in exemplary fashion by Karen Swann in "'Christabel': The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form."[39] She begins by suggesting that Coleridge, in "Christabel," both "capitalizes on and exposes culture's tactical gendering of formal questions" (535). He, moreover, both "dramatizes and provokes hysteria" (535; the response of reviewers provides ample evidence of the latter--a point to be made again below). Focussing on the nature of hysteria and fantasy life (including dreams), Swann

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38. In addition to the essays to be discussed below, one might note Camille Paglia's seizure--perhaps inflation--of the poem's homoeroticism, its "blatant Lesbian pornography," in her "Christabel" in Harold Bloom, ed., Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York, New Haven and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), p. 217. Also noteworthy is Margery Durham's "The Mother Tongue: *Christabel* and the Language of Love" in The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation, edited by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), where she links the poem to Coleridge's Notebook speculations on the development of language and associative thought, and to Melanie Klein's theories of the infant/mother relationship as the source of "symbol formation," and thus of language and culture (169-70). Speechlessness is one effect of this process gone awry; Durham argues that "Christabel" may also be seen to symbolize "the conflicts within the reparative struggle" (173)--the movement from loss back to love.

39. Studies in Romanticism 23 (Winter, 1984).

speculates that "in critical discourse as in fantasy life, it seems, feminine forms...represent the enigma of form itself. Female bodies 'naturally' seem to figure an ungraspable truth: that form...is yet the source of all meanings, whether the subject's or the world's" (544).

Swann begins by reading "Christabel" against Burton's (ironically truncated) material on hysterics in The Anatomy of Melancholy. Significantly, the main symptom of hysteria is speechlessness; hysterics feel themselves to be bewitched, but "cannot tell" what ails them.[40] Swann shows that Christabel's experiences correspond to the characteristic symptoms of hysteria as Burton presents them. There could, indeed, be more: one of Freud's early disciples, Sandor Ferenczi, observed that the refusal of the hysteric consciously to accept unconscious desire results in various degrees of antipathy and, at the extreme, loathing.[41] Christabel is, clearly, so affected. It follows that Geraldine, in Swann's analysis, is compared to an hysterical symptom, "which figures both desire and its repression" (539)--"She appears in response to what Burton implies and psychoanalysis declares are the wishes of hysterics--to get around patriarchal law, which legislates desire" (538). Answering both Christabel's desires and the indeterminacy of the narrative, Geraldine is a fantasy,

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40. Swann cites from The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: Random House-Vintage Books, 1977), p. 416. For a more detailed discussion of the links between Burton and "Christabel," see Swann, p. 537.
41. Cited by Charles J. Rzepka, "Christabel's 'Wandering Mother' and the Discourse of the Self: A Lacanian Reading of Repressed Narration" in Romanticism Past and Present 10:1 (Winter, 1986), p. 18.

"produced by the psychic operations of condensation and displacement" (540). In "Christabel," as in dreams, "there is no version of the negative: questions raise possibilities that are neither confirmed nor wholly dismissed" (540); yet, through condensation and displacement, the repressed comes to light.

Feminine forms, typically, come to represent "the dangers and attractions of fantasy life" (541).[42] This complex mix of gender and genre, where "'the feminine' is the locus of erotic and generic licence," produces two alternatives (either "the exciting charge of perversity or madness," or else it appears "absolutely conventional, affected") which ultimately "redound upon the reader, who continually feels mad or just stupid, unable to 'tell' how to characterize the verse at any given point" (545). The erotic ambivalence of the poem is contagious and affects the narrator who cannot do more than re-present the central riddle: "The narrator circles round but cannot tell the enigma of form, of the body or sign that is at once meaningless and too full of significance" (546). Swann suggests that "Christabel"'s "narrators" are themselves hysterics (plural because, although the poem's "interlocutor and respondent mime the entanglement of Geraldine and Christabel," it is "not clear if we hear two voices or

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42. Swann's main argument is that, not only was Coleridge no exception in his dramatization of "the highly overdetermined romance/hysteria plot in 'Christabel,'" he was, moreover, "mockingly obtruding a conspiracy to view, allowing us to see 'feminine' genre and gender alike as cultural fantasy" (541). Swann develops this by examining Coleridge's generic play and his treatment of the family romance. Since I am focussing on the explicit question of form, I do not present her case in full.

one")--hysterical because "they" are "overmastered by visions" and often stymied in their tale-telling (541). The narrator(s) create the paralyzing logic and conditions of dream. Similarly, and as a result, "the reader is impotent to decide the poem's ambiguities from a position outside its fictions"; "Furthermore, the poem's 'fictions' seem to be about little else than these formal slippages" (542).

In a later essay, "Literary Gentlemen and Lovely Ladies: The Debate on the Character of *Christabel*," Karen Swann pursues these problems, further implicating Coleridge's readers in "the central cultural fantasy and defence that his poem holds up to view: that of a possessed female body, unable to control its own speech."[43] Contemporary reviewers, of course, attributed the effeminacy and hystericality of the poem to Coleridge as well, since he could not tell his own tale.[44] The paralysis extends to interpretation as the similarly-thwarted reader is "'bound' passively to imitate the relation between Christabel and Geraldine in his own relation to the story" (149). Moral outrage--of the sort expressed by Hazlitt--is the only possible mode of empowerment available to the reader.

As Hazlitt remarked in the Examiner, Coleridge's "superficial, pretty, ornamental" style is forced "into the service of a story which is petrific." Petrific (with its suggestion of what one might call the paralytic sublime--

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43. Reprinted from ELH 52 (Spring, 1985) in Chase, ed., Romanticism (cited above). Just cited were Chase's introductory comments, p. 140.
44. The poem was declared improper and immodest "and its author, not simply 'unmanly,' but an 'enchanted virgin,' a 'witch,' and an 'old nurse.'" (142). See also p. 147.

frozen, as it were, by fear) because unfigurable: a presentation of unpresentability. Against Hazlitt's suggestion that something essential has been concealed is his suggestion that the poem conceals a void, that there is nothing, after all, at the bottom of "Christabel" (150).[45] But the poem has "subterfuges" of its own: "In a sense it...contains its critics, whose two responses to it--a spellbound accession to play and a petrified and petrifying refusal of exchange--are figured in the text" (150).

These "subterfuges" are, as much as anything, an effect of narration. As Charles Rzepka argues, the narrative contains all that *can* be told, and it does so with a certain Christabel-like naiveté.[46] "Unsophisticated, even child-like at times, the third-person narrative reads like a species of ventriloquism or metempsychosis....the disingenuousness and literalness of style are at times almost infantile" (21). Rzepka suggests that the effect of this is uncanny, as though the narrator is a displaced or repetitive self of Christabel--representing her from "without" (22). The narrator is thus unavoidably implicated in the uncanny representation of that which must be denied in the poem. While the traces of obsession and denial are

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45. Swann links the response of "disgust" to "a category, or genre, of representation" (150). Through an analysis of two notebook entries from the same period, she constructs a category of "problematic representations...which disrupt the idea of category by exposing the arbitrariness of the fundamental categories of 'inside' and 'outside,' 'self' and 'world'" (153). These might be thought to figure, in some way, what I have been describing here as anomalous manifestations--or an uncanny materiality.

46. "Christabel's 'Wandering Mother' and the Discourse of the Self: A Lacanian Reading of Repressed Narration" (cited above), p. 21.

accessible to the reader by their figuration in the language of the verse, the reader is in turn paralyzed by the effects of the narration: "The unembarrassed repetitions, the transparent, simple diction, the innocent assurances of the narration attend so narrowly to what is happening as to inhibit reflection" (23). And yet this obtrusive denial on the level of narrative, Rzepka suggests, makes an important level of meaning--the story of Christabel's sexual repression--accessible. The point of the analysis is finally to reveal the "appositeness" of Coleridge's "ingenuous" narrative style (38-9), and, ultimately, to link his inability to finish or tell the tale of "Christabel," and his abandonment of poetry, to his own poetic desires and expectations.

These latter readings of "Christabel," which focus so effectively on gender and psychology, do not attempt to make the poem whole again but rather explore with exactitude the lines of its brokenness or fragmentation. The feminine, in this context, may be seen as another way of figuring or understanding an anomalous manifestation like the fragment itself.[47] The uncanny elements and effects of "Christabel,"

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47. Although feminist critiques have been launched against the implicit gendering of aesthetics (the masculinist assumptions of the theory of the sublime, for example, have been well-documented), there has not been, to my knowledge, a sustained examination of gender and the problem of the fragment. While the marginalized, and potentially subversive, subject position of women was exploited to great effect by early feminist theory, a position which again is analogous to the disruptions of the fragmentary, discussions of women's writing and the fragment in the Romantic period contribute little to the discussion. Meena Alexander, for example, writing about Dorothy Wordsworth ("Writing in Fragments") in her Women in Romanticism (Houndmills, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989), claims that she exploited her marginality by embracing "the form of the

the repetition through diplacement of repressed desires and/as ghostly presences, serve a similar function: they might be thought to double or allegorize the unstoppable gap at the heart of the poem--a gap figured, in turn, by the poem's internal and external degrees of fragmentation.

In his 1919 essay on "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud observed that aesthetics had not adequately dealt with the question of the uncanny--that aesthetic treatises were more concerned with positive feelings (the attractive, the beautiful and the sublime), than with their opposites: repulsion, dread and distress. Perhaps he overlooked the negative aspect of the sublime because it functions in the service of an ultimately pleasurable sensation. The uncanny, in any event, draws its negative strength from a slightly different source; instead of figuring the unknowable, the unapprehendable, the uncanny "is that class of the frightening that leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[48]

Freud examines at length the etymology of the German term *unheimlich* which "uncanny" approximately translates

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fragment" even though this is also considered a *necessity* of her marginalization and her writing, thus, "splintered through the pressures of domestic living" (80). More effective analyses address the gendering of romantic theories of poetic production. To extrapolate from these to the configuring of the fragment in current Romantic criticism remains, nevertheless, just beyond the scope of the current project.

48. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" in Art and Literature, Vol. 14 of The Pelican Freud Library, trans. James Strachey (Penguin, 1985; first published in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), p. 340.

("unhomely" would be a more literal translation). He begins with the linguistic history of *heimlich*, which in one sense includes things that are homely, cosy, domesticated, but which in another refers to something concealed or kept from view. Freud recites Schelling's suggestion that "'*Unheimlich*' is the name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light" (345). To reduce his painstaking analysis to a brief summary, the definitions of *heimlich* start to become distinctly *unheimlich*: "Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*." "*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a subspecies of *heimlich*" (347).

The uncanny has several characteristic manifestations, and some of these are peculiarly, perhaps uncannily, relevant to "Christabel." First are the related phenomena of doubling and repetition--repetition of a central event (perhaps a crime), or the recurrence of something such as names or traits. Doubling refers, on the one hand, to the appearance of two identical characters, but it also refers to the identification of the subject with someone else: "In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (362). This identification is to serve, as Otto Rank claims in his work on the double, as "an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death'" (350). Freud identifies its source as the primary narcissism ("the unbounded self-love") which dominates childhood, but adds that once this stage of life has been surmounted, "the 'double' reverses its aspect":

"From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (357).

Freud argues that the force of the uncanny must be traced to infantile psychology; that is, the uncanny is precisely what resonates with something overcome at an earlier stage of development, or, development involves passage through an animistic stage from which we retain residues which are brought to expression in an uncanny moment. This residue relates in an essential way to something that was repressed or surmounted in the passage through that early stage, or, to a moment when the ego defensively "projected that material outward as something foreign to the self" (358). The double is, thus, established early on; initially, its aspect may be friendly, but its return represents a reversal. The uncanny is thus that class of frightening things in which a repressed emotional impulse recurs--and it matters little, if at all, if the original affect was not fright, but something other. Finally, it is clear why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* to include its opposite, *das Unheimliche*, "for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (263-64). Schelling's definition of the uncanny as "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" is shown to be singularly apt.

Critical readings of "Christabel" frequently suggest or even presuppose that Geraldine is an embodiment of Christabel's repressed desires and/or anxieties. Swann,

above, argued that Geraldine is comparable to an hysterical symptom--figuring both desire and its repression (Swann, 539). Charles Rzepka argues convincingly that much in the poem suggests that Christabel's denial of her adult sexual desire is caused by the death of her own mother in childbirth. Geraldine, in her own sinister way, represents "a surrogate mother, sexually mature and attractive," through whom Christabel can explore the question of her own (potentially fateful) womanhood (21). As he summarizes his argument, "Christabel's struggle to integrate her sexual and social identities can be understood as a severe crisis of recognition with respect to the Other, as represented in two conflicting images of the same-sex parent she never fully managed to internalize: that part of herself which Christabel can accept and about which she can speak seeks recognition from her father, the dead mother's familial and societal delegate; that part of herself--her sexual desire--which Christabel cannot accept and about which she cannot speak seeks tacit recognition from Geraldine, the dead mother's sexual surrogate--or double. At the root of Christabel's sexual repression--and of its accompanying silence--lies the fear of death in the manner of her mother" (38).

One does not need to stray too far from current critical discourse to suggest that Geraldine is an uncanny apparition in several respects. Not only may she be seen as Christabel's double in the Freudian sense, that is, as a representative of Christabel's repression, but she has been interpreted as a return, of a sort, of Christabel's mother--

thus doubled twice over. Following Rzepka's analysis, the encounter with Geraldine must re-present, for Christabel, the death of her mother: a moment when sex and death come to light. This representation occurs in a narration that Rzepka suggested was uncanny, insofar as it repeated Christabel's naive voice--and with it represented repressed content. The narration is similarly compelled (similarly paralyzed by an unspeakable dread) to present-by-hiding the poem's central riddle: that which must remain concealed (the sight of Geraldine's bosom and half her side, in the touch of which "there worketh a spell,/ Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!" ll. 267-68) has, but only for Christabel, come to light. This significant revelation is unpresentable; the eliptical style of the narrator repeats or doubles Christabel's speechlessness. Rzepka remarks that "repetition and question-begging are, like silence, failures of speech" (26). Recalling Swann's analysis of hysteria, it is because the hysteric is speechless and cannot tell her tale that she is doomed to a repetition that we may now identify as uncanny--an infectious repetition that knows no end.[49]

Because of this central dynamic of doubling and repetition, the uncanny may be seen as a figure for--as well

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49. Bostetter, some time ago, wondered if there wasn't a connection between the "repetition compulsion," which Freud discusses at greater length in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and "Christabel," that is, if a similar psychic operation were not motivating both the writing of the poem and Coleridge's well-documented dreams at that time, where the central situation was Coleridge's own helplessness before various, sadistic female figures (Bostetter, 127).

as a cause of--inconclusiveness: for how can its effects be suspended?[50] Coleridge's fragmentary poem may be thus be seen as a canny, or shrewd, presentation of the central problem. But to admit this is, in effect, to enter a trap of my own making: to posit my *own* comprehensive reading of the poem. To read "Christabel" in terms of the *in*terminable compulsion to repeat risks a return to a Romantic assertion of the fragment's infinitude--a return to a totalizing impulse. While reading "Christabel" as an uncanny poem is itself a critical allegory, for "doubling" is ever-present in the displacement from one type of discourse to another (Christabel may not speak but we, after all, read...and read again), I have been anxious not to use "Christabel" as a final statement, a tidy concluding allegory, for the "whole" thesis--for the entire or "whole" problematic of the fragment. In any event, it is in the nature of allegory to make this impossible: to displace, yet again, the lines of fissure.

It is the impossibility of concluding that (because nothing absolutely new or final can be said) says it all. The central problematic may be given a summarizing (or rather parallel, or repeated) presentation by considering the double of Freud's text, its return in the form of new

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50. In Hoffmann's "The Sand-Man," a tale of the uncanny which Freud discusses at length (the importance of his emphasis on the aesthetic value of the uncanny is finally that it occurs more often in literature than in life), it ends badly. Coleridge himself noted in 1823, in a less often cited reflection on the poem's ending, that "Were I free to do so, I feel as if I could compose the third part of Christabel, or the song of her desolation." CN, IV, 5032. Perhaps Levinson's location of "Christabel" in a tragic context is more apposite than she realizes.

texts which analyze, in turn, its *own* uncanniness.[51] Adopting Derrida's suggestions in Dissemination for a reconsideration of Freud's text, Hélène Cixous first explicitly reads "The 'Uncanny'" as uncanny, like "a strange theoretical novel," beset by a contradictory unfolding--by the presence of the author's double in the form of his hesitation (Cixous, 525). Over the course of Freud's essay, many subjects, themes and difficulties are brought up and then abandoned, so that the explication of the uncanny is "thwarted by Freud himself": "the complexity of the analysis and its suffocation go hand-in-hand with the uncertainty of the analyst" (526).[52] The *unheimlich* is thus shown to be an indefinite domain, on the fringe, or threshold perhaps, of something else. Already, with the repetition of key terms from the above discussion of Coleridge's (or at least his narrator's) relation to the text of "Christabel" (self-thwarting, thresholds, suffocation) we see something of the

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51. A rereading of "The 'Uncanny'" was initiated by Derrida in two footnotes in Dissemination (cited above), pp. 220 and 268. The principle texts which have followed are Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*" in NLH 7, (Spring, 1976); Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, Or: Remarks on a Canny Moment" in MLN 88 (1973); Sarah Kofman "The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of *The Sandman*" in her Freud and Fiction, trans. Sarah Wykes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Neil Hertz, "Freud and the Sandman" in his The End of the Line (also cited above).

52. The problems are more precisely stated by Samuel Weber, and they pertain as much to "the nature of the uncanny, to its position *abseits* [off-side, off-beat], than to any peculiarities of Freud, or weaknesses in his argument." The problems, of which Freud is aware, include the following: "the central thesis, involving repression (and then surmounting) is too abstract and too formal, and the particular relation between repression, anxiety and the Unheimliche is left open: however interrelated these three are, they are not simply identical. Secondly, the status of Freud's 'evidence' remains open to question: how exemplary are the examples, if the elements they comprise are not necessarily uncanny?..." (Weber, 1109).

larger operation of the uncanny, "outside" as well as "inside" the poem--something, perhaps, of what perplexes Coleridge and/or his narrator. In Freud's case, his occupation of the envied space of the writer--envied for his power to create uncanny effects at will--admits of a certain strangeness with respect to creation, so that he is, "in his relationship to the writer, as the *Unheimliche* is in its relation to the *Heimliche*" (532).

Cixous subjects Freud's text to a thorough scrutinizing--or, perhaps, analysis. Her comments on Freud's discussion of the uncanny in manifestations of death, on ghosts, on the return (of the repressed, of the dead, etc.), are particularly apposite for they not only address but link two matters of concern here: the representation of liminality (the "third" category of anomalous manifestations that pervade "Christabel" and come to reveal something essential about the fragmentary), and the question of the "return" in the form of Geraldine. These converge on the question of death. "As an impossible representation, death is that which mimes, by this very impossibility, the reality of death." What is more, "what is an absolute secret, something absolutely new and which should remain hidden, because it has shown itself to me, is the fact that I am dead; only the dead know the secret of death" (543). Is Geraldine more than an uncanny apparition? Is she more than the return of the dead mother, but death *itself*--at least to Christabel? The dead are powerful provokers of dread and terror because, as Freud says, if the dead return it is to carry us off with them. "In order to

carry you *off*," Cixous points out, "it is always a question of displacement, the insidious movement, through which opposites communicate. It is the *between* that is tainted with strangeness." Everything remains, claims Cixous, to be said about the Ghost, and about why its ambiguous return is so intolerable, for the return does not prove that death exists and neither does it announce death, *per se*. It is *only* the return itself that is confirmed, just as the fragment ultimately confirms *itself*--and not a completing, nor even disintegrating, context. "What is intolerable is that the Ghost erases the limit which exists between the two states, neither alive nor dead; passing through, the dead man returns in the manner of the Repressed." The ghost is constituted by this return, as much as a repression is inscribed by *its* return. "In the end, death is never anything more than the disturbance of the limits" (543).

The fragment, as I argued at length in the Introduction, is also that which disturbs, rather than implicates or confirms, a relation between parts and wholes. The consequent *ghostliness* of the fragment, then, which constitutes it as a kind of return, indicates a crisis of phenomenality and perception akin to the Kantian crisis of presentation remarked on above with respect to the sublime. The sublime has its own special links with death: Wordsworth's inscription of sublime passage, discussed above in Chapter Four, was against the *spectre* of the extinction of individual consciousness and it registered, as Jacobus argued, the impossibility of autobiographical self-

encounter. This impossiblity echoes the impossiblity of self-encounter in *death*, in the way death both completes and incompletes one's own life--by reason of the impossiblity of representing one's own death (prerequisite for a unified "life"). The opposition drawn by Freud between the uncanny in literature and life, his envy of the artist's capacity to create and manipulate uncanny effects, relates, of course, to the presence of death. The *creation* of doubles is to conceal the fact that death is "always already present in life."[53] Neither living nor dead, the double must supplement or perfect the living--and yet the double is "the harbinger of death." It is uncanny because "it cannot but invoke what man tries in vain to forget" (148). By extension, the presence of the fragment, as a persistent reminder of the *remainder*, may be seen as the allegorical presence within a text, within every text (no matter how *lively*) of its own "death": its own necessarily incomplete incompletion.

The threat posed by the uncanny is bound up by the same crisis of presentation remarked on above insofar as that which is revealed (what should have remained hidden) nevertheless eludes perception: by being repeated, doubled and fragmented, its meaning is (allegorically speaking) endlessly displaced. The uncanny is thus, as Weber suggests, "a certain undecidability which affects and infects representations, motifs, themes and situations,

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53. Sarah Kofman, "The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of *The Sandman*" in Freud and Fiction (cited above), p. 148.

which, like the allegories described by Walter Benjamin, always mean something other than what they are and in a manner which draws their own being and substance into the vortex of signification" (Weber, 1132). The shift that "Christabel" has enabled, from presentation to effects of representation, from presences to symptoms (the uncanny, the feminine, the endlessness of the formal, the fragment, allegory) does not mark a disintegration of the argument into a necessary critical abyss, but *re*marks the essential presentational problematic that the fragment has been shown to typify. In "Christabel," the poem's several degrees of fragmentation and discontinuity illuminate again a complex of representational and hermeneutic factors that trouble the question of reading--the author's self-reading, as well as ours. The question of the fragment and that of the "gap" (of fragment *as* gap), and their reconfigurations in criticism, remain ever alive and problematical.

EPILOGUE

Foregone Conclusions: A Preface to the Fragment

Concluding a thesis on the problematics of fragmentation, as my comments at the end of the last chapter suggest, raises particularly telling difficulties. The principal challenge throughout has been to investigate a disintegrative problematic (Hertz's sublime turn) without, on the one hand, embracing its disorder (Blanchot's warning), or, on the other, submitting it to a totalizing formula, to supply or supplant it with a *unity* of fragmentation. On the one hand, then, to offer a conclusion is in some significant respects antithetical to the matter of the thesis and the manner of its argumentation.[1] Indeed, the original conception of the conclusion, in too-Coleridgean fashion, outgrew its function and became the preface to another project. However, on the other hand, the difficulty of concluding, which I will treat here as the difficulty of *beginning*, articulates the substance of my argument. In the first (or last) instance, then, this thesis may be concluded by analogy (or perhaps an allegory), by revisiting a problematic central to the "whole" of Part Three: that of the preface. More precisely, if my thesis has established anything, it is that to refer the problem of concluding to that of beginning is to represent more vividly

1. One risks here a dangerous suggestion, namely, a Romantic emphasis on process rather than product, or again, a slip into the explanatory force of the dialectic.

the salient features of fragmentation in the Coleridge texts under discussion.

This approach, however, has particular relevance for Part Three of this thesis, for which Parts One and Two function as a preface and a preparation. Part One served a largely prefatory function with its examination of broader issues attaching to the fragmentary, that is, issues from which it needed to be detached and/or absorbed: the ruin, the unfinished, current critical constructions of the fragmentary, a theory of the fragment and, finally, a theory of criticism. Part Two, with its emphasis on the aesthetic discourse surrounding the fragment--organicism, symbolism, allegory and the sublime--served as a preparation in two ways, first by rendering the term as problematic as possible (and thus emphasizing its radicality), and second, by establishing a method of enquiry that paid additional attention to the role of literary criticism in advancing readings of "Romantic" texts that depend on those very aesthetic assumptions.

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Friedrich Schlegel observed, as I noted above, that "[a] good preface must be at once the square root and the square of its book."[2] Although expressed mathematically, this suggestion nevertheless invoked an ideal, organic model where not only was the work to be entirely self-constituting, but where the preface, as the part that most explicitly expresses the whole, must be both an internally necessitated statement of the work's intent as well as an

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2. Critical Fragment 8, in Philosophical Fragments.

essential part of the whole. Thus one might say that the burden of the organic aesthetic model falls not only heavily but revealingly upon the preface. Where, with Schlegel, distinctions between inside and outside, before and after, were to be, so to speak, worked over, one might argue that the effect of this working over was finally a more precise location (or dislocation) of those very distinctions. The problematic of the preface, like that of the fragment, goes straight to the heart of the construction, presentation and mediation of a given work.

The Schlegelian preface, with its obvious shortcomings, sits in an interesting relation to Hegel's reflections on the prefacing of philosophical texts--a series of reflections worked out, significantly, in prefaces. In what may be seen as either a contradiction or an intensification of Schlegel's dictum, Hegel argues in his preface to the Phenomenology that the preface is in fact an *inappropriate* place to present anything of real importance: "For whatever might be appropriately said about philosophy in a preface--say a historical statement of the main drift and the point of view, the general content and results, a string of random assertions and assurances about truth--none of this can be accepted as the way in which to expound philosophical truth."[3] Philosophical concepts cannot be separated from their deduction, and the point is made again in the preface to the Logic: "it is impossible to give in a preliminary way a general impression of a philosophy. Nor can a division of

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3. Phenomenology of Spirit [1807], trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1.

philosophy into its parts be intelligible, except in connection with the system."[4] The apparent contingency of beginning, of any starting point, must already be subsumed within the exigencies of exposition. "In this manner," as Hegel proposed, "philosophy exhibits the appearance of a circle which closes with itself,..." (23).[5] The entry, so to speak, into philosophy is itself philosophy (or, philosophy is "always already" where you begin). Philosophical discourse must be circular and self-completing, in sum, self-presenting. When it comes, or returns, to the question of the preface, then, it must either become an essential or integral part of the progressive revealing of the concepts in question--sublated to the text, which is to say, effaced entirely as *preface*--or it must move in the opposite direction, detaching from the work itself, falling, in a contingent and unnecessary manner, beyond it. This is what I meant when I commented that Hegel's reflections may be seen either to contradict or confirm Schlegel's notion of the preface as square and square root of the work. Indeed, as Derrida points out in *Outwork [Hors livre]*, "isn't the preface both negated and

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4. Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences [1830], trans. William Wallace, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 23.
5. "Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle rounded and complete in itself" (20). Cf. Schlegel: "A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog" (AF, 206). Hegel: "The single circle, because it is a real totality, bursts through the limits imposed by its special medium, and gives rise to a wider circle. The whole of philosophy in this way resembles a circle of circles. The idea appears in each single circle, but, at the same time, the whole Idea is constituted by the system of these particular phases, and each is a necessary member of the organization" (20).

internalized in the presentation of philosophy by itself, in the self-production and self-determination of the concept?"[6]

The relation of the work of philosophy to the production of a work of art (and here, of literature--specifically, even, of poetry) is both readily apparent and in need of some further examination. The significance of the organic model, in which beauty arises from the harmonious relation of parts, was examined at length in Chapter Two. Kant's aesthetic, for example, prized the beautiful object as autonomous and autotelic, containing within itself its own means and end, and thus constituting its own adequate description. The fully realized work of art was seen as internally coherent and externally intransitive. Its concentrated signifying capacity rendered artistic language untranslatable and unexplainable--therefore without need of either prefacing or commentary. However, as we saw in Chapter One, a more problematic view of the economy of the Romantic aesthetic is advanced by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy in what they configure as the moment of the literary absolute. This is the characteristically Romantic moment, inaugurating our own era, in which literature produces its own theory, and theory thinks itself as literature--the moment of "a Literature enclosed in and enclosing the law of its own engendering," and a poetics "in which the subject confounds itself with its own production."[7] The exemplary work-model of this theory is not, however, the whole, but the incompletable

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6. Dissemination, p. 11.
7. The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism, p. xxi-xxii.

realization of incompletion that determines the productive capacity of literature: in the end, as their argument suggests, the fully realized aesthetic object can *only* be the fragment.

My thesis has tried consistently to expose the way the fragment both preserves and annuls the idea of the whole. Similarly, the preface, as Chapter Six showed, is both absorbed and repudiated by the work; therefore, the problem of the preface and the problem of the fragment converge. In the case of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," the preface both constitutes and identifies the fragmentary condition of the poem.[8] That is, for readers (of which there are many) who find the poem to be a satisfactory whole on its own, Coleridge's insistence in the preface on its fragmentary state represents an unnecessary intervention into an otherwise adequate text. Readers resist Coleridge's assertion for good reasons: the dubious factual basis of the narrative of the man from Porlock, concocted a considerable length of time after its alleged occurrence, and the publishing history of the poem, which has not always included the preface (or the "whole" preface). However, a modern reading which does not suppress the preface is obliged to take into full account the conditions for the poem's reading that Coleridge clearly establishes there.

Insofar as Coleridge's preface contains its well-known account of the poem's history--its inspiration and

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8. Although the discussion of Biographia Literaria precedes that of "Kubla Khan" in my thesis, the order is reversed here because it is Chapter Six that initiates an explicit discussion of the problematic of the preface.

composition--it performs a conventional preliminary function and thus keeps a certain distance from the work it presents. This distance is signalled by the difference in genre, style, tone--by the confessional, conversational prose of the preface, against the highly wrought, visionary verse of the poem itself. Yet the detailed consideration undertaken here of the thematic and structural similarities of preface and poem has indicated the degree to which the preface is absorbed by the poem, and that, moreover, the very movement of fragmentation and reintegration, dispersal and restoration, that marks the preface, falls well within--and not outside--the thematics and the rhetoric of the poem.

"Kubla Khan"'s symmetries, repetitions, inversions--all apparently totalizing tendencies--were productively considered above against the fragmenting tendencies of its self-reflexive rhetoric. To put it slightly differently here (and now), the poem's preface attempts to close the circle of inspiration (a circle re-drawn around the figure of the inspired poet in the poem's concluding lines)--to render it, perhaps, like the poetic equivalent of Hegel's closed circles of philosophy. It intends to sublate vision and poetic expression, or at least to articulate the means by which such sublation--or closure--might be effected. And yet, by representing it so effectively, the preface opens the gap between assertion and experience, form and content, or (as in Hegel), truth and certainty. In a way, Coleridge attempts to render "Kubla Khan" a whole by declaring it a fragment, but the fact of the declaration, after a fashion and in the manner of allegory, *speaks otherwise*.

If the elements of the preface that seemed to confirm the poem's mystified, symbolic (unified, in sum) status are reconsidered as key elements in an allegorical or allusive reading (a reconsideration now more common among critics as the preface loses literal authority), the preface may be seen not so much as an account of the poem's origins as a commentary on origins (perhaps a mythic instance of beginning) running parallel to the poem itself and drawing attention to the disjunction between the poem and its ghostly ideal. Given that this is the case (and/as argued chiefly in Chapter Six), it is now possible to conclude that the preface as ghostly presence, as *revenant*, effects the very repetition disparaged by Hegel/Derrida as an (empty) echo of the work. It renders the poem a dim analogue, rather than an enactment, of the famed creative powers of the imagination. Or rather, it turns the whole of "Kubla Khan" into one long preface to the possibility of such an enactment.

In the case of "Kubla Khan," the addition of the preface casts a shadow over the poem which the brilliance of the poem does not completely disperse--where, after all, do the effects of the preface cease to be felt--where, in effect, does the preface really end? How much more complicated--or simple--does the problem of situating the end of the preface become in a text like Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, where the alleged preface totally *pre*occupies, or usurps, the place of the text. (One must recall its presumed origin as a preface to Sibylline

Leaves.) Its status as over-grown preface contributes to the reader's sense that Biographia Literaria has no *necessary* end, and could indeed have been much longer.[9] This is to say, perhaps, that Biographia Literaria is a "whole" text only because it is a "whole" preface, and has, as preface, detached itself completely from the work it was to present. The end of the preface (Hegel), were it possible (Derrida), would have to be "the moment at which the order of exposition (*Darstellung*) and the sequential unfolding of the concept, in its self-movement, begin to overlap according to a sort of a priori synthesis..." (Derrida, 30-31). As the site of a *failure* of such synthesis, as a work that draws much of its creative power from the *absence* of such synthesis, Biographia Literaria illustrates in exemplary fashion the impossible space the preface occupies. This difficulty was explored above in Chapter Six with Barbara Johnson's comments about its untenably paradoxical nature as an instance of "anticipatory retrospection" and "internalized exteriority." Situated "both inside and outside, both before and after the 'book' whose 'bookness' it both promotes and transgresses, the preface has always inscribed itself in a strange warp of both time and space" (Dissemination, p. xxxii). As Derrida remarks in *Outwork*, his own essay on prefaces, the preface is to "announce in the future tense ('this is what you are

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9. Cf. Baudelaire's Petits poèmes en prose, which Gérard Genette (and Baudelaire himself) describe as "un ouvrage «sans queue ni tête», où tout est à la fois tête et queue, et que l'on pourrait couper n'importe où: c'est la définition même de l'agrégat inorganique." In Seuils (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), p. 187.

going to read') the conceptual content or significance...of what will *already* have been *written*" (7). Its logic is fundamentally that of the postface, or conclusion. Having made present *and* absent what is to follow, having anticipated everything, the preface cancels the need for the main text--eliminating, at the very least, the necessity of reading on. History has confirmed the cancellation of Sibylline Leaves--a text whose contents have been absorbed (and hence, in a sense, scattered) into the author's "collected" works, just as Sibyl's verses, recorded on leaves (in Book III of The Aeneid), were scattered by the winds.[10]

The preface is itself, however, open to preoccupation. Like "forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles, prologues, and prolegomena," prefaces, it would seem, "have always been written...in view of their own self-effacement" (Derrida, 9). At the end of the preface, the *pre* must cancel itself out, "the route which has been covered must cancel itself out," but this subtraction nevertheless leaves a trace, "a mark of erasure, a *remainder* which is added to the subsequent text and which cannot be completely summed up within it" (9). In the case of Biographia Literaria, Spivak comments that it is only "because it failed in its self-effacing task" that it became "a full-fledged book," containing, within it, "its own

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10. III, 576-589. In Virgil's account, Sibyl does not reorder her words and symbols, once they have been disordered by the wind, "never/ recalls their place or joins them all together" (ll. 588-89).

failed preface" (Spivak, 4). According to Derrida's logic, all prefaces fail in precisely this way. All attempts at prefacing must fall prey to the inherent difficulty of the task. The preface, like the fragment, claims to share a certain reversibility of status with its "whole" text. This reversibility is at play in Schlegel's dictum that the preface must be both square and square root, but the point is that the preface, by nature, resists reduction to a totalizing, geometric formula. The remainder, the *restance*, remains. Coleridge's "prefaces" and/as fragments have provided interesting instances of this incommensurability between the part, the prior, the explanatory, and their "whole" signifying contexts. The prefaces to "Kubla Khan" and to Biographia Literaria, which may be seen as excesses and/or extensions of the "text" itself--absorbed and/or remaindered--reveal that the form and function of the preface, or, indeed, of the whole text or book, is under considerable strain.[11]

Assuming the fundamentally prefatory logic of the postface (or conclusion), one might look forward (and backward) at other ways in which the problems of prefacing illuminate the problem of the fragment in the main Coleridge

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11. One could raise here, finally, the question of the Book, insofar as the questions a preface raises--origin, originality, the subject, presence--are the questions of the Book. Furthermore, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out in The Birth to Presence, "the book never aspires to anything less than the retracing of what exceeds it." "Exscription" in The Birth to Presence, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 327. The Book, then, I hazard, aspires to nothing less than its own preface.

texts examined here. For example, one could investigate Coleridge's conclusion to Biographia Literaria, with its timely reflections on the convergence of before and after, present and past. One could also examine instances of prefacing within the text, such as the relation of the philosophical first volume to the second--such as, moreover, Coleridge's use of a fabricated letter from a friend to introduce his theory of imagination, a gesture which made present and absent, in exemplary manner, the transcendental deduction it supplanted. The burden of Chapter Five was indeed to show that the forces of fragmentation throughout Biographia Literaria, a major preoccupation of its critical reception, are exemplified rather than rectified in the model of the imagination--where what was to be a unified and unifying force is checked or blocked by its fundamental self-division, by the fundamental belatedness of the secondary imagination (to which the primary is perhaps an endless or infinite prolegomenon).

One could, finally, productively extend this problematic to "Christabel," where the two parts and their respective conclusions could be configured as an assortment of prefaces and postfaces to a non-existent text. That is, instead of (or in addition to) reading the relation between the actual preface and the poem as the principal site of the disintegration or incommensurability of an ideal and a real text, the work of fragmentation can be observed at each point of rupture in the poem. Chapter Seven explored at length the dilemma this has posed for readers, who variously locate the poem's truncation within (between the two parts)

or without (at either end). This dilemma was seen to find expression in the prevailing sense that the poem's fragmentary state served both to conceal and configure an essential void or absence at its center. The introduction of new terms into the discussion (in particular the uncanny) helped to clarify the problem of fragmentation in "Christabel" by revealing its structural connection with a profound paralysis that was, paradoxically, productive--at least insofar as it enacted a compulsive repetition that suspended indefinitely the requisite conditions for conclusion. The additional resonance of the Freudian concept of the uncanny--the problem of repetition, the *return* (of the repressed, of the dead)--figures with additional force the fragmentary exigency identified by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy. To complete, after a fashion, the circle, I would like to observe that the *repetition* implicit in the uncanny--its ghosts or *revenants*--is a recurrence of Hegel's observations about the preface.

This conclusion, through its prefatorial orientation (and with all the problems that entails), has attempted to recapture or recapitulate the dynamics of fragmentation *not only* as they have informed or deformed three Coleridge texts, but, with the "whole" of the thesis, to suggest how those dynamics operate more widely: in all literary texts, and in aesthetic and critical discourses. To do so through or in a preface (even a postfacing preface) is, in some key ways, to allegorize the problem. This is, however, a significant rather than a reductive gesture since, as

Chapter Three showed, allegory is itself a mode that both captures and defers its full meaning. The significance of an allegory, like any form of analogy, cannot be exhausted or completed. In this light, and following the logic of the preface, it would only be fair and accurate to comment, in closing, that there is still more that remains to be said in conclusion--more claims that were staked in the opening parts of the thesis and not exhausted by its development--that could only have exceeded, in the manner of the preface or the fragment, that very development.

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