

ABSTRACT

“Kubla Khan,” *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, and
the Decomposing Subject of Coleridge’s Corpus

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In “Kubla Khan” and its prose introduction, Coleridge offers repeated examples of conscious efforts to gather up the loose ends of history, both globally and personally, in political and spiritual contexts. “The Pains of Sleep” depicts personal suffering as inextricably linked with the act of constituting self and others in relationships determined by the act of representation itself after the manner exemplified in Coleridge’s philosophical and poetic works. This depiction is especially important in light of the convergence since Coleridge’s time of views as different as Japanese Buddhism and Continental philosophy. West or East, philosophy seeks to represent the human subject as accounting for itself and all things with no residue of prior representation. Coleridge’s work anticipates this convergence, particularly in the spiritual concerns which dominate his late works.

Coleridge’s attempt to represent himself in terms of Christian confession while upholding his account of the human subject leads him to discuss the doctrine of original sin at length in *Aids to Reflection*. This engagement broadens the conversation beyond

the parochially Christian or Western and exposes the complex problem of Coleridge's philosophical anthropology which persists in Coleridge's posthumously published *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. Despite the formative role he attributes to Scripture in Christian confession, Coleridge is scandalized by the traditional doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Coleridge uses Scripture to explain original sin in *Aids*, but reads Scripture in *Confessions* under a scheme of representation that implicates not only readers and writers, but the divine Author, in complicity with original sin. This limits the possibilities of those very resources upon which he draws in "A Nightly Prayer," which responds to "The Pains of Sleep" by elaborating in perhaps its simplest, most personal form Coleridge's Christian confession. Ultimately, Coleridge's attempt to found a Christian self-understanding on a Biblical doctrine of original sin is incompatible with the philosophical anthropology in which Coleridge grounds his Biblical hermeneutics. Coleridge's corpus thus provides an extended example of the difficulties involved in attempts to found a unified understanding of self, others, world, and God upon the conscious experience of the human subject.

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the Decomposing Subject of Coleridge’s Corpus

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DEDICATION

To my friends in Japan,
especially Mr. & Mrs. Nakano,
Pastor and Mrs. Kanba,
and Hibiki:
with hope for the future of
未来バプチスト協会
(Mirai Baptist Church).

CHAPTER ONE

History, Sources, and the Subject

*I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;
For, though their currants yeeld returne to none,
What shall my West hurt me? As West and East
In all flatt Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the Resurrection.*

Donne "Hymne" 11-15

As John Donne lay in bed, made "flatt" by illness, he also answered to the cries of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, more than a century later, arising from horrifying dreams caused by nervous disorder and withdrawal from opiates. Donne did so in language Coleridge would recognize: with the parenthetical "I am one," Donne explicitly labels the subject "Donne" in the poem as an exemplary subject, not a cipher for the author and not a transparent narrative voice. The "I" that can "joy" and "see" perceives approaching death as "my West," a representation of European hopes which at the time of Donne's writing already had mutually-reinforcing religious and political dimensions as both "New World" and "City on a Hill." These hopes are represented in Donne's poetic language as the text-inscribed images on "flatt Maps." The "I" who identifies himself as such a map, in which "West and East . . . are one," is the subject of both "death" and "Resurrection"; written in a poem, this same "I" serves as an example, depicting "Resurrection" as a particular possibility of thought for humans facing "death."

Coleridge's poetic voices and the representation of the subject "Coleridge" in his prose works serve a similar exemplary function. Such poems as "Kubla Khan" and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* also represent even the political and religious dimensions of

“West and East” as personal. The exemplary subjects in the poems “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep,” poems Coleridge describes as works of “psychological curiosity,” provide the clearest poetic *entrée* to Coleridge’s complex representation of the human subject, the “self” which both represents and is represented in every movement of language. The example provided in “The Pains of Sleep” stands in stark contrast to that in Donne’s “Hymne to God, my God, in my Sickness.” Donne assimilates the represented and representing “I” into his experience of a more authoritative text, representing himself as a faithful and responsive reader of Scripture:

And as to others soules I preach'd thy word,
Be this my Text, my Sermon to mine owne,
Therefore that he may raise the Lord throws down. (28-30)

Coleridge’s very different exemplary “I” attempts to secure himself by appealing beyond text to an inarticulate “sense” which is, paradoxically, also a composition:

It hath not been my use to pray
With moving lips or bended knees;
But silently, by slow degrees,
My spirit I to Love compose. (2-5)

The contradictions intrinsic to this attempt to “compose” without admitting any prior text, to pray with “no wish conceived, no thought exprest, / Only a sense” (8-9), suggest the limitations of Coleridge’s theory of the human subject. “The Pains of Sleep,” then, is a very personal example which nonetheless serves as a warning to others following Coleridge’s path to understanding of self and others.

Further exemplary works, such as “Kubla Khan” and the prose introduction which links it to “The Pains of Sleep” (to be examined in Chapter Two), link this very personal suffering still more clearly to the global political and religious concerns bound up in Coleridge’s philosophical and poetic works. Beyond these works, Coleridge’s attempt to

represent himself in terms of orthodox Christian confession while maintaining his philosophical account of the human subject leads him to a protracted engagement with the doctrine of original sin in *Aids to Reflection* (as discussed below in Chapter Three). This engagement both broadens the conversation beyond the parochially Christian or Western and exposes the complex problem of Coleridge's representation of the human subject which persists even in Coleridge's posthumously published *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (as seen in Chapter Four). Ultimately, Coleridge's attempt to found a Christian self-understanding on a Biblical doctrine of original sin is incompatible with the representation of the human subject that Coleridge uses to explain his reading of Scripture. Coleridge's corpus thus provides many examples, or one extended example, of the difficulties involved in the effort to found a unified understanding of self, others, world, and God within the conscious experience of the human subject.

Introduction: Examples, Method, and Focus

More than one commentator seeking to broaden the application of such examples has found reason to compare Samuel Taylor Coleridge's career with that of Wilhelm von Humboldt. Stephen Prickett opens his *Words and the Word* by contrasting Humboldt's separation of theology from the liberal arts in the University of Berlin to the "fact that the first generation of English Romantic poets, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, so far from rejecting Christianity like Humboldt, were devout Christians of one kind or another" (1). Setting aside the question whether the "one kind or another" of religious thought found in each of these can be made consistent with any particular description of "devout Christians," Prickett seems clearly in the right when he claims that "current problems of biblical hermeneutics are unlikely to be solved" without an historical

understanding which brings into focus “not [. . .] development of theology or of literary theory considered as separate disciplines” but rather “their interaction and subsequent separation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (2). In a recent article turning more specifically on the comparison of Coleridge to Humboldt, E. S. Shaffer endeavors “to show the outlines of the shared ideology” in the culminating projects of these remarkable contemporaries (“Ideology”). Shaffer is particularly interested in the persistent features of what, quoting Louis Dumont’s “objective definition of ideology,” she calls “‘attitudes that come spontaneously to the minds of people living in a given cultural milieu.’ [. . . which are] best revealed by comparison with other cultures.” Shaffer follows Dumont’s reading of Humboldt’s career, noting that Dumont “ranges across disciplines and employs literary examples” in order to describe “Humboldt’s founding of his own subject, comparative anthropology, as a lifelong project of self-development conceived in 1797.” The intellectual and social project of “comparative anthropology” thus reflects the personal “project of self-development” which Shaffer, Dumont, and most critics of Romanticism readily recognize as an example of *Bildung*.

Shaffer also follows Dumont’s representation of this *Bildung* “as an ‘institution’” in a sense which (like the word “constitution”) reflects the telescoping of personal and global understandings that characterize the ideology of the period, and of Romanticism especially, “from social and intellectual formations to imaginative substitutes for improved institutions that failed to materialize.” It is precisely this “movement between the individual pole and the social pole” that justifies Shaffer’s attention to the “illuminating parallels” between Coleridge and Humboldt, who “was almost exactly Coleridge’s coeval.” This telescoping of the personal and the global makes Dumont’s

parallel examination of “the progress of Goethe’s writing of *Wilhelm Meister* as part of the programme of mutual *Bildung* shown in his correspondence with Schiller” especially useful to Shaffer, whose goal is to describe Coleridge’s late works as unfolding in a similar way from his early projects. It is precisely at this thematic convergence of Humboldt’s career with Goethe’s works that Shaffer locates Coleridge’s *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, which ostensibly “had its immediate impetus from Carlyle’s gift of his translation of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* in June 1824,” as the key “characterization of [Coleridge’s] own religious experience” which constitutes “an example of ‘represented *Bildung*’ in Dumont’s sense.” Such an understanding of *Bildung* as “represented” in particular projects which both exemplify and describe “self-development” in terms of “improved institutions” or their “imaginative substitutes” provides considerable insight into Coleridge’s corpus.

Thomas McFarland follows a similar strategy, taking the work of “the greatest of all sociologists, Emile Durkheim,” as an example for comparison (“Coleridge” 43). Coleridge’s particular method of telescoping the social and personal, arguing that each represented a unique synthesis and not a mere aggregation, “was so radical as not to be understandable” according to McFarland, who argues that “the work of the French school of sociologists, beginning in the 1890s,” was the first to make widespread use of this enabling “distinction.” Durkheim, himself a product of *l’École normale supérieure* (46), is of course a key contributor to the emergence of modern (and postmodern) anthropology and sociology. Durkheim’s understanding of “*conscience collective*” or “*conscience commune*” (44) is drawn from “Rousseau’s conception of the *volonté générale*,” and Durkheim himself argued that Montesquieu was “the first sociological

thinker,” but McFarland suggests that “neither Montesquieu or Rousseau [. . .] even comes close to matching the point and profundity of Coleridge’s grasping of the bedrock fundamental of sociological awareness” (43). This “bedrock fundamental” is very similar to Dumont’s definition of ideology, as used by Shaffer. McFarland describes this basic understanding in Durkheim’s terms: “the ‘*conscience collective* or *commune*’ is ‘the set of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a single society and forms a determinate system that has its own life’” (44). McFarland does not only use Durkheim as a parallel example to Coleridge in order to argue for “Coleridge’s prescience,” though, for the parallel becomes stronger as each man’s career moves toward a focus on religion. McFarland argues that “Coleridge certainly understood that the church was a *conscience collective*, not a gathering of discrete individuals; the Greek word *ekklesia* means a gathering of citizens, an assembly, not simply a crowd” (44-5). Coleridge’s focus on the intersubjective nature of religion finds a direct parallel in Durkheim’s late work, as McFarland points out:

Elementary Forms of the Religious Life [. . .] is not only his final and greatest work, but is one of the truly significant books in all of Western culture. For in *Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse* Durkheim demonstrates, once and for all, what religion is. He shows that religion does not depend primarily on a belief in God—for some religions, such as Buddhism, do not have such a belief—but on the division of sacred from profane; and that the substratum and regulating factor of religion is always social. (46)

Regardless of any evaluation of the essential claims, here, about the teachings of any particular religion (which sociological analysis tends to ignore) or the emergence of an ontological claim (“what religion is”) from an empirical premise through an enabling structuralism, McFarland’s method of comparative examples and the general nature of his

claims meshes neatly with those of Shaffer, and each draws attention to the same intersection of thought as Prickett mentions.

This is fitting, of course, as the relationship of poetics to the reading of Scripture is Prickett's chief concern in *Words and the Word*. Shaffer's article about Coleridge's late works finishes its discussion of ideology with an explicit argument about literary theory and Scripture. Not only could Coleridge (in advance of Matthew Arnold) "be seen to have founded the new discipline of English literature (or even comparative literature)," but in fact to have announced a cultural mission explicitly targeted to a post-Christian age: "The fusty old poseur of Highgate had brought off the most radical movement of thought: the shift from religious to literary culture, and with immense bravura he had done it on the home ground of the text of the Bible itself." This statement seems too broad; yet Shaffer is certainly right that Coleridge's work partakes of a milieu in which historical criticism was often thought to have fractured the Bible beyond recognition, so that "Religion—if it was to survive—must be refounded."

In his *Coleridge and the Inspired Word*, Anthony John Harding has taken up the task of explaining in some detail how this grounding of Biblical authority in the reader's experience was to be effected. Harding's reading draws attention to the determination of Biblical hermeneutics by philosophical anthropology, that is, by a theory of the human subject. "The Romantics insisted on the uncompromised humanity of the prophet" (5). This humanity meant, for example, that "Jewish writers" were privileged in the same way that William Blake and William Wordsworth, and after them Victorian culture as a whole, famously privileged children: they were "closer to the sources of divine inspiration" just as "the child was closer to the well-springs of creative genius than the

adult.” Harding argues that Coleridge’s reading of Scripture was an act of recovery, seeking to restore “the authentic [. . .] claim of one whole human being addressing another whole human being” (7). Harding attributes much of the tension in Coleridge’s poetry, particular his poetry of the supernatural, to “the anxieties attendant upon the poet in a remote time and a strange land who tries to emulate the poets of ancient Israel” (8-9). Harding seems to identify his critical stance directly with the Romantic view, which treated the prophets primarily as “poets” and assimilated European Christendom’s historical distance from the composition of Scripture to the concept of “exile” found in those prophets (8-9). Of course, in a very real sense neither literary theory nor Biblical hermeneutics have ever thoroughly superseded the Romantic approach, as shown by Harding’s citations ranging from Spinoza to J. G. Eichhorn (1) to E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (11), and Walter J. Ong (13), among many others—an assemblage, spanning three centuries, whose literary and Biblical hermeneutics inform Harding’s Coleridgean reading.

Recent interest in Coleridge’s religious thought is in keeping with his influence in his own time; as Daniel Hoffman observes in discussing Coleridge’s part in nineteenth-century debates over Scripture, Coleridge “is often recognized today only as a great English romantic poet, but in the nineteenth century he was better known as a theologian” (55). It is certainly worthy of note, then, that David L. Jeffrey, in an address on the role of Scripture in the Church of England, lists Coleridge side-by-side with the likes of F. D. Maurice (whom Coleridge directly influenced) and Bishop Spong as a contributor to a modern revival of “the apostasy which Jesus identified with the Sadducees.” Jeffrey’s brief mention of Coleridge points out an important problem:

We need more vigilantly than ever to guard against that least fortunate impulse of the logic of the Reformation by which, in the search for a

personal (individual) experience of authenticity or “empowerment,” we find ourselves at last in a “church of one.”

This is the counter-epistemic path that has led from Puritanism and some experiential biblicism to the Romantics, from the life authenticated by Scripture (Bunyan, Baxter, Newton) to the idea that Scripture is rather to be authenticated by life (Coleridge, F. D. Maurice, Bishop Spong). [. . .] the slippery slope from a well-intentioned subjectivity can quickly accelerate the ego [. . .] to the apostasy which Jesus identified with the Sadducees.

The “slippery slope” Jeffrey describes begins when “authority in the reader becomes individualized,” but its terminus lies in “apostasy.” This concern is dealt with in a variety of ways by critics of Coleridge, who may or may not be concerned with the meaning of Coleridge’s Christian confession, but Coleridge himself would not have regarded such a charge with equanimity. Jeffrey acknowledges this in his *People of the Book*, in which he points out that although Coleridge contributes to a precipitous fall toward “apostasy,” the Coleridge of *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* “clearly wants to secure the Bible’s continuing preeminence in the life of Christians” and would want Biblical “authority” to be understood “in terms of an authenticity derived from what he takes to be the indisputable confirmations of experience” (303). Jeffrey helpfully particularizes the debate as it has continued to play out since Coleridge’s time when he observes that “Coleridge, in fact, is not an adherent of the doctrine of verbal inspiration of Scripture” when that doctrine is understood to imply “a plenary and inerrant inspiration, guaranteed in the texts which have come down to us” (304). Neither Coleridge nor Jeffrey, of course, are referring to the myriad of minor preservation, transcription, and translation issues which complicate interpretation for students of the text, regardless of their presuppositions; rather, Jeffrey points out that Coleridge’s treatment of the history of Christian interpretation of Scripture is, in the end, limited to the observation that

“eminent writers [. . .] too have been able to judge the authenticity of the Bible by inner feelings of accord, or conformity to their own personal experience” (306). This shift in the meaning of the “authenticity” or “authority” of the text of Scripture accords with the outlines of the readings Shaffer, MacFarland, and Harding have provided, and identifies the center of the question of literary theory and Biblical hermeneutics Prickett also addresses.

Despite the seeming remoteness of such concerns as “plenary and inerrant inspiration” from contemporary discourse in literary theory, or even religious studies, its continuing significance for readers of the late Coleridge is complemented by its currency in the theological discourse, both academic and popular, of a vast swath of contemporary Christianity. As Jeffrey says, “Coleridge [. . .] is fully a modern in his romantic emphasis on the self”; and perhaps more importantly for the American evangelicals most likely to be attuned to this debate, Jeffrey continues that “more fully than the descendants of the Puritans would like to think, he has followed the logic of the evangelical tradition’s own defense of Scripture to get there” (306). To take a very recent example, in his 2008 book *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism*, G. K. Beale of Wheaton College takes issue primarily with the view of Scripture set forth by Peter Enns of Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia), a view Beale characterizes as setting forth “an incognito genre of divine accommodation to myth” in which “what appears to be a historical genre [. . .] is really to be understood as myth” (43). Beale maintains that Enns, despite claiming to uphold the authority of Scripture, undermines “the doctrine of inerrancy” which “was espoused as an orthodox notion long before the Enlightenment and modernism, from the time of the early fathers up through the Reformers and until the end of the twentieth

century” (42). For both Enns and Beale, both faithfulness to the meaning of the writers’ acts and the authority of God in the writing are significant, as they would be for Coleridge; what remains in dispute, as it did both within Coleridge’s corpus and among his milieu, is the relative significance of these concerns for the meaning of the text for the reader.

Similarly, the uptake of Karl Barth’s work into American evangelicalism has, in all its variations, continually re-opened the question of whether “his reassertion of biblical authority in the face of its erosion in modern Protestantism” (Vanhoozer 26) can succeed, given the “distance (*diastasis*) that remains” in his work between “Bible” and “Word of God” (40), a distance described in “Barth’s indirect identity thesis—according to which the Bible *becomes* the word of God” (26). Barth’s case is especially interesting because, as a product of liberalism attempting to articulate Biblical authority over against that tradition, he stands as a sort of bookend to Coleridge and his cohort, whose efforts to grapple with the problems of historical-critical study and the fragmentation of the Reformation impulse into idiosyncratic sectarianism created classical liberalism. As Vanhoozer reads him, in fact, several of Barth’s key moves with regard to the reading of Scripture seem to have close parallels in Coleridge. Like Coleridge, Barth emphasizes the primacy of divine volition (and, though with important differences, also the co-inherence of the human with the divine volition in faith) in the meaning of Scripture (41); also like Coleridge, he does so over against a “seventeenth-century Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration” which he thought “historicized or ‘materialized’ revelation” and therefore engages in “reformulation and rejection of the doctrines of verbal inspiration and inerrancy respectively.” The similarities do not end there, but it is sufficient to note

the existence of these parallels, and to return to Prickett's assertion that "current problems of biblical hermeneutics are unlikely to be solved" without thorough re-evaluation of the history of interpretation of which Coleridge's corpus forms an important part.

On an entirely different front, Jerome Christensen engages a charge of "apostasy" leveled by Frank Lentricchia, who argues that deconstructive critics have committed a political form of apostasy from the radical agenda of the "heady days of political enthusiasm during the war in Vietnam" (769). Christensen responds to the charge by drawing a "philosophic analogy"¹ between the Romantics, specifically Coleridge, and the deconstructors. As he says,

The analogy exploits the similarity between the experience of the proponents of activism in the late 1960s and their English predecessors in the 1790s [. . .]. The analogy derives a specific historical gravity from the notable intersection of the heyday of campus activism in the late sixties with the first enthusiastic reception of deconstruction in America, [. . .] and with the aggressive revival of romanticism by what has since become known as the Yale school[,] [. . .] preceded by de Man's masterly essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in 1969. If there is such a thing as coincidence, this connection of political turmoil with deconstruction and romanticism is not it. The dominant model of our modern understanding of the relation between politics and poetry is derived from romantic experience and romantic practice. For the relation between politics and criticism it is possible to be even more precise: the pattern is the career of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. (771)

Christensen goes on to argue that "deconstructive method makes a neat fit with the Coleridgean text—a fit so neat as to suggest a propriety for deconstruction in Coleridge" (771). Christensen takes Coleridge as prototypical of deconstruction's apparent departure from sixties-style political activism in order to argue that a falling away, an apostasy from one's profession, is intrinsic to such activism. Christensen argues that such

¹An idea he borrows from Edmund Burke, by way of setting up Burke as a foil to Coleridge and a further precedent for Coleridge's political "apostasy."

apostasy is part and parcel of Coleridge's romanticism, just as it was always already a part of the campus politics of the last half of the twentieth century in America (that is, the move from the revolutionary rhetoric of the radical Left to the famous "march through the institutions" of the New Left). As he says, "At every point we examine him, even at the beginning, Coleridge is already falling away from every principled commitment" (772).

Given this critical background in both recent studies of Coleridge and the contemporary discourse about Coleridge's chief concerns, it becomes possible to make an inference to method and to focus. Regarding method, the explicit exemplarity of Coleridge's poetry and prose—its proposal of its speakers, point-of-view characters, authorial interventions, and even personified objects and hypostasized abstractions as representations of the human subject—suggests a strategy of comparison to other examples which, by their patterns of similarity and difference, may help to unfold the implications of Coleridge's works. To that end, each chapter in this work unfolds from a prologue which serves as an example outside, but not unrelated to, the Coleridgean lineage (as the above, from Donne, prompts the themes of exemplarity and restored unity of "West and East" which continue to develop throughout this chapter). These prologues themselves also respond to the suggestions (such as those in Donne's poem, and in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, among many others) that the nature of the claims here examined requires at least an attempt, an exemplary effort, to cross global political and religious boundaries and demonstrate that such claims are not easily reducible to a merely English, or even European, discourse. Such a crossing is effected, in this case, by the choice of examples from Japanese Buddhism as well as

European philosophy and Christianity for comparison to Coleridge's hermeneutical efforts. This choice of examples has the advantages of being readily accessible, as both Coleridge and the Kyoto School have easily analyzed points of contact with the main tradition of Continental philosophy from Kant and Hegel through Husserl and Heidegger; and especially informative, as in some respects it seems easier to make Coleridge's hermeneutics intelligible in terms of Buddhism than in terms of orthodox Christian confession.

Again, as the above sources demonstrate, it is necessary that such a work as this range across fields, as indeed Coleridge's work does; yet such freedom need not mean incoherence. Coleridge's work constantly makes representations of subjects according to a theory of the human subject, which Coleridge constantly refines on (indeed, his famous idea of "symbol" and his pronouncements about "Imagination" are just two of many faces of this one developing idea). The attempt to examine such representations is best accomplished with the tools of literary criticism, and accordingly a reading of "Kubla Khan" provides one of the first and most significant examples from Coleridge's own work. Perhaps more significant, however, once the extent of the project in "Kubla Khan" is understood, the importance of a signal failure throughout the tradition of Coleridge criticism can be better understood. Virtually all major studies of Coleridge's work omit "The Pains of Sleep" from readings of "Kubla Khan," despite the urgent importance of this connection. "The Pains of Sleep" is directly annexed to "Kubla Khan," yet very clearly does not partake of anything like the apparently Paradisal delight which the more popular poem depicts. Shaffer (among many others) reads "Kubla Khan" too much in the light of Coleridge's early views, treating the poem as part of a consistent project to re-

ground Christianity; Harding even notes the “trauma” hinted in “Kubla Khan,” but fails to mention “The Pains of Sleep.” Coleridge’s collocation of “The Pains of Sleep” with “Kubla Khan” suggests one of the key claims of this study: that Coleridge’s attempt to effect a unity of all knowledge within the experience of the human subject (as construed by his Romantic philosophical anthropology) is undermined from the very outset by the very nature of that experience.

The method of this work, then, is first exemplary, and then literary, beginning with the problem of Coleridge’s many-layered representation of the human subject. The focus, as suggested by the work of Shaffer, McFarland, Harding, and others, is on Coleridge’s outworking of this philosophical anthropology in terms of his developing Christian confession and his significant philosophical and religious output, works which these authors have correctly reproved critics of Coleridge for neglecting. Not only does reading of these late works, perhaps especially the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, have profound consequences for interpretation of Coleridge’s poetry (and vice versa), but the works themselves are examples of just such an attempt to grapple with the mutual implications of literary theory and Biblical hermeneutics as Prickett calls for. Of course, the direct influence of *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* on the likes of F. D. Maurice and J. C. Hare in England, and Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Marsh in the States, justifies the continuing interest in this work of which Harding’s book is perhaps the most prominent example. When these concerns are filtered through the strategic arrangement of examples around Coleridge’s representation of the human subject in the mid-career collocation of “Kubla Khan” with “The Pains of Sleep” and the posthumously published *Confessions*, an almost narrative progress of the argument unfolds.

In “Kubla Khan” and its prose introduction, Coleridge represents the equivocal results of a poetic and philosophical effort to gather up the loose ends of history both globally and personally, in political and spiritual contexts. The poem, in its apparent fragmentation and multiple layers of narration, repeatedly represents subjects in the act of composing. These repetitions of the representation of the human subject in the act of composing directly reflect Coleridge’s explicit theory of the human subject’s origination. In “The Pains of Sleep,” the threat that dreams and nervous disorder pose to the speaker’s ability to maintain self-composure also represents the threat such dreams pose to the philosophical project of abridging the subject/object difference.

Along a line from “The Pains of Sleep” to the very late devotional work “A Nightly Prayer,” Coleridge’s career is marked by further attempts to cope with the moral and spiritual challenges posed by his early works, whether by elaborating his characteristic representation of the human subject or by appropriating the confessional resources proper to his Christian faith. In his efforts to do so, however, Coleridge is hampered by the incompatibility of his theory of the human subject with his attempts to represent himself as a Biblically orthodox believer. Despite the formative role he attributes to Scripture in Christian confession, Coleridge is scandalized by the traditional doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Coleridge turns to Scripture to understand and explain original sin in *Aids to Reflection*, but reads Scripture in *The Confessions of Inquiring Spirit* under a scheme of representation which implicates not only the reader and writer, but the divine Author, in complicity with original sin. In so doing, he limits the possibilities of those very resources upon which he founds his petition in “A Nightly Prayer,” which both responds to “The Pains of Sleep” and elaborates in perhaps its

simplest, most personal form the faith toward which Coleridge makes such uneven progress. The very theory of the human subject through which Coleridge attempts to understand Christianity is undermined by Coleridge's dependence on the resources of Christian confession to cope with the failures of his philosophical anthropology, even as Coleridge's effort to appropriate Christian confessional resources is impeded by the incompatibility of his representation of the human subject with the dependence of Christian confession upon the text of Scripture.

Overview of Coleridge's Explicit Theory of the Human Subject

One focus of this discussion, then, must be the term "subject" itself. Coleridge's work, following the German idealists he has often been accused of plagiarizing,² is relentlessly concerned with what William S. Davis terms "the subject/object interaction that makes the temporal I possible." This concern finds its religious expression in Coleridge's statement in *Confessions* that Christians ought to read and respond to Scripture in a way which will "restore what ought never to have been removed—the correspondent subjective" (335). In the text of Coleridge, whatever the ostensible subject, both the primary subject matter and the primary agent to be represented by the linguistic subject are the self as represented in relation to God and others in the exemplary act of Coleridgean writing.

James Cutsinger's *The Form of Transformed Vision* traces this "Estecean effort to make us grasp the meaning of unity" at considerable length (42). Dealing with the often bewildering variety of ostensible subjects and modes of discourse in Coleridge's works,

² With some justice; but see "The Problem of Coleridge's Plagiarisms" in Thomas MacFarland's *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1969).

Cutsinger chooses a passage from Chapter VII of *Biographia Literaria* in which Coleridge offers a preliminary description of “imagination” by use of analogies from gravity, from the act of leaping, from the movement of “a small water-insect,” and from the “momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion” which Coleridge sees in each of these (41). This passage is especially appropriate in that it foregrounds the process of composition:

Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous [to leaping by first resisting and then making use of gravity]. [. . . the water-insect’s propulsion] is no unapt emblem of the mind’s self-experience in the act of thinking. (*BL* 174)³

Within the passage, that is, Coleridge not only uses the examples of gravity, leaping, and water-bugs; he also offers the example of “a man” who is in turn to represent himself to himself as an example of the acts of composition or memory. Cutsinger’s point is sufficiently made when he describes the consistency among the diverse analogies Coleridge offers for the mental process (which “in philosophical language” is called “imagination”) (41). As Cutsinger says, the passage is most fully understood as “theological,” but this understanding is only available “if one is prepared to agree that the act of leaping is theological, too”—that is, if physical acts and laws as well as those governing “aesthetic or psychological” experience work to manifest “True oneness, which is the form of transformation,” which Cutsinger argues “is here as always the primary focus” (42).

Working a very similar tack, J. Robert Barth asks “What is there in Coleridge’s view of reality that allows him to see ‘one Life within us and abroad,’ to assert implicitly

³ Cutsinger nods, and places this passage “in *Biographia XII*” (41).

that a given reality—whether material or spiritual—is essentially linked with all other reality?” (“Symbol” 321) Barth then turns to Coleridge’s early work on the Bible, *The Statesman’s Manual*; for it is in controversy over “the composition of the Scriptures” that Coleridge supplies one of the key terms for Barth’s discussion of “Symbol as Sacrament.” Barth focusses, as most have, on Coleridge’s description of “symbols” as “consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors” (322); but in discussing the representation of the subject, the reference to “self-circling energies of the reason” in the passage Barth quotes must be equally important. The “fulcrum” in the passage Cutsinger discusses, the movement of language by which the subject is represented in “self-experience,” and these “self-circling energies” all form the tacit structure of Coleridge’s descriptions of “imagination.” Barth emphasizes Coleridge’s “consubstantial” symbols, which are then “Potentially [. . .] unlimited in scope: particular and universal, idea and image, new and old, subjective and objective” (322). Yet the “consubstantial” symbols are what the “reconciling and mediatory power [. . .] gives birth to”; they are the objects of composition, not its subject. Barth tacitly admits this on his way to another argument: “We are, all of us, shapers of our experience of what would otherwise appear a chaotic world around us. In the Coleridgean ‘system,’ this instinctive movement is founded upon an implicit act of faith” (“Theological” 23). Barth’s use of “instinctive” and “implicit” to the side, it is important to see in the “shapers” who “act” here what Coleridge would have considered central: the active agency of the human subject.

This activity of “shapers,” represented as “founded upon” yet another “act,” forms and is informed by the composition of “symbols.” On account of this participatory

construction, such “symbols” are “consubstantial” with the subjects whose different roles (such as writer/reader, artist/audience, prophet/people) are secondary to the unity they effect through “symbols.” As Cutsinger has it, “The most important thing to realize about Coleridge’s vision of unity is that it excludes attention to the particular elements united” (34). The primary concern, for Coleridge, is the active participation of the subject in the “symbol” which accordingly serves as a representation of the subject in a dual sense: it represents the subject matter in the service of the subject whose representative act it embodies. The subject is always representing itself as well as the ostensible subject of its representation. In the special case of the explicitly self-representing self—Donne’s “I am one” or Coleridge’s poetic speakers—the unity should be nearly maximized; it is limited only by the available means of representation. This limitation creates the dilemma between silence and partial representation which underwrites the economy of language. The “symbol” at the level of poetic craftsmanship is thus the mark of a prior act of representation, an act repeated in the act of writing, again in reading, and again in reflection.

It is thus important to engage Coleridge’s theory of the human subject at the level of Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria*, rather than its issue in the apparently fragmentary Chapter XIII, with its famous definition of “primary imagination.” Coleridge’s own words justify this priority: in the *locus classicus*, the “repetition in the finite mind” of “primary imagination” is itself repeated in “secondary imagination,” which is “an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will” (144). Chapter XII establishes that the “conscious will” is only “conscious” as an act of representation or affirmation. It is “not a kind of being, but a kind of knowing” (133), “a self-development” which “we may

abstract” and “reduce [. . .] to kind” to be described “by a metaphor” (134). Coleridge’s development of human subjectivity, of the subject’s self-representation as “conscious will,” is more phenomenological than Barth’s scholastic development of the symbolic imagination allows for. Abstraction, classification, and metaphor permit partial representation of the subject, but only as they repeat the representation of “self-consciousness” as the sole “predicate of self,” conditioned on an “identity of object and of representation” (131). The language of “being,” then, is the “echo” of an apparently objectless representation, the self-asserting self’s proper name. As Coleridge himself puts it, “herein consists the essence of a spirit, that it is self-representative.”

This “self-consciousness” emerges from the necessity, which (as Coleridge acknowledges) Descartes, Locke, and Kant wrestled with in different ways, that philosophy simultaneously treat things known as realities to be acknowledged and treat knowledge as subject to human ascertainment. For Coleridge, this dual exigence for philosophy requires that self be “its own object” only after, as “an absolute subject” (132), it constitutes itself as its own object: “It must therefore be an act,” an act which forms “the most original union” of “finite” (as object) and “infinite” (as subject) in what Coleridge characterizes as “a will, or primary act of self-duplication.” This use of “original,” as also the subject’s being “originally the identity of [finite and infinite],” does not have in view simply the most prior: in it lies the “mystery” of “production and life” (132), and it answers the demand for “the most original construction or first productive act for the inner sense” (122). Thus it is the “I AM” which Coleridge will “indiscriminately express by the words spirit, self, and self-consciousness” which originates in this “act of constructing itself objectively to itself” by which “a subject [. . .]

becomes a subject” (130). Coleridge claims that this “act of self-duplication” by which the subject becomes the object of representation as subject, “*fit alter et idem*,” is not peculiar to his philosophical approach, but is “the mediate or indirect principle of every science” (132). This representation is common to every kind of knowing, characterizing as it does the act of knowing; even the appearance of a beginning, or a breach, in natural causation is “but a shadow of our own casting,” a more or less accidental “reflection” of “will” in its “power of originating an act or state” (*Aids* 176n).

Knowledge of the cosmos and knowledge of others, then, are representations of the self in particular relations; every breach in the “continuous line” of causation, every difference, represents the self-same subject among other things. Knowledge of God, as suggested by the subject’s need to “manifest itself in the SUM or I AM” (BL 130), is a special case of this representation. God’s being may be posited, according to Coleridge, “in relation to the ground of [the thinker’s] existence, not to the ground of his knowledge of that existence” (131); while with regard to “the absolute self, the great eternal I AM,” that is, the originary act of self-consciousness, the differences are collapsed: “the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality, the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical, *Sum quia sum*.” Coleridge directly opposes this last “I am that I am” to the Cartesian cogito, and in so doing also argues that knowledge of God is not (as in Descartes) a condition of self-consciousness; rather, it is this self-same consciousness “elevated” (131) to consciousness of itself in “perpetual self-duplication” (132). In considering the “I AM,” then, the “finite mind” comes to consider—returning to the *locus classicus* in Chapter

XIII—that it is “a repetition [. . .] of the eternal act” (144), and thus to acknowledge God.

While Coleridge’s confession concerning the nature of God changes considerably over the course of his life, as late as the “Essay on Faith” and the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* there is little question that his theorizing of the subject is still conditioned on self-consciousness being a “self-representative” act, constituting subject and object as antithetical. Indeed, it is this sense which underlies the description of “Revealed Religion” in *Confessions* as “the union of the two [Subjective and Objective], that is, the subjective and supernatural displayed objectively—outwardly and phenomenally—as subjective and supernatural” (335). Parallel developments in the *Logic*, the *Opus Maximum*, and the notes demonstrate that this pattern characterizes Coleridge’s representation of the subject.

In the *Logic*, for example, Coleridge describes “understanding” as that which “gives and attributes substance” (239); reflecting the need for the subject to take itself as its own object, and also the role of understanding (judgment) in constituting perceptions from stimuli, he says that

[giving substance] is its essential act, without which it could not act at all; there would be nothing for it to act on. It follows, therefore, that all objects of the understanding must be likewise and previously *entia logica*, or logical entities, having their substance in the understanding itself; but it does not follow that all logical entities are *entia realia*, that is, having a correspondence to realities out of the mind. (239-40)

This development of the understanding, Coleridge argues, is the foundation of “universal grammar as well as of logic.” Proceeding through the two “principles of reason,”⁴ which

⁴ It is important to remember that Coleridge deals with Understanding as a lapsed Lockean; that is, where Locke described the human subject in terms of Understanding

he calls “identity and incompatibility” (247), Coleridge establishes that understanding proceeds “by means of conceptions” (249). These “conceptions” differ from “perceptions” in being “not *intuitive* but *discursive*”; they do not appear as givens without regard for the state of the understanding (as sensory stimuli or hallucinations would), but as “grounded” in “the functions of the understanding.” This discourse of the understanding proceeds from unity to unity by means of conceptions: the “‘antecedent’ unity” which is “the ground and productive principle of the future whole” is discovered from, or else suggests the possibility of, “the unity of totality, [. . .] the consequent or resulting unity” (250). The correspondence of these unities in conceptual discourse is inscribed in the “term ‘constitution’”—and at this point in the discourse Coleridge makes a gesture familiar to readers of “Kubla Khan” and *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, citing “the somewhat unpoetic line of a philosophic poem accidentally lying open before me” (250).⁵ By this move, Coleridge indicates the relationship of the poetic to the philosophical (and implicitly theological) discourse he is conducting; and by the language of “constitution,” he implicates the language of history and politics, as well. This political connection is reinforced when he engages in an extended analogy of the understanding as the “court exercising at different times several different sorts and forms

entirely built up from Ideas of Sensation and Ideas of Reflection, all of which operate by an associative logic of fitness or repugnance motivated by the pleasure principle, Coleridge defines the Understanding as the partial repetition of the Reason. The “self-circling energies” mentioned above characterize the Reason; the portions of these movements of representation which include objects not identified as “self” are the domain of Understanding. (see Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, *passim*)

⁵ The lines read “the constitutive one / Present to all that doth make all one whole.” The editors of the *Complete Works* point out that the line, from *Religious Musings*, differs from Coleridge’s quotation here. The original reads “But ’tis God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole” (250n3).

of judicial law,” yet doing so with “a given portion of that power” possessed by “the *mind*,” which is “the viceregent and representative of the man or of the soul” (252-3). As in “Kubla Khan” or any number of other examples of Coleridgean writing, the subject is the human self as represented and representing itself in discourse, whether in theology, philosophy, politics, or poetry.

“Kubla Khan” Among its Sources

In order to understand the nature of the global historical and religious unity Coleridge hopes to recover within the conscious experience of the human subject, it is important to understand how Coleridge actually does gather together these elements in the poem. For this purpose, it would be hard to select a more obvious or fitting example than “Kubla Khan.” Fully titled “Kubla Khan: A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment” as published, the poem has become both Rorschach blot and lodestone for readers of Coleridge, as the sheer profusion of books and articles solely or principally concerned with “Kubla Khan” readily attests. The scene for the work is the famous “farm-house between Porlock and Linton” in which, Coleridge states, he “fell asleep [‘an anodyne had been prescribed’] in his chair at the moment that he was reading [. . .] in ‘Purchas’s Pilgrimage.’” The date of composition of the poem as eventually published is almost certainly 1798, though Coleridge refers the inciting incident to “summer of the year 1797” (43). The passage from Purchas which Coleridge paraphrases reads, in the 1626 fourth edition, as follows:

In *Xamdu* did *Cublai Can* build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground with a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant Springs, delightfull Streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game,

and in the midst thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure, which may be removed from place to place. (418)⁶

The connection between the passage and the poem is, of course, explicitly indicated by Coleridge, and has been explored in a bewildering variety of ways by readers and critics ever since. The opening lines “IN Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree” are too manifestly paraphrases of Purchas to be long missed, in any case.

The relationship between “Kubla Khan” and Coleridge’s promiscuous reading and note-taking habits has been copiously explored by John Livingston Lowes in his *Road to Xanadu*, who takes note of several closely related passages in the immediate context of the famous “Xamdu” sentence. Lowes notes that, upon reading the “Xamdu” sentence, “a remarkable expression among the Tartars of the survival of the dead,” Coleridge “had turned the page but once since he had read another statement of that belief more striking still,” a passage in which Purchas relates the funerary customs of the Tartars, who buried their chiefs sitting, with tent, feast, and a stuffed horse carcass (396-7). Lowes goes on to note that Purchas’s description of prophets who “foretell holy days, and those which are unluckie [. . . so that] *No warres are begunne or made without their word*” sets a precedent for Kubla’s “*Ancestral voices prophesying war!*” (emphasis in

⁶ In deference to the text, I have not normalized orthography; in deference to readability, I have normalized typography, so that “f” is not used for “s”; nor “i” for “j”; nor “u” for “v” in my quotations from Purchas. No standard modern edition of *Purchas his Pilgrimage* has come to my attention; a facsimile edition of the 1617 edition (in two volumes) has been brought out by Kessinger Publishing in July, 2003 (available online; I cite it below for one obscure reference). Unless noted otherwise, I have cited Purchas from the digital facsimile (image files of each page) available from the Kraus Collection of Sir Francis Drake in the Library of Congress. (To prevent confusion, note that most articles I have read follow other researchers who used a different edition, in which the “Xamdu” passage occurs on page 472. There is no clear consensus on which edition Coleridge would have read, nor is there likely to be one; but see notes in Warne, “Prester John in ‘Kubla Khan’”).

Lowes). For Lowes, this is the beginning of a considerable tracery of other sources which lay the groundwork for Coleridge's composition of "Kubla Khan."

The title of the chapter in which the "Xamdu" sentence occurs is "Of the Religion of the Tartars, and Cathayans" (415). The chapter opens with Purchas, in turn, citing other sources in an effort to establish a broader context for understanding Tartar (the group of tribes which included Mongols, and which in the time of Kublai Khan was dominated by them) and Chinese culture. To demonstrate that this is no mere curiosity, but in fact the principal concern of Purchas's work, one need only look at the full title: *Purchas his Pilgrimage: or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in all Ages and places Discovered, from the Creation unto this Present*. The advertisement on the title page continues, in fact,

Contayning a theologicall and geographicall Historie of Asia, Africa, and America, with the Ilands adjacent. Declaring the ancient Religions before the Floud, the Heathenish, Jewish, and Saracenicall in all Ages since, in those parts professed, with their severall opinions, Idols, Oracles, Temples, Priests, Fasts, Feasts, Sacrifices, and Rites Religious: Their beginnings, Proceedings, Alterations, Sects, Orders, and Successions. With brief Descriptions of the Countries, Nations, States, Discoveries; Private and publike Customes, and the most remarkable Rarities of Nature, or Humane industrie, in the same.

Purchas is, in other words, attempting to comprehend within the lines and leaves of his volume all the spatial and temporal differences which have characterized the propagation and diversification of the human race in the world "from the Creation," specifically beginning with "the ancient religions before the Floud" and geographically and ethnographically cataloguing variants of religious belief and practice "in all Ages since," down "unto this Present."

Purchas is principally a collector of other accounts; Coleridge not only recapitulates that collection in his own work, but also participates in the same effort to recover the political and religious unity, or even the possibility of continuous communication, lost through ages of changing beliefs and violent conflict. Coleridge is in fact an important actor in that history of change, both in his efforts to recover that unity and in the effects of his attempt to locate that unity within the conscious experience of the human subject. Connected to his use of Purchas in the background of “Kubla Khan,” for example, is his earlier plan to compose a blank verse rendition of the *Telluris Theoria Sacra* of Thomas Burnet. Burnet’s work describes a conjectural universal cosmology and geology roughly based on the Biblical account of the Flood (Lowes 16). The geological and hydrological fantasia in “Kubla Khan” suggest the possibility of a similar use of Purchas: adding verse to create an epic from an account Biblical in its stature and scope. Whether any such epic was actually projected, the suggestion of one in both the prose introduction and the language of the poem must be accounted for.

Such an accounting begins with the particular elements juxtaposed to create those fantasia. Warne notes that “the background of the unfinished poem seems to be ever changing,” and draws attention to the diversity of “Xanadu” and “Kubla Khan,” the “Abyssinian maid,” the quizzical “mount Abora,” and “Alph the sacred river” (55). Given that the place “Xanadu” or “Xamdu” or “Shangtu” (and a whole host of other spellings in Marco Polo, William of Rubruck, Purchas, and others including modern map-makers and explorers) is known to be just north of modern Beijing (which was

founded as the winter capital of the Khans),⁷ it is difficult to see how “Alph, the sacred river,” which is (as Warne tentatively notes) almost universally agreed to be the Nile, could flow in “caverns measureless to man” beneath the mountain fastness.⁸ It seems equally counterintuitive that a young woman from Ethiopia, “an Abyssinian maid,” found singing of a “mount Abora,” should have a place in the thirteenth-century Khan’s tent-palace.⁹

Lowes does an excellent job of demonstrating that Coleridge’s reading provides plenty of material to account for this juxtaposition (373ff); and Warne supplies additional possibilities, as have later scholars.¹⁰ In particular, Lowes’ explanation of the presence of

⁷ See for example Lawrence Impey’s account of his trip to the site, which he calls “Shangtu,” which contains a small map and references to earlier surveys, in “Shangtu, the Summer Capital of Kublai Khan,” *Geographical Review* 15.4 (Oct. 1925), 584-604. The only map I have been able to find which clearly marks Shangtu is an old one, available at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/shepherd/mongol_domains.jpg>.

⁸ But see Lowes, 387ff, and his many sources, for very important notes on this identification, especially with regard to its subterranean flow.

⁹ All sources are agreed that Kublai Khan’s summer palace was such that it could, in Purchas’s words, “be removed from place to place.” Purchas here (as in much of the work) follows the account of Marco Polo, who details (and is corroborated by many other travellers before and since, and by now-common knowledge of East Asian culture) the construction of a very elaborate residence after the fashion of a large tent, but from bamboo. For a searchable electronic text of *The Travels of Marco Polo*, see <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/10636>> and <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/12410>>. This, the most popular English version of Marco Polo’s account, is the Yule edition, which was not yet available in Coleridge’s lifetime, so beware subtleties of translation and interpretation.

¹⁰ Pramod K. Nayar, “Another Source for Coleridge’s Pleasure-Dome in ‘Kubla Khan’” in *ANQ* 17.3 (Summer 2004), 33-35, offers the 1794 book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* as a source for the “dome” otherwise hard to find (though Lowes manages it: see pp. 386-387). Garland H. Cannon, “A New, Probable Source for ‘Kubla Khan’” in *College English* 17.3 (Dec 1955), 136-142, argues the importance of Sir William Jones; while Pearce, 565-583, argues for some of Coleridge’s own favorite landscapes and haunts from childhood up. Each provides, as do many other studies, additional possible

“Alph, the sacred river” in measureless caverns which provided the source of the waters for Coleridge’s fantasy version of “Xamdu” or Shangtu, Kublai Khan’s summer capital, is convincing: it is tied to the ancient and medieval speculation concerning the four pre-Flood rivers which, according to Genesis 2:10-14, divided from the principal river which “flowed out of Eden to water the garden” and are still identifiable in the post-Flood world (Lowes 387-396). Coleridge’s fondness for Burnet’s attempt to describe a Biblical geology of the world, his wide reading in similarly far-reaching accounts of religious and cultural geography, and the context of Purchas’s own work (which begins, recall, with “the ancient Religions before the Floud”) make it quite understandable that “Kubla Khan” should depict an ancient and subterranean unity in the waters of “Alph, the sacred river,” or that these waters should give rise to “Ancestral voices prophesying war.”

Warne’s look at the “ever changing” setting of “Kubla Khan” reinforces the fitness of “Kubla Khan” and the prose introduction as an *entrée* for discussing Coleridge’s representation of the human subject in its global political and religious dimensions. This fitness is strikingly evident in Warne’s discussion of the story of “Prester John,” the hoped-for Christian king of a realm beyond the Muslim threat that dominated North Africa and the Middle East for centuries, cutting off Europe from East Asia. Although “Prester John” as known from the A.D. 1165 letter in that name to the Byzantine emperor is almost certainly a pastiche, and the subsequent elaboration of his fame is wildly varied and fabulous (Nowell 435 *et passim*), Warne is almost certainly right to note that the same juxtaposition of Mongols and Ethiopians as in Coleridge’s

contributions; but it is probably fruitless to try to exhaust the possible contributions to, for example, a love of greenery or mountain views.

poem occurs throughout Purchas and his sources concerning the legend of Prester John.¹¹ Warne cites multiple instances in Purchas, reflecting also the multiple sources Purchas collated, in which the Mongol Khans (especially Kublai's ancestor "Cingis," since better known as "Genghis") are thrust into dealings or confrontations with Prester John. Especially convincing is Warne's accumulation of passages in which "Purchas, no less than his sources, tends to make no distinction between the rulers of Abyssinia (or Æthiopa, as he has it) and the Kings of Tenduc" (57). The apparent confusion of locales and place-names in "Kubla Khan" parallels that among its sources, reinforcing the relationship between the unifying, idealizing vision the poem initially purports to offer and the religious and political histories the poem assimilates and abridges.

This seeming confusion begins to make more sense when Charles E. Nowell recalls that, in the famous letter, "The Prester describes himself as ruling in 'India,' a geographical expression that to Europeans in 1165 and much later meant nothing more specific than a land lying to the east" (435). While this observation is generally true,

¹¹ "Prester John" is generally taken to be a title, and often known by writers such as Purchas to be a European label which has been applied differently in various times and places; for example, Warne cites Purchas referring to an Armenian account of a king "by us vulgarly called PRESTER JOHN" (58). While this term has often been expanded "Presbyter John," the link if any has not yet been shown between the legendary king and the controversial reference in a fragment of Papias to "John the presbyter" taken by some (including Jerome) to be different from the Apostle John, though the best evidence suggests they are one and the same. For the fragment of Papias which mentions "John the presbyter," see <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.vii.ii.i.html>>; for a brief discussion of the alleged difference between John the Apostle and "John the presbyter," see <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08492a.htm#II>>. For another plausible derivation of the title "Prester John" see Charles E. Nowell, "The Historical Prester John," *Speculum* 28.3 (July 1953), 435-445 (esp. 438). Schaff, in his *History of the Christian Church*, follows an analysis similar to Nowell's (Schaff's "Tuliu Tasha" or "Coirchan" is the "Yeh-lu Ta-Shih" of Nowell and "Gurkhan" or "Yelu Dashi" of other sources, with one being a personal name and the other the title "Great Khan"), but offers a different derivation of the title.

Nowell incidentally suggests a more specific meaning for “to the east,” in this context, when he points out that Yeh-lu Ta-Shih, a Mongolian ruler who won an epochal battle against the Seljuk Turks in 1141, “could be identified as a non-Moslem from beyond the eastern frontier of Islam” (436). With the Silk Road—the connective tissue of Eurasian civilization since before the Roman Republic had become an Empire—cut off by Islamic aggression in the Near East, the continuity of communication among the peoples of Europe and East Asia was breached; that European ignorance which subsequently produced the fabulous Far East grew as a consequence. “Beyond the eastern frontier of Islam” lay the wide world from which Europe, in disarray since the fall of the Western Roman Empire, was cut off. Europe was an armed camp besieged by Islam from East (Turkey and Eastern Europe) and West (Spain) and South (North Africa); it was too completely at war with itself to effectively counter the millennium-long assault (as the ill-fated Crusades proved); what remained was to look “beyond the eastern frontier of Islam” for forces to lift the siege.

Nor, despite the fanciful form in which that hope played out, was there any lack of foundation for the belief that Christianity existed outside Europe, and had continuously since the time of the Christ. Nowell very probably establishes that the historical source of the “Prester John” legend is the remarkable victory of Yeh-lu Ta-Shih, and corrects the record where some have mistakenly assumed that Yeh-lu Ta-Shih was himself a Christian king; he was almost certainly Buddhist (442-4). At the same time, Nowell establishes the credibility of the general impression in Europe that a mighty king in the East fighting the Turks might be Christian, when he points out that

Nestorianism [an Eastern branch of Christianity, so called because it did not repudiate Nestorius, deemed an heretic in the Roman and Eastern

Orthodox churches¹²] survived and even grew in Mongolia and Turkestan. We are informed by the Asiatic Christian historian, Bar Hebraeus, that in 1007 the powerful Mongol tribe of the Keraites was baptised *en masse* into the Nestorian faith, and other evidence exists to show that this people remained Christian, at least in part, until the thirteenth century. (443)

Purchas notes, in the chapter following that which contains the “Xamdu” sentence, the presence of observant Christian peoples and clergy in Kublai Khan’s dominions:

When *Cublai* had overthrowne *Naiam* his uncle (as before is said) understanding that the Christians observed their yeerely soemnitie of Easter, hee caused them all to come to him, and to bring the Booke of the foure Gospels, which he incensed often with great Ceremonies, devoutly kissing it, and caused his Barons to doe the like. And this he observeth always in the principall Feasts of the Christians, as Christmasse and Easter.

Kublai, of course, should not be mistaken (and none of the principal sources do mistake him) for a Christian; he was a religiously tolerant pluralist, henotheistically honoring the “one God” of any monotheistic religion as helping him to be the one ruler of all his dominions, even as he honored the many gods of the peoples he ruled. Purchas continues, “The like he did in the chiefe Feasts of the Saracens, Jewes, and Idolaters” (420).

The “uncle” Purchas mentions is relevant, here: it was this uncle whom William de Rubruquis (more conveniently known as William of Rubruck) associated to the legend, when he was sent to find the “Prester John” fabled by the 1165 letter. This fabrication was probably based (if Nowell is right, by an intentionally fabulous satire) on the rumors about Yeh-lu Ta-Shih. Says William in Chapter 19 of his journal:

¹² See Schaff’s *History of the Christian Church*, s. v. “The Nestorians,” available at <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc3.iii.xii.xxiii.html>>; compare also the treatment in Sir E. A. Wallis Budge’s *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1928), a translation of a much older Syriac account of the westward journey and subsequent lives of two Chinese Nestorian monks, one of whom became the head of the Asiatic Church at its greatest extent, in the latter 13th century.

[Nayman. Presbiter Iohn.] And in a certaine plane cuntry within those Alpes, there inhabited a Nestorian shepheard, being a mighty governour over the people called [N]ayman, which were Christians, following the sect of Nestorius. After the death of Con Can, the said Nestorian exalted himselfe to the kingdome, and they called him King John, reporting ten times more of him then was true. For so the Nestorians which come out of those parts, use to doe.¹³

William continues to report with great frustration his perception that the Nestorians have exaggerated a minor Christian king into the great Prester John; he seems completely unaware that the exaggeration was almost certainly the creation of a European writer. Marco Polo's account has a similar, but similarly confusing, rendering of the history of the early Khans and the "Prester John" story.

With the help of the Yule-Cordier annotations of Marco Polo's accounts, however,¹⁴ the following picture emerges: the Keraites and Naimans were among several tribes who collectively converted to Nestorian Christianity in the eleventh century. Before their subjugation by Genghis Khan (Kublai Khan's grandfather), the Keraites were ruled by one Toghrul, who had the title Wang Khan (variously spelled in antique histories) after 1183. Toghrul was foster-father to Temujin, later known as Genghis

¹³ I have here followed the same conventions of normalization as I used earlier in citing Purchas. I have also corrected the spelling of "Nayman" based on usage elsewhere in this text and others. This text, like that of Purchas, is variously organized, translated, and normalized in available editions. For this and other matters, it is helpful to compare the parallel passage in chapter 17 of Christopher Dawson's modernized edition, "The Journey of William of Rubruck," *The Mongol Mission* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 121-123.

¹⁴ Notes at page 227, 237, 288 *et passim* in the edition cited. In sifting through this history, I have been much aided by various formal and informal resources such as Columbia University's site *The Mongols in World History*, made available at <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/figu_kub.htm>, and Per Inge Oestmoen's less official "Mongol history and chronology from ancient times" to be found at <<http://www.coldsiberia.org/webdoc3.htm>>. I have also had recourse to Paul Buell's *Historical Dictionary of the Mongol World Empire* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2003) for confirmation of names, dates, and places.

Khan. As the ruthless and revenge-obsessed Genghis rose in power, however, Toghrul (Wang Khan) agreed to allow Genghis to marry his daughter as cover for a plot to have Genghis assassinated. The plot backfired: Toghrul was sent on the run, Genghis abducted the daughter, and in short order the Kerait and Naiman were absorbed among the Mongols. Thus when William of Rubruck came, more than half a century later, searching for the “Prester John” whose fame in Europe had grown following the 1165 letter based on the exploits of Yeh-lu Ta-Shih, he found only the stories of the Kerait and Naiman (as well as other Christian tribes absorbed among the Mongols). Such stories were, to his frustration, rarely if ever connected with the name “John.” William, as seen above, associated the title of Prester John to the Naiman king, while recounting how “At the same time was the daughter of Vut taken, which Cyngis married vnto one of his sonnes, by whome she conceiued, and brought forth the great Can, Which now reigneth called Mangu–Can.” William’s “Vut” (or “Uut”) is Wang Khan, the Christian Kerait king Toghrul. Marco Polo, in chapters 46-48 of his *Travels*, associates the monicker “Prester John” with Wang Khan, and makes Genghis’s request for his daughter the substance of their conflict, and Prester John’s demise.¹⁵ Despite the confusion, these accounts do much to justify the medieval belief that a militarily powerful and strategically significant Christian kingdom existed “beyond the eastern frontier of Islam,”

¹⁵ For further evidence and related accounts, see Schaff’s *History* under “Missions among the Mongols,” available at <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc5.ii.xi.iv.html>>; see also the extensive notes in “History of Chinese Society Liao,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 46 (1946), 307 n52. Cf. references in the chronology (from the Chinese point of view) at pp. 648-9 of the same, where the battle in the year 1208 is probably that at which the Kerait and Naiman, among others, were finally defeated; also 653 n31.

if only the political and religious divisions which had led to weakness and division could be overcome.

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," then, emerges directly from these accounts whose basic effort was to use history and geography to rediscover the unity of belief prior to the fall into schism, idolatry, and separation. It is relevant to Coleridge's work, then, as well as to the history which lies behind it, to note that Nestorius, condemned for taking one extreme (teaching the continuing separation of Christ's divine and human natures) against another (the Monophysite teaching that Christ's human nature was obliterated by His divine nature), was "dragged [. . .] from one place of exile to another, first to Arabia, then to Egypt" (Schaff *History* III §138); and (as Wallis Budge continues the story) "was chased from one part of Egypt to another, [. . .] to the Oasis of Khargah in the Western Desert," and later to the ancient city of Panopolis, dominated by his Monophysite foes, where he is believed to have died between A.D. 436 and 454 (26). The Syriac church, alienated from the Latin church, and finding itself without allies in Greek Antioch or Constantinople (which were swayed by the Latin church's arguments), or Alexandria (where Monophysite theology ruled, and survives today among Coptic and some Asian churches), "continued to spread in all directions and especially in the countries east of Edessa" (28). From the seventh to ninth centuries, Nestorian Christianity was awarded royal patronage by the T'ang emperors in China, until persecution from Buddhist emperors pushed it into the margins of Chinese culture (Klimkeit 46); its presence among the Mongol and Tartar tribes has already been noted; and it has been continuously manifested in Syria, Chaldea, and Persia (Schaff §139), wherever Islamic persecution has not driven it underground or exterminated it. Thus a fifth-century schism among

Christians over the metaphysics of Christ's nature preceded the invention of Islam, whose conquests materially, politically, and geographically demarcated the divisions of the Christian world, forming the wall over which European Christendom came to look for rescue from "Prester John."

These multiple layers of alienation—of world religions from the postdiluvian faith, of Christian East from Christian West, of Far East from Europe—take place again in the speaker's apparent incapacity to remember the composition in "Kubla Khan." Like a universal history or a systematic theology, the epic narrative that "Kubla Khan" purports to open should propose a structure to bridge these gaps, while also using narrative technique and versification to abridge the differences by which they are systematically inscribed as history. If the poem does so, however, it does so by refraining from, rather than achieving, epic inscription. "Kubla Khan" is, as Donald Pearce puts it,

a poem *about* suspended powers. The unfinishedness of 'Kubla Khan' is integral to the theme, not a deformation of it. 'Finishability,' given such a term, not failure to finish, but a longing to finish, or to have finished, is what the poem is about. [. . .] Significance is precisely what is withheld. If there is an action, it is that of pure expectation arrested, as in a dream, by dread. (581)

Pearce's description of the poem's movement as "expectation" whose fulfillment is forestalled "as in a dream, by dread" comports well with Coleridge's choice of "The Pains of Sleep" as a companion poem to "Kubla Khan," as well as their joint publication in the *Christabel* volume.

As Pearce shows from Coleridge's notebooks, the apparent abridgment of historical differences by such "arrested" movement directly reflects Coleridge's construction of the subject: "The intuition of oneness is the soul's essential joy—the visionary instant 'in which the divisions between inner and outer, between symbol and

letter, between subject and object, and between objects themselves vanish, and the lost connections are suddenly recaptured” (580-81). Nor is this subjectivity merely personal, as opposed to globally political and religious; Pearce captures the relationship of Coleridge’s philosophical reflection to the apparent failure of “Kubla Khan” to become an epic when he says that

Coleridge's thought was so subtly interwoven with the deepest thought of his time that in wider perspective we can see the poem as imaging a much vaster failure, of which Coleridge's was but a symptomatic part. The West has far from succeeded in harmonizing heart and head, desire and reason, morality and science, imagination and reason. Now that the wars prophesied by the “ancestral voices” have finally come about and the stately pleasure dome of Western civilization appears to lie in ruins, “Kubla Khan” may come to seem less a personal elegy about the failure of S. T. C. than a prophetic elegy about the failure of an entire culture. That is to say, the famous interruption of the poem may in fact have been inherent in the subject. (582)

By choosing the words “inherent in the subject,” of course, Pearce implicates himself in a critical discourse which has been much modified since 1955; indeed, Coleridge’s composition is such that “the subject” is almost always plural, and lies at the intersection of several chains of significance.

“Kubla Khan” and the History of Epic

Discussion of “Kubla Khan” in terms of the larger sweep of history, and questions of the relationship of historical to poetic representation, also requires some consideration of the status of epic in Coleridge’s day. The long title “Kubla Khan: A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment” combined with specific statements in the prose introduction suggest that a much larger work was in view from the beginning. Whether this work was ever actually projected for completion (the overlap with the projected blank verse adaptation of Burnet suggests it may have been) really does not matter; in its published

form, “Kubla Khan” stands as part epic fragment, part dream-vision poem. Its relationship to Coleridge’s theory of the human subject is not limited to the dream-vision elements, though these are the most frequently commented on. As an apparently fragmentary epic, the poem describes, dramatizes, and re-enacts the problems intrinsic to finishing a re-unifying work such as an epic poem or its historiographic counterpart, a work of global history.

“Kubla Khan” serves as an excellent and early example of what W. David Shaw has called “an indeterminate genre,” a term he uses to describe a broad range of poetry, mostly Victorian (473). Shaw explains that “by generic indeterminacy I mean that a reader is invited to treat a poem’s tenor and vehicle as examples of some wider concept that cannot be named”; the term also refers to “the radical failure of a poem to satisfy the expectations it sets out to raise.” His primary example of this latter pattern is Tennyson’s *Idylls*, in which

the road to generic certainty is constantly being blocked by “no entry” or “detour” signs placed on the route that should lead the reader back from the dualities of hope and despair, credulity and distrust, to the stable conventions of epic poetry or Spenserian allegory. (473)

Shaw describes a relationship between developments in epistemology and poetic genre when he describes instances of “framed narration” such as Tennyson’s Arthurian works as generic parallels to “Kant’s synthetic *a priori* judgments” which “give knowledge of an external world” but do so in a manner “as *a priori* as the prophet’s or the seer’s” (474). This indeterminacy of genre (not to be confused with jumbled genres) in *Idylls* is still “generically intelligible,” as Shaw analyzes it; understanding the poem requires understanding its relationship to the genres it alludes to. Both with reference to the Kantian backdrop (Coleridge’s “conceptions” are very near kin to Kant’s synthetic *a*

priori) and the “radical failure” to achieve its ostensible purpose, “Kubla Khan” alone would demonstrate that Shaw’s model can be applied at least a generation before the leading Victorians came to prominence.¹⁶

Contemplating the cultural forces which produced a poetics of “generic indeterminacy” helps to link Coleridge’s fragment to Herbert F. Tucker’s assertion that, for a “firmly consensual line of Romantic theorists from J. G. Herder to Northrop Frye,” the epic which “tells a culture-making story” may function in much the same way “whether its inaugural action is offered as a history or as a tale” because “the power of a national story to hold its people together inheres in the power of the people to hold their story true” (701). Tucker notes that from the eighteenth century to the present, this critical reception of epic has led to a preoccupation among poets with “themes of cultural conflict and definition” (701), while “by 1800 the redirection of emphasis toward historicist and nationalist projects was if anything more marked among the critics than among the poets” (702). Using the example of critical debates about Homer, Tucker describes the “Enlightenment dialectic of formal analysis and cultural synthesis—a double movement of critical destruction and hermeneutic recuperation” by which critics “rescued genius from deconstruction by putting it under the protection of consensus” (702). As a consequence of this movement within the concept of epic, Tucker says, “creative responsibility was absorbed as public responsiveness. The epic function of teaching the nation its traditions looked more and more like telling readers what they were ready to hear” (703). The problem within the paradox lies not only in the ease with

¹⁶ Indeed, the generation which produced Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* and Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*, to name just two, should arguably establish the paradigm for “generic indeterminacy.”

which poetry so conceived can be suborned to various nationalistic perjuries, nor in the increasingly solipsistic hero's eventual reduction to the cult of celebrity, but in the erasure of "responsibility" to the antecedents of the poet's work and in its reduction to the "responsiveness" of the audience as judged by the consequences of its reception.

In any case, the force of this paradox is felt keenly in Coleridge's works. On one hand, Coleridge's theory of the subject precisely addresses the difficulty of gaining access to the sort of unified vision promised by epic and demanded by Burkean appeals to the English "constitution." It is no coincidence that crucial passages on "symbols" and "imagination" occur in works such as *The Statesman's Manual*, whose overarching goal is to find a unifying vision of politics and religion in a particular construction of the human subject's relationship to God and King as represented in the Bible. In a manner hinted at by Pearce's discussion of "finishability" and Shaw's of "generic indeterminacy," Coleridge in "Kubla Khan" delves into the deep problems of authority which overflow the bounds of poetic form, calling into question the resources of authors to provide what readers ask of them.

"Kubla Khan" thus enters into a poetic and critical discourse, well described by Brian Vickers, concerning the nature and status of long narrative verse. Discussing the role of the epideictic (concerning the praise or blame of actions in the present, or presented as current concerns) rhetoric in the Renaissance conception of epic, Vickers describes the effect of emerging modern historiography on Renaissance poetics as follows:

Plato's acceptance of epideictic depended on its being true, praising gods or men who deserved to be praised, and one of the defenses of panegyric has always been that it was based on fact. Yet fact was now the province

of history, and the fiction of poetry was often confused by its opponents with lies. (513)

One tension within the concept of authority, or the related concept of poetic truth, thus lies in the relation of works of history such as *Purchas his Pilgrimage* to works of poetry such as “Kubla Khan.” The critical defense of poetic truth as moral, rather than historical, turns on the modification of classical rhetoric whereby “the poet, like the orator, became the propagator of accepted moral systems” (502). As epideictic rhetoric, Renaissance epic presents fictions about heroes and kings as “true” in the sense of their being worthy of emulation: “The characters [the poet] creates must not only be, in Aristotle’s terms, ‘good of their kind’ but must be, in Platonic terms, ideal, perfect”; the consequence is “an elevation of art and a disvaluation of life, which cannot offer such perfection” (521).

The tension between historic reportage and the rhetoric of praise and blame, of course, is not new.¹⁷ What is peculiarly modern, developing from the Renaissance forward, is the isolation of the ideal from the real, the peculiarly strong emphasis of history on its amorality and moral suasion on its lack of ontology, its ideality as unreality. Thus Vickers shows in Giraldo Cinthio an early moment on this trajectory:

Cinthio made the common Renaissance interpretation of Aristotle, by which the poet is said to show “not things as they are but as they ought to be, for the ameliorizing of life.” Then, in his own copy of the printed book he added the following gloss: “The subject of the work was called the fable because the poet . . . changes history and makes it become a fabulous creation, of greater worth indeed than if he had treated the subject factually. Feigning or fabling is necessary to convey an idea either of a perfect man or of a perfect action since the frailty of human nature obstructs human perfection.” (521)

¹⁷ See, for example, the discussion of “music” in Book III of Plato’s *Republic*.

It is not very hard to see Coleridge's theorizing of the human subject foreshadowed in Cinthio's discussion of "fabulous creation" achieved through the poet's art, in which the "subject" is treated by such artificial means rather than "factually" in order to "convey an idea" concerning "perfect man or [. . .] perfect action." The word "subject" even appears here in a similarly multiple usage: it refers generally to the ostensible subject matter of the poem, its narrative. In the course of doing so, "subject" again specifies the idealized personal characteristic or behavior described as the subject matter of that narrative. As it is "an idea either of a perfect man or of a perfect action" which cannot be "treated . . . factually," this "idea" must be the true "subject." Like the Romantic defense of poetry, the Renaissance privileging of the poet over against the historiographer as a moral authority provides a ready defense of poetry's artificiality in the era when natural philosophy, the expression of history under the empiricist realization that experience as such belongs by definition to the past, threatens the total deflation of even such fictions as Plato and Aristotle would have retained.

Such a preservation of poetry, however, has limits of the kind already suggested by Tucker. Vickers mentions, as a stipulation of Renaissance poetics, that "the fact that praise of virtue can arouse men means that the reader is both capable and willing to imitate the behavior praised" (510). If the poet's authority is secured by the critic's valorization of the poet as "propagator of accepted moral systems," then the poet's authority is limited by the degree to which society accepts such moral systems; the consensus of the culture becomes the limit of the authority possible within the culture, and the failure of moral consensus is the vitiation of the poet's authority. This limitation marks the gap between the ostensibly modern (that is, conceived in the Renaissance)

rationale for poetry, especially epic, and the reception of works so conceived among modern readers. As Vickers notes, “the Renaissance reader was accustomed . . . to seeing each character not as a complex, autonomous personality but as an illustration of a virtue” and “looked through [the character], as if using an X ray, to the moral quality and ignored other, less essential aspects of his or her behavior” (522). As the “essential aspects” of behavior came to be viewed increasingly in empirical and structural terms, the isolation of the poetic as ideal, and ideal as unreal, defended the moral authority of poetry only within contracting and fragmenting regions of consensus on morality.

Efforts to revive or constitute a national or global moral authority, such as Coleridge’s and those of the other Romantics, or those of Hazlitt, or of Burke, continue to find themselves involved in problems of religious and political authority—problems which occur quite predictably but paradoxically in spite of their commitments to the autonomy and self-determination of the human subject. In the case of Coleridge, both the nature of these efforts and their challenges find their fullest and most accessible early expression in the poems “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep.”

CHAPTER TWO

“Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep”

Our whole knowledge of art is at bottom illusory, seeing that as mere knowers we can never be fused with that essential spirit, at the same time creator and spectator, who has prepared the comedy of art for his own edification.

Nietzsche *Birth* 42

Nietzsche’s concern for the difference between “mere *knowers*,” who try to conceptualize the work of art, and the “essential spirit,” whose repetition as “creator and spectator” is the origin of the work of art and the composition of the self, closely reflects Coleridge’s representation of the human subject. The composition of the creative subject through “self-duplication,” as Coleridge describes it, is echoed in Nietzsche’s representation of the work of art as originating in “essential spirit, at the same time creator and spectator, [. . .] for his own edification.” The Coleridge of *Biographia Literaria* and *Logic*, however, describes the process of representing the subject’s self-representation as producing an awareness of repetition which leads to a consciousness of unity; this unity is not merely the product of experience, but is the “antecedent unity” recovered in the subject, a totalizing conception which is both personal and global in scope. For Nietzsche, however, this confidence of recovering antecedent unity is no longer available: “at bottom” the whole project is founded in the “illusory.” The history of idealism and its decadence, of the development of the human subject as the site of a hoped-for reconciliation of representation’s divergence from experience, the fragmenting moral consensus by which fanciful epic is held to be more true than amoral historiography, suggests that thinkers like Coleridge are the rearguard of a retreating

illusion (as famously imagined in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach"). In "Kubla Khan" and "The Pains of Sleep," as united by the prose introduction which collocates them in the 1816 *Christabel* volume where they were first published, Coleridge's representation of the subject is offered in the exemplary form of a "psychological curiosity"; but in the challenges to memory and consciousness of agency they pose, both poems also express more than a little anxiety that (as Nietzsche would argue) their own account of their composition, and of the constitution of the human subject, is "at bottom illusory." In keeping with Pearce's description of "Kubla Khan" as about "finishability," and further illustrating the changing role of poetry discussed by Vickers, both of these poems offer a case of the idealized human subject's unreality creating a barrier to even the most intensely imaginative scrutiny. The very imaginative potency which strives to constitute subjects proof against historical criticism, it seems, renders them insignificant for real historical purposes (as in "Kubla Khan"), and their acts morally and spiritually unintelligible (as in "The Pains of Sleep"). As relatively early examples, published well after *Lyrical Ballads* but still before *Aids to Reflection* and before *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* had begun its long odyssey as an unpublished conversation piece, these poems together form a reference point for the examination to come of Coleridge's continued wrestling with the representation of the human subject, especially where that subject is supposed to be Coleridge himself, in terms of Christian orthodoxy as well as philosophical anthropology.

Turns in "Kubla Khan"

In "Kubla Khan," as in many of Coleridge's other works, multiple layers of expectation regarding the use of history and epic to think the possibility of a globally

unified religious and political experience are negotiated in a series of “turns” in the representation of the subject. These “turns” may be likened to (and often actually are) the turns of a sonnet or other poem whose significance is informed by a shift in focus or ostensible subject. In “Kubla Khan” the consciousness of repetition intrinsic to the self-representing subject’s acts are represented in the relations of Khan, speaker, reader, and poet to the same ostensible subjects, the objects of attention. The multiplication of subjects also exposes the reader’s role in constructing the “romantic chasm” within the mind more really than the “decree” or the potential “music” have.

The representation of the human subject in “Kubla Khan” begins with the Khan himself, at the very opening of the poem:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
 Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens [. . .] (1-8)

The Khan’s agency is initially brought into focus several ways. The powerfully rhythmic arrangement of the first two lines, aside from assigning “Xanadu” and “Kubla Khan” prominence and accentuating the exotic sounds through repetition, also makes the emphatic auxiliary verb “did” the fulcrum of the first line. The sequence “Xanadu did” comes very near to being a conjugation; it also prepares the reader for the repeated “d” of “dome decree” in the next line, allowing the “decree” to stand as the culmination of a pair of lines in which nearly every stressed sound is echoed and reduplicated to a fulness. Even the “ks” sound of “Xanadu” finds a dual echo in the “k” of “Kubla Khan” and the “s” in “stately.”

Throughout the opening sequence, down to “Enfolding sunny spots of greenery” (11), no human agency other than the Khan’s is evident. In a display of godlike (or poetic) creative force, the Khan “did [. . .] decree” the “stately pleasure-dome,” and the site appears prepared, with no intermediate agency named: the lands “were girdled round” (7), and on them “were gardens” (8), and in the same place “were forests” (10). The boundaries of the Khan’s agency blur as these passives fulfill his “decree,” for the land’s arrangement and gardening are attributable to the Khan and his unnamed minions, while the “forests ancient as the hills” would surely predate the Khan’s involvement, as a matter of literal history. With the exception of the participial adjective “Enfolding” and the descriptive “blossomed” (9), only one other verb in active voice is to be found in the passage: “Alph, the sacred river, ran.” The underlying activity of the river partially accounts for the blurring of the Khan’s agency, as its contribution to the “fertile ground,” the “gardens bright with sinuous rills,” and the “forests” surely predates and acts with the Khan’s works. That the river is “sacred,” and subterranean (it “ran / Through caverns”), suggests the antediluvian frame of reference Coleridge may have taken over from Burnet; that the Khan is able to turn it to his purposes tends to reinforce the appearance of divine creative force suggested by the efficacy of his “decree.”

The first poetic turn comes at the ejaculation “But oh!” which introduces the second section:

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover! (12-16)

The multiple exclamations, breaking in on what began as a straightforward narrative, are just one class of marks that introduce a change in the representation of the subject. The ostensible subject matter, the Khan's "decree" to build the "pleasure-dome," has apparently completely given way to new subject matter. Lines 12-27 describe the breach between the subterranean waterway and the surface river that watered the gardens of Xanadu. They do so, moreover, in terms which continue to complicate the relationship between the subterranean "sacred river" and the Khan's "decree."

The Khan is represented as exercising creative force which, joined with the already active river, brings forth the earthly Paradise of Xanadu; but the "deep romantic chasm" is not so placidly "sacred" as the river that watered the "gardens bright" seemed to be. The "romantic chasm" is a "holy" place, and "enchanted" may certainly suggest its charm; but the place is also "savage" and "haunted," and in this sense the word "enchanted" may well also suggest illusion. The shift to iambic pentameter lines in sets of three rhymes, like the descent into a green place and a garden of delights, may allude to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the dangers from dealers in illusion like Errour, Duessa, and Archimago; the "mazy motion" at line 25 may reinforce this allusion. Certainly, the incubus imagery of "woman wailing for her demon-lover" does not suggest anything "sacred" within Christian context: it does, however, suggest the Ancient Near Eastern religious observance mentioned in Milton (*PL* I.446ff) and Purchas (*Pilgrimage* I.xvii.89),¹ the "weeping for Tammuz" called an "abomination" in Ezekiel 8:14. If the imagery of Xanadu is Paradisal, as it has commonly been read, it is not the Paradise of

¹ This obscure reference can currently be found in the Kessinger reprint of the 1617 edition at <<http://books.google.com/books?pg=PA90&id=cey14NxFHBsC>>. Note that this is a different edition than I have used elsewhere.

Eden or the New Jerusalem; it is a place whose “sacred” nature is fraught with spiritual danger, which is “savage” in a sense which readers primed on Milton and Spenser would recognize.

Still more significantly, though, this poetic turn brings an entirely new subject, and an entirely new level of the poem’s discourse, into view. Throughout the opening section of the poem, the poetic speaker is the transparent narrator of epic or history. The ejaculation “But oh!” frames what follows as the emotional response of the poetic speaker to the scene. The reader is now to consider, not only the Khan’s “decree” and its consequences, but also the relationship of the dramatized speaker to the Khan. When the poem returns to “the dome of pleasure” (31), that “dome” is represented in relation to two subjects: speaker and Khan model the repetition of the subject in the act of representation even as they re-enact the complex ambivalence of historical and poetic discourse. To the extent the Khan of the poem is a representation of the historical Kublai Khan, the language of the poem which prompts the reader’s imagination of Xanadu is a repetition of the Khan’s “decree” and its effects (and also of the account in Purchas). To the extent the Khan of the poem is the “Kubla Khan” of a fictional Paradise, however, the Khan’s “decree” is itself a repetition within the poem of that utterance of the speaker which prompts the Khan’s appearance in the reader’s imagination. Both readings find specific support in the poem: the reference to Purchas clearly roots the imaginary “Kubla Khan” in historical accounts of Kublai Khan, while the poem is clearly marked as fiction by the transformation of the nature and dimensions of the “stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground” into a “pleasure-dome” on “twice five miles of fertile

ground” and the omission of the key fact that Kublai Khan’s bamboo summer palace “may be removed from place to place.”

With the complicated historical situation of the speaker and the Khan in view, the poem’s self-referential moments become more intelligible. The poem establishes this reflexivity through several patterns of repetition and internal allusion. The term “measureless” is used repeatedly to describe the “caverns” where “Alph, the sacred river, ran.” The Khan’s “decree” of a “stately” palace is juxtaposed with the river’s subterranean movement, which exceeds the limits of the “decree” in both the “caverns measureless” and in the river’s engorgement in the “sunless sea.” Darkness, immeasurable space, and the ocean are all key markers of the sublime in Coleridge’s aesthetic milieu.² The subterranean space, which being “measureless to man” is subjectively infinite, is immediately juxtaposed with a surface of “twice five miles” not merely laid out in a grid, but limited by “walls” periodically marked by “towers”—a space quintessentially finite and measured. The ejaculatory production of the river from the “romantic chasm” takes place “in fast thick pants” (18), a rhythm twice described as “momently.” Neither an immeasurable subterranean fluidity nor an architectural grid, the “half-intermittent burst” (20) produces “dancing” in the boulders it flings about, and produces the flow of the river “at once and ever” (23). It is important to notice that the “fountain” in the “deep romantic chasm” is the source of “Alph, the sacred river,” which flows “Down to a sunless sea” only after traversing Xanadu:

² In addition to Coleridge’s own writings, Burke’s work on sublimity and beauty, Kant’s pre-critical work on the sublime, and Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* would all have discussed this, though the *Critique* would not have been available to Coleridge as he wrote “Kubla Khan.”

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean. (25-28)

The confluence of the Khan's "decree" with the Alph's pre-existing flow is developed by the speaker's emotional description into a model for that very description: poised between the emotional and the grammatical, between the ejaculatory and the prosaic, between the "measureless" and the "girdled," the speaker's words and the Khan's "dome of pleasure" appear as a "shadow" that "Floated midway" (31-2). The "tumult" even produces voices, and though only the Khan hears the "Ancestral voices prophesying war," the speaker is able in these words to repeat the ostensible subject matter of their speech (29-30). The self-referential poetic act is consummated when the "mingled measure / From the fountain and the caves" appears at the end of four lines of crisply metrical ballad stanza, and immediately before a couplet in the rougher-hewn accentual tetrameter Coleridge frequently preferred: "It was a miracle of rare device, / A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!" (35-6) The paradoxes flow thick and fast: the "miracle," produced not by supernatural interposition but by "device" (whether in the sense of schema or of trope), describes the extremes created by the juxtaposition of measured surface and measureless subterranean expanse. The "mingled measure" binds these aurally, as the river's watering the gardens binds them in the logic of narrative, to the Khan's "decree" and the speaker's depictions.

The representations of the subject as speaker and as Khan thus provide a profound echo of Coleridge's explicit theory. The speaker's words and the Khan's "decree" must each sustain some definite but also profoundly ambivalent relationship to the reader's visions of Xanadu and the roles of Khan, speaker, and "sacred river" in their production.

As seen above, in Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge grounds the act of knowing in a self-objectifying act of the human subject, an act which forms “the most original union” of “finite and infinite” in what Coleridge characterizes as the “primary act of self-duplication” which unfolds the “mystery” of “production and life” (132) and which is “the most original construction or first productive act for the inner sense” (122). That the Khan’s “decree” and the “caverns measureless” appear first, but are only fitly joined in “mingled measure” once the “fountain” in the “romantic chasm” has been described, again reflects the similarity between Coleridge’s “conceptions” and Kant’s “synthetic *a priori*,” the movement of philosophical language that Shaw argues is modeled by the poetics of “generic indeterminacy.”

The architectonics of the poem, then, are already in place when the final poetic turns come into play. The third poetic turn is marked by the introduction of a new human subject, and by the explicit labeling of the poetic speaker as the exemplary subject “I”:

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora. (37-41)

The speaker, who has been describing the confluence of the Khan’s “decree” and the “sacred river” in the production of the “pleasure-dome” and its surroundings from the “deep romantic chasm,” seems to have digressed. At the subject-predicate sequence “I saw,” the subject “I” first acts explicitly as an agent within the narrative which that same subject, the poetic speaker, also voices.

Even before explicitly taking responsibility for the narrative, though, the speaker has already begun to enunciate a “vision” which forms a new body of subject matter, and

a new level of the discourse. The inverted syntax of “In a vision once I saw” not only fits the meter but accentuates the reflexivity of “I saw” and “vision” that is intrinsic to the subject’s self-representation in a dream. In this respect, it once again expresses the kinship between Coleridge’s “conceptions” and the Kantian “synthetic *a priori*” as discussed by Shaw. By “a” and “once” the vision is marked out as taking place in the past, and as distinct from the depiction of the Khan’s “decree” and the “sacred river” and “pleasure dome”; the disrupted and restored semblance of historical narrative, at first threatened by this new digression, seems instead to be receiving a new level of commentary.

As a matter of epic convention, the appearance of this dream-borne musician should denote an invocation of the muse. Her song joins the Khan’s “decree” and the “mingled measure / From the fountain and the caves” to which the poetic speaker has been giving voice; but concerning the “damsel” the speaker relates only her ethnicity, the name of her instrument, and the topic of her song. The speaker claims to remember the “damsel [. . .] Singing,” but within the poem her song remains unsung. This reinforces what the juxtaposition of Ethiopia and Inner Mongolia has already suggested, and what the allusion to Milton embedded in the reference to “Mount Abora” reinforces: the *Paradise* of “Kubla Khan” is already *Lost* to writer and reader alike.³ For it is Milton’s epic that warns the reader of “Kubla Khan” to avoid the inviting error; the “True Paradise” is not the “sweet Grove” or the “Nyseian Ile” (4.272, 275),

³ Garland H. Cannon argues for acceptance of Alice Snyder’s note that “the original expression in the ‘Kubla Khan’ manuscript was Mount *Amara*, which was crossed out and replaced by *Abora*” (139), though it forces him to qualify his argument that a “A Hymn to Ganga” by Sir William Jones is the direct source for much of Coleridge’s language in “Kubla Khan.”

Nor where *Abassin* Kings thir issue Guard,
Mount *Amara*, though this by som suppos'd
True Paradise under the *Ethiop* Line
By *Nilus* head, enclosd with shining Rock,
A whole days journey high, but wide remote
From this *Assyrian* Garden, where the Fiend
Saw undelighted all delight (4.280-6)

Milton is, of course, also working from Purchas (Cooper 329), distinguishing various claimants to the title of the Garden in Eden from “this *Assyrian* Garden,” which on Milton’s account was the true location of the primeval Paradise. It seems unlikely to have been lost on Coleridge that this passage, in which Lucifer views the Garden before the Fall of Adam and Eve, contains some of the most powerful and memorable lines on subjectivity ever penned, among them the richly polysemous “Saw undelighted all delight.”

The “symphony and song” which the speaker does not represent, which that selfsame “I” cannot remember, is nonetheless assigned a role in the poem by the details of place, time, and manner which the speaker has recounted. Such a cipher, however, cannot directly represent the “stately pleasure-dome”; having depicted the “fertile ground” and “sacred river” and “deep romantic chasm,” the speaker seems to wish for the music to bring “deep delight” so that

with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice! (45-47)

This is also the content of the Khan’s “decree,” which also goes unfulfilled within the language of the poem. The poem mentions the “shadow of the dome of pleasure,” the “decree,” the preparation of the ground, and the speaker’s wish to “build that dome in air”; at no point does the poem describe the dome itself (except insofar as, being on the

surface and not subterranean, it is “sunny”). In fact, only the “deep romantic chasm,” which is neither the “dome” of the “decree” nor the “sacred river” which “ran,” yet is spatially and temporally the origin of both, receives extensive description and response from the speaker. The “deep delight” that the speaker suggests “I” would respond to is parallel to the “deep romantic chasm” which, it must be remembered, has given rise to the “mingled measure” and “dancing rocks” as well as “tumult” and “wailing”: like the “fountain” that “flung up momentarily the sacred river,” the speaker expects that to “revive within me / Her symphony and song” would prove to be the origin of a musical creation.

The final poetic turn at the ejaculation “Beware! Beware!” depicts the response of “all who heard” the speaker’s hypothetical “music loud and long.” Specifically, though, those who “heard” would “see [the sunny dome and caves of ice] there”: the representation of the subject “I,” the poetic speaker turned agent within the narrative, is now almost identical to that of the Khan, whose “decree” has been represented as similarly efficacious. It is important to remember the profound ambivalence of the Khan’s status within the poem: as a representation of the historical Kublai Khan, the language which prompts the reader to imagine the “stately pleasure-dome” repeats the Khan’s “decree” and its effects as found in Purchas. As the “Kubla Khan” of a fictional Paradise, the Khan in speaking his “decree” repeats the utterance of the speaker which prompts the Khan’s appearance in the reader’s imagination. This confluence of the roles of speaker and Khan is especially significant in this final turn—for though it is the “sunny dome” and “caves of ice” which the speaker wishes he could build, the projected audience responds to a weakly defined “he,” who may be either the speaker who “would build that dome in air” or the Khan evoked in the “Xanadu” thus built. The “he” to

whom the projected audience responds with such fear has “drunk the milk of Paradise,” a ritual recorded by Purchas on the very page where Coleridge found “Xanadu”:

[Kublai Khan] hath a Heard or Drove of Horses and Mares, about ten thousand, as white as snow; of the milke whereof none may taste, except hee bee of the bloud of *Cingis Can*. [. . . H]e on the eight and twentieth of August aforesaid, spendeth and poureth forth with his owne hands, the milke of these Mares in the ayre, and on the earth, to give drinke to the Spirits and Idols which they worship, that they may preserve the men, women, beasts, birds, corne, and other things growing on the earth. (418)

The speaker’s agency having become so tightly related to the Khan’s, it quickly becomes apparent that a poem expressing the futile urge to “build that dome in air” in response to the forgotten music of the “Abyssinian maid” could well be the sort of offering spilled “in the ayre, and on the earth,” in the Khan’s annual ritual. In any case, the speaker’s taking the Khan’s place in the ritual only ambiguously serves to “preserve” the “things growing on the earth” of the poem. The reader must continually represent the Khan, the speaker, and “all” others to himself in order for poem, ritual, and decree to be effective; and yet the Khan, the speaker, the “all who heard,” the music of the “damsel with a dulcimer,” and the “stately pleasure-dome” are very conspicuously not described in the poem. As Pearce says, “Significance is precisely what is withheld” (581).

“Kubla Khan” thus represents an ambivalent effort to think the possibility and desirability of founding a globally unified vision of history and religion in the conscious experience of the human subject. Of course, few now take the glamorizing view of Lowes, for whom the poem is throughout a dream-like, paradisaical work; Pearce’s perspective that the poem’s appearance as a fragment is intrinsic to its meaning seems generally to have won out. Shaffer reminds readers of Coleridge’s works that there really is no place in reading Coleridge that is free from such considerations (“Ideologies”). The

tension between philosophical anthropology and Christian faith, however, is equally ubiquitous in Coleridge's corpus. Though rarely remarked outside of inquiries after Coleridge's sources and influences, the "Prester John" context of the Purchas allusion and the absorption of Burnet's hydrological theories into the fantasia of "Kubla Khan" help to represent this problem in personal and global dimensions. The "pleasure-dome" is "decreed" as such a work of art, both repeating and building upon an apparently natural origination in the "romantic chasm"; but the violence of this natural origin is represented in "Ancestral voices prophesying war" among the "tumult" of erotic, erosive force around the "mighty fountain." The political unity alluded to under the historical figure of the Khan is a history of violent conquest and despotism, or else a wished-for reunification of Christendom under the ultimately fictional "Prester John." The unity of thought founded in the subject's self-representing acts may appear in the idea of "Paradise" only insofar as it is insusceptible of realization; it takes place in history as a past and future of violence and flux. The poem represents the effort as exciting but fruitless: the imagined Khan of "Kubla Khan," like the poem's speaker, is possessed of a power which is Paradisal only insofar as it is inconsequential and dream-like, and which is effective only insofar as it is born from and borne to violence.

The Prose Introduction

The prose introduction commonly associated with "Kubla Khan" in anthologies first appeared with "Kubla Khan" and "The Pains of Sleep" in the 1816 collection of poems headlined by *Christabel* (itself apparently a fragment of a longer narrative poem). Ostensibly an apology for the appearance of an outré "psychological curiosity" in the collection, and tacitly an excuse to use Byron's name to counter Wordsworth's refusal to

include the poem in *Lyrical Ballads* (and thus to continue the debate that had been carried on in successive prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads* and in *Biographia Literaria*), it is the prose introduction which supplies much of the material on which readings and misreadings of “Kubla Khan” have been based ever since its first publication. Coleridge specifically mentions the connection to Purchas, and suggests that he plans to write the longer poem of which the opening lines of “Kubla Khan” are a fragment (*Selected* 43-4). The prose introduction does much more than merely frame “Kubla Khan,” however; despite its appearance above “Kubla Khan” on the printed page, the prose introduction continues to add layers to the discourse of “Kubla Khan”; it also pairs “Kubla Khan” with “The Pains of Sleep,” a pairing crucial to understanding the representation of the human subject in either work.

Like the multi-layered subject in “Kubla Khan,” the subject Coleridge depicted in the prose introduction is a composition. The prose introduction first introduces the poetic turn in the representation of the human subject of “Kubla Khan” to which Coleridge puts his own name, and in so doing also introduces the “profound sleep” to which the subtitle “A Vision in a Dream” refers. Practical, outward, historical experience as embodied by the “person on business from Porlock” is represented as interfering with efforts to remember the inarticulate images which “arose before” the subject Coleridge. This inability to remember reprises the lack of fruition already represented in the creative acts of Khan and speaker within the poem.

The effort to recover a presupposed unity in the subject, an apparent totality of meaning (the *parousia* of presence in which “images rose up before him as *things*”), is represented as dependent upon a removal from historical being (the social, political,

practical life represented by the “person on business from Porlock”). Coleridge describes this effort in the prose introduction and the poems through the figures of the Khan and of the subject Coleridge, with his affinity for Purchas and Burnet and Spenser and Milton expressed by reference and allusion. At the same time, such unity is meaningful only insofar as the historical (“such a unity did exist”) prompts the idea (“therefore such a unity is conceivable”) which hopes for realization (“such a unity may be recovered”). Like the Khan’s “decree” to build a “stately pleasure-dome,” however, any such recovery may be realized within the text only as the marker for an ideal unsusceptible of realization. The “miracle of rare device” remains a paradox, like the realization that one is dreaming. Insofar as the Khan is a poetic subject, and his “decree” therefore unreal, the “pleasure-dome” is inconsequential as a matter of history; and insofar as the Khan is an historical subject, and his “decree” enforceable, the “tumult” of natural violence is also realized in the actual “war” by which alone the trans-Eurasian unity of the Khanate could take place.

The representation of the subject in “Kubla Khan” is thus repeated for the subject Coleridge as depicted in the prose introduction, and also for the “youth” in the included fragment. The “youth” is offered as an example of the ideal recovery of an apparent totality of meaning, as his hope for the return of “that phantom-world so fair” is realized when “the fragments dim of lovely form” return and “unite.” This apparent success, however, is also deferred several times over from any real or possible historical event: first, in its being retailed as an example; then, by the very language in which the recovered unity is described. The hoped-for totality of meaning is a “charm” which is broken, and a “phantom-world” that “Vanishes,” and “visions” which are to return,

visions moreover in a “stream” whose motion would constantly disrupt the “smoothness” in any real context. Even the returning vision is “trembling,” and the “pool” (or was it a “stream”?) at its most real is only a vision of the self; it “becomes a mirror.”

Like the “decree” and the “music loud and long,” the “still surviving recollections” and the “fragments dim of lovely forms” are traces of what Jacques Derrida calls “the invisible interior of poetic freedom”:

To grasp the operation of the creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom. One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness. (“Force” 8)

The poetic turns characteristic of “Kubla Khan,” and extended by the prose introduction, are characteristic of Coleridge’s efforts to “grasp” what he calls “the most original union” (*BL* 132). As in these works, so in Coleridge’s explicit theorizing of the subject the “elevated” consciousness is that which first turns to the “ground” (*BL* 131). Coleridge describes these movements of language in representation of the self “by a metaphor borrowed from astronomy” as “centrifugal and centripetal forces” (134).

The problem of memory in “Kubla Khan” and the prose introduction, a problem also treated in *Christabel*, is a problem for Coleridge’s philosophy (though not his alone). Erasure of the past is a characteristic move in the language which constitutes modern history and poetry, and is constitutive of modernity; this erasure has a parallel movement in philosophy of mind. What Coleridge describes as the “act of self-duplication,” in which the self becomes conscious of itself as subject by taking itself for its own object, depends upon another act: “an absolute and scientific scepticism to which the mind voluntarily determines itself for the specific purpose of future certainty” (126). This attempt to represent the mind as free from preconceptions exposes what Derrida calls

“the willful sense of the will: freedom, break with the domain of empirical history, a break whose aim is reconciliation with the hidden essence of the empirical, with pure historicity” (“Force” 13). Paul de Man suggests another interpretation of this reciprocating movement when he says that although “origination is inconceivable on the ontological level,” it is “the ease with which we nevertheless accept it” which “is indicative of our desire to forget” (*Rhetoric* 5). Keiji Nishitani points out the “variety of ethical, philosophical, and religious doubts, anxieties, and demands tied up with the essence of the ego’s mode of being [. . .] since the elemental ground of the ego has been closed off to the understanding of the ego” by “a process implicit from the very start in the origination of the ego itself” (15). Coleridge offers a representation of these “doubts, anxieties, and demands” directly related to the problems of memory and the ontological status of dreams in the poem collocated with “Kubla Khan” by the prose introduction, “The Pains of Sleep.”

“The Pains of Sleep”

“The Pains of Sleep” is the important but often-omitted companion poem to “Kubla Khan” in the 1816 *Christabel* volume. In the prose introduction, Coleridge presents it as a second “psychological curiosity” to be read alongside “Kubla Khan.” The descent into the “romantic chasm” in “The Pains of Sleep,” however, is “of a very different character”; the poem represents the subject undergoing a profoundly personal but also morally and spiritually significant suffering, an awakening “in anguish and in agony.” Given its confessional characteristics (the more pronounced for having been first included in a letter to Southey), “The Pains of Sleep” tempts a naïve reading in terms of Coleridge’s opium withdrawal symptoms; but one need not dismiss the personal pain

expressed here to acknowledge the difference between the composition of a poem and the scream that it mentions.

The representation of the subject in “The Pains of Sleep” proceeds in two major poetic turns. At first, the subject seeks passive participation in a meaningful totality realized within the self, a submergence in what Davis calls “an invisible world that defies direct description” (58):

It hath not been my use to pray
With moving lips or bended knees;
But silently, by slow degrees,
My spirit I to Love compose,
In humble trust mine eye-lids close,
With reverential resignation,
No wish conceived, no thought exprest,
Only a sense of supplication. (3-9)

Explicitly, the subject is the self composing: “My spirit I to Love compose” well summarizes the construction of the ideal self in Coleridge’s works. The grammatical object of the sentence, “My spirit,” already implies the “act of self-duplication” by which the subject comes to be known as “spirit, self, and self-consciousness.” The possibility of “spirit” as an object possessed or conditioned by the genitive in the pronoun “my” represents the origin of the human subject through taking itself for its own object, even before the use of “My spirit” as the direct object of “I [. . .] compose” does. Through a poetic inversion which also serves the purposes of rhythm (though “My spirit to Love I compose” would reflect the natural stresses of these words better), the object not only precedes the subject in the reader’s experience, but is immediately juxtaposed to it. “My spirit I” creates, in fact, an opportunity for false syntactic closure: the reader’s eye is tempted to stop before completing the grammatical unit, untangling the possibility of reading both “My” and “spirit” as modifying “I,” which would then be the grammatical

object, and not the subject. This reading, though less probable, is still possible: it requires only that the infinitive “to pray” be permitted to govern the reading of the verb “compose,” so that the passage reads “It hath not been my use to pray [. . .] But [. . . to] compose [My spirit I].” The parallel “mine eye-lids close” in the next sentence offers still further possibilities for reading of this polysemous “I” and at the same time makes it much harder to avoid taking the word “I” as the grammatical subject of the predicates “compose” and “close.” The poem’s first sentence thus enacts for the reader the formation of a synthetic *a priori* judgment concerning the subject’s conception as a subject, the experience of “I” taking “spirit” (conditioned as “My spirit”) as the object of its efforts to “compose.”

This effort to “compose” is also explicitly represented as inarticulate on every level: with no “bended knees” or “moving lips,” the physical and the verbal movements associated with the verb “pray” are eliminated; so are the mental movements they would typically signify, as there is “No wish conceived, no thought exprest.” The subject’s composition in relation to God and other things through a series of “conceptions” which articulate the repetitions of the inarticulate subject’s self-objectifying act is thus both enacted in the words of the poem and denied in the poem’s representation of the speaker’s behavior as typical of the speaker’s voluntary habits and exemplifying a possibility for general human behavior. The “antecedent unity” possibly suggested in the plurivocity of “My spirit I” is to be recovered in the “resignation” of the inarticulate self “to Love”; the “sense of supplication” still marks some distance, but this distance is never measured. Instead, it is lost as a repetition modifies the sense of “sense”:

A sense o'er all my soul imprest
That I am weak, yet not unblest,

Since in me, round me, every where
Eternal Strength and Wisdom are. (10-13)

The distance from subject to object, from point to point on the globe, and from self to another are abridged in the “sense” the speaker proposes to himself as “imprest” upon “my soul.” By a probable apposition (which only the absence of a comma or emdash declares to be a secondary reading), the noun clause beginning “That I am weak” can serve not only to define “sense” but also “soul”: the speaker’s “soul” would, after all, be an echoing “I AM” in Coleridge’s theory. That “I am” which is peculiarly the speaker’s is “weak, yet not unblest.” On the other hand, as an assertion the clause “I am weak, yet not unblest” serves to define the “sense of supplication” without involving any personal relation of supplicant and benefactor. Such a relation would presuppose the distance between self and other ostensibly abridged in the Coleridgean project of recovering antecedent unity through the discovery of subsequent unities. As Davis says, the “Contemplation, representation, and communication” which mark “the subject/object interaction that makes the temporal I possible” have no place in “Coleridge’s non-prayer”; he points out that this effort may be seen as Coleridge’s adaptation of Schelling’s philosophical efforts to transcend the subject/object dichotomy (57). The subject is thus represented as in “Kubla Khan,” albeit under a more literal and more explicitly spiritual schema, as sinking “down to a sunless sea.” From this inarticulate (and therefore cognitively sublime) center, in the subterranean union of the primeval rivers, the “mighty fountain” of his self-representing being is forced: he descends into the “deep romantic chasm.”

The speaker’s attempt to “compose” the inarticulate self, however, collapses into a need for articulation and external resources:

But yester-night I prayed aloud
In anguish and in agony,
Up-starting from the fiendish crowd
Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me. (14-17)

This is the first poetic turn in the representation of the subject in “The Pains of Sleep,” and unlike even the implicit violence and ambivalence of “Kubla Khan” and the disappointment of the prose introduction’s “Alas!” the turn here is abrupt, an “Up-starting.” The move from the typical to the particular example (the remembered incident of “yester-night” and the articulate and personal speech of “I prayed aloud”) suggests the contrast between the effort to achieve self-composure through the “resignation” of the self to inarticulate “sense” in sleep and the apparent consequences of that practice for both dreaming and waking: as Davis says, the dreams are “a perverted fulfillment of the non-prayer’s aspirations” (57).

These “aspirations” apparently involve the speaker in breathtaking moral and spiritual difficulties. Davis points out that “The Miltonic moral universe is under attack,” as the speaker in “The Pains of Sleep” even echoes the speech of Satan on Mount Niphates (59), a reference to the fourth book of *Paradise Lost* which corresponds neatly to the allusion in “Kubla Khan” to the introduction of that speech. In addition, of course, the Cartesian *cogito* is directly challenged by the speaker’s “aspirations” to eliminate the distinctness of the *sum*. The poem puts into play the sequence by which Descartes establishes the priority of the thinking subject: as Derrida says, Descartes

elaborates the hypothesis [the identity of waking and dreaming sensation] that will ruin *all* the *sensory* foundations of knowledge and will lay bare only the *intellectual* foundations of certainty. This hypothesis above all will not run from the possibility of an insanity—an epistemological one—much more serious than madness. (“Cogito” 51)

The speaker's inability to escape the doubt represented by the dream's erosion of the subject's conscience of agency is, in terms of the *cogito*, not only barely indistinguishable from madness—it may well pre-empt the fear of madness, bespeaking a more profoundly significant error or erasure at the foundation of human consciousness, one that cannot be neatly confined to the asylum. For the speaker of the poem, in any case, such efforts to recover antecedent unity, risking as they do the subject's conscience of agency, lead to “Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame”:

the powerless will
Still baffled, and yet burning still!
Desire with loathing strangely mixed
On wild or hateful objects fixed.
Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!
And shame and terror over all!
Deeds to be hid which were not hid,
Which all confused I could not know
Whether I suffered, or I did:
For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe,
My own or others still the same
Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame. (21-32)

Reft of the comforting distance which separates the “*fit alter et idem*” of “My spirit I” from the “all confused” state in which “My own or others” appear “still the same” morally and spiritually, the speaker finds that the philosophical effort to consciously erase such differences risks a terminal descent into the “maddening brawl.” As Davis says, “this heightened subjectivity approaches narcissism and paranoia” (59), as the “self-conscious subject” struggles to restore the boundaries which, as has already been mentioned, Nishitani calls “the essence of the ego's mode of being” (15).

As the poem continues, and on successive nights in its narrative time, the speaker struggles to shake off “the fiendish dream,” to recover the meaningful totality “in me, round me, every where” that is lost when sleep uncovers “the unfathomable hell within”

(46) that overwhelms “the powerless will.” As a matter of natural causation, of course, the result is inconclusive: it would be impossible to demonstrate that the philosophical and spiritual representations embedded in the poem’s structure are the physiological roots of the night terrors more likely attributable (as representations of experiences in the natural world) to Coleridge’s nervous condition and opium withdrawal symptoms. Just the same, in the poem the speaker’s expectations concerning his philosophical and poetic practices and their outcomes, as a method of moral and spiritual development, are shaken to the core. The speaker continually expresses a specifically spiritual expectation of meaning, believing that the sequence of events will, like the syntax of a sentence, articulate a judgment about the speaker’s moral and spiritual state. The poem itself is an attempt to read the series of events, to discover the moral allegory in sleep broken by dreams of “Deeds to be hid which were not hid.” These dreams seem to defeat such reading, as he cannot even know “Whether I suffered, or I did” these deeds that caused “soul-stifling shame.”

The second “turn,” after the catastrophic failure of the initial descent into the “deep romantic chasm,” comes on

The third night, when my own loud scream
Had waked me from the fiendish dream,
O'ercome with sufferings strange and wild,
I wept as I had been a child. (37-40)

The speaker “by tears” returns to a “milder mood,” and attempts to discover a system of moral differences that will make it possible to read the allegory in the sequence of events. In a sequence where the pursuit of enlightenment through philosophy and poetry leads to the closed eyes of sleep, terrifying dreams, and an awakening “in anguish and in agony,” however, the philosophical practice described in the poem’s opening fails to clarify the

meaning of the mortal terror which follows. The inarticulate “resignation” and the inarticulate “loud screams” and “tears” do answer to one another, but they will not serve to represent an antecedent and subsequent unity; if anything, they seem to argue the incommensurability of the discourse proper to prayers and poems with the discourse of philosophies and poetics scheming to compose an inarticulate self as such.

This effort to find the proper reading of these experiences, to uncover the moral allegory which the narrative should provide, leads the speaker to establish a hierarchy of “sin” in which those “deepest stained” may be judged worthy of the suffering inflicted by such dreams. Just the same, the representation of this effort in the past tense (the utterance of a past instance of the subject, which the speaker does not presently reaffirm), and its collapse into querulous *non sequitur* make it plain that the reading is unsatisfactory:

Such punishments, I said, were due
To natures deepest stained with sin,—
For aye entempesting anew
The unfathomable hell within,
The horror of their deeds to view,
To know and loathe, yet wish and do!
Such griefs with such men well agree,
But wherefore, wherefore fall on me?
To be beloved is all I need,
And whom I love, I love indeed. (43-52)

Not only does the speaker here echo Milton with the language of “hell within”; he also echoes the Apostle Paul, speaking in his letter to the church at Rome, who also engaged in an extended representation of the problem of moral agency in the sinful yet believing soul. Paul’s representation of the conflict within even ends with an exclamation and a desperate query in much the same fashion:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. [. . .] I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. [. . .] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (7:15-24)

For Paul, however, the question is not whether the “Wretched man” is the fit subject of suffering, but how to end it. Paul, unlike the speaker in “The Pains of Sleep,” does not differentiate between “natures deepliest stained with sin” and his own. Far from it: Paul writes elsewhere that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15).

The theory and practice of the speaker in “The Pains of Sleep” turns on an expectation that philosophical and poetic efforts to establish a subsequent unity within the subject will recover the unity which is lost in the dissembling “act of self-duplication” by which the subject represents itself in relation to God, the cosmos, and others. Such a recovery should ideally constitute “Love” as the meaningful totality of all things remembered within the subject, whether upon sleep or upon the deeper sleep of death.⁴ There is movement within the poem toward a new experience of “Love”: the speaker’s attempts to discover the difference between self and others “stained with sin” displaces the abstract noun “Love” with the predications “to be beloved” and “I love indeed,” by which the speaker introduces the relation “love” within the realm of subjects and objects, self and others. Absent, however, is the agent by which the speaker will “be beloved” and the object of the speaker’s “love indeed.”

⁴ If it were possible that such a recovery should succeed, it would achieve the Christian rhetorical *desideratum* of the comprehension of all things in love set forth by Augustine (see for example I.xxxv in *On Christian Doctrine*, and throughout that work).

The speaker in “The Pains of Sleep” thus remains trapped in that dilemma which led Hamlet to exclaim “O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams” (II.2).⁵ The speaker’s moral alarm over “sin” and “hell within” reflects a larger spiritual concern: that more serious than terrifying dreams or even madness, damnation waits when voluntary commitments diminish the subject’s capacity for moral agency. Unable to achieve the dissolution of differences without making it impossible to find in the text the moral allegory of philosophical and poetic experience the sentence of justification he hopes to find, the speaker clings to a self-justifying self-representation whose terms are, nevertheless, at last of the love between the self and some other, however tenuous and elliptical.

The ambivalence in the representation of the human subject “Kubla Khan,” the prose introduction, and “The Pains of Sleep” becomes crucial in the last of these poems; for not only religion as historical and cultural, but the spiritual inwardness of the subject as represented throughout, is here morally and existentially on trial. This deeply personal approach to the problem seems to belie Shaffer’s “fusty poseur” characterization, even as it provides an example of a philosophically serious approach to the difficulties of representing the human subject in terms of Christian confession as well as those of Coleridge’s philosophical anthropology. The attempt to recover antecedent unity through the representation of the subject’s experience as subsequent unity is depicted in “The Pains of Sleep” as a failure which, far beyond generating ambivalently dangerous and ephemeral beauties, risks madness and damnation. As both “Kubla Khan” and the prose introduction show, this representation is intimately connected to the whole of Coleridge’s

⁵ cited from the venerable MIT web edition of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* at <<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/hamlet/hamlet.2.2.html>>.

philosophical, religious, and poetic work. Probing more deeply into the contradictory nature of his efforts to integrate his theorizing of the human subject with his Christian confession as a response to the challenge posed by these early works uncovers the link between Coleridge's work and the convergence of later thought in both East and West, a convergence anticipated in Coleridge's work on original sin.

CHAPTER THREE

Original Sin, Apostasy, and *Apostasis*

*I say, to remake his anatomy.
Man is sick because he is badly constructed.
We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that
animalcule that itches him mortally,*

*god,
and with god
his organs.*

*For you can tie me up if you wish,
but there is nothing more useless than an organ.*

*When you will have made him a body without organs,
then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions
and restored him to his true freedom.*

Artaud To Have Done

When Antonin Artaud says that “Man is sick because he is badly constructed,” he not only reflects the history of Western philosophy, with its efforts to find the ideal constitution of man (and occasionally woman) in the republic, and the republic in man; nor does he merely rehearse the tragedy of subjects represented and representing in that tradition, in philosophy and politics as in drama. He also amplifies the relationship between the “Man” and “his anatomy” in the figure of “god” who co-inheres in “his organs” through a slippery play with the singular masculine pronoun in the third person. Artaud seeks to purge himself of his creation altogether, to experience the unity whose submergence is implied in what Coleridge describes as the “act of self-duplication” which founds consciousness. Artaud’s work seems to go far beyond Coleridge’s “absolute and scientific scepticism to which the mind voluntarily determines itself for the

specific purpose of future certainty.” Even in the radical hollowing of Artaud’s corpus, however, there is some “him” to be “delivered” and “restored,” some “body” to be “made.” Artaud, like Coleridge, seeks to expose what Derrida calls “freedom, break with the domain of empirical history, a break whose aim is reconciliation with the hidden essence of the empirical, with pure historicity” (“Force” 13). Artaud’s call to “make up our minds” recalls Coleridge’s “my spirit I to love compose,” allowing each to appear as commentary and response to the other, and to call into question the representation of the human subject as “badly constructed.”

Derrida’s “La Parole Soufflée” provides a reading of Artaud’s works which helps to draw these two into conversation. Derrida’s reading is deeply concerned with the propriety of taking Artaud as an example, given that Artaud’s own explicit dramatic theory and the apparent focus of his mental disturbance is the problem of representation itself. Specifically, Artaud’s work represents a response to what Derrida calls the “metaphysics of subjectivity (consciousness, unconsciousness, or the individual body)” (178). The problem continually confronted by such a metaphysics is that

what is called the speaking subject is no longer the person himself, or the person alone, who speaks. The speaking subject discovers his irreducible secondarity, his origin that is always already eluded; for the origin is always already eluded on the basis of an organized field of speech in which the speaking subject vainly seeks a place that is always missing.

This problem is amply explored in Coleridge’s work, of course, as the problem of how the origin in the “I AM” and its “repetition” are to relate, exactly, in practice and in systematic philosophy. Derrida’s examination continues by pointing out that Artaud’s self-representation is not merely an example of a merely theoretical point, however; first because “Artaud does not exemplify it. He wants to explode it” (179). Artaud intends to

do so by replacing the “instantaneous and original elusion without which no speech could ever catch its breath [*souffle*]” (178) with a “good inspiration” of his own devising: “the spirit-breath [*souffle*] of life, which will not take dictation because it does not read and because it precedes all texts. It is the spirit [*souffle*] that would take possession of itself in a place where property would not yet be theft” (179). Artaud’s works, on Derrida’s reading, attempt to recover what Coleridge calls the “antecedent unity” of the concept, particularly the originary concept of the self.

At least equally significantly, for Artaud as for Coleridge (and Nietzsche, and even Donne), this problem is not a merely theoretical one; it is not a matter merely of disembodied thoughts. Derrida points out the importance of the real, bodily being of the human subject in Artaud’s work:

Let us not be detained here by a possible resemblance to the essence of the mythic itself: the dream of a life without difference. Let us ask, rather, what difference within the flesh might mean for Artaud. [. . .]

Ever since I have had a relation to my body, therefore, ever since my birth, I no longer am my body. Ever since I have had a body I am not this body, hence I do not possess it. (180)

In all the talk of concepts and dreaming as abstract elements of systematic philosophy, or as poetic tropes, it is possible to lose sight of waking and sleeping as bodily functions. Thought itself, it must be remembered, takes place in an organ: the brain. This is true whether it is understood as a phenomenon or as epiphenomenal. Artaud’s work restores to the foreground the conflicted relation between the subjective origin of the human subject as a thinking being (as one of those Nietzsche calls “mere *knowers*”) and the birth of the body, two things which are only notionally the same yet can never be entirely dissociated.

For Artaud, as for the speaker in “The Pains of Sleep,” the turn to recover antecedent unity is both driven by a danger (which drives the subject seeks to achieve self-composure) and driven to danger (which arises from the subject’s attempt to compose the inarticulate self). Artaud’s terror over the loss of his body is moral and spiritual, going far beyond the anticipation or memory of physical pain or the fear of death:

Death [. . .] is not what we believe we can anticipate as the termination of the process or adventure that we (assuredly) call life. Death is an articulated form of our relationship to the Other. I die only *of* the other: through him, for him, in him. My death is *represented*, let one modify this word as one will. And if I die by representation, then at ‘the extreme moment of death’ this representative theft has not any less shaped the entirety of my existence, from its origin. (Derrida “La Parole” 180)

The human subject which desires its own self-possession must face the problem of bodily death as the end of its possibilities for being; once this end becomes apparent, however, other limits of the self’s ability to represent itself as fully present to itself and fully realized in its own construction also become apparent. The distance from the self to another, the subject/object boundary, the consciousness that the “I AM” is a moment in an endless “repetition,” even the fact of physical birth and the necessity that one inhale in order to speak: all of these limits of the self’s ability to fulfill its longing for self-composure, self-possession, and mastery take on the character of death. The bodily existence of the subject is thus trapped between deaths, in a cycle of death, as the turn to recover the antecedent unity within the human subject must always proceed by representation, and discover itself in repetition. The effort to compose the inarticulate subject continually manifests itself as the acting-out of a moribund desire.

Not only is this effort not merely a matter of ideas; it also refuses to limit itself to the span between the bodily birth and death of any particular person. As Joshua D. Gonsalves reads him, Artaud's works mark an effort to inscribe a global unity within this inarticulate self, moving beyond "deliriously globalized epistemic desire" to "the desire to re-make the body through a displacement of the Western subject without reserve" (1033). This project closely parallels Coleridge's absorption of Purchas into "Kubla Khan." In the crisis of Coleridge's "The Pains of Sleep," as in Artaud's work, far more is at stake than the author's distress. It is a constitutional crisis, personally; and insofar as such works as "Kubla Khan" represent efforts to constitute a global religious and political unity within the human subject, this constitutional crisis reverberates globally, as well. "The Miltonic moral universe is under attack" when the forms of representation break down: "the subject/object interaction that makes the temporal I possible" is abrogated by the philosophical and spiritual nescience of "Coleridge's non-prayer" (Davis 57). Such a "scientific scepticism" (as Coleridge calls it in *Biographia Literaria*, noted above) appears in the self-representation of the subject self as inarticulate, as either hollow or divine in its ineffability.

The hoped-for "certainty," the desire to produce and master "the hidden essence," and the "freedom" described by Coleridge, Artaud, and Derrida all appear as freedom from or power over "the empirical" and "historicity." Thomas MacFarland goes so far in tracing these developments as to suggest that in certain expressions "Coleridge speaks the language of twentieth-century phenomenology" and that Coleridge's development of his always-to-be-completed *magnum opus* "would bear a close resemblance to the kind of extended re-thinking of the implications of the *cogito* that Husserl labors toward"

(Coleridge 236). Derrida, in turn, links Artaud to “the tradition of mad poets” including Nietzsche and Holderlin (184), whose works have been epochal for Continental philosophy and literary criticism, and whom readers such as Foucault, Heidegger, Derrida, and de Man find crucial to understanding the origin of the work of art. Thorough reading of the discourse of origins among these writers, then, requires taking stock of Coleridge’s intervention,¹ and of the moral and spiritual crisis to which both Coleridge and Artaud attend.

Coleridge’s Theology of Original Sin

The crux for understanding Coleridge’s representation of the human subject as an intervention in the discourse of origins must be Coleridge’s development of “the Scriptural *doctrine* of Original Sin” (*Aids* 193). This is not merely a coincidence of the language of philosophy and theology, though it is not less than that. Coleridge’s lengthy engagement with this doctrine in the *Aids to Reflection* develops his representation of the human subject in terms of Coleridge’s increasingly orthodox Christian confession. In a typical Coleridgean move, the text of his engagement with Jeremy Taylor’s controversial writings on original sin in Aphorism X of the “Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion” is nearly squeezed off the page by a dense footnote specifically discussing the sense of the term “origin” in which “no *natural* thing or act can be called originant, or be truly said to have an *origin* in any other” (176). As though to reinforce the fitness of the subjects in “Kubla

¹ In calling Coleridge’s work an “intervention” in the discourse of origins among writers such as Heidegger, Derrida, de Man, it is necessary to recall that their criticism of the language of metaphysics is developed primarily in response to themes in Rousseau, Hegel, Holderlin, and others whose lives and writings overlap Coleridge’s; and to notice that themes developed in Continental thought have often been exported to contemporary Anglo-American criticism with insufficient regard for the history of that discourse in English, a history for which Coleridge’s work has significant implications.

Khan” as examples, it begins by doing so in terms of the “metaphorical or figurative use” of the term to describe “a *river* that [. . .] *originates* in [. . .] a *fountain*” (176n).

When Coleridge’s writing is focused on the personal, conscience of original sin coincides with the origination of the conscious human subject because Coleridge represents both strictly in terms of the subject’s activity over against the passivity of an object in natural causation. This overlapping representation, however, is not merely a preference in portrayal of the individual; Coleridge is still interested in truth which is both global and personal. Coleridge specifically offers examples from not only Christianity but Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, among others, to discover “in the usual form of an historic solution [admixture]” the belief everywhere that “a moral corruption connatural with the human race” exists, a belief that also pre-dates Christianity in the Western tradition: “In the assertion of ORIGINAL SIN the Greek Mythology rose and set” (189). To understand Coleridge’s view of origination and original sin, then, is to read it in the context of Christian confession both globally and personally, and to understand it both within and beyond the strictly modern Western philosophical context of his explicit theory of the human subject.

Coleridge derives the meaning of the theological term “Original Sin” as follows:

Sin is Evil having an *Origin*. But inasmuch as it is *evil*, in God it cannot originate; and yet in some *Spirit* (that is, in some *supernatural* power) it *must*. For in *Nature* there is no origin. Sin therefore is spiritual Evil: but the spiritual in man is the Will. Now when we do not refer to any particular sins, but to that state and constitution of the Will, which is the ground, condition, and common Cause of all Sins; and when we would further express the truth, that this corrupt *nature* of the Will must in some sense or other be considered as its own act, that the corruption must have been self-originated;—in this case and for this purpose we may, with no less propriety than force, entitle this dire spiritual evil and source of all evil, that is absolutely such, Original Sin. I have said, “the corrupt *nature*

of the Will.” I might add, that the admission of a *nature* into a spiritual essence by its own act is a corruption. (180)

This is “the precise import of the Scriptural *doctrine* of Original Sin,” according to Coleridge; it is not unique to Scripture, but is found there “in common with every philosophy, in which the reality of a responsible Will and the *essential* difference between good and evil have been recognized” (193). This definition, and the discussion of the term “origin” to which it responds, is important for two reasons: first, for the effort to conform Coleridge’s theory of the human subject to Christian confession which it represents; and second, for the sharp turn in that representation constituted by the last sentence.

Orthodoxy in confession, for Coleridge, is most specifically represented by the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, though he would not characteristically have simply quoted these articles. The Aphorisms, indeed, combine Coleridge’s commentary with extensive reference to traditional Anglican sources such as Leighton, Hooker, and Taylor to discuss the materials of Christian confession in an order established by Coleridge’s philosophical and theological priorities. Nonetheless, Coleridge’s concern for the Articles is expressed in many places, as is his awareness of the famous *via media* in the confession of “a Church which in the construction of its Liturgy and its Articles is known to have worded certain passages for the purpose of rendering them subscribable by both A and Z—that is, the opposite parties as to the points in controversy” (*Aids* 255). Coleridge makes use of this leeway in what Christopher S. Noble calls Coleridge’s “rhetorical self-containment,” characterized by his “complex forays into and retreats from the project of philosophical systematizing,” a complexity which “pervades both Coleridge’s poetics and his understanding of religious

orthodoxy” (29). The “self-containment” Noble describes typically consists of a double motion: “forward” steps represent efforts to unify knowledge and defy what Coleridge describes as facile dualisms or false dichotomies, while “backward” steps are characterized by a strong controlling bent best described as a Christian pragmatism.² Whether “forward” and “backward” steps relative to philosophical systematics represents progress on a personal or a global scale depends on whether one privileges movement toward a totalizing understanding or toward consistent Christian confession. As MacFarland extensively documents, Coleridge very definitely prioritized the Christian purpose of his philosophical efforts, and did so with increasing clarity throughout his career (*Coleridge* 202-3). Coleridge maintains this “self-containment” while negotiating the complexity of the Anglican *via media* in the context of his discussion of original sin:

The two great moments of the Christian Religion are, Original Sin and Redemption; *that* the Ground, *this* the Superstructure of our faith. The former I have exhibited, first, according to the scheme of the Westminster Divines and the Synod of Dort; then, according to the scheme of a contemporary Arminian divine; and lastly, in contrast with both schemes, I have placed what I firmly believe to be the *Scriptural* sense of this article, and vindicated its entire conformity with reason and experience. (*Aids* 206-7)

Coleridge’s rehearsal of this process of development recapitulates the mediating procedure he describes in the Articles, while also making no concessions against the claims that both he and the Articles would make to Biblical truth.

² Other useful perspectives on Coleridge’s religious development include Anthony John Harding, “Coleridge, Scripture, and the Active Reader,” *Christianity and Literature* 36.4 (Summer 1987): 33-42; John Beer, “Coleridge’s Religious Thought: the Search for a Medium,” *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher, and Romanticism*, Ed. David Jasper, New York: St. Martin’s, 1986, 41-65; and the chapter “The Trinitarian Resolution” in MacFarland’s *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford U P, 1969, 191-255.

The key sentence from Chapter VI (“Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and the Punishment thereof”) of the Westminster Confession of Faith states that “[Adam and Eve] being the root of all mankind, the guilt of [eating the forbidden fruit] was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation” (VI.iii). The assertion that “guilt [. . .] was imputed” based on the status of the first sinners, rather than on any predicate specific to the guilty party, enforces the view of original sin most particular to Westminster: the federal theory by which Adam’s sin is held to be the sin of every human, and Christ’s righteousness the righteousness of every believer. By conditioning both “imputed” and “conveyed” on the first sinners’ roles as “root of all mankind,” Westminster requires its subscribers to uphold the realist interpretation of original sin as inhering in the “nature” of humans as a metaphysical consequence of Adam’s and Eve’s sin, whether by a supposed organic unity of human being or by some physical or spiritual inheritance mechanism. The word “conveyed” further obliges its subscribers to hold to the Traducian view that sinfulness is inherited from generation to generation.³ The term “corrupted nature” in this article of the Westminster Confession (and use of the term “nature” *passim*), as in the ultra-Calvinist canons of the Synod of Dordt (which state that “Man brought forth children of the same nature as himself after the fall” so that “corruption spread [. . .] by way of the propagation of his perverted nature”), anticipates

³ Traducianism, according to the OED, may be defined as “the doctrine of the transmission of the soul from the parents”; in theology the term refers to a specific theory of origin of the soul, but also to the general cluster of theories which trace moral and spiritual qualities through sexual reproduction. The teaching is principally of interest in the context of discussions of original sin.

the significance of this term in both the Thirty-Nine Articles and Coleridge's derivation of the meaning of original sin.

The Thirty-Nine Articles are, like Westminster and Dort, careful to avoid the "Pelagian" doctrine into which Arminian teachers in the Church of England sometimes lapsed. Article IX, "Of Original or Birth-Sin," expressly proscribes any such teaching in which only actual sin (each person's particular sinful behaviors) accounts for the whole meaning of human sinfulness. Just the same, nothing in the Thirty-Nine articles affirms or denies a federal or realistic theory. The Anglican confession suggests a Traducian theory of the origin of the human subject:

Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.

Such is the tact of the confession, however, that while "naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam" does suggest the Traducian theory, the structure of the clauses does not enforce the obligation. The "fault and corruption" are indeed a matter of "Nature" and apply to "every man, that naturally is ingendered" (thus using the Virgin Birth to exclude Christ); yet the omission of any teaching of sin's being "conveyed" or the manner of its "propagation," along with the article's insistence that this "Nature" belongs severally to "every man," leaves significant room for other theories. The "mediate imputation" theory preferred by many, including many Arminian theologians, by which every human upon sinning is held guilty of Adam's sin, would be acceptable under these articles. Such a theory is even hinted in the last clause, which attaches "wrath and

damnation” to the “Original Sin” which is “in every person born into this world,” and not to the person.⁴ Coleridge, concerned as he is with the problems of “nature” and causal necessity set over against “spirit” and freedom, or active agency, makes the most of this opening.

The crucial clause in Coleridge’s initial derivation of the meaning of original sin, then, is that which says “in *Nature* there is no origin.” This distinction is of a piece with Coleridge’s rejection of the necessitarianism he saw in the works of his early mentors and associates David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, and rival William Godwin (MacFarland 169-77), which in turn underlies the schism with Wordsworth over “Coleridge’s rejection of passive perception” in favor of “a creative activity” in which may be found “the germinal potency of the theory of Imagination” (Hill 21). As Coleridge says in the footnote on “origin,” under the continuity of causation any such “creative activity” must appear as a rupture in the natural order: “where there is no discontinuity there can be no origination, and every appearance of origination in *nature* is but a shadow of our own casting. It is a reflection from our own will or spirit” (176n). Coleridge thus argues that beginnings, the “original” in nature, are strictly epiphenomenal. The human subject projects the newness of its perception upon the object; in the course of repeated acts of self-composition, the phenomena are thus conceived to be objects of perception. Detecting a phenomenal description at work in the confessional language which makes “Original Sin” to consist in a “Nature,” Coleridge insists that insofar as “Original Sin” is

⁴ That is to say, the logic of the clause reads “the fault and corruption [. . .] deserveth God’s wrath and damnation,” and does so when it is found “in every person born into this world.” The necessity of excluding Christ, who was certainly “born into this world,” makes it necessary to treat the phrase as establishing the scope within which the claim may be true, rather than specifying the extent of its actual truth.

original (“the ground, condition, and common Cause of all Sins”), it cannot be strictly natural; yet it is describable as natural (“this corrupt *nature* of the Will”), and therefore must be conceivable and perceived among the phenomena, within the continuity of causation in nature. The doctrine of original sin, he says, describes the “state and constitution of the Will” by which humans are inscrutably and inevitably betrayed into particular bad acts (and general aversion from God); and it does so by noting that such a process being necessarily “of the Will,” it is equally necessary to affirm that “the corruption must have been self-originated.”

Upon examination, Coleridge’s “Original Sin” turns out to be the theologically specific coloring of his representation of the subject in “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep,” as expounded in his theoretical writings. The human subject originates through a “self-duplication,” taking itself as object in order to constitute itself as subject—to become composed. It is important to notice that Coleridge’s descriptions of the origination of the human subject and of original sin correlate exactly. What Coleridge characterizes as “a will, or primary act of self-duplication” in *Biographia Literaria*, he also calls “original,” as well as describing the self-representing subject as “originally the identity of [finite and infinite]”; in this act of the human subject lies the “mystery” of “production and life” (132); it is “the most original construction or first productive act for the inner sense” (122). The “I AM” which Coleridge chooses to “indiscriminately express” as “spirit, self, and self-consciousness” originates in the “act of constructing itself objectively to itself” by which “a subject [. . .] becomes a subject” (130). Coleridge claims that this “act of self-duplication” is “the mediate or indirect principle of every science” (132).

Each of these claims is duplicated in the description of “Original Sin” found in *Aids to Reflection*. As noted, original sin is “of the Will,” and not merely derivatively (as in voluntary acts or “particular sins”) but as its “state and constitution.” This “state and constitution of the Will” is not explicable in terms of natural causation: it “must be considered as its own act,” as only the “self-originated” could be “the ground condition, and common cause” and the “source of all evil, that is absolutely such.” Later in the same section, Coleridge bolsters his argument that volition, not causation, is under consideration in the teaching of original sin by showing that religious and philosophical thought from all over the globe acknowledge original sin, however the teaching may have been redefined to suit various responses to or denials of human sinfulness (188). At this point Coleridge holds himself to have explained “the precise import of the Scriptural *doctrine* of Original Sin; or rather of the Fact acknowledged in all ages, and recognized but not originating, in the Christian Scriptures” (191).

To represent a human being as complicit in original sin, then, is nothing other than to say that such a human being sins. Original sin is the ontological inference, the synthetic *a priori* judgment concerning the human subject, required for the understanding of human sinfulness as both human (originating with/in the human subject) and sinful (taking place phenomenally in bad acts). As exemplary of human nature, the bad acts or “particular sins” are explicable and caused; they are rationally within the scope of human being, though sinfulness is irrational with regard to God and the cosmos. This possibility of rationally caused local instances of the cosmically unreasonable is the possibility of sin, as opposed to dream-states or delusions. As Coleridge puts it,

the phrase, original sin, is a pleonasm, the epithet not adding to the thought, but only enforcing it. For if it be sin, it must be *original*; and a

state or act, that has not its origin in the will, may be calamity, deformity, disease, or mischief; but a *sin* it cannot be. It is not enough that the act appears voluntary, or that it is intentional; or that it has the most hateful passions or debasing appetite for its proximate cause and accompaniment. All these may be found in a mad-house, where neither law nor humanity permit us to condemn the actor of sin. (178)

This dramatic representation of the sinful self as different from the delusional self, of course, is acted out on the stage of the *cogito*, where the turn away from the representation of the subject as possibly dreaming or delusional in favor of the subject's necessary rationality stands out as the foundational principle of modern Western philosophical discourse.⁵ Here, as elsewhere, Coleridge's work invests the representation of the individual human subject with global significance.

In representing original sin as the conception required for the representation of the human subject as sinful by nature, Coleridge threads the needle neatly. He refuses to reduce sinfulness to acts within the scope of human being but accidental to it, mere wrong behaviors which may be reformed or modified (the error historically known as Pelagianism). At the same time, he also refuses to reduce human being under the continuity of natural causation (the fatalism into which many otherwise orthodox formulations of the doctrine fall, and which Coleridge had already rejected in the necessitarianism of Hartley and Priestley). Coleridge asserts original sin "with no less propriety than force" as the origination of a self such that the phenomenon "bad act" has the ontological character "sinful." As he says in announcing the topic, the primary concern is

⁵ Here see Descartes' *Meditations* I.5, the whole of the first of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* being the development of the *cogito* as it has been continuously discussed and revised from Descartes to Derrida.

NOT the Origin of Evil, NOT the *Chronology* of Sin, or the chronicles of the original Sinner; but Sin originant, underived from without, and no passive link in the adamantine chain of Effects, each of which is in its turn an *instrument* of Causation, but no one of them a Cause;—NOT with Sin *inflicted*, which would be a Calamity;—NOT with Sin (that is, an evil tendency) *implanted*, for which let the planter be responsible; but I begin with *Original Sin*. (170)

That the last sentence could itself be taken “with no less propriety than force” as a believer’s confession is perhaps a coincidence, but it is no less significant for that.

Coleridge’s “Scriptural doctrine of Original Sin”

Coleridge insistently describes the teaching of original sin as “Scriptural,” even in the context of his argument that its recognition (even in denial) is universal and not dependent on Christian teaching. This insistence serves both an apologetic and a tactical function, reflecting the double purpose of *Aids to Reflection* as a whole. The projected audience of the *Aids* is Coleridge’s fellow believers among the Church of England; Coleridge aims to provide “a febrifuge against aguish scruples and horrors, the hectic of the soul” (170). Once again, Coleridge’s work offers to the world what the author of “The Pains of Sleep” can easily represent as a very personal problem. The apologetic task extends beyond encouraging the faithful, though: given Coleridge’s reputation and associates, like any work he published on religion and philosophy it necessarily has in view also the ferment of Spinozists, Socinians, Unitarians, and others that formed Coleridge’s intellectual and spiritual *milieu*. Coleridge is explicitly concerned that the rational-empiricist project will dead-end into apostasy:

both Reason and Experience have convinced me, that in the greater number of our ALOGI, who feed on the husks of Christianity, the disbelief of the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ included, has its origin and support in the assumed self-evidence of this Natural Theology (169).

Given this apologetic project, Coleridge avoids extensive appeals outside the tradition, attempting instead to present a propaedeutic vision of the internal consistency of the faith. In addition, working within a Protestant tradition Coleridge is well-served by a tactical emphasis on the authority of Scripture, which helps him to justify his exploitation of the latitude allowed by the language of the Thirty-Nine Articles.

Recognizing these rhetorical moves, however, does not necessarily justify E. S. Shaffer's assertion that "The fusty old poseur of Highgate" used Scripture in pursuit of an Arnoldian religiosity of culture, "a shift from religious to literary culture [. . .] on the home ground of the text of the Bible itself" ("Ideologies"). While there is some truth to Shaffer's argument that *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* contains the controversial arguments about Scripture which would disrupt the example of "the reconstructive use of the imagination in the religious sphere" found in *Aids to Reflection*, and while Coleridge's faith could scarcely be described as doctrinaire, Shaffer goes too far in suggesting that treatments of Coleridge's orthodoxy can only "present a simulacrum of a conventionally pious Coleridge" by suppressing *Confessions* in favor of *Aids*. MacFarland provides a much more satisfactory guide to Coleridge's balancing act when he concludes that "for Coleridge an act of faith could in no sense by-pass the claims of reason; it represented the utmost exertions of reason in the quest for deity" (231). That Coleridge's "exertions of reason" with regard to Scripture did not have uniformly orthodox results, or did not summarily exclude his philosophical compeers from the debate, hardly justifies a dismissive treatment of his appeals to Scripture as authority.

Coleridge explicitly refers to Scripture in a variety of modes and manners: for example, he lists several references when discussing the term "*the old man*" (194), quotes

the description of “Saul of Tarsus” (192), and adapts the parable of the “good Samaritan” to further his argument (193). Coleridge even interrupts a quotation from Taylor to correct Taylor’s quotation of Scripture (186). Perhaps the most important of these, in examining the relationship between Coleridge’s interpretation of original sin and his theorizing of the subject in the discourse of origins, is a passing reference to Romans 6: “if by an act, to which [the Will] had determined itself, it has subjected itself to the determination of nature (in the language of St. Paul, to the law of the flesh), it receives a nature into itself, and so far it becomes a nature” (190). Full evaluation of the metaphysical statement Coleridge makes here (one which corresponds to the final sentence of the derivation of the meaning of original sin quoted above) requires some examination of the Biblical language he invokes.

In the passage to which Coleridge refers, Paul describes complicity in sin as a constraint on the future possibilities for human being as part of his discussion of the practical consequences of justification by faith:⁶ “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (6:16) Coleridge’s paraphrase of Paul compresses the structure of the argument, including language from the next chapter:

we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. [. . .] I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (7:14-23)

⁶ Justification is described in Article XI the Thirty-Nine Articles as follows: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings.”

The aim of Paul's argument is to establish that justification by faith (5:1) does not support antinomianism (6:15), and that therefore no violence is done to God's redemptive-historical work when legalism is finally and fully declared obsolete on account of Christ's cross-work (8:3-5). The argument turns on a use of the term "law" which recasts its prescriptive function in terms of the ordering principle which it reveals experientially, so that "law" in the passage means variously a set of instructions and the origin of the phenomena named "sin" and "obedience."

The radical incompatibility of "sin, which leads to death," with "obedience, which leads to righteousness," is traceable to the radical difference of their origins. The "law" as prescription enables the articulation of a synthetic *a priori* judgment about the origination of sinfulness through moribund human desire (6:21);⁷ this judgment is expressed as an explanation, the narrative of a covering causal law. Similarly, the "obedience, which leads to righteousness" enables the articulation of a synthetic *a priori* judgment about the origination of "sanctification" in which the "obedience" mentioned above takes place as a "free gift" (6:22-23).⁸ The fulcrum of the passage is Paul's argument that "you are slaves of the one whom you obey": the causal continuity of behavior ("law" as the revealed ordering principle of experience, or what is traditionally referred to as *habitus*) originates in the individual through a volitional acquiescence to some antecedent state of affairs, and particular behaviors and outcomes follow in causal

⁷ Origination through moribund human desire, but not absolutely origination as such: the author of Hebrews (probably Paul) speaks of Christ's work as defeating "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (2:14). John in his First Epistle describes the two origins by saying "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (5:19).

⁸ The "obedience" here is more fully expressed as having "become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed" (6:17).

continuity. In saying, then, that “this corrupt nature of the Will must in some sense or other be considered as its own act,” Coleridge’s language closely reflects Paul’s.

Not only on this point but in the larger argument about the universality of original sin’s intelligibility and appearance as a teaching not only in Christianity but throughout the world’s religion and philosophy, Coleridge’s argument corresponds to Paul’s. At the very beginning of his letter to the mixed assembly of Jewish and Gentile believers at Rome, Paul establishes in both a global and a personal sense the meaning of complicity in sinful human being. This understanding of sin is fundamental to his argument upholding the justice of God in saving believers in Christ without regard for their ethnic or institutional relationship to Israel, despite the significant role of Israel in His redemptive-historical work. Paul describes human “ungodliness and unrighteousness,” or sin, as an active ignorance or aversion in which human beings “by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” about God, truth which “can be known” and “is plain to them,” so that they are “without excuse” because these things “have been clearly perceived” (1:18-20).

Coleridge explicitly cites this passage in the context of a note on his distinction between Reason and Understanding in *Aids*, and in so doing also alludes to John’s Gospel and Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians (156n).

Throughout this discussion in Romans, Paul concerns himself with the global and personal history of the sinfulness of each individual: people who “knew God” refused to acknowledge Him, and therefore “became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (1:21); they proceeded to a variety of idolatries and social sins, “because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (1:22-25). Human sinfulness thus originates both personally and

globally as a voluntary suppression of available truth about God; rather than respond to “the Creator” as a Creator (with “obedience, which leads to righteousness”), humans “worshiped and served the creature.” The paired synonyms “worshiped and served” here have in view the moribund human desire which takes as its object the creature specifically as opposed to the Creator, the being without God first and foremost of the self. Paul emphasizes the law’s role in explicating as moribund the desire through which the human subject constitutes itself: “Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” (1:32). This articulation thus concerns not only the individual as the agent of bad acts, but the complicity which founds the society of such subjects.

The representation of sinful human being Paul develops in Romans, and to which Coleridge appeals, is consistent with that developed in other parts of Scripture. In his letter to scattered Jewish Christian communities, the Apostle James develops the distinct origins of the created human being and the subject originating through moribund desire:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (1:13-18)⁹

James describes the origination of the sinful human subject, differentiated from the creation of the human being, in order to clear away confusion or objections arising from

⁹ In French, the last sentence begins “Il nous a engendrés selon sa volonté, par la parole de vérité,” which bears remembering in the context of Derrida’s reading of Artaud in “La Parole Soufflée.”

his teaching that believers should accept incidental evils (“trials of various kinds”) as “testing of your faith” (1:2). Though James has often been misunderstood as at least implicitly contradicting Paul concerning the relationship between the believer’s being “steadfast under trial” and the promise that “he will receive the crown of life” (1:12), this development of the origin of sinful human being serves the same purpose as in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Establishing the radical difference between the origination of sin, or moral evil, and the “good gift” which includes the origin of creatureliness, James makes it possible for his readers to treat incidental evil as part of the “good gift” without lapsing into the antinomianism, fatalism, or even maltheism which follow from attributing moral evil to the Creator. James also joins Paul in attributing the violence of society to the self-asserting nature of subjects originating through moribund desire: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (4:1) Indeed, in reading Artaud with Coleridge, the translation “your lusts that war in your members,” from the Authorized Version, seems especially appropriate, as it suggests the organic relationship between the personal and the global violence of the human subject’s self-origination through moribund desire which all of these writers have in view.

It would be possible to multiply examples. The origin of sinful human being described by Paul and James, and its radical difference from the creation of human being, recurs in the poetic language of Psalm 51, where the penitent David grapples with his own guilt over adultery and murder: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother

conceive me” (51:4-5). The first clause is hyperbole,¹⁰ and it points to the radical difference between the liminal discourse of sinfulness (the origination of the human subject over against the Creator’s creature through moribund human desire, a desire whose articulation as moribund is made possible by the law) and the medial discourse of original sin’s consequences in human behavior. As with the radical difference between moral and incidental evil marked by James, in the Psalm the difference between sin’s being (in Coleridge’s words) “Evil having an *Origin*” and the contingency of the sinful behaviors which directly affect human society make it possible to conceive the subject’s originary aversion from God as the only sin which “is absolutely such.” The synonymous parallelism concerning conception and gestation (51:5), itself frequently read as though it occurred in a polemic for a Traducian interpretation of original sin, follows from this hyperbole in service of a radical difference.¹¹

¹⁰ David’s sins were clearly “against” others, for example the husband he conspired with Joab to murder. See 2 Samuel 11:1-12:15 for the background to Psalm 51.

¹¹ Even more radical hyperbole occurs in David’s accusations against sinful society in Psalm 58, where “you gods” who “devise wrongs” personally and also “deal out violence on earth” globally are described as “estranged from the womb”: “they go astray from birth, speaking lies. / They have venom like the venom of a serpent” (58:3-4). The Psalmist’s imprecations even reverse the image: “Let them be [. . .] like the stillborn child who never sees the sun” (58:8). As both the hyperbole and the reversibility of the trope suggest, at stake here is the distance between “Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?” (58:1) and “O God, break the teeth in their mouths” (58:6), the difference between the origin “in your hearts” (58:1) of idolatries and social evils too radical to be reduced to their phenomenal nature and the origin of the expectation (represented as yet unrealized, a *parousia* hoped for but not apparent) that “there is a God who judges on earth” (58:11).

As with Psalm 51, the interpretation of the other *locus classicus* for debates over the teaching of original sin, Romans 5:12-21,¹² turns on the law's enabling the articulation of the origin of sinful human being in terms of the phenomena which manifest the human subject's origination through moribund desire. Crucial to understanding of the passage is the apparent parenthesis of verses 13-17, in which Paul uses the role of the law and the radical difference between the two origins to establish limits for the interpretation of the parallel histories of fallen and redeemed human being, histories in which "one trespass led to condemnation for all men" and "one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (5:18). The phenomena of death and sinful behavior are described according to the pattern set forth in the Mosaic law, but not restricted to it. That pattern serves to demonstrate the universality of a generally revealed law which makes it possible to articulate the origin of sinful human being.¹³

This movement from the example of Mosaic law to the general case can be explicated by

¹² For the most prominent example of the use of this passage in theological debate, see Augustine's *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and Infant Baptism*, conveniently available online at <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf105.x.html>>, which as its title suggests treats as the fulcrum for the argument against Pelagius the notion that infants, unless baptized, are already damned from birth: "as nothing else is effected when infants are baptized except that they are incorporated into the church, in other words, that they are united with the body and members of Christ, unless this benefit has been bestowed upon them, they are manifestly in danger of damnation. Damned, however, they could not be if they really had no sin. Now, since their tender age could not possibly have contracted sin in its own life, it remains for us, even if we are as yet unable to understand, at least to believe that infants inherit original sin." (III.7) Augustine's use of the passage "death reigned [. . .] even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam" (Romans 5:14) to corroborate his argument (I.13), despite his infelicitous handling of the immediately preceding clause (I.12), is paradigmatic of treatments of this passage by proponents of Traducian, realistic, or federal theories of original sin.

¹³ This propaedeutic function of law is itself explicitly taught by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, where he says "the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" (3:24), and likewise in many places throughout.

carefully reading the paradox that “sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law” (5:13). A naïve reading might yield an abrupt translation of the term “sin” here from the moral and spiritual discourse of “justification and life” to the law-of-contracts context of forensic discourse, so that some sinful behaviors are simply never accounted for; but the term being recast in this context is “law.”

The Mosaic law, argues Paul, is the paradigmatic and propaedeutic instance, but not the absolutely typical case, of the law which enables the articulation of the moribundity of the desire through which the human subject constitutes itself over against its creaturely being: “death reigned from Adam to Moses” (5:14), even without the Mosaic law’s prescriptions of death for covenant-breakers.¹⁴ The presence of sin was consistently articulated in the reign of death, “even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam” in that the accidents of sinfulness were different: human sins since Adam takes place even in the absence of the particular phenomena (the Garden, the Tree, etc.) which marked the chronological and typical origin of human sinfulness. It is this generally revealed law, implicit in Adam’s sin and implicated in sins “from Adam to Moses,” which is of concern when Paul vindicates justification by faith in Christ from claims that it abrogates the Mosaic law. The Mosaic law does not define absolutely, but explicates, the law implicit in Adam’s sin; therefore it is Adam “who was a type of the one who was to come.” The relationship between the cases of Adam and Christ is not,

¹⁴ Again, the reign of death is not discussed merely as an hypostasized abstraction, but as part of an economy antecedent to the origin of sinful humans: as the author of Hebrews (likely Paul) says, Christ’s cross-work had as its purpose “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (2:14-15).

therefore, one of strict parallelism; nor is the chief significance of Adam's sin its being the chronological and typical origin of human sinfulness.¹⁵ Rather, Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness are alike (and Adam therefore typical of Christ) in their being a chronological and typical origin of human being, and yet unlike (and Adam therefore typical of sinful humanity, and Christ unique) in Christ's righteousness being united with the "free gift" and therefore not merely typical but constitutive of the renewed possibility of human being articulated as creatureliness and represented by the willing subjection of the human self to an act of God.

Insofar then, as Coleridge's treatment of original sin emphasizes the radical difference between the origin of human sinfulness and that of human creatureliness, his language clearly parallels Biblical language concerning the matter. Arguing that "inasmuch as it is *evil*, in God it cannot originate," he echoes James. To the extent that "in *Nature* there is no origin" means that original sin, as sin, is specifically a human contingency and not a natural necessity, Coleridge's language is consistent with that of James as well as that of Paul, whom he cites directly. When he differentiates further between "particular sins" and a "state and constitution of the Will, which is the ground, condition, and common Cause of all Sins," he reflects the radical difference between the behaviors whose character as sin is marked by the law and the underlying active aversion to God which Paul discusses literally and historically in Romans and David represents poetically in the Psalms. Coleridge's claim to have given a Biblical understanding of the doctrine, despite making use of some leeway within the Anglican confession to which he subscribed, may thus far be asserted "with no less propriety than force."

¹⁵ In fact, verses 15-17 list differences between the two, and at verse 20, Paul resumes describing the grace which surpasses the law by overcoming sin.

This claim, however, comes with a challenge built in. Coleridge's characteristic representation of the human subject as originating in an "act of self-duplication" is the inscription of the self on the site of an erasure: an erasure whose deliberate retracing in philosophy Coleridge terms an "absolute and scientific scepticism." This erasure corresponds to the suppression Paul describes in the first chapter of Romans as both personal and global, and also to what Coleridge describes as the "last and total apostasy of the Pagan world, when the faith in the great I AM, the *Creator* was extinguished"; an apostasy in which only "relics remain," among them the acknowledgement of original sin (*Aids* 188). Coleridge's concern for this loss underlies the representation of the Khan and his "decree" in "Kubla Khan," drawing upon his interest in writers such as Purchas and Burnet whose works suggest the possibility of recovering a totality of vision and understanding through works of historiography and speculative reconstruction. Coleridge's engagement with the philosophical and personal implications of founding the possibility of knowing on the erasure of the known underlies his representation of the subject responding to the loss of agency in dreams in "The Pains of Sleep."

In a powerful irony which runs throughout his entire corpus, however, Coleridge's own confession of original sin implicates his philosophical construction of the human subject in the apostasy he seeks to avoid. When he speaks of "scientific scepticism to which the mind voluntarily determines itself for the specific purpose of future certainty," he incidentally invokes the Biblical precedent of the serpent's words to Eve, words involved in the historical and typical origin of human sinfulness: "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). In Coleridge's representation

of the human subject, there is a wide fissure between his concern to escape “total apostasy” through “faith in the great I AM, the *Creator*,” on one hand; and his representation of the act of self-representation both as original sin and as the “repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM,” on the other. This fissure is the aporetic abyss of which the “deep romantic chasm” is the allegorical figure.

The “move in the service of essence”—Apostasis

The challenge for Coleridge’s effort to articulate an orthodox and Biblical confession is contained in the very representation of the human subject by which he defines the terms of his confession. At the end of the description of original sin cited above, Coleridge makes a turn toward his characteristic metaphysics, a move which should ameliorate the tension between his philosophy and his confession. If anything, however, the coda briefly restates the problem: “I have said, ‘the corrupt *nature* of the Will.’ I might add, that the admission of a *nature* into a spiritual essence by its own act is a corruption.” This addition, which seems to be proffered tentatively, nonetheless defines the terms under which Coleridge reads Paul’s treatment of the origin of sinful human being: “if by an act, to which [the Will] had determined itself, it has subjected itself to the determination of nature (in the language of St. Paul, to the law of the flesh), it receives a nature into itself, and so far it becomes a nature” (190). Because Coleridge represents the origination of the human who sins (original sin) in the same terms as he describes the unity of the “I AM” of the origination of the human subject with the “I AM” of the Creator, he obscures the theologically necessary difference between the divine decree of Creation and the constitution of human sinfulness at precisely the point where it should be clearest.

Coleridge's representation of the human subject risks making original sin itself an act of God, an unacceptable entailment which Coleridge is eager to avoid (hence his engagement with Taylor, a critic of the teaching of original sin as natural or inflicted; hence also his insistence that he is discussing sin and not "Calamity" or "evil tendency"). Coleridge's recourse to metaphysics to solve the problem, however, instead repeats it. Where the Biblical language repeatedly treats the radical difference between the origin of human sinfulness and the creation of human being as reflecting significantly contradictory uses of the term "nature," Coleridge conflates the two only to represent "nature" as strictly secondary to "spiritual essence." Thus he fundamentally alters the representation of sinful human being (and uses his own terms inconsistently) when he speaks of it as "the universal Calamity of Human *Nature*" (180), for it is with the reduction of volition under causation that Coleridge is here concerned. Coleridge attributes sin to the human subject's having been determined as a "nature" by its choices in the process of the very self-composing act he describes. On the one hand, Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* finds himself able to identify the confessional character of the descent into the "deep romantic chasm" of "Kubla Khan" or the "unfathomable hell within" of "The Pains of Sleep," and to do so with reference to the development of that confession from Scripture. On the other hand, his theorizing of the subject inscribes original sin itself within his effort to confess an orthodox and Biblical Christianity. Coleridge's reading of his own confession of faith, of the Thirty-Nine Articles, and of Scripture itself is complicit in the very apostasy it describes.

Jeffrey's use of Coleridge's works as an example of the sort of thinking which leads back to "the apostasy which Jesus identified with the Sadducees," already noted above, is especially appropriate at this juncture. In his talk, Jeffrey describes

the counter-epistemic path that has led from Puritanism and some experiential biblicism to the Romantics, from the life authenticated by Scripture (Bunyan, Baxter, Newton) to the idea that Scripture is rather to be authenticated by life (Coleridge, F. D. Maurice, Bishop Spong).

The "slippery slope" Jeffrey describes begins when "authority in the reader becomes individualized," but its terminus lies in "apostasy." Christensen's engagement with Lentricchia similarly turns on the idea of "apostasy" as exemplified in Coleridge's representation of himself in his works, though this time the "apostasy" is political.

Christensen, of course, is not so troubled by the idea of apostasy as Jeffrey, or Coleridge himself, would be. However, in answering the charge in the terms of radical political discourse as conducted among the New Left and the Yale School, Christensen does valuable service to readers of Coleridge's philosophy and hermeneutics by emphasizing Coleridge's development of a notion of "Apostasis" as necessary to human understanding. As Christensen says, "A metaphysics of apostasy is explicitly adumbrated by Coleridge [. . .] . Coleridge introduced the technical term 'apostasis' as part of his endeavor to employ Friedrich Schelling's model of dynamic polarity purged of its pantheistic implications" (772-3). Acknowledging that the current state of human understanding can only be accounted for by a Fall is common enough in both dogmatic and philosophical theology; even the idea of a *felix culpa*, while perplexing in its providential logic, has ample precedent. The idea of a metaphysically necessary falling-away from God, however, or the conflation of the ontological distinction between the Creator and his human creatures with the moral distinction between holy and sinful

beings, is certain to cause theological problems. For Coleridge, specifically, the problem is obvious; for this is another phase of the same appropriation of Schelling which Davis identifies with the philosophical and spiritual problems posed by “The Pains of Sleep.”

Coleridge does seem to choose this thorny path to understanding, however.

Christensen quotes Coleridge’s notes:

[There] must be the way downwards and the way upwards—but this is because there are two Spheres. . . . the Plenitude and nature—the way downwards commencing with the Fall from God, Apostasy—the path of transit with the Chaos and the *descent* of the Spirit—the way upwards with the genesis of Light. (773)

While Christensen does press Coleridge’s views heavily in one direction for polemical purposes, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Coleridge represents “Apostasy” as a metaphysical necessity for the display of God’s goodness. Such a representation of Creation “commencing with the Fall” casts “the *descent* of the Spirit” in a light which must be theological controversial, at least. In such terms, the Creator seems equally active in the Spirit’s hovering over the primeval waters of Creation and in the origination of humans as sinful. Christensen argues that on such a view “The first move, apostasy is also the essential move—a move in the service of essence: for only the standing off permits the manifestation of the godhead” (773). He warrants this conclusion from

Coleridge’s marginal notes on Böhme:

For in God the Prothesis is not manifested for itself, but only in the Fountain which he is from all eternity because he never can subsist but with the Light in the bosom of the Fountain, whence proceeds the Spirit. But in the Creation as conditioned by the Fall of, the Prothesis is manifested as the Hardness, the Austerity, the stone indeed of the foundation, but likewise the Stone of offence. (773-4)

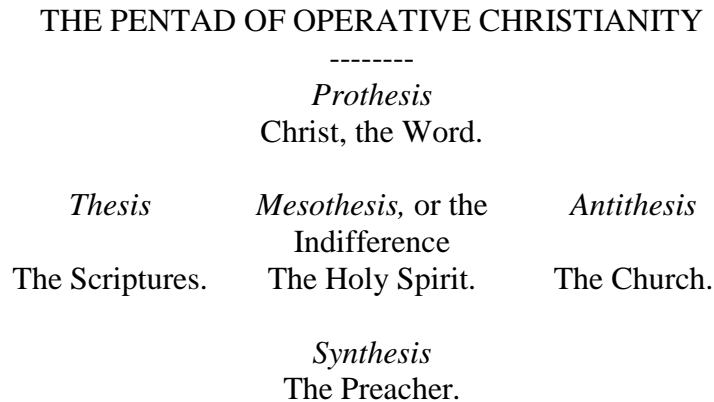
The theanthropic subject Christ, the “Prothesis,” is thus the ultimate example of the unity of the human subject with the “I AM” which it repeats in its self-representing act.¹⁶

When “the way downwards” is taken to be a necessary antecedent of both Creation and the standing forth of Christ, however, it becomes impossible to describe an act of God in relation to any human being without simultaneously charging God with complicity in an evil more original even than original sin in the human being.

This perplexing need for “the way downwards” in both Creation and Fall is drawn still more plainly by the depiction of God’s relation to humanity Coleridge alludes to when he uses such terms as “Prothesis.” The spatial and structural representation of the origination of the subject that Coleridge uses here is drawn from a recurrent spatial metaphor in Coleridge’s notes and works. Most prominently, the “Pentad of Operative Christianity” prefaces Henry Nelson Coleridge’s edition of his uncle’s *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, as it figures prominently in the discussion of the role of Scripture in Christian confession, and the nature of Scripture as text, which that work carries forward. The Pentad is found repeatedly throughout Coleridge’s works, appearing in the form published with *Confessions* also in his notes on Richard Baxter, John Donne, and Irving’s *Ben Ezra*. This recurrence suggests the persistence of Coleridge’s efforts to draw his Biblical and philosophical hermeneutics into correspondence. The Pentad is developed at length in a note in the *Aids to Reflection* which advocates the use of “the terms *objective*, and *subjective* [. . .] to the exclusion of the false antithesis between *real* and *ideal*” in the context of a discussion of the meaning of the name “God” in natural

¹⁶ The appearance in this note of the “Fountain” and the “Light” and the metaphor of building, and even “the Stone of offence,” suggest once again Coleridge’s tenacious mining of the same imagery that yielded “Kubla Khan.”

language (117). In the *Aids* it has a strictly metaphysical purpose, and no peculiarly theological development, but it is the form given in *Confessions* which represents the most common and mature deployment of the Pentad:



"This is God's Hand in the World" (*Confessions* 288)

Christensen exploits the political implications of this metaphysical re-explaining of apostasy as the necessary ground for reflection,¹⁷ but Coleridge's primary concern in the note on Böhme is the space needed for the "Prothesis," or God's eternal Word (see diagram) to stand forth from the "Fountain," the self-generating source of God's being. Only where there is such a space can it be manifested as such by the "Hardness" of the Prothesis, the "stone indeed of the foundation."

Though Coleridge alludes to Christ, in this context the "Hardness, [. . .] the stone indeed of the foundation" more strongly resembles the Greek temple in Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art." The temple by its presence serves to manifest its ground and cause all things around it "to appear as what they are" (41). The Prothesis is enabled to be manifest as what it is because there exists a space, a ground, which the Prothesis, in

¹⁷contra Hazlitt's charge that Coleridge is "*Once an Apostate and always an Apostate*" (772), and thus by analogy as an initial move contra Lentricchia.

the act of manifesting itself, makes manifest. Creation having fallen off from God requires the standing-forth of the Eternal Word in order to be grounded as creation; thus, in a similar manner to Heidegger's description of the temple, "Towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force" (43). As long as these terms are considered only as ciphers to be used for philosophical system-building, Coleridge may seem to have successfully integrated his theorizing of the human subject with Christ's unity with both the human repetition and the divine origin of the "I AM" of the self-representing self; but the systematic consequences of such a set of rhetorical moves are nearly impossible to keep within their intended limits.

As Christensen says, "[Coleridge's] apostasy is supposedly redeemed when referred to the life of [his social and political] life, that 'I am,' which is the finite repetition of 'the All-might, which God's Will is, and which he knoweth within himself as the Abyss of his Being—the eternal *Act* of self-constitution'" (774). By attending to the inarticulate core from which understanding and historically determined being develop by a fall from unity into distance, the Coleridgean subject's faith should found the subject's being. In that very act, however, the subject takes on a being necessarily conditioned by apostasy, by that origination which is also original sin; the effort and its failure recapitulate the problem represented in "The Pains of Sleep."

In this respect, while Coleridge maintains some approximation of Christian orthodoxy, he does so through a "sublimation" that "invites the intervention of the deconstructionist" (774). Christensen briefly sketches in the moves that would be used in such an attempt "to problematize the authority of the metaphysical construct" underlying Coleridge's attempt to incorporate apostasy itself in a broad affirmation of faith:

They would consist of a criticism of the enabling distinction between an absolute stasis and a consequent but completely distinct polarity, a disenfranchisement of the priority given to the former over the latter, and a challenge to the unity of the one as well as the bivalence of the other. There would follow an exploitation of the dependence of the system on a difference (that between stasis and apostasis) which is not a polarity, a probing of the infelicitous reliance of the absolute on the fall for its very manifestation. (774)

The “infelicitous reliance” Christensen mentions is precisely the fissure in Coleridge’s writings, the stutter-step in his movement toward orthodox Christian confession. In Coleridge’s thought “absolute stasis” is the eternal form of God; the “consequent but distinct polarity” follows equally by the act of Creation and the fact of Apostasis, manifesting the Prothesis; and “the infelicitous reliance of the absolute on the fall” proves to be a fair restatement of Coleridge’s peculiar version of the *felix culpa*. The Prothesis, or Eternal Word, represents God’s fundamental impulse to represent Himself among others, as well as the particular representation thus effected—what Coleridge calls “the unity, that is, the identity or co-inherence, of Subjective and Objective” (*Confessions* 335) in the “Revealed Religion” of the Christian confession of Christ’s work. Given the contingency of the believer’s faith on God’s fidelity, the “reliance” of the Incarnate Christ and (as the Thesis and Antithesis which, by the Spirit’s actuation, manifest the Prothesis) the Scriptures and the Church upon Apostasy for their “very manifestation” becomes very “infelicitous” indeed. This “infelicitous reliance” also opens the question whether, insofar as the “the precise import of the Scriptural *doctrine* of Original Sin” and its remedy are understood in these terms, it is possible to affirm, as Coleridge does, that this confession of a Biblically orthodox Christianity has the unique “remedy and [. . .] solution” for this universal moral ill of humanity. As Coleridge’s discussion of the universal teaching or admission of original sin anticipates, however, such a question is

not of interest only among Christians, or within the Western tradition. Taking the measure of Coleridge's work, reaching East and West for other examples which converge with his own multiplied representations, shows that his attempt to consolidate his Christian confession with his philosophical anthropology leads him at once to acknowledge his dependence on Scripture in the most traditional terms and to explain that dependence in terms which have more in common with the Buddhism he repudiates than the Christianity he embraces.

CHAPTER FOUR

Being, Nothing, and the Text of Scripture

Absolute selfhood opens up as nonobjectifiable nothingness in the conversion that takes place within personality. Through that conversion every bodily, mental, and spiritual activity that belongs to person displays itself as a play of shadows moving across the stage of nothingness. [. . .] It is the field commonly seen as “outermost” by the personal self and referred to as the external world actually present in the here and now, ever changing. [. . .] The “outer world” emerges here as a self-realization of nonobjectifiable nothingness, or, rather, makes itself present such as it is, in oneness with nothingness.

The field of true human existence opens up beyond the outer and the inner, at a point where the “shadowy man” is in oneness with absolute selfhood. We have here an absolute self-identity. Thinking, feeling, and action are, on every occasion, entirely illusory appearances with nothing behind them, the shadowy heart and mind of the shadowy man.

Nishitani 73

It should, perhaps, be surprising that Zen practitioner and philosopher Keiji Nishitani, a chief representative of what has come to be called the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy,¹ so neatly retraces the quintessentially modern and Western

¹ In the Translator’s Introduction to *Religion and Nothingness*, Jan Van Bragt says that “Keiji Nishitani is universally recognized as the present ‘dean’ of the Kyoto School and standard-bearer of the tradition that began with his teacher and master, [Kitaro] Nishida. [. . . Since his retirement in 1963] Kyoto has remained the center of his apparently unflagging activities as a professor of philosophy and religion at Ōtani University, and as president of the Eastern Buddhist Society (founded by D. T. Suzuki), of the International Institute for Japan Studies (at the Christian Kanseigakuin University in Nishinomiya), and of the Conference on Religion in Modern Society (CORMOS).” (xxxiv) Nishitani and Van Bragt cite as Nishitani’s formative influences Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Emerson, Carlyle, the Bible, St. Francis of Assisi, Japanese novelist Sōseki Natsume, Buddhist commentators Hakuin and Takuan, Heidegger, and Meister Eckhart—and of course “Schelling, whose work *The Essence of Human Freedom* he later translated into Japanese” (xxxiv-v). Emerson and Carlyle are, of course, prominent Coleridgeans (more and less critical, respectively); and Nietzsche and Heidegger are principal

representation of the human subject as found in Coleridge's corpus and the related interventions of Nietzsche and Artaud, along with the comments of Heidegger, de Man, and Derrida. Nishitani's discussion of the "play of shadows" by which humans perceive as phenomenal the "bodily, mental, and spiritual activity" which originates in the human subject corresponds closely to Coleridge's discussion of origination. Going beyond Nietzsche's statement about art, Nishitani describes all "Thinking, feeling, and action" as "illusory" insofar as they are themselves phenomena with regard to the "shadowy man." This "shadowy man" is another name for the self as absolute subject, prior to what Coleridge calls the "act of self-duplication" which founds the conscious being of the human subject. Nishitani describes a conscious retracing of this origination as the "conversion" which introduces "absolute selfhood" once again into the consciousness. Like Artaud, and with reference to Plato as well as Nietzsche, Nishitani's practice is self-consciously theatrical, taking as the goal of Buddhist practice and philosophy the freedom of the human subject from prior representations. This convergence of thought seems to be of just the sort predicted in Coleridge's discussion of the universal philosophical and religious affirmation (even underlying apparent denial) of original sin in *Aids to Reflection*. Nishitani's remark therefore serves as a further example of the telescoping of global and social concerns at work in Coleridge's thought. Perhaps more importantly, it also serves as a step in examining to what extent Coleridge's representation of the human subject and his discussion of original sin may actually reach beyond a parochially Christian or Western discourse.

Continental contributors to the discourse of origins into which Coleridge and Nishitani write themselves, a century and a half apart.

The correspondence of Nishitani's text with Coleridge's corpus is less surprising than it might be, as Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* throughout represents his Zen practice in terms intelligible to the Western tradition, with special attention to developments in Continental philosophy. There is in fact a steadily growing (though very uneven) interaction of Western philosophy with Buddhism throughout the past two centuries. Nietzsche's *Antichrist* at one point addresses the relationship of Buddhism to Christianity under the very late Nietzsche's critical reading of both religions. Significantly, Nietzsche compares the two in terms of the relationship between representation of the subject and the theology of sin: "Buddhism is the only really *positive* religion to be found in history, even in its epistemology (which is strict phenomenalism)—it no longer speaks of the 'struggle with *sin*' but fully recognising the true nature of reality it speaks of the 'struggle with *pain*'" (17). Nietzsche (whose access to Buddhist works would have been extremely limited, likely to poor translations of derivative Sanskrit texts, and whose understanding of Eastern thought principally comes through Schopenhauer) does not have a particularly close understanding of Buddhism, but he does identify the difference in emphasis between Western philosophy and Buddhism reasonably well.²

The case of Buddhism also occasions a considerable refinement in Coleridge's analysis of the universality of original sin as a religious doctrine or philosophical exigency. "In that most strange *phænomēnon*, the religious atheism of the Buddhists," he says in *Aids to Reflection*,

² For an extensive attempt to correlate themes in Nietzsche's writings with significant Buddhist teachings, see Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities*, New York: Oxford U P, 1997.

with whom God is only universal matter considered abstractedly from all particular forms—the Fact [of original sin] is placed among the delusions natural to man, which, together with other superstitions grounded on a supposed *essential* difference between right and wrong, *the sage* is to decompose and precipitate from the *menstruum* of *his* more refined apprehensions! Thus in denying the Fact, they virtually acknowledge it. (188-9)

Coleridge's understanding of Buddhism is very imprecise. What he grasps, along with Nietzsche, is that Buddhism completes what Coleridge's "rhetorical self-containment" prevents in his representation of the human subject. This added perspective, in fact, helps to clarify the stakes in what Christensen calls "the infelicitous reliance of the absolute on the fall for its very manifestation," and how Coleridge's abridgement of the difference between creatureliness and fallenness complicates his strivings toward orthodoxy.

"Dependent Origination" and the Subject

The Zen-derived philosophy described by Nishitani, or the somewhat different Amida Buddhism (also called Jodo Shinshu) of Takeuchi Yoshinori, does begin with the insight that the desire through which the human self originates is moribund—the same insight encoded ambivalently in "Kubla Khan," more clearly and personally in "The Pains of Sleep," and confessed openly in Coleridge's effort to articulate a Biblical theology of original sin. Takeuchi criticizes "neo-Kantianism—along with the liberal theology based on it" for being "fettered to the immanentism of human reason and hence [. . .] only impeding our view of that abyss of death and sin and nihility that opens up under our very feet as the fate of being human" (72-3). In Takeuchi's writing, the "turn" toward what Derrida calls the "invisible interior" or Nishitani the "shadowy man" is represented as the subject's becoming conscious of "dependent origination." Takeuchi suggests that this conversion is often described in the "fundamental experience of artists

and poets,” who in their self-conscious acts of representation may “experience an immediate embodiment of the dynamism of world and body, other, and life prior to the distinction of subject and object” (74). Takeuchi describes “dependent origination” as follows:

the subject that, seen from the world, is part of the world, constructs its own being-in-the-world co-dependently and correlatively with the world, and yet does so as its own activity. [. . .] We may liken it to dreaming: when we dream, we live in correlatedness with the world of the dream and, through the phenomenal identity of dreamer and dream, keep the dream alive; but as soon as we become aware of this correlatedness, we have already awoken. (80-1)

Takeuchi extends this similitude of “dreaming,” as though to accommodate reading with Coleridge, when discussing the consequences of a developed consciousness of “dependent origination”: “at the moment one awakens, the various sufferings that troubled the world of sleep are awakened to in the realization, ‘it *was* only a dream; I *was* sleeping’” (91). Takeuchi writes as though to suggest a Buddhist solution to the problem depicted in “The Pains of Sleep,” proposing that the conditions for the construction of world and self “are only grasped in their primary sense when their essential determination is sought in terms of their extinction, when they are seen as past essences, as things that *were*.”

Coleridge’s expectation (which he shares with the Western tradition in metaphysics) is that the erasure he calls “scientific scepticism” has for its goal “certainty”—just as Derrida suggests when describing the metaphysical work as that “break with the domain of empirical history [. . .] whose aim is reconciliation with the hidden essence of the empirical.” Takeuchi, on the other hand, sets forth a Buddhist practice whose retracing of the constitution of the self has in view, not a recovery of

antecedent unity, but its more complete erasure; it seeks to obliterate the trace, also, by counting the subject, self, spirit, sin, all among the phenomena of causation. The subject having awakened to the understanding that something—the subject, the self, Coleridge’s “I AM” both personally and globally, as self or as deity—has originated through moribund desire, the practice of disassociation from such desire should cause, not a return to that self, but a ceasing from those very perturbations of spirit which Coleridge envisioned in the prose introduction to “Kubla Khan” as “images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast” (43). Where Coleridge exclaims “but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter!” over his apparent incapacity to remember the historical, religious, and poetic vision which the dream-vision represents, and is tormented by the memory of dreams and his apparent incapacity to regain his self-composure in “The Pains of Sleep,” Takeuchi’s Buddhism attempts to describe everything except the present phenomenon not only as originating (conceived) within the human subject but as therefore essentially illusory, to be awakened from and not to.

The Convergence: Coleridge, Artaud, Mishima

From Coleridge’s representation of the human subject, in view of the unhappy coincidence of original sin (the origin of the fallen human) with origination through repetition of the “I AM” (the unity of human and divine creativity), two paths forward seem to become one: the Western path of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida as exemplified by Artaud converges with the Eastern path as marked by Buddhism, whose singular distance from the Western metaphysical tradition has yet to be rendered fully intelligible. Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, a product of the Shinto-Buddhist culture of Imperial Japan whose postwar writings were among the most read in the West, serves as

a convenient reference point. Like Coleridge, Nietzsche, and Artaud, Mishima's works place the self-representing work of the human subject in the foreground. In *Sun & Steel*, Mishima seems to echo Artaud's anxiety over his body's being stolen by the priority of text:

Interestingly enough, my stubborn refusal to perceive my body was itself due to a beautiful misconception in my idea of what the body was. I did not know that a man's body never shows itself as "existence." But as I saw things, it ought to have made itself apparent, clearly and unequivocally, as existence. It naturally followed that when it did show itself unmistakably as a terrifying paradox of existence—as a form of existence that rejected existence—I was as panic-stricken as though I had come across some monster, and loathed it accordingly. It never occurred to me that other men—all men without exception—were the same.

[. . .] Never dreaming that the body existing in a form that rejected existence was universal in the male, I set about constructing my ideal hypothetical physical existence by investing it with all the opposite characteristics. And since my own, abnormal bodily existence was doubtless a product of the intellectual corrosion of words, the ideal body—the ideal existence—must, I told myself, be absolutely free from any interference by words. (Mishima 11)

The "ideal body" in this passage corresponds to both Artaud's "body without organs" and the "absolute subject" in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. It represents the hoped-for unity prior to the discursive formation of the self, the "act of self-duplication" which in Coleridge's work is both creation and fall. The effort to construe the human subject in this way, in Mishima as in Coleridge, leads to "a terrifying paradox of existence" which leaves him "panic-stricken" in the face of a universal failing: "other men—all men without exception—were the same." Mishima's response to this, as revealed in his own political and personal preoccupations, has the Buddhist pattern set out by Takeuchi. As Shu Kuge has helpfully summarized,

The "body" in Mishima's thought is a metonymy for "experience" that is not yet translated into discursive language. Mishima once clamored: Why don't people realize the importance of the depth of the surface? The

surface is the depth; in other words, the surface is not a representation or reflection of what is hidden beneath. The surface is everything. (Kuge 66)³

For Mishima, the “terrifying paradox” of “the body existing in a form that rejected existence” (the very crux of Nietzsche’s assault on Christianity, and his critique of Buddhism, in *The Antichrist*) is ultimately resolved, beyond the naïveté of simple oppositions, by an insistence on the surface—on the very skin itself—as the phenomenal being, here, now, than which nothing else can be meaningfully represented. This ultimately meant, for Mishima, that only the act of ritual suicide by cutting into the skin with a sharp blade, only at the peak of physical perfection, and only at the historical moment when he (vainly) hoped his public political act would lead to revolution, could be meaningful.

The example of Mishima thus presses the urgency of the problems which plague Coleridge’s representation of the human subject. In collocating “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep,” and in classifying each as a “psychological curiosity,” Coleridge broaches the subject of madness and the more serious problem of damnation. The moral and spiritual, as well as the epistemological, dimensions of his theorizing of the human subject are at stake. The discourse of Western metaphysics from Coleridge’s time forward is increasingly studded with what Derrida calls a “tradition of mad poets” such as Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Artaud; and what is perhaps more significant (for, as Derrida says, “Artaud is not the son of Nietzsche. And even less so of Hölderlin.”) is the exemplary significance which the interrogators of that discourse have assigned to these works. Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger, de Man, and Derrida, to name but a few, have

³ The embedded quotation is printed thus in the original, likely due to a difference in Asian and American citation habits.

extensive recourse to these “mad poets,” whose primary distinction is the radical pressure they bring to bear on the language of metaphysics in their efforts to represent the “terrifying paradox” that Coleridge has also found.

For Coleridge, however, *seppuku* is not an option; neither is the extremity of Artaud, for whom “God is [. . .] a sin against the divine” and “the essence of guilt is scato-theological” (Derrida “La parole” 185). Coleridge’s representation of the origination of the human subject through repetition of the “I AM” of God’s creation creates a challenge for him, and for his readers, precisely because it does clash with his representation of the origination of the human subject as sinful through moribund desire. That is, whether in the context of the post-Christian West or of Shinto-Buddhist Japan, it is possible to completely conflate the subject’s creaturely being with the subject’s moribundity. At one extreme of the modern Western tradition, one may join Artaud in rejecting the repetition intrinsic to the discursive formation of the self, especially as that repetition comes to be the basis for knowledge of God and to be associated with the moribundity of human desire. On the other hand, one may carefully disregard, as Mishima does, “what is hidden beneath,” and attempt to signify only by and concerning the surface, the flesh of human being. The two seem to meet, however, in the fulfillment of the horrible expectations described in “The Pains of Sleep.” Coleridge, who makes an intellectual effort to reconcile himself to a Biblically orthodox confession of Christianity, continues to represent within his works the consequences of conflating the Creator/creature difference with the creature/fallen difference, confusing the origination of the human being as creature with the origination of the fallen human self.

Dependence on Scripture in the Late Coleridge

“A Nightly Prayer,” composed just three years before Coleridge’s death, well attests to his increasingly articulate and orthodox confession of Christianity. It addresses all three members of the Trinity, espouses an orthodox Christology, treats the Spirit as a person, confesses both original and actual sin, and recognizes God’s self-revelation “in thy holy word as a God who answers prayer” (360-2). It also redefines the “humble trust” that “The Pains of Sleep” associates with inarticulate “reverential resignation.” The text of the prayer, described as “my bounden nightly sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving,” is now to be offered “in humble trust, that the fragrance of my Saviour’s righteousness may remove from it the taint of my mortal corruption.” The importance of the act of self-representation has significantly faded in favor of a “reverential resignation” to Christ’s representation of the believer. Coleridge directly addresses the concerns of “The Pains of Sleep” when he prays specifically to be spared those same symptoms: “O shield me this night from the assaults of disease, grant me refreshment of sleep unvexed by evil and distempered dreams.” “A Nightly Prayer” is thus the bookend and response to “The Pains of Sleep,” the prophylactic articulation of what the younger Coleridge first “prayed aloud” in terror.

The fissure in Coleridge’s representation of the human subject, though, is still present in “A Nightly Prayer,” along with that fissure’s implications for Coleridge’s conception of that God whose “I AM” the self repeats, and whose revelation in Scripture is the substance of Coleridge’s hope that original sin can be clearly stated and remedied. The petition which addresses the problem of “The Pains of Sleep” is only meaningful as it attempts to bridge that gap, as Coleridge asks for the help of “thou who hast revealed

thyself in thy holy word as a God that hearest prayer.” The prayer, dependent on the character of God as willing to hear (and respond), is first dependent on a conclusion drawn from the text, a conclusion which Coleridge must take as given in order to pray. Coleridge’s prayer for a remedy to the problems of self-representation, of the human subject’s discursive formation, depends on the status of the text of Scripture itself as representative of both God and the reader, among others.

When Coleridge writes about his Christian confession, then, the reading and writing of Scripture take on special importance. As already noted, it is with “the Scriptural *doctrine* of Original Sin” that Coleridge concerns himself in the passage defining that teaching. At the very beginning of the “Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion,” Coleridge quotes Henry More to the effect that ministers must “make good every sentence of the Bible to a rational inquirer” (*Aids* 96). While this admits of an appropriate degree of hermeneutical flexibility, it strongly suggests the importance of Scripture in Christian confession. Aphorism IV in this section likewise features More inveighing against those (chiefly Quakers) who suggest that a “*Light within*” can “support the truth of Christianity” when they have allowed themselves to “judge concerning the authenticity and uncorruptedness of the Gospels, and the other sacred Scriptures” (98). This is in keeping with the tradition whereby the churches are held to acknowledge, not to ratify or construct, the canon of Scripture.⁴

⁴ As one twentieth-century confessional standard puts it, “The Church’s part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own.” The *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* may conveniently be found at <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>>. The Westminster Confession has “The authority of the Holy Scripture [. . .] depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; [. . .] therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (I.iv). The Thirty-Nine

Despite his own idealist philosophy, and in light of More's concern about those who make a pastiche of Scripture through idiosyncratic textual strategies, Coleridge shows considerable concern for the Biblical text as a text: he asks whether, given that "the *Letter* without the Spirit killeth," one must conclude that "the Spirit is to kill the Letter?" (101) Coleridge goes so far as to propose an exegetical rule of thumb, arguing that "where [. . .] the plain sense of the Scriptures is left undisturbed," the "Believer" at whatever risk of error is still better off than "those who receive neither the Letter nor the Spirit, turning the one into metaphor, and oriental hyperbole, in order to explain away the other into the influence of motives suggested by their own understandings, and realized by their own strength." In a later passage in *Aids*, discussing belief in the Trinity, Coleridge objects vehemently to the idea of

a Christian, who accepts the Scriptures as the Word of God, yet refuses his assent to the plainest declarations of these Scriptures, and explains away the most express texts into metaphor and hyperbole, *because* the literal and obvious interpretation is (according to *his* notions) absurd and contrary to reason (122).

Coleridge's deployment of a traditional adherence to the historical sense of the language of Scripture here proceeds a step beyond his interaction with More's rebukes to Quakers and other radically individualistic or irrationalist readers. Coleridge goes so far as to suggest that even to reject "the literal and obvious interpretation" because it appears irrational from a particular point of view would be at odds with Christian confession. Characteristically, what Coleridge here emphasizes is the unity and integrity of the Scriptures as a whole. The constructive tension, however, arises from his insistence that reading of Scripture has confessional ends which cannot be wholly comprehended within

Articles (in Article 6) asserts the same canon by taking as "Holy Scripture" the texts "whose authority was never in any doubt in the Church."

either rational or irrational, literal or spiritual, representations of the text as part of the individual reader's self-representing acts. It is in view of this understanding of the Bible's role in Christian confession that Coleridge appears to depend upon the self-revelation of God in Scripture during "A Nightly Prayer" as proof against the moral and spiritual trauma depicted in "The Pains of Sleep," despite the considerable inconsistency of this confessional dependence with his theorizing of the human subject.

Scripture and the Representation of the Self in Conflict

The role of Scripture in Coleridge's movement toward an orthodox confession of Christianity coexists uneasily with his characteristic representation of the self. His oscillation between these two commitments continually produces results like those most clearly seen in his discussion of Original Sin, where Coleridge's differentiating "a spiritual essence" from "a *nature*" marks the fissure in the groundwork Coleridge seeks to lay. Specifically, despite and even within his efforts to avoid such a result, Coleridge's works perpetuate the conflation of the subject with the created human being, a conflation common in the history of Western philosophy. Because of this tacit confusion of origins with original sin, Coleridge's works are betrayed into a preoccupation with distinguishing a perfectible, recoverable "hidden essence" from the phenomenal being of the body in the world of the continuity of causes, the "domain of the empirical."

Just before the strong language concerning Scripture cited above, for example, Coleridge refers to the "living (that is, self-subsisting) soul" of the human creature as "*the man in the man*" (4). Coleridge thus seeks to establish a more inward and "self-subsisting" level of human being from which his representation of the subject may be more confidently articulated and more readily harmonized with his Christian confession.

The opening of another section, titled “Elements of Religious Philosophy, Preliminary to the Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion” is similar:

If there be aught *Spiritual* in Man, the Will must be such.
If there be a Will, there must be a Spirituality in Man.
I suppose both positions granted. (88)

Coleridge maintains his fusion of philosophical and theological understanding of the human subject by asserting the identity of the subject of both in the active and self-representing “Will” or “Spirituality.” Coleridge proceeds to describe the “assertions” on which “The *Christian* [. . .] grounds *his* philosophy” as “the Reality of the LAW OF CONSCIENCE; the existence of a RESPONSIBLE WILL [. . .] and lastly, the existence of EVIL—of Evil essentially such, not by accident [. . .] nor from any cause, out of itself” (91). Coleridge’s “LAW OF CONSCIENCE” and his understanding of “Evil essentially such” are consonant with the Pauline account of law and original sin, respectively, as the phenomenal being and the “existence” (or “having an *Origin*”) of sin in the human subject. The “RESPONSIBLE WILL” is an inference from perceived moral reality, conceived to be such under the law (whether in public prescriptions or in the antecedent sense of such prescriptions called “conscience”) which enables the articulation of a judgment about the origination through moribund human desire of the human who commits bad acts.

At the same time, this “WILL” is the self-constructive act which Coleridge’s theory of the human subject’s origination unites with the “I AM” of the Creator. Coleridge only partially succeeds in re-inscribing under the figure of “repetition” the difference between the “I AM” of the Creator and the “let there be” by which the Creator

constitutes creatures as such.⁵ In light of his discussion of original sin as a fall into natural causation all too easily paralleled to the *Apostasis* needed for the Word to stand forth in Creation, Coleridge's philosophical anthropology can fairly be seen as grounded upon a redefinition of the Creator/creature difference as a Creator/creator difference, or "repetition." This redefinition responds to the same limits in the representation of the human creature as an autonomous subject as those which concerned Artaud; as seen in Coleridge's development of the "I AM" in *Biographia Literaria*, discussed above, the inference to the subject's "I AM" as a "repetition" of the Creator's "I AM" is warranted by the unending sequence of representative acts which constitute the subject's conscious experience. God's "I AM" in turn must be understood as exactly analogous to this repeatable self-representation, that is, as relating to the being of God in the way that the conceptualized human subject relates to the inscrutable antecedent unity. Such a representation of Creator and creator, however, partakes of the "infelicitous reliance" Christensen notes in Coleridge's philosophy: "the infelicitous reliance of the absolute on the fall for its very manifestation."

Anthony John Harding locates the nexus of this conflict in the course of his reading of "Kubla Khan" when he says that

the matter goes deeper than the inability of a notoriously self-doubting poet [. . .] to prolong or preserve a particular moment of vision. The understanding of supernatural inspiration within Judaeo-Christian tradition provides the essential elements of Coleridge's specific crisis (16).

Harding's word "essential" is well chosen. Coleridge's construction of the human "understanding" in general becomes a "specific crisis" for him in the manner described

⁵ This "let there be" is, of course, quite different from the "letting be" of which Heidegger is prone to speak.

by the juxtaposition of “Kubla Khan” with “The Pains of Sleep.” It is, even then, a problem not only of the discursive relation of the author and the subject in the poem, or in the text generally, but of the subject as an originary construction of the self: “My spirit I” as the “mystery of production and life” which “I” must “to Love compose.” Morally and existentially, the speaker in “The Pains of Sleep” finds reason to fear that such self-composure cannot survive exposure to bad dreams. As a matter of philosophical argument, it relies upon but also invalidates the Cartesian strategy for establishing the *cogito* by banishing all phenomenal difference between waking and dreaming perception. As a spiritual understanding of life, an attempt to read the moral allegory of phenomena, its erasure of the subject-object boundary makes determinations of moral agency impossible or inscrutable. As a personal response to trouble, it puts forth mystifying abstractions in place of the loving personal relations to which the speaker instinctively turns in order to render the moral and spiritual landscape intelligible once again.

In response to these problems, Coleridge’s efforts to represent himself in terms of an orthodox, Biblical confession of Christianity focus on “the precise import of the Scriptural *doctrine* of Original Sin.” In its turn, “A Nightly Prayer” results from this effort and answers directly to the “I prayed aloud” of “The Pains of Sleep,” but can do so only on the basis of the Biblical attestation of “a God who hearest prayer.” Though in a slightly different sense than the one Harding develops, Coleridge’s “understanding of supernatural inspiration” is indeed the crux of “Coleridge’s specific crisis.” By failing to adequately account for the significance of “The Pains of Sleep” as a representation of the fatal flaw of Coleridge’s representation of the human subject, Harding like most Coleridge critics misses just how thoroughly Coleridge has engaged this crisis as both a

philosopher and a Biblical thinker. Harding is quite right, however, to set out to restore *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, which he insists on calling by its manuscript title “Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Scriptures,” to the place in Coleridge’s corpus that it occupied for Coleridge’s closest contemporaries and successors.

As a late, posthumously published text, *Confessions* provides significant perspective on Coleridge’s mature thought. In the first published edition, Henry Nelson Coleridge calls it “a key to most of the Biblical criticism scattered throughout the Author’s own writings” (286). It also, as an explicit work of Christian confession, provides a late analogue to the confessionalism of the “psychological curiosity” in “Kubla Khan,” the prose introduction, and “The Pains of Sleep.” Shaffer argues that “Coleridge had intended to publish [*Confessions*] as the preface to *Aids to Reflection*, but did not do so” (“Ideologies”), and suggests that the displacement of *Confessions* serves to market Coleridge as a “conservative defender of the Church.” Shaffer’s observations about the displacement of *Confessions* dovetail with Christensen’s representation of Coleridge as always “already falling away from every principled commitment” as an essential part of his program; both fit neatly with Noble’s description of Coleridge’s “rhetorical self-containment.” What this analysis seems to assume, of course, is that Coleridge’s natural or intended movement is away from any Biblical orthodoxy in the direction of a post-Christian philosophical and poetical synthesis of radical subjectivism and Arnoldian religiosity of culture (perhaps like that of Rudolf Bultmann).

The evidence of Coleridge’s double movement, however, cuts both ways: for Coleridge’s Christian confession of original sin premises that he is always already falling away from the creature’s most fundamental commitment, that apostasy is actual even

before it is realized in behavior. Such a confession, even when expressed in terms of a theory of the subject which is itself complicit with original sin, commits Coleridge to a representation of the human subject intrinsically at odds with that which underlies his philosophical and poetic projects. It is therefore possible that the late Coleridge has reversed the telescope on Shaffer and Noble, and perhaps Christensen; that Coleridge's approach to orthodoxy is "falling away" from apostasy itself. *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, which directly treats Coleridge's view of Scripture by repeating his representation of the subject, focuses the reader's attention on just this possibility.

Goethe's "Fair Saint" in Coleridge's Confession

The representation of the subject in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* has strong parallels to the prose introduction to "Kubla Khan" even in the first two sentences (291). Coleridge weaves together the literary but literal pretext of having just finished reading "*The Confessions of a fair Saint* in Mr. Carlyle's recent translation of the *Wilhelm Meister*" with the probably fictive pretext of having read "the concluding sentences of your Letter" to create an "immediate occasion" for *Confessions*. Just as the similar mentions of Purchas, the "person from Porlock," and the poetic fragment about the "youth" can significantly inform readings of "Kubla Khan" and "The Pains of Sleep," so the early mention of Goethe's "Confessions of a Fair Saint" holds great potential significance for critical readings of *Confessions*.

The representations of the human subject within Goethe's text and those in Coleridge's works, especially as regards the ostensible authors of each, are especially closely related. The "fair Saint" or, as Coleridge suggests, "Beautiful Soul," is the author of a fictional autobiography embedded in Chapter VI of *Wilhelm Meister's*

Apprenticeship. Near the end of the chapter, as the narrative time of the account approaches the time of writing, the “fair Saint” claims that her “health was feeble,” but that she maintained “tolerable equilibrium” despite feeling that “the weakness of my body so obstructs me” (416). In the prose introduction to “Kubla Khan,” the “profound sleep” is attributed to “an anodyne” taken “in consequence of a slight indisposition” (43). “The Pains of Sleep” is ostensibly concerned with health problems; and “A Nightly Prayer” mentions not only the terrors described in “The Pains of Sleep” but the speaker’s gratitude for “alleviation of my bodily sufferings and languors” (361). Similarly, in *Confessions* the writer’s “severe indisposition” serves as the occasion of writing (291). The subjoined comment in Goethe that “In my many sleepless nights, especially, I have at times felt something which I cannot undertake to describe” (416) is directly reminiscent of the drama of sleep and sleeplessness in “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep,” and evokes a background of sublimity which parallels the play of light and darkness in the opening of *Confessions*.

The parallels between Goethe’s “fair Saint” and the subject of Coleridge’s *Confessions* are, in fact, throughout directed to the representation of the human subject in the act of thinking. The “fair Saint” describes a relationship between this “feeble” constitution and a fragmented self-awareness, “as if my soul were thinking separately from the body” (417). Her doctor warns her that, excessively indulged, such spiritual sensations “tend as it were to excavate us, and to undermine the foundation of our being.” The subterranean metaphor for both body and consciousness is also carried over to Coleridge’s *Confessions*: the speaker “loves Truth even for itself,” yet finds that such love “withdraws the genial sap of his activity” down into the “labyrinthine way-winning”

of “the deep root” (291). For Coleridge’s subject and Goethe’s “fair Saint,” the “soul [. . .] thinking” is more truly oneself than the “body.” This spiritual inwardness proves to be architectonically unstable: as depicted by the imagery in *Confessions* and “Kubla Khan,” the “labyrinthine way-winning” of the quest for truth within takes the speaker down the river “meandering with a mazy motion” to “the caverns measureless to man,” recapitulating the origin of the human subject through conscious philosophical or poetic efforts. At some point, however, the descent into the “deep romantic chasm” collapses into morbid spiritual inwardness, the “unfathomable hell within” depicted in “The Pains of Sleep.” The subject of Coleridge’s *Confessions* treats these risks as the dangers to be borne by one “who [. . .] loves Truth even for itself,” and therefore the marks of valorous “way-winning.” Just the same, this subject would be “a happier—at all events a more useful—man if my mind were otherwise constituted” (291-2). This simultaneous valorization and problematization of the written work as an effort to “be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness,” as Derrida puts it (“Force” 8), could stand as a brief summary of the crucial problem found throughout Coleridge’s works. Coleridge’s effort to be better “constituted” by grounding all knowing including knowledge of God in the conscious experience of the human subject, while at the same time representing himself in terms of a Biblically orthodox Christian confession, makes the status of the text of Scripture in that effort a complex dilemma for Coleridge.

The Complexity of Representation in Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit

Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit is organized into seven Letters to a “Dear Friend” who is cast in the role of a supporter of a traditional teaching of the inspiration of

the Scriptures, which here is taken to be more than the familiar teaching of the Scriptures' infallibility (with regard to their having divinely intended effects in faithful readers), inspiration (with regard to the divine authority by which the human writers composed them), and inerrancy (with regard to the possibility of error being in their composition, rather than in the reading).⁶ The speaker interprets the traditional view, then current among orthodox Anglicans, as not merely extending to the fact but to a particular theory of the inspiration of Scriptures:

the Doctrine in question requires me to believe, that not only what finds me, but that all that exists in the sacred volume, and which I am bound to find therein, was—not alone inspired by, that is, composed by, men under the actuating influence of the Holy Spirit, but likewise—dictated by an Infallible Intelligence. (296)

The striking move in this passage is the equation of “inspired by” with “composed by” in the description of how “men” produced the text by either “influence” or dictation. By treating “inspired” as a feature of the relationship of the writer to the text, rather than the relationship of the “actuating influence of the Holy Spirit” to the act of writing the text, the speaker covertly insists on Coleridge’s representation of the human subject.

The production of the text thus “composed” must be a fundamentally human act of representation of the self in relation to God, the cosmos, and others. As Harding puts

⁶ Though the exact meaning and extent of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is widely discussed within and beyond the Christian tradition, one brief example from Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* should help to indicate its traditional nature and parameters. He says that “it is necessary that we become meek through piety so that we do not contradict Divine Scripture, either when it is understood and is seen to attack some of our vices, or when it is not understood and we feel as though we are wiser than it is and better able to give precepts. But we should rather think what is written to be better and more true than anything which we could think of by ourselves, even when it is obscure” (II.vii). That is, the doctrine of inerrancy does not specify the exegetical or hermeneutical method in detail, but it does require that the faithful reader accept reader error and obscurity, but not error in the text, as outcomes of interpretation.

it, Coleridge's hermeneutic of Scripture represents "the deepseated belief that a person reading a text, especially and pre-eminently the Bible, is first and foremost a human being called into relationship with another human being" (58). Harding describes Coleridge's underlying project in *Confessions* in light of the traditional teachings about the inspiration of Scripture as follows:

To understand how certain human beings had tried to give expression, in human language, to the Word of God within them, how their words had been recorded and transmitted to later generations, and how the resulting documents were credited in both the Jewish and the Christian churches with a power that was of divine rather than of human origin—this was no denial of the divinity of Scripture, but rather a new way of affirming its divine power. (90-91)

The reader of such a text, then, proceeds according to the principles of self-representation and repetition which govern all acts of human knowing, on Coleridge's account. On this account, the meaning of the text is determined as the reader's repetition of the writer's creative act. The reader's "I AM" and the writer's "I AM," like those of the human subject and the divine spirit, are represented in the reader's imagination as coinciding in the act of representation.

Restricting the possibilities for meaning in Scripture to the reader's capacity to represent himself as repeating each writer's act of composition follows from Coleridge's principle, asserted in the *Biographia Literaria*, that the possibility "that self-consciousness may be itself something explicable into something, which must lie beyond the possibility of our knowledge," is to be discounted in the discourse of origins. The logic of consciousness, founded in the human subject's taking itself for its own first object, makes it impossible to acknowledge any such prior representation, as Coleridge argues: "without distinction conception cannot exist" (*Logic* 250). As this tacit system

of enabling distinctions gives birth to the “*entia logica*” which “all objects of the understanding must likewise and previously” be, any meaning in the text other than that attributed to it by its reader is quite literally inconceivable. This understanding of the discursive formation of the human subject is “the bottom of universal grammar as well as of logic” (239-40). As Coleridge says in Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria*, the meaning of representations of the subject prior to its self-representing origin “does not at all concern us as transcendental philosophers” because “self-consciousness” is the “kind of knowing” which is “the highest and farthest that exists for *us*” (133).

Insofar as Coleridge maintains this representation consistently, the “somewhat more” which the traditional view of the inspiration and inerrancy of the canonical Scriptures calls for is absolutely precluded. At the same time, Coleridge does strive to represent this work as upholding “the divinity of Scripture,” as Harding argues. There is little evidence to support Shaffer’s picture of “the fusty old poseur of Highgate” attempting to enforce “the shift from religious to literary culture [. . .] on the home ground of the text of the Bible itself” (“Ideologies”); Shaffer seems to mistake Coleridge’s persistence in revising his philosophical anthropology for an across-the-board retention of nearly all of his early philosophical and theological presuppositions. On the contrary, Coleridge’s effort to find the “somewhat more” required by Christian confession ensures that the metaphysical representation of the human subject remains contested, both within *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* and throughout Coleridge’s corpus.

Coleridge represents the tension between the metaphysical attempt to elude all prior representations and the Christian acknowledgement of the priority of Biblical over

personal representation by portraying the subject of *Confessions* as maintaining a dialogue with a “Friend” who provides arguments which support the traditional understanding of the inspiration and inerrancy of the canonical Scriptures (301 *et passim*), as well as by frequently representing the speaker in the act of persuading those who dismiss the inspiration of Scripture altogether by use of the same arguments which the subject of Coleridge’s *Confessions* musters against his interpretation of the traditional view as dictation theory (316-17 *et passim*). Tracing out Coleridge’s representation of the exemplary subject Coleridge in *Confessions* reveals by turns a traditionalist whose teaching very nearly approximates the actual doctrine of inerrancy, an objector against an almost parodic representation of that teaching, and an apologist whose confession of Christianity and the role of Scripture in Christian teaching reproduces within itself the very tensions it claims to resolve. In each case, Coleridge’s concern is for the efficacy of such confession, but his philosophical anthropology consistently seems to complicate his access to confessional resources—the ability to faithfully articulate his grounds for trust in the means of grace offered by God in Christ—which proceed from the “somewhat more” that seems to elude him.

The Traditionalist Coleridge: Approaching Inerrancy

Coleridge’s discussion of original sin as a Biblical doctrine, taken with his citations from More and other introductory comments on Scripture in *Aids to Reflection*, demonstrate that Coleridge does emphasize the priority of the text of Scripture in Christian confession, at least in the context of certain arguments. Certainly one need not read very far into *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* to conclude that Coleridge’s dependence on Scripture has some strict limits; but Shaffer goes too far in suggesting that

treatments of Coleridge's religious thought can only "present a simulacrum of a conventionally pious Coleridge" by suppressing *Confessions* in favor of *Aids* ("Ideologies"). Not only in its concessions (which go farther than the Coleridge of *The Statesman's Manual* would have) but in its affirmations, *Confessions* gives ample evidence of Coleridge's efforts to mate his philosophical anthropology to his Christian confession. At points, Coleridge's position approximates inerrantism, even as he builds his polemic against the misconstruction of the doctrine which he takes as his target.⁷

To take an early example, Coleridge's initial five-part exposition of his confession in Letter I, which describes in fairly orthodox terms "my belief, [. . .] the full acquiescence of my intellect, and the deep consent of my conscience" (293), also takes the traditional, early dates for the composition of the New Testament books. Coleridge describes the New Testament as "with one or two doubtful exceptions, all the writings of the followers of Christ within the space of ninety years from the date of the Resurrection." Since the writing of *Confessions*, of course, many new first-century manuscripts have been recovered or publicized, so that the gesture toward historical generality Coleridge attempts here would have to be retrenched into a more traditional view of canon formation.⁸ In the face of an even more aggressive tendency to fragment

⁷ In the era which produced Paley's famously overstated efforts in defense of special revelation, of course, Coleridge alone does not bear full responsibility for this misconstruction.

⁸ Coleridge's canon, of course, is the traditional sixty-six book pre-Tridentine and Protestant canon, which may admit the historical or pedagogical worth but not the Scriptural status of the deuterocanonical works (*Confessions* 295).

historical writings than subsequent criticism would support,⁹ however, Coleridge still affirms that “I do not myself think that any of these writings were composed as late as A.D. 120.” He allows “ninety years from the date of the Resurrection” only to account, presumably, for the idea which occurs early in church history that the Revelations may have been written by a different John than the Apostle who wrote the Gospel and Epistles under that name.¹⁰

To some extent Coleridge’s setting of his own view that the New Testament writings were completed within the lifetimes of Christ’s Apostles over against the still fairly conservative view that they may have been “composed as late as A.D. 120” is rhetorical, allowing Coleridge to represent himself as traditionally orthodox even as he proposes a fairly radical revision of Christian understanding of the Scriptures. Just the same, unless one chooses to call Coleridge an outright liar (as Shaffer’s “fusty poseur” characterization seems to do), it remains that Coleridge accepts in its general outlines a traditional understanding of the authorship, date of composition, and canonization of the Scriptures. Attending to this feature of *Confessions* is important, because much of the conflict within Coleridge’s view is erased, and almost the whole ground of his continued faith in the efficacy of Scripture under his revised view is cut away, if the reader is led to

⁹ here see Daniel Hoffman, “S. T. Coleridge and the Attack on Inerrancy,” *Trinity Journal* n.s. 7 (1986): 55-68.

¹⁰ Recall from the discussion of the legendary Prester John and Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan” the controversial reference in a fragment of Papias to a “John the presbyter” (as the author of John’s Epistles signs himself) differentiated from John the Evangelist. Eusebius and Jerome, among others, take these to be different men named “John,” though the best evidence suggests they are one and the same. For the fragment of Papias, see <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.vii.ii.i.html>>; for a brief but very helpful discussion of the alleged difference between the two Johns see <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08492a.htm#II>>.

ignore Coleridge's confidence that even to grant the most radical available criticisms will leave virtually the entire traditional canon standing.

Again, whether by concession or by affirmation, Coleridge cannot begin the thought-exercise (a portrayal of an exemplary subject in the act of representing itself in relation to Scripture) he has set out on, an effort "to read [this Book] for the first time as I should read any other work" (294), without recognizing the impossibility of such an effort. He confesses that he "neither can, nor dare" proceed without acknowledging "a strong and awful prepossession in its favor" which stems from his dependence on Scripture. The very considerations which impel him to move away from a merely parochial religiosity and attempt to read Scripture "above the contagious blastments of prejudice, and the fog-blight of selfish superstition" are part of the "living body of faith and knowledge" Coleridge has already confessed, a body of which "a large part" at least "has been directly or indirectly derived to me from this sacred volume." Thus, while Coleridge correctly realizes that the individual's experience of faith is never merely derived from a naïve reading of Scripture—whether with a credulous or a critical eye—he also acknowledges the priority of Scripture to and within the individual's experience of faith, and that such experience is inextricable from its textual matrix, as Coleridge's exemplary reader is "unable to determine what I do not owe to its influences." Indeed, it is the divine authority in Scripture, on Coleridge's account, which entertains the possibility of human reasoning about Scripture, and not vice versa: it is "the sun" of Scripture which "endures the occasional co-presence of the unsteady orb" of reason, and significantly "seems to sanction the comparison" by "leaving it visible." The evidence of

human writing and reading in Scripture, Coleridge observes, warrants the efforts of reading Scripture and writing about it which reasoning beings undertake.

It is at this point that Coleridge, quite possibly in spite of his own understanding of the state of the question, very nearly takes the position actually held in practice by adherents of the inerrancy of Scripture. In an early-twentieth century work clearly intended to reassure a lay audience of the claims of Scripture (a work still used for that purpose among some evangelicals today), W. Graham Scroggie summons the marks of a complex composition process as evidence of the Providential management of history which makes the Bible available to the modern reader:

We now know that writing was among the most ancient of arts, one practiced from the very beginning. There is no reason to doubt that Noah took records with him into the ark; records which, in some form or another, had been accumulating for a millennium and a half. These were preserved from the flood, and constituted the basis of the earliest of writings. These, as they grew, were preserved, by divine Providence, through all the changing fortunes of Israel—in Egypt, in the Wilderness, in the Land, and in Babylonia. Collected during the inter-Testamental period, they were alike a record of the past and a vision of the future, greatly cherished by the Jews. (14-15)

Despite the differences in their positions elsewhere, at this point there is little to distinguish Scroggie's speculative reconstruction of the composition history of the Hebrew Scriptures from Coleridge's observation that the Bible "contains the reliques of the literature of the Hebrew people, while the Hebrew was still the living language" (293). Similarly, when William Varner of The Master's College provides a fresh translation with critical analysis of the *Didache*, a catechetical and liturgical guide written during the Apostolic period, he follows Andre Tuilier in tracing a complex composition history for the Gospel of Matthew, the single text the Didachist quotes more than any other. Varner accepts Tuilier's suggestion that the quotations in *Didache* come from "a

Greek translation of those Aramaic *logia* [sayings of Christ]” (50), based on a proposed composition history of Matthew in which “Matthew arranged the *logia* of the Lord around 45 C.E.; someone translated it into Greek by 55-60; and the Gospel of Matthew in its finished form appeared by 65-70” (51). Like Scroggie’s popular arguments, Varner’s scholarly analysis takes into account a complex composition history, in this case multiple stages of compilation, translation, and interpolation of a single book—all in service of an inerrantist reading of Scripture. For both Coleridge and adherents of a traditional view of Scripture, the Bible does indeed contain marks of complex composition and historical accretion which justify the use of human reason in understanding them. Both also acknowledge that Scripture is inextricable from Christian faith as historically realized, and has its significance prior to the individual experience of that faith; and though Coleridge often seems to honor this realization in the breach, he does join them in acknowledging that this priority of Scripture has consequences for the use of human reason.

Specifically, Coleridge actually seems to adopt an inerrantist view before he misconstrues that position in pursuit of his Romantic apologia. In the same passage as he appeals to “a Light higher than all, even *the Word that was in the beginning*” (294), that is, to the Son’s revealing the Father, as the basis for the mutual intelligibility of the representations in Scripture and those conceived of in human reason, Coleridge takes the step which logically follows from the priority of Scripture over the individual human reason in Christian confession. He proposes that suspension of inference, rather than unreasonable assertion or denial of some particular reading, is the appropriate response to conflicts and uncertainties in the process of reading Scripture:

If between this Word and the written Letter I shall any where seem to myself to find a discrepance, I will not conclude that such there actually is; nor on the other hand will I fall under the condemnation of them that would *lie for God*, but seek as I may, be thankful for what I have, and wait.

Again, though Coleridge and many other critics may not think so, this suspension of inference is the usual practice of inerrantists. Where Scripture is understood as inextricable from and prior to the reader's conscious confession, it follows that problems discovered by reading will only be resolvable in terms of the reader's improved understanding of the faith or the text. Reading the text may correct the reader's understanding of the faith, and further individual or corporate experience may correct the reader's understanding of the text, but as long as the reader remains "unable to determine what I do not owe to its influences" the text itself must remain an inappellable source of Christian confession.

Thus, when (as mentioned in the introduction) Beale confronts Enns for holding to a view of inspiration of Scriptures which undermines the inerrancy of Scripture, Beale plainly argues that suspension of inference is the proper response to serious difficulties in the reading:

I agree [with Enns] that when diversity appears irresolvable on the literary or biblical-theological level, then we let it stand, and we do not foist some precarious harmonization onto the text. What we philosophically label such irresolvable diversity will differ with the presuppositions of the individual interpreter: some will call it *error*, some *difficulty*, and some, like Enns, just *diversity*. (80)

What concerns Beale is that a critical predisposition to provide new readings (such as Enns' "christotelic" approach) causes a rush to label such instances which call for a suspension of inference "errors" in the text, or instances of "diversity" which can be read coherently only under assumptions alien to the writers and the projected audience attested

to within the text itself. Beale's response to instances of "irresolvable diversity" clearly matches Coleridge's refusal to actually "find a discrepancy" in the text or to "*lie for God.*"

The same approach is advocated in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which the Evangelical Theological society has (since 2006) specifically referred to as setting forth the view of Scripture to which its members putatively subscribe (Beale 19). This confessional standard holds, in Article XIV, "that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved" should not be understood to "vitate the truth claims of the Bible." This need not be understood as a call for what Beale calls "precarious harmonization," however, for in the section of its Exposition addressing "Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation" the Chicago Statement argues that

Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

The Chicago Statement, in words which nearly echo Beale and Coleridge, argues for a suspension of inference in favor of a presumption that "His Word is true." To use Coleridge's words, such a reader "will not conclude [. . .] there actually is" an ultimate "discrepance" in any case "between this Word and the written Letter." This approach follows from that used to discern the historical sense, or *sensus litteralis*, from which all valid hermeneutical development proceeds, throughout the history of Christianity, at least as far back as Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. In *De Doctrina*, Augustine says that

it is necessary that we become meek through piety so that we do not contradict Divine Scripture, either when it is understood and is seen to attack some of our vices, or when it is not understood and we feel as

though we are wiser than it is and better able to give precepts. But we should rather think what is written to be better and more true than anything which we could think of by ourselves, even when it is obscure. (II.vii)

Properly understood, that is, the traditional understanding of the role of Scripture in Christian confession, to which Coleridge's speaker claims to adhere, allows for considerable hermeneutical fluidity; but it does require that the faithful reader accept reader error and obscurity in the text, but not error in the text, as outcomes of interpretation.

Were Coleridge actually content to "seek as I may, be thankful for what I have, and wait," it would be very hard to differentiate his view from that of those Christians who have confessed the inerrancy of Scripture throughout church history. Coleridge himself cites that history at length, mentioning against his own default position that "more than this was holden and required by the Fathers of the Reformation, and by the Churches collectively, since the Council of Nice at latest" (295). He finds that this "somewhat more" persists across the differences of time, place, and tradition which separate "Jerome, Augustine, Luther, and Hooker," for they "were of one and the same judgment" in confessing the priority of Scripture in Christian confession, "less than which not one of them would have tolerated." Again, some of Coleridge's own starting-points lead him near to agreement with this confessional history; in the second Letter of *Confessions*, having reaffirmed his "Christian Faith," he affirms that "I receive willingly also the truth of the history, namely, that the Word of the Lord did come to Samuel, to Isaiah, to others;—and that the words which gave utterance to the same are faithfully recorded" (297). This mode of affirmation hints at the metaphysical misreading of the significance of Christ's being called *Logos*. Nonetheless, insofar as Coleridge here

realizes that as a resource for Christian confession the prophetic witness is inextricable from and dependent on its textual attestation, his view accords with that of the tradition he cites—the same tradition within which Christians since the Apostolic age have received both the canon of Scripture and the teaching that human understanding, but not the text of Scripture, may be in error.¹¹

The Objector: Demanding Immediacy from the Medium

Coleridge's representation of the "I" who reads Scripture, confesses Christianity, and writes the letters that make up the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, of course, could by no means be fairly read as an attempt to defend a traditional view of Scripture. If, as shown above, Coleridge's admitted dependence on Scripture leads him much nearer to confessing the inerrancy of Scripture than even he may have realized, such affirmations and concessions always appear as parameters or boundaries to a set of arguments much more radical in their tendencies. It is the influence of these arguments on thinkers such as Maurice and Emerson that has made Coleridge's works generally, and *Confessions* (in addition to such early works as *The Statesman's Manual* and the Unitarian *Lay Sermons*) specifically, central to the classical liberal strain of Anglo-American theology. Coleridge's influence makes his representation of himself as an conscientious objector to the traditional understanding of Scripture's role in Christian confession of more than merely literary or historical interest, for the problem of philosophical anthropology it illustrates is of a piece with the problem of original sin and *Apostasis* discussed above.

¹¹ It is to be understood, as every one of the above-cited adherents of a traditional view of Scripture would affirm, that "obscurity" and error on the side of the reader include change in the text as a result of translation, transcription, or loss or destruction of media, in addition to more obvious concerns like individual misreading, motivated belief, or obscuring traditional and institutional commitments.

This can be most easily seen by observing closely the juxtaposition of Coleridge's nearly inerrantist concessions and affirmations with his strident objections to the doctrine itself. As seen above, Coleridge accepts that the attestation in a Biblical text that God spoke to the prophet is historically true; from this it follows that he accepts as true not only passages where both the encounter and the recorded witness were "enjoined by the special command of God" but also "others in which the words are by the sacred historian declared to have been the Word of the Lord supernaturally communicated" (297). The general principle which undergirds this acceptance is an acceptance of the historical sense of the words of Scripture about itself: Coleridge accepts such words "with a degree of confidence proportioned to the confidence required of me by the writer himself, and to the claims he himself makes on my belief." In order to proceed by such a method, however, the canonicity and the historical sense of the text in which the declaration that the prophet's words were received from God must already be established in the reader's mind. As seen above, if this be granted, and suspension of inference in doubtful cases be adopted as a hermeneutical principle, there is little difference between Coleridge's position and the traditional view.

On the very next page, however, as Coleridge attempts to minimize the obstacle posed to his theory by the Biblical attestations to the general character of Scripture, he represents the notion that one text could "declare the plenary inspiration of all the rest" as "involving [. . .] a *petitio principii*, namely, the supernatural dictation, word by word, of the book in which the question is found," specifically because "until this is established, the utmost that such a text can prove, is the current belief of the writer's age and country concerning the character of the books, then called the Scriptures" (298). This argument is

in direct conflict with Coleridge's own standard for accepting some words as recorded exactly; in fact, either this line of argument or Coleridge's dependence on Scripture must undermine the other. If only "dictation, word by word," can yield truth beyond "the current belief of the writer's age and country," then not even the prophet's "Thus saith the Lord" can be credited until the "dictation, word by word," of that text can be independently verified. In a writer for whom the Bible's authority is a dead question, such an argument would be of no significance; for Coleridge, who is not such a writer (301), such self-defeating argumentation calls for explanation.

The explanation lies in the nature of the arguments Coleridge raises. As developed above from Harding and others, Coleridge's particular theory of reading and writing (including the writing of inspired Scripture) actually prioritizes the autonomy of the human subjects; only the reader's ability to repeat, with the immediacy of the interior acts of human consciousness, the experience of representing himself in relation to God, the cosmos, and others in terms of the text constitutes a text as meaningful to that reader. Thus, when in the course of the second Letter Coleridge re-visits those instances of prophetic utterance and inscription to which he does grant full authority, he does so in terms of a sharp dichotomy: "the Word of the Lord" to the prophet "did come" as an "origin of the words" which is "supernatural" until "the words [. . .] have taken their place among the *phænomena* of the senses" (297). This "origin" which cannot occur in nature, which is "supernatural" precisely insofar as it is removed from the continuity of causation conceived of by the human subject, is thus of a radically different ontological order than the "words" which appear to lie (as symbols are "translucent") on the boundary between the merely conceivable and the observable, historical, and verifiable.

This distancing of the “words” from their “origin” follows from a larger and still more typical claim Coleridge makes during his initial articulation of his Christian faith in *Confessions*. Speaking of the universal and public nature of historic truth-claims (that is, with regard to the consensus available to validate the historical and pragmatic, as opposed to the ideal but “unreal” moral and spiritual), Coleridge describes works of God “offered to all” (293). It will be convenient, here, to remember Cutsinger’s dictum that Coleridge’s interest in unity “excludes attention to the particular elements united” (34); for Coleridge says, “Even when the Gospel is preached to a single individual, it is offered to him as to one of a great Household” (293). While this general call of the Gospel is almost universally agreed upon, Coleridge defines this “Household” rather differently than most Christian theology (where it refers to the People the Father intends the Son to head, as described in Hebrews 2). He proceeds to draw a conclusion directly related to the discussion of original sin in the *Aids to Reflection*:

Not only Man, but, says St. Paul, the whole Creation is included in the consequences of the Fall [. . .]; so also in those of the Change at the Redemption [. . .]. We too shall be raised in the Body. Christianity is fact no less than truth. It is spiritual, yet so as to be historical; and between these two poles there must likewise be a midpoint, in which the historical and the spiritual meet.

Coleridge’s argument, here, is a mixture of direct Biblical citation (indeed, the ellipses above omit words of Paul in Greek included as substantiation) and Coleridgean structuring of the cosmos. In Romans 8:18-23, the passage Coleridge cites, the Apostle Paul does distinguish believers and “the whole creation.” Paul also emphasizes that believers “wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” while “the whole creation” also waits to “be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Paul further characterizes this “bondage to

corruption” as being “subjected to futility” by God; it is this “futility” from which the creation will be “set free” by the “glory of the children of God.” In understanding that the bodily resurrection and historical being of God’s people are attested to by the Scriptures and all Christian orthodoxy, Coleridge reads Paul well.

There is a very significant difference between Paul’s writing and Coleridge’s reading, however. Coleridge organizes the passages as describing “Not only Man, but, [. . .] the whole Creation”; Paul’s text discusses “not only the creation, but we [believers] ourselves.” Coleridge makes a metaphysical distinction between human being and the world of causation; but Paul differentiates the moribund cosmos, including sinful human being, from the “glory of the children of God,” the cosmos reshaped to suit the resurrected and transformed believers. Paul’s unfolding of the Creator/creature difference, obscured by the aversion to God which constitutes the conscious human subject as sinful, uses the Law to reveal the creature/fallen difference as distinct from the Creator/creature difference. By doing so, Paul displaces the pursuit of understanding and control of reality through metaphysics with submission to the transforming grace of God as the central concern of fallen creatures.

Coleridge’s introduction of the idea that “the admission of a *nature* into a spiritual essence [. . .] is a corruption” (*Aids* 180) into his discussion of original sin conflates the origin of sinful human being (as opposed to being created by God) with the origin of human being (as a creature involved in networks of reciprocal causation with other creatures and the Creator). Doing so enables Coleridge to conceive of human sinfulness as basically a problem of metaphysics, to be solved by theory; but by making the Fall a requisite for Creation, this account represents not only humanity but God as complicit in

original sin. In the passage above from *Confessions*, misreading the creature/fallen difference involved in Paul's treatment of Creation, Fall, and Redemption as one of "Man" and "the whole Creation" makes it possible for Coleridge to organize his hermeneutics around a set of differences which fit his representation of the human subject: "Christianity" is to be described as both ideal "truth" within and historically verifiable "fact" without; similarly, it is "spiritual, yet so as to be historical"; and religion (including the text of Scripture) is then to be understood as the "midpoint, in which the historical and the spiritual meet" (293). However, the need for an hermeneutical work to bring the two to "meet" arises only as a consequence of "spiritual" and "historical," of "truth" and "fact," being arranged as "two poles" that religion must mediate "between."

In Coleridge's works, the conception of the human subject as a "repetition" of the "I AM" and of beginnings in nature as the "shadow" of the mind's origination through a "self-duplicating act" underlies the Khan's "decree" and the possibility of a Christianity re-founded entirely within the conscious experience of the human subject, but also subjects the imagined "pleasure-dome" and the vision of God's creative activity to related dilemmas of unreality or complicity in a history of violence following from original sin. Coleridge's attempt to develop a hermeneutics of Scripture (and a philosophy of religion) along similar lines leads to a similar dilemma, which leads Coleridge in *Confessions* to increasingly strident efforts to push past it. Coleridge describes the traditional view of an "unmodified and absolute *theopneusty*, which our divines, in words at least, attribute to the Canon collectively" as indistinguishable from "the doctrine of the Cabbalists" whose mystical and numerological treatments of the Torah are well-known (299). Having done

so, he attempts to reinforce the metaphysical difference which enables his hermeneutical efforts, but proceeds to demonstrate the dilemma this approach creates:

as long as the conceptions of the Revealing Word and the Inspiring Spirit are identified and confounded, I assert that whatever says less than this [the Cabbalistic mystical unity of Scripture], says little more than nothing. For how can absolute infallibility be blended with fallibility? Where is the infallible criterion? How can infallible truth be infallibly conveyed in defective and fallible expressions?

This series of rhetorical questions, if they achieve anything at all, achieve too much for Coleridge's purposes: if only "defective and fallible expressions" are available, then even Coleridge's acceptance of the historical record of the words of Christ or verbal revelations to the prophets means "little more than nothing," except as precisely the sort of parochial or personal assertion Coleridge claims to be avoiding. If "infallible truth" is divided from the possibilities for language by the very nature of human being, then it is inconceivable that even the Incarnate Christ, let alone the apostles and prophets and historians, should have been able to enunciate "infallible truth."

Coleridge's attempt to distinguish the "Revealing Word" and the "Inspiring Spirit," of course, mark off another instance of the "antecedent unity" and "subsequent unity" discussed in the *Biographia Literaria* and *Logic*. In this case, the movement of "absolute infallibility" and "fallible expressions" through text and through history, like the text's mediation between "truth" and "fact" and between "spiritual" and "historical" being, are marked by the symbols and figures and reported events that make up the text itself. This appears all the more distinctly when Coleridge, attempting once more to maintain his affirmation of the authority of explicitly declared prophetic utterances in Scripture, launches another series of rhetorical questions, culminating with

Who more convinced than I am—who more anxious to impress that conviction on the minds of others—that the Law and the Prophets speak throughout of Christ? That all the intermediate applications and realizations of the words are but types and repetitions—translations, as it were, from the language of letters and articulate sounds into the language of events and symbolical persons? (303)

The entire system of Biblical language, then, is a sort of currency exchange. The “language of letters and articulate sounds” form an economy of transactions (such as “types and repetitions”) which can be converted into “the language of events and symbolical persons” and back again. The process is repeatable and reversible because the “persons” are, as Coleridgean subjects, “symbolical” and exemplary. The “applications and realizations” which take place in the human subject’s experience of reading the text are “intermediate” between the antecedent unity in the writer’s experience and the subsequent unity in the reader’s experience of the “Revealing Word,” experiences shaped by the repeated “I AM” that Coleridge terms the “Inspiring Spirit.” The entire movement of language between the origin of the words in the writer’s self-representation and the reader’s repetition of that self-representation is reduced to a series of “translations” among interchangeable vocabularies; meaning consists only in the repetitions of the same act of self-representation within and among consciousnesses. On this account, the relationship between writer and reader seems to consist in a strictly arbitrary assertion, an immediate coincidence of will occurring among interchangeable media. When Coleridge depreciates the actual phenomena of the writing and reading of Scripture as “but types and repetitions,” he establishes once again the privilege of the immediate self-representative act within the human subject over the media of representation, but in so doing he invalidates precisely that prior representation which Christian confession takes

Scripture to be, and which in “A Nightly Prayer” he himself takes as the basis for his confidence in God’s intervention to protect him from “The Pains of Sleep.”

This increasing tension between the traditionalist “I” and the objector “I” reaches an early climax in the third Letter, when Coleridge’s increasingly dramatic speaker follows up a long set of concessions to the traditional view by responding vehemently to the question, “Why should I not believe the Scriptures throughout dictated, in word and thought, by an infallible Intelligence?”

Because the Doctrine in question petrifies at once the whole body of Holy Writ with all its harmonies and symmetrical gradations,—the flexible and the rigid,—the supporting hard and the clothing soft,—the blood *which is the life*,—the intelligencing nerves, and the rudely woven [. . .] cellular substance [. . .]. This breathing organism, this glorious *panharmonicon*, which I had seen stand on its feet like a man, and with a man’s voice given to it, the Doctrine in question turns at once into a colossal Memnon’s head, a hollow passage for a voice, a voice that mocks the voices of many men, and speaks in their names, and yet is but one voice, and the same;—and no man uttered it, and never in a human heart was it conceived. (305)

This extensive metaphorical representation of the Scriptures in terms of a “body” which is a “breathing organism” is voiced from the dramatic perspective of an exemplary “I” who has “seen [Scripture] stand on its feet like a man.” This injection of the “I” into the metaphor, like the turn marked with “But oh!” in “Kubla Khan,” serves to foreground the role of that conscious human subject which the *Logic* claims “gives and attributes substance,” as discussed above. The play of the inward and ideally significant (“supporting” and “intelligencing” and “breathing”) against the outward and historically realized (“clothing” and “substance” and “organism”), is repeated in a telescoping pattern, as indeed the subject’s self-representation as subject and object must be repeated for every conception from self to the self’s representation with regard to all things as the repetition of God’s “I AM.”

This play most strongly resembles that already found in “Kubla Khan” in the phrase “the blood *which is the life*”; for unlike the metaphysical distinction of the “intelligencing nerves” from the “cellular substance,” this speaker’s deployment of “the blood” transgresses the discourse it ostensibly serves. As the italics primarily indicate, the phrase is an allusion which becomes a quotation. The phrase is drawn from Genesis 9:1-6, where the drinking of animal blood is forbidden and the execution of murderers is commanded; and this reference, of course, cannot be made in a Christian theological context without drawing attention to the shedding of Christ’s blood as the culmination of His First Advent and the origin of the Body whose Resurrection is begun and figured in Christ’s own. In each of these cases, however, the relationship of “the blood *which is the life*” has to do with the very concrete relationship in which the hemoglobulinous plasma circulated throughout the human body stands to that body’s ability to live; if the blood represents life, as also breath, or speech, or movement, or eye contact may do, it does so because even more than these it is present in all the living tissue, intermediating among breath and digestion and metabolism and excretion, and appearing first where a wound threatens the physical integrity of the body. Christ’s blood is important, first and foremost, because by shedding it Christ died; bloodshed is taboo because blood is required for life.

The system of oppositions created in this passage, however, in replicating Coleridge’s philosophical anthropology, makes the blood’s inwardness, its hiddenness, the true import. As life under this *schema* must be inward, and breath must be invisible, so must the subject, in its antecedent unity before it takes itself for its own object and thus receives “clothing” and “cellular substance” through the conceptions (the *entia logica*) or

“intelligencing nerves,” in the assertion “I AM.” The blood, then, by its integration with each of these systems, becomes the symbol of that life, of the “I AM” as an active principle—just as “Alph, the sacred river ran” through and beneath the Khan’s paradise, most vitally in the “deep romantic chasm” and the “caverns measureless to man.” “The blood *which is the life*” even more vividly than the “breathing organism” and the “glorious *panharmonicon*” represents the recovery of antecedent unity within the human subject’s self-representing repetitions of the “I AM,” but also marks again the fissure between his Christian confession of creatureliness and fallenness and his philosophical anthropology. By alluding to the Biblical teachings concerning the importance of blood as a matter of concrete life and death, including the historical event of Christ’s death, Coleridge allows his representation of the subject (here, Scripture as a metonymy for its writers, as viewed by the “I” who takes the role of objector) to be haunted by the significance of the concrete history which must be interchangeable “clothing” (“but types and repetitions”) of the real event, the repetition of “I AM” within.

Under these circumstances, then, representation of the objector as one who “had seen” the living Scripture “stand on its feet as a man” until “the Doctrine in question turns [it] at once into a colossal Memnon’s Head, a hollow passage for a voice,” is more than usually ironic. On Coleridge’s view, it is to be remembered, “the Doctrine in question” is not merely the priority of Scripture, nor its inerrancy, but its dictation. It is Coleridge’s philosophical anthropology, however, which enforces a dichotomy between “dictation, word by word” and texts which can only reveal “the current belief of the writer’s age and country.” It is that same philosophical anthropology which restricts the significance of writing and reading to the repetition of one and the same “I AM” in a

range of interchangeable vocabularies, and thus leads him to describe all the details of the text as “types and repetitions—translations, as it were.” It is, in short, not the features of the traditional view, even as represented within *Confessions* itself, which make of the Scriptures a “Memnon’s head.” It is Coleridge’s own theory of the human subject, in which all knowledge and action and language are so many repetitions of one and the same “I AM” within, which most clearly depicts Scripture as “a voice that mocks the voices of many men, and speaks in their names, and yet is but one voice, and the same.”

It is important to notice the degree of hyperbole with which Coleridge’s dramatized speaker voices his objections, though, because although the materials and to a great extent the arguments must belong to Coleridge, the degree of latitude allowed to first one and then another of these conflicting strains in Coleridge’s thought is nearly unparalleled in his prose works. The self-defeating nature of the objector’s arguments are due, to some extent, to their being thoroughly aired, as well as to the significant concessions made in service of both a tactical and a confessional acknowledgement of the traditional teachings about Scripture. Coleridge more than once characterizes the arguments in *Confessions* as “an attempt to delineate an arc of oscillation” (301). This “arc” encloses the “doubts and objections” which arise between the treatment of Scriptures according to his philosophical anthropology, where “I might have been content to stand” as in the days of the *Lay Sermons* and *The Statesman’s Manual*, and his turn toward the “somewhat more” required of him by his Christian confession (295).

In keeping with the radical tensions Coleridge allows to play themselves out in *Confessions*, the representation of the human subject soon takes additional turns and generates additional layers. After the “Memnon’s head” passage in Letter III and a

lengthy exposition of the *reductio* to dictation theory in the opening of Letter IV, the argument of *Confessions* is increasingly conducted in long dramatic monologues or set speeches, in which the Coleridge's dramatization as the subject of *Confessions* is again dramatized as an apologist who clings to "the means of silencing, and the prospect of convincing, an alienated brother" through the use of Scriptures as read under Coleridge's theory of the human subject (316). This "alienated brother," also called a "serious and well-disposed Sceptic," is also dramatized for the reader (317-18), and rehearses the arguments Coleridge has already presented, before the apologist resumes, this time addressing the skeptic in the same manner as the subject of Coleridge's *Confessions* addresses the projected audience, as "Friend!" (319)

This dramatized application of Coleridge's philosophical anthropology thus brings together on the same ground the "Dear Friend" addressed thus at the beginning of each Letter in *Confessions*, described here as "scrupulously orthodox," and the "Sceptic" whom Coleridge's speaker imagines as "studying the sacred volume in the light and in the freedom of a faith already secured" (319). In the manner described by Tucker above, and responding to the same separation of the spiritually idealized from the historically verifiable described in Vickers' work on epic, Coleridge thus appeals in both directions for the establishment of a consensus. The value of the text of Scripture is to be affirmed and secured under the seal of the "faith already secured" of the former skeptic, reconciled by an act of Coleridgean imagination with the traditional believer, who is to agree that such a reconciliation accomplishes the purposes for which Scripture was given by God.

This double address to the "scrupulously orthodox" and the "Sceptic" may reflect still more than Coleridge's unifying and reconciling methodology. Given the context of

Goethe's "Fair Saint" which is reproduced not only in the opening but in the narratives of the skeptic's progress, it is significant that the "Fair Saint" from first to last represents her inward self, as well as the voice of God, as "my Friend" (*passim*). Given the considerable overlap between Coleridge's understanding of the origination of the human subject through self-representative acts which repeat the "I AM" of God and the German Romantic consensus represented in Goethe, there is little reason to doubt that, at the very least, Coleridge's use of Goethe's narrative to frame his *Confessions* suggests that the projected audience represents a conflict of inner voices; it would even be possible to suggest that the text represents a negotiation with God Himself, in the person of the Friend who contends with an inner skeptic. However strong these possibilities may seem to the reader, it remains the case that this text, heavily edited but narrowly circulated for a decade before Coleridge's death, was never published until after his death.

As a matter of theory, however, the argument maintained throughout the fifth, sixth, and seventh Letters simply rehearses Coleridge's characteristic representation of the human subject. Near the end of *Confessions*, Coleridge says

I comprise and conclude the sum of my conviction in this one sentence. Revealed Religion (and I know of no religion not revealed) is in its highest contemplation the unity, that is, the identity or co-inherence, of Subjective and Objective. It is in itself, and irrelatively, at once inward Life and Truth, and outward Fact and Luminary. But as all Power manifests itself in the harmony of correspondent Opposites, each supposing and supporting the other,—so has religion its objective, or historic and ecclesiastical pole, and its subjective, or spiritual and individual pole. In miracles, and miraculous parts of religion—both in the first communication of divine truths, and in the promulgation of the truths thus communicated—we have the union of the two, that is, the subjective and supernatural displayed objectively—outwardly and phenomenally—as subjective and supernatural. (335)

Coleridge's "identity" and "union" are here achieved, once again, by a representation of the subject in which a spiritual inwardness, "the subjective and supernatural," finds it possible to represent the antecedent unity of the absolute subject as a "unity" or "co-inherence" subsisting "in itself, and irrelatively." This frequently cited passage provides one of the most important and latest expressions of Coleridge's theory of the human subject in the context of his developing thought. The effort to represent himself as an orthodox believer continues, but it is overwhelmed by the language of metaphysics. Coleridge the traditionalist refuses to acknowledge "religion not revealed" and maintains the reality of "miracles," including those which manifest "divine truths," but this revelation is the repetition within the subject, the Creator/creator difference here inscribed under the term "identity or co-inherence." Just as the object gains significance only as a conception enabling the self-representation of the subject in Coleridge's philosophical anthropology, so the "miraculous parts of religion," including the giving of the Scriptures, can be described as the "union of the two" only in a manner of speaking, as a matter of interchangeable "translations" by which "the subjective and supernatural [is] displayed" in the realm of natural causation. The historical, however, has only a pragmatic and consensual function: "outwardly and phenomenally" it signifies reality only when it signifies "*as* subjective and supernatural."

Conclusion

Shortly after the famous passage about the "co-inherence" of "Subjective and Objective" which constitutes "Revealed Religion," Coleridge closes the text with the challenge which (like the insistent "*as*" in the "Revealed Religion" passage) marks the continued contestation of this seeming resolution. Returning to the language with which

he concluded Letter IV, in which the multiple speakers described the skeptic's progress, Coleridge leaves the matter still clouded: "I now conclude by repeating my request—Correct me, or confirm me. Farewell" (337). Coleridge's own corpus, however, refuses to confirm his opinion. In deploying Coleridge's characteristic representation of the subject to resolve historical and theological problems concerning the text of Scripture, the subject of Coleridge's *Confessions* repeats the movement of "Kubla Khan" and the prose introduction, dissolving the differences articulated by Scripture into an effort to compose an inarticulate "unity" entirely within the conscious experience of an individual self. There is no gain even over the dictation theory, as any particular language in which revelation takes place is reduced to the human reader's and writer's self-representation, a technology by which "spiritual and individual" meaning may be "displayed" for purposes of "communication" and "promulgation." Coleridge's theorizing of the subject continues to deny the "somewhat more" which Coleridge's Christian confession demands of him, even while his understanding of original sin concedes the demand's reality and inevitability.

In "Kubla Khan" with its prose introduction, Coleridge represents the equivocal results of a poetic and philosophical effort to gather up the loose ends of history both globally and personally, in political and spiritual contexts. Representing the Khan, the poetic speaker, and even the "Abyssinian maid" as constructing a new vision of the reconciliation of apparent oppositions and the abridgement of differences, through "decree" and "music loud and long," Coleridge's work leads many to see only the beauties of the "deep romantic chasm" into which the poem's speaker descends. The poem, however, is not fragmentary by accident: the "decree" concerns the one thing not

described, the “stately pleasure-dome”; the “damsel with a dulcimer” is represented as playing a music no one hears; the speaker himself never describes the dome or tells the tale. Instead, these images are of subjects in the act of composing, whether that act is attributed to Coleridge, the youth in the prose introduction, the speaker of the poem, the damsel, or the Khan.

These repetitions of the representation of the human subject in the act of composing directly reflect Coleridge’s explicit theory of the human subject’s origination through an “act of self-duplication” by which the subject takes itself for its own object, and thus constitutes itself as a represented and representing being. In “The Pains of Sleep,” Coleridge represents the catastrophic failure of philosophical and poetic attempts (like those outlined in “Kubla Khan”) to construct a subsequent unity within this subject’s consciousness which will discover the antecedent unity, the absolute subject in which all differences are dissolved. This central work is described in the crucial phrase “My spirit I to Love compose.” The threat dreams and nervous disorder pose to the speaker’s ability to maintain self-composure is reinforced by the threat such dreams, with their erasure of agency, pose to the philosophical project of abridging the subject/object difference—to the “Miltonic moral order” and the Cartesian *cogito* alike.

Along a line from “The Pains of Sleep” to “A Nightly Prayer,” and especially in the passages examined above from *Aids to Reflection* and *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, Coleridge’s career is marked by attempts to describe and remedy this danger, whether by elaborating his characteristic representation of the human subject or by appropriating the confessional resources proper to his Christian faith. In his efforts to do so, however, Coleridge is hampered by the continuing opposition of his theory of the

human subject to his attempts to represent himself as a Biblically orthodox believer. The challenge plays out in two ways, both of which can be exemplified from the *Aids* and applied to the *Confessions*: First, Coleridge confesses original sin in terms he himself significantly calls “Biblical”; yet his description of the origination of the human subject as sinful coincides exactly with the description of the human subject’s origination as the finite repetition of the “I AM” of God which is most fully developed in *Biographia Literaria*. The unity of God and man in human consciousness is thus described as complicit in original sin. Under this scheme of representation, God participates in being only through *Apostasis*, a falling-off Coleridge himself connects to original sin. Second, Coleridge’s writings in *Aids* and “A Nightly Prayer,” among others, declare and depend on the truthfulness and reliability of Scripture, so that its prophecies and promises reveal to him “a God who hearest prayer.” Coleridge’s understanding of Scripture according to his characteristic representation of the subject, as developed in *Confessions*, however, severely restricts the possibilities of Scriptural representation. On this understanding, Scripture can only be “inspired” to the extent of the reader’s ability to represent himself in terms of the text as coinciding with the human writer in the creative act.

The resources for answering the problem set forth in “The Pains of Sleep” and throughout Coleridge’s corpus are available, and to some extent availed of, in the very works themselves. Coleridge’s understanding of original sin, as already discussed above in passages from the *Aids*, recapitulates in part the Biblical accounts of the radically distinct origins of the human creature and the sinful human subject. The representation of the human creature (given being by the Creator’s “let there be”) and the fallen human being (originating through moribund desire) accounts for two differences which ought

not to be conflated. The first is the Creator/creature difference, a difference which need not describe an opposition but may not merely repeat the name of the Creator; the second is the creature/fallen difference. This latter difference founds the economy of violence with which Western philosophy has been engaged. Just as Coleridge represents the ambivalent relationship of warfare and human creative force in the Khan's "decree," so the history of philosophy from Descartes to Derrida, at least, has continually rediscovered the totalitarian threat implicit in the attempt to encompass all things both personally and globally in the *parousia* of the presence of the self to the self. In the post-Christian global West, it has become more evident even than Coleridge could see that such different ontological frameworks as the Buddhism of Nishitani or Takeuchi and the theatrical radicalism of Nietzsche or Artaud converge on this same goal. In every case, the concern is to represent the human subject so that its self-represented and representing presence accounts for itself and all things with no residue of prior representation.

However, as Coleridge discovers repeatedly, rendering the subject inarticulate in order to compose a self free from prior representation defeats the purpose of turning to the spiritual inwardness of the "deep romantic chasm." The human subject, as a discursive formation, is articulated in its origination. As Artaud discovers, the self asserting its own propriety finds its very aspirations depend on breath which seems to have been stolen by the prior representations of another. Even when readers, like Artaud, respond not with ordinary suppression but with radical defiance to the discovery, the conduct of a truly liminal discourse always discovers the givenness of creaturely being prior to the "act of self-duplication." The distance from creaturely being thus described is the creature/fallen difference called "sin" as it takes place in the human subject's

amour propre, its desire for self-presence without residue. As both Coleridge and the Apostle Paul agree, and the broad center of Christian tradition between and beyond them affirm, this condition is universal (and even Mishima emphasizes that “every man” lives in “a form that reject[s] existence”). Coleridge’s commitment to an originary Creator/creator difference marked by “repetition” partially re-inscribes and partially obliterates the trace of the Creator/creature difference. The Creator/creature difference is already profoundly obscured by conflation with the creature/fallen difference, as the human subject for whom sin originates with/in his being takes the fallen as the norm for human being and thus mistakes the distance it falls off from creatureliness for the space between the limitation of being and the unlimited becoming of the absolute subject. This “absolute subject” is imagined to be an inarticulate being which cannot be expressed: the self asserts itself to be ineffably hollow or divine, involving itself in a contradiction. This contradiction, however, erases the prior representation of creatureliness; despite the cognitive dissonance, as de Man says, “the ease with which we [. . .] accept” origination “is indicative of our desire to forget.”

In “A Nightly Prayer” and the discussion of original sin in *Aids to Reflection*, among other places, Coleridge shows his conviction that “*Peculiar* to the Christian religion are the remedy and [. . .] the solution” for original sin (193). If the attempt to recover the subject’s origins from the perspective of the fallen creature leads to delusions or delirium as in “The Pains of Sleep,” then the “remedy” must account for human origins in terms of the creature/fallen difference, but must also make possible an account of a new origination and composition of the human subject. As Coleridge says:

Supposing him therefore, to know the meaning of original sin, and to have decided for himself on the fact of its actual existence, as the antecedent

ground and occasion of Christianity, we may now proceed to Christianity itself, as the Edifice raised on this ground, that is, to the great Constituent Article of the Faith in Christ, as the Remedy of the Disease—The Doctrine of Redemption. (*Aids* 195)

On Coleridge's account of the human subject, the effort to dwell in the "Edifice" gets lost in the "labyrinthine way-winning," the descent to the "deep romantic chasm." His Christian confession, however, suggests the necessity of a "somewhat more" which is specifically textual and anterior to the self-representation of the human subject. The "Edifice" of "Christianity itself," both personally and globally, is a discursive formation whose "Constituent Article" is a "Doctrine" by which "the Faith in Christ" may be construed to represent both Christ's work and the faithful reader's responsiveness to that work.

Despite his recognition of the textual and dependent nature of his Christian confession, and the importance he ascribes to Scripture within it, though, Coleridge is scandalized by the traditional doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Coleridge turns to Scripture to discover the radical distinction between the origin of the creature and original sin, but reads Scripture in complicity with original sin. In so doing, he denies himself those very resources upon which he founds his petition in "A Nightly Prayer," failing to grasp the "somewhat more" he acknowledges in *The Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* before lapsing back into the same representation of the human subject from which he appeared to turn. Given Coleridge's influence on the likes of F. D. Maurice, J. C. Hare, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, it is important to attend to the theological implications of this "move in service of essence," as Christiansen calls it (above), and to allow the unraveling of the language of metaphysics which has worked itself out in Continental philosophy to reveal the lack of a center for Coleridge's theory of

the human subject. It is equally important to attend to those elements of Coleridge's Christian confession which, by acknowledging the priority of articulate divine revelation in Scripture, announce the possibility of an historically realized "Remedy of the Disease." For if Coleridge ever wrote a poem *in propria persona*, it must have been "The Pains of Sleep"; and if Coleridge ever understood the need of a Scripture whose authority is conveyed in particular language and not dissolved in the "absolute subject" of the fallen imagination, it was when he entrusted himself to "thou who hast revealed thyself in thy holy word as a God that hearest prayer."

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