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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Allen Dale Widerburg submitted for thesis credit to the English Department July 30, 1975.

Title: "Kubla Khan" and its Critics

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

Gregory Goekjian, Chairman

Ray P. Mariels

John A. Scharbach

This paper evaluates the critical response to Samuel Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." In the Introduction I outline my critical approach, which attempts to see the relationships between parts of the poem, sources outside the poem and the poet himself. In analyzing Coleridge's esthetics, I have come to the conclusion that the poem was the first of a new type of Romantic poem. The central structural principle of this type of poem is the use of illusion and the fragment form, or the illusion of the fragment form. Poems that fall within this esthetic frequently use the "vision within a dream" motif as a metaphor for this illusion.

The poem presents several problems that make it difficult to see

it as a poem of this type. First Coleridge claimed that it was produced under the influence of drugs, second he claimed it was a fragment, and third he claimed that it was literally dreamed. I propose that the preface to the poem was a deliberate artistic device used to create the "illusions" necessary to build the many layers of meaning in this poem. The illusions act like mirrors to multiply meanings. An example of this type of work where the device is seen as a literary device is the ending of Poe's Narrative of A. Gordon Pym.

After the Introduction I divide the text into five sections. The first simply gives examples of the early critical reception of "Kubla Khan" so that we can see the early misunderstanding that greeted the poem.

The second section evaluates the critics who have dealt with the sources of "Kubla Khan." I chiefly evaluate two critics: Werner W. Beyer whose Enchanted Forest offers Wieland's Oberon as the chief source, and John Livingstone Lowes whose Road to Xanadu was the first to hunt sources for "Kubla Khan." I outline the problems which were created when a note which was found on a manuscript threw suspicion on the preface, and the problems this creates in dating the poem and verifying Lowes sources.

In the third section I outline some of the Freudian and Jungian responses to the poem and attempt to show how they can be useful and how they sometimes lead us away from the poem. I briefly present the biographical facts which have led some critics to see Freudian implications in the poem.

In the fourth section I deal with the problems of drugs and dreams.

I outline the arguments of Elizabeth Schneider whose Coleridge, Opium and "Kubla Khan" denied that drugs influenced the poem, and M. H. Abrams whose Milk of Paradise said that drugs did influence the poem, and Alethea Hayter's Opium and the Romantic Imagination which took a middle ground and whose arguments make sense to me.

In the last section I attempt to give summaries of several overviews that have been proposed, chiefly those of Harold Bloom in The Visionary Company, Edward Bostetter in The Romantic Ventriloquists and Geoffrey Yarlott in Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid. I also attempt to show how my ideas about illusion relate to their interpretations and to summarize my own overview of the poem. I believe that if we try to fragment this poem into several separate interpretations we will fail to discern its richness and see the subtlety of its interlocking structures.

"KUBLA KHAN" AND ITS CRITICS

by

ALLEN DALE WIDEBURG

A thesis submitted for thesis credit to the
English Department:

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1975

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this study I have tried to do three things. First I have attempted to give a partial survey of critical works related to "Kubla Khan." I have had to leave many interesting articles out of this survey in the interests of economy and form, but I have attempted to indicate most of the major directions that criticism has taken. I have endeavored to evaluate these responses and to indicate which interpretations have tended to lead me away from the poem.

I have organized the chapters in the following way. The second presents the early reception and misunderstandings that greeted the publication of "Kubla Khan." The third attempts a summary of those critics who investigate the sources of the poem. The fourth presents some Freudian and Jungian interpretations. The fifth deals with the problem of what influence drugs and dreams may have had on the poem, which is brought up by Coleridge in his preface to the poem. The last chapter attempts to give a brief summary of some critics who have attempted a larger overview of the poem, to indicate some recent new directions in criticism and various problems and loose ends which do not fall under any of the other chapter headings. In the process I attempt to indicate my own view of the poem.

My second purpose in this study is to attempt to come to some understanding of Coleridge's aesthetics and, in particular, the aesthetics behind "Kubla Khan" itself.

My third purpose, growing out of the second, is to attempt to see the poem in the context of structuralist criticism, which comes the closest of any of the critical methods I have studied to my own way of evaluating literature. Though I have not strictly adhered to structuralist method, I have tried to evaluate the poem in the spirit of structuralist thought, which has its roots in Coleridge's poetic thought, and attempts to give an integrative "ecological" view of the relationships of the various images and symbols of the poem. The problem I find with many of the "modernist" critical approaches is that they seek the meaning of a poem in its individual parts and sometimes fail to put it back together again. In an attempt to escape misrepresentation, I hasten to add that I don't reject any critical approach that adds to our understanding of even the most minute detail. I simply want to stress that when we have explained the individual part of the poem, we must then attempt to see what other meanings it may have when seen in relation to other parts of the poem and to the poet himself.

In my last chapter my reference to Coleridge's use of illusion can be easily misunderstood. I don't use the term illusion in any pejorative sense. I am using it to attempt to get at what I see as Coleridge's method in arriving at the "imitation" that Aristotle tells us in his Poetics is behind all art. Coleridge's famous statement in the Biographia Literaria about the necessity for a "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" is useful here. This aesthetic requires participation by the reader who is actively engaged in trying to separate "illusion" and "reality" and

permits the reader to remove the "film of familiarity" that keeps us from seeing truth. The illusion of real life we find on the stage is necessary to allow us to "suspend" our "disbelief" long enough for the author to transmit his message or truth in his "imitation" of life.

We see an example of this use of the fragment form and illusion in The Narrative of A. Gordyn Pym by Poe which breaks off just at the point where we see a chasm open with a horrible human figure emerging who is strikingly reminiscent of Coleridge's figure with the flashing eyes and floating hair in "Kubla Khan." Poe then alludes to the untimely death of the narrator in a passage that we recognize as a literary device. The literary use of fragments is common in the Romantic period. Coleridge's preface may serve the same function as Poe's note at the end of his story, that is to create an illusion for poetic purposes. No one will likely ever be able to say for sure without committing an intentional fallacy, but if Coleridge is using a number of illusions to create his effects, he is using them more skillfully than Poe whose use of the device of illusion is seen as a literary device by the reader. As Longinus says in his essay On the Sublime, "It is art to conceal art."

I see illusion [and allusion] as the "structural" principle on which the whole poem is built. The references to magic and all the vanishing images in the poem point to this interpretation and some of Coleridge's other poems seem to support my impression that he was interested in the nature of illusion both as a device and a metaphor. Laudanum is a useful metaphor for the suspension of will, and dreams are a useful metaphor for the state of illusion. Like mirrors, these

metaphors change appearance when held up to various critical interpretations. The poem is greater than any of its critics, and many of the various interpretations I summarize may be "right" at once. Not because the poem is vague, or ambiguous in the worst sense of the word, but because it has a structure that is perhaps, purposely flexible and rich. The purpose behind the fragmentary nature, or the illusion of a fragmentary nature, in the poem is perhaps best seen in the following quotation from Moby Dick, which is a kind of credo for this kind of Romantic work:

I now leave my cetological system standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God help me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught-nay, but the draught of a draught.¹

Coleridge's poetry also supports this notion of the use of illusion. We find him referring to "phantoms" in "Christabel," "Self-Knowledge," and "Phantom or Fact." Though I realize that this interpretation of "Kubla Khan" cannot be "proved" in the ultimate sense of the word, I present it, for disagreement if necessary, as one possible explanation of the poem's structure.

¹Herman Melville, Moby Dick, ed. Alfred Kazin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. 125.

CHAPTER II

EARLY CRITICS

For the most part, Coleridge's contemporaries were baffled by "Kubla Khan." I am citing a few of their comments in this chapter to illustrate the range of their confusion and the general hostility the poem was greeted with. Some of this confusion has been generated by the preface to the poem which states that the poem was composed in a dream, that it is a fragment and that an anodyne, taken for a slight indisposition, was responsible for the poem's effects. A manuscript known as the Crewe Manuscript was found in 1934. It had a note in Coleridge's handwriting which contradicts the preface in several particulars; the date, the drug and the method of composition. Dream and Reverie had different meanings for Coleridge. The latter was always used to suggest a conscious, or at least waking, state. For the sake of comparison I will give both versions here.

The following fragment is here published at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity [Lord Byron], and, as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned, rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed poetic merits.

In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in "Purchas's Pilgrimage": "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall." The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time

he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter!

--Preface to "Kubla Khan"

This fragment with a good deal more, not recoverable, composed in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of opium, taken to check a dysentery, at a farm house between Porlock and Linton, a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, in the fall of the year, 1797.

--Crewe Manuscript note.

The discrepancies between the two versions, the detail he gives us to locate the farm house he wrote it in, and his insistence that it is a fragment all lead me to the belief that Coleridge is carefully attempting to create illusions with the published version of the preface. I believe he is doing this for artistic reasons, personal psychological reasons and reasons having to do with the way he knew it would be accepted by critics. I believe the poem was written in a revolutionary form that critics were not yet ready to accept. This form used illusion as both a metaphor and structural principle and was often characterized by the use of the "vision within a dream" motif and/or the use of the fragment or use of the illusion of a fragment to make it's effect.

This form became common during the Romantic period. Outstanding

examples that readily come to mind are Shelley's Alastor and The Triumph of Life, Coleridge's Christabel, Keats' Lamia and both versions of Hyperion, Poe's Narrative of A. Gordon Pym and "A Dream Within A Dream."

Coleridge knew the literary world was not ready to accept it; and much of his subsequent prose was written to lay the ground work for an eventual understanding of his intentions. In this chapter I simply give a sampling of the initial critical response to the poem so we can see why Coleridge felt it necessary to put his preface in an apologetic tone.

Josiah Condor in an 1816 essay said that:

As to 'Kubla Khan', and the 'Pains of Sleep', we can only regret the publication of them, as affording a proof that the author overrates the importance of his name. . . . We closed the present publication with sentiments of melancholy and regret, not unmixed with pity. In what an humbling attitude does such a man as Coleridge present himself to the public in laying before them these specimens of the rich promise of excellence, with which sixteen years ago he raised the expectations of his friends--pledges of future greatness which after sixteen years he has failed to redeem!¹

William Hazlitt writes in one review that:

'Kubla Khan,' we think only shews that Coleridge can write better nonsense verses than any man in England. It is not a poem, but a musical composition. . . . We could repeat these lines to ourselves not the less often for not knowing the meaning of them.²

In another essay in which he implies that Coleridge was published

¹Josiah Condor, Coleridge, The Critical Heritage, ed. J. R. Jackson. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 212-213.

²William Hazlitt, Coleridge, The Critical Heritage, pp. 208-209.

because his political beliefs coincided with those of the publishers rather than for his poetic merits, Hazlitt says:

It it be true that the author has thus earned the patronage of those liberal dispensers of bounty, we can have no objection that they should give him proper proofs of their gratitude; but we cannot help wishing, for his sake, as well as our own, that they would pay in solid pudding instead of empty praise; and adhere, at least in this instance, to the good old system of rewarding their champions with places and pensions, instead of puffing their bad poetry, and endeavouring to cram their nonsense down the throats of all the loyal and well affected.³

John Wilson in a review of Biographia Literaria in 1817 attempts to sum up what he feels is Coleridge's failure. He writes that of the Lake poets only Southey and Wordsworth have written anything lasting, and that Coleridge's vision of himself as a great poet is a "ludicrous delusion." In a passage that seems to be a direct attack upon "Kubla Khan" and perhaps "Christabel" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," he says that Coleridge is a man of genius,

. . . but he is not a man of strong intellect nor of powerful talents. He has a great deal of fancy and imagination, but little or no real feeling, and certainly no judgment. He cannot form to himself any harmonious landscape such as it exists in nature, but beautified by the serene light of the imagination. He cannot conceive simple and majestic groups of human figures and characters acting on the theatre of real existence. But his pictures of nature are fine only as imaging the dreaminess, and obscurity, and confusion of distempered sleep; while all his agents pass before our eyes like shadows, and only impress and affect us with a phantasmagorical splendor.⁴

³William Hazlitt, Contemporary Reviews of Romantic Poets, ed. John Wain. (London: George G. Harrop, 1953), pp. 90-91.

⁴John Wilson, Contemporary Reviews of Romantic Poets, p. 91.

There is a kind of Romantic conservatism implied in this judgment that emphasizes realism, or a kind of pastoral pictorialness that passes for realism, at the expense of more inventive forms. Francis Thompson's "The Seasons" comes to mind as an example of this pastoral pictorialness. Coleridge's preface may have been a shielded apology for not coming up to what he knew would be the expectations of most critics. Coleridge, of course, had some friends who admired the poem, but even Southey, who might be expected to appreciate it, called it a "Dutch attempt at German Sublimity."

It might be useful here, in making the distinction between the new poetry of the imagination and the old poetry of pictorial literalness, to look at Keats' self-comparison with Byron which Coleridge might have said if he hadn't been so defensive.

You speak of Lord Byron and me--There is this great difference between us. He describes what he sees--I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task. You see the immense difference.⁵

Byron's own blindness to the workings of Coleridge's mind is perhaps exemplified in his dedication to Don Juan, where he says:

And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing,
 but like a hawk encumber'd with his hood, --
 Explaining metaphysics to the nation--
 I wish he would explain his explanation.

⁵John Keats, from a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Friday, September 17, Monday, September 27, 1819; Romantic Criticism 1800-1850, ed. R. A. Foakes (Columbia S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), p. 107.

⁶Anon, Coleridge, The Critical Heritage, pp. 246-247.

The extent to which Coleridge's preface to "Kubla Khan" was accepted at face value is illustrated by an unsigned review published in 1817 wherein the critic questions:

Were they dreamt, or were they spontaneously poured forth instantly after the dream . . . ? 'Psychological curiosity,' as he terms it, depends in no slight degree on the establishment of the previous fact which we have mentioned: but the poem itself is below criticism. We would dismiss it with some portentous words of Sir Kenelm Digby, in his observations on Browne's Religio Medici: 'I have much ado to believe what he speaketh confidently; that he is more beholding to Morpheus for learned and rational as well as pleasing dreams, than to Mercury for smart and facetious conceptions.'⁶

So from the very start, confusion and misconception have surrounded this poem. Coleridge seems to have brought all this on himself, however, as Humphrey House says in the chapter entitled "'Kubla Khan,' 'Christabel,' and 'Dejection,'" from his book Coleridge:

If Coleridge had never published his preface, who would have thought of 'Kubla Khan' as a fragment? Who would have guessed at a dream? Who, without the confession, would have supposed that 'in consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed?' Who later, would have dared to talk of its 'patchwork brilliance?' Coleridge played, out of modesty, straight into the hands of critics.⁷

Although I'm not sure Coleridge's motivation was "modesty," he indeed led critics astray for a century or more until John Livingston Lowes began the first full-scale serious attack on its complex logic and "fugitive causes" and we began to see the importance of "Kubla Khan" both to an understanding of Coleridge's creative processes and

⁷Humphrey House, "'Kubla Khan,' 'Christabel' and 'Dejection,'" British Romantic Poets: Recent Revaluations, ed. Shiv K. Kumar. (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1966), p. 119.

to an insight into an aesthetic shift that caused tidal waves that are still rolling under the craft of twentieth century writing.

Some of the Victorians valued Coleridge, although it was often for the wrong reasons. They sometimes saw him as an "art for art's sake" degenerate with whom they could identify. "Kubla Khan" was considered the epitome of this type of composition. It is interesting that to this day some people still read the poem that way. John Livingstone Lowes was the first to take a serious and deep look at the poem and find that what Coleridge had said all great poetry must have, namely, a more than usual state of order, "Kubla Khan" had in abundance.

CHAPTER III

SOURCE HUNTING CRITICS

Much of the criticism surrounding "Kubla Khan" has concerned itself with the many possible sources from which Coleridge may have drawn his images. Coleridge was a voracious reader. He once referred to himself as a "library cormorant," so the possibility of an unusual number and variety of sources must be entertained. The first person to make a major attempt at identifying Coleridge's sources was John Livingstone Lowes in his book The Road to Xanadu. Werner Beyer in The Enchanted Forest has recently challenged some of Lowe's assumptions. Beyer points out that Lowes took Coleridge's 1816 preface at face value. First, he assumes that it is a fragment, a dangerous assumption, and second, the difference between the two versions of the composition of the poem was not known to Lowes because the Crewe Manuscript note was not found until seven years after Lowes first published his book. The doubt this cast on the date of the composition not only influences our judgement of the possible sources, but throws doubts on the influence of drugs and certain biographical interpretations of the poem, which I will discuss in later chapters.

Though Coleridge, in the preface to Christabel, defends himself against charges of plagiarism, it is ironic that none of the critics who first read "Kubla Khan" were aware of his borrowings in that poem. If Coleridge did borrow from other sources, and I think the evidence shows that he did, it was only to fill what Lowes called the deep wells

of his own inward experience from which his fountains fitfully flowed. Lowes writes, in chapter three of The Road to Xanadu, of "the deep well" as a metaphor for the unconscious.

The key to understanding Coleridge's borrowings is found in his "Gutch Memorandum Book," which Lowes describes in the following passage:

It is a catch-all for suggestions, jotted down chaotically from Coleridge's absorbing adventures among books. It is a repository of waifs and strays of verse, some destined to find a lodgement later in the poems, others yet lying abandoned where they fell, like drifted leaves. It is a mirror of the fitful and kaleidoscopic moods and a record of the germinal ideas of one of the most supremely gifted and utterly incalculable spirits ever let loose upon the planet. And it is like nothing else in the world so much as a jungle, illuminated eerily with patches of phosphorescent light, and peopled with uncanny life and strange exotic flowers. But it is teeming and fecund soil, and out of it later rose, like exhalations, gleaming and aerial shapes.¹

Lowes documents at great length how many of these fragments gleaned from Coleridge's reading found their way into his work. His reading resulted in wide-ranging entries such as those on crocodiles from Bartram's Travels or entries on the Upa Tree of Java from Erasmus Darwin, which supposedly emitted a vapor which killed everything within 15 to 18 miles. Coleridge did not know that the latter was a myth; but it was the kind of thing which caught his imagination.

In this notebook Coleridge mapped out plans for works he never completed, wrote notes about his son Hartley falling down and crying, included recipes as well as notes reminding himself to check footnotes of works he was reading.

¹John Livingstone Lowes, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), p. 6.

Coleridge was the kind of reader who examined the stems coming out of every branch just to see if they ended in leaf or fruit. As Lowes says:

Darwin, that is to say, sent Coleridge to Thompson; Thompson sent him to Maupertuis; and once more an incorrigible habit of verifying footnotes led the imagination upon fresh adventures.²

Disparate gleanings from Coleridge's scientific readings in Priestley's Opticks merged with his readings in Captain Cook's Voyage to find their way into The Ancient Mariner. Priestly has a chapter on the tracks of light left by fish on the phosphorescent sea, and Captain Cook describes the blues and reds and greens of the bright sea animals, that he sighted off the coast of Oregon, that had the appearance of glowing fire in the dark. References or quotations from these writers turn up in the Gutch Memorandum Book.

This notebook then gives us a glimpse into what Lowes calls the "deep well." This notebook which was kept by Coleridge from the spring of 1795 to the spring or summer of 1798 contained the fragments of his research. Lowes talks about the deep well of the subconscious, in which these fragments are dropped for a time or permanently, to emerge sometimes transformed or to be forever submerged.

Coleridge referred to the "hooks-and-eyes of the memory" by which images combine before being brought up. Here, perhaps, it would be well to point out what Coleridge felt was the difference between the fancy and the imagination; a difference that was important to Coleridge and one that inspired the later romantics to lay great

²Lowes, p. 34.

importance on imagination as opposed to the wit or fancy that had dominated 18th century verse. As A. E. Housman writes:

Meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not. If it were, the eighteenth century would have been able to write it better.³

Coleridge's definition of the difference between the Fancy and the Imagination reads as follows:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.⁴

Lowes speculates somewhat on Coleridge's theories of the creative process and notes that the observed processes of other creators seem to fall within the same pattern.

In a fascinating collection of essays on The Creative Process

³A. E. Housman, "The Name and Nature of Poetry," The Creative Process, ed. Brewster Ghiselin. (New York: Mentor, 1952), p. 86.

⁴Coleridge, Biographia Literaria Chapter XIII.

edited by Brewster Ghiselin, creative people from several different fields talk about what happens at the moment of creation. A few examples, when compared with the preface to "Kubla Khan," are intriguing. The following is contained in a letter from Mozart:

All this fires my soul, and, provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself, becomes methodised and defined, and the whole, though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue, at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them as it were, all at once (gleich alles zusammen). What a delight this is I cannot tell! All this inventing, this producing, takes place in a pleasing lively dream. Still the actual hearing of the tout ensemble is after all the best. What has been thus produced I do not easily forget, and this is perhaps the best gift I have my Divine Maker to thank for.⁵

And in another essay where Henri Poincaré talks about how he came up with some important mathematical solutions which had vexed him for a long time: I add this as an example of the creative process at work outside of art to show that Coleridge was describing a general creative process, and not something exotic.

For fifteen days I strove to prove that there could not be any functions like those I have since called Fuchsian functions. I was then very ignorant; every day I seated myself at my work table, stayed an hour or two, tried a great number of combinations and reached no results. One evening, contrary to my custom, I drank black coffee and could not sleep. Ideas rose in crowds; I felt them collide until pairs interlocked so to speak, making a stable combination. By the next morning I had established the existence of a class of Fuchsian functions, those which come from the hypergeometric series; I had only to write out the results, which took but a few hours.⁶

⁵Wolfgang Mozart, "A Letter," The Creative Process, p. 45.

⁶Henri Poincaré, "Mathematical Creation," The Creative Process, p. 36.

A few paragraphs later he theorizes:

Often when one works at a hard question, nothing good is accomplished at the first attack. Then one takes a rest, longer or shorter, and sits down anew to the work. During the first half hour, as before, nothing is found, and then all of a sudden the decisive idea presents itself to the mind. It might be said that the conscious work has been more fruitful because it has been interrupted and the rest has given back to the mind its force and freshness. But it is more probable that this rest has been filled out with unconscious work and that the result of this work has afterward revealed itself to the geometer just as in the cases I have cited; only the revelation, instead of coming during a walk or a journey, has happened during a period of conscious work, but independently of this work which plays at most a role of excitant, as if it were the goad stimulating the results already reached during rest, but remaining unconscious, to assume the conscious form.⁷

Poincaré then goes on to talk about the relative importance of the conscious self to the subliminal self:

A first hypothesis now presents itself: the subliminal self is in no way inferior to the conscious self; it is not purely automatic; it is capable of discernment; it has tact, delicacy; it knows how to choose, to divine. What do I say? It knows better how to divine than the conscious self, since it succeeds where that has failed.⁸

And in a letter from composer Harold Shapero that strikingly resembles Coleridge's preface:

On my way to Vienna yesterday, sleep overtook me in my carriage. . . . While thus slumbering I dreamt I had gone on a far journey, to no less a place than Syria, on to Judea and back, and then all the way to Arabia, when at length I actually arrived at Jerusalem. The Holy City gave rise to thoughts of the Holy Books. No wonder then if the man Tobias occurred to me, which led me to think of our own little Tobias and our great Tobias. Now during my

⁷Ibid., p. 38. ⁸Ibid., p. 39.

dream-journey, the following canon came into my head:

(Music and Lyrics shown)

But scarcely did I awake when away flew the canon, and I could not recall any part of it. On returning here, however, next day, in the same carriage . . . I resumed my dream-journey, being on this occasion wide awake, when lo and behold! in accordance with the laws of association of ideas [The use of this phrase is indeed striking--H. S.], the same canon flashed across me; so being now awake I held it as fast as Menelaus did Proteus, only permitting it to be changed into three parts . . .⁹

This creative process, as my examples point out, is not anomalous To Coleridge but rather a normative process. The poem is a "psychological curiosity," only in the sense that the process that the poem is about is demonstrated in the story of the poem's creation told in the preface.

In his chapter on "The Hooked Atoms," Lowes tries to imaginatively recreate the conditions out of which "Kubla Khan" was written:

Suppose a subliminal reservoir thronged, as Coleridge's was thronged, with images which had flashed on the inner eye from the pages of innumerable books. Suppose these images to be fitted, as it were, with links which render possible indefinite combination. Suppose some powerful suggestion in the field of consciousness strikes down into the mass of images thus capable of all manner of conjunctions. And suppose that this time, when in response to the summons the sleeping images flock up with their potential associations, from the deeps--suppose that this time all conscious imaginative control is for some reason in abeyance. What, if all this were so, would happen?

That hypothetical question fairly covers, I think, the case of "Kubla Khan." The fragment is a thing of unique and imperishable beauty, and if I thought that an essay at the elucidation of its genesis would dull its brightness, I should be tempted to let the facts, however remarkable, rest undisturbed. But that triumphant beauty is secure. And

⁹Harold Shapero, "The Musical Mind," The Creative Process, p. 51.

Coleridge himself has told enough to raise a host of questions which he has left unanswered and which, from then till now, have piqued legitimate curiosity.¹⁰

Lowes wasn't aware of just how many questions were unanswered when he wrote that statement. Some very important ones hadn't even been asked.

Beyer attempts to show that there were other influences than those pointed to by Lowes, and that Lowes' ideas on the effects of drugs were erroneous:

Since the poet under no circumstances could have confused the 1816 version's 'three hours in a profound sleep' with 'a sort of Reverie' (a term he used now broadly, now technically, and applied in 1800 to the "Ancient Mariner," to Lamb's critical dismay), among other things Lowes' central assumption--That Coleridge's 1816 Preface contained a true account of the composition of "Kubla Khan"--had been shaken. Subsequent criticism would sooner or later point out the discrepancies in Coleridge's account and many of Lowes' conclusions would disintegrate. Although this did not occur at once, the publication in 1945 of Elizabeth Schneider's important article, 'The "Dream" of Kubla Khan,' gave impetus to the process.¹¹

Of more central concern to Beyer is the question of sources. Lowes named as the chief sources of "Kubla Khan," Purchas, Bartram, Bruce, Maurice, Milton, Burnet, Herodotus and Pausanias. Beyer believed that because of the evidence of the Crewe Manuscript and the watermark that the revised date of composition of "Kubla Khan" should be October, 1797, as E. K. Chambers has suggested at some length in his biography, rather than May of 1798. Establishing this date is important for Beyer's argument insofar as Beyer points out that

¹⁰Lowes, pp. 312-313. ¹¹Ibid., p. 121.

Coleridge was translating Wieland's Oberon around November, 1797.

Beyer believes that Oberon was one of the most influential works of the Romantic period and has been neglected somewhat by scholars:

As for Oberon, among its myriad Kaleidoscopic scenes are two enchanted palaces (one beside a sacred river), a daemon-haunted forest and the dreamlike mountain paradise of Titania, separated from her beloved. There are other elements and figures which could readily have left traces in "Kubla Khan." There is a shadowy vision of a spot in Abyssinia at the source of the Nile. There is the daemon king himself and another who hears prophetic voices. There is the dreadful assassin, a youth with floating hair and flashing eyes amid the enchanted circling observers. He has several visions--of a transcendently lovely lady, of an African maid playing an instrument and singing, and of some other damsels that abide in a paradise whose joys make him mute for all time.¹²

Beyer further argues that the influence of Oberon on other works by Coleridge was tremendous. He discounts Lowes' assertion that Bartram's Travels was influential because the parallels weren't that strong and he argues against Elizabeth Schneider's theory that the poem was not influenced so much by the travels as by Milton, Landon's Gebir (1798) and Southey's Thalaba.¹³ She had argued for a later date but he dismisses it as a "tortuous attempt." While the argument is complex, I find Beyer at least tentatively convincing.

There is always the distinction between sources dredged up from the "deep well" and those plucked out of the air at a particular time. The pseudo-oriental tradition in Romantic literature is well known, and I think the similarities of works produced in this time owes no more to positively identifiable borrowing than does the similarity

¹²Beyer, pp. 123-124.

¹³Elizabeth Schneider, Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953).

of instrument choices in the compositions of Mozart and Handel. There are, obviously, features common to any age. Beyer has very convincing and thorough arguments for Oberon as a major source both of "Kubla Khan" and "The Ancient Mariner."

After Beyer sent Lowes some of his material, Lowes sent Beyer the following letter on '4 December, 1939':

A week ago last Friday evening, finding myself at loose ends, I picked up Oberon again, idly reading, for the interest of it all. All at once, to my astonishment, "Kubla Khan" began to appear! I've gone a bit farther since, and there's no question, I think, that Oberon is there, in much the same fashion as in The Ancient Mariner. Since the two poems are virtually synchronous, it's not strange that it should be so. . . . Had you not proved beyond question that Coleridge was reading Oberon, I should have cherished doubts of my eyes. As it is, the case, I think, is clear.¹⁴

Beyer goes on to compare his symbols in Oberon with those in "Kubla Khan" in an attempt to discern what each work "means." He finally agrees essentially with the interpretation laid down by Beer in Coleridge the Visionary, while disagreeing with Lowes' final conclusions that the poem was the result of unconscious or automatic composition in an "opium dream" and produced under suspended imaginative control. He incidentally agrees that there may have been other influences, though he cursorily skims over them with, "This may well be." The following quote is Beer's position as Beyer sees it:

Beer sees "Kubla Khan" as a 'poem where every . . . image seems to refer to ancient history and mythology' (p. 253). He [Beer] believes the Abyssinian maid a symbol of the lost tradition of knowledge (p. 254), a redemptive figure who

¹⁴Beyer, p. 120.

sings of the lost paradise. And he believes that Milton's Book IX, Maurice, Bruce, and Collins' 'Ode to the Poetical Character' played key parts in the genesis of the poem. This may well be. In the light of Lowes' letter (cf. p. 120) and the evidence from Oberon not only in this chapter but in Cain and the Mariner, it seems only fair to say in Mr. Beer's own words: 'Nevertheless, if "Kubla Khan" is a petrified forest, it is also an enchanted forest.'¹⁵

It is interesting at this point to look quickly at Bush's assertion in Mythology and The Romantic Tradition:

Coleridge was not 'primitive' or 'pagan' enough in temperament to have an instinctively mythological intuition of the natural world such as, in varying degrees, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley had.¹⁶

Coleridge could not accept mythology directly because he felt conscious rejection of all things pagan, and felt that mythology did not offer suggestive enough metaphors for his intentions. As Bush points out, in a footnote, Coleridge asserts in a letter to Southey, September 10, 1802, that mythology is, at best, fancy and not imagination; and that he was opposed to it because he saw in his Christian impulses a modifying element that mythology did not have. Perhaps this is why Coleridge felt apologetic for the poem. It may have had un-Christian influences that he didn't want to admit or accept.

Returning to Lowes, it would behoove us to look at the lines of Purchas that Coleridge was reading when he fell asleep and to consider a note which Lowes appends to it. Purchas' lines read as follows:

¹⁵Ibid., p. 141. Also J. B. Beer, Coleridge The Visionary (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 276.

¹⁶Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937), p. 55.

In Xandu did Cublai Can build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground with a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant springs, delightful 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.¹⁷

Lowes notes here that there exists a thirteenth century Arabic account of Xandu, which was not translated into any occidental language until years after Coleridge had his dream, and he includes the following fascinating quotation from Yule's Cathay and the Way Thither:

On the eastern side of that city a karsi or palace was built called Langtin, after a plan which the Kaan had seen in a dream and retained in his memory.

Lowes adds,

In ancient tradition the stately pleasure-dome of Kubla Khan itself came into being, like the poem, as the embodiment of a remembered vision in a dream.¹⁸

We might well ask ourselves if Coleridge knew this, and if so, where he read it. The coincidence between Coleridge's account of his production of the poem and the above accounts I find extremely intriguing. Lowes believes Coleridge couldn't possibly have known about the actual facts of Kubla Khan's real palace or the legends surrounding it. He states, in a further note, that the actual site of the palace has recently been explored; and that it was originally built over a lake that was filled up and covered by the palace itself. Water imprisoned in the earth eventually forced outlets, and fountains were produced.

¹⁷Lowes, p. 326. ¹⁸Lowes, p. 326.

There is another intriguing possible problem, however, and that is, if he did read this somewhere, did he make up the dream composition story, and if so, why? This poem differs from his other dream poems because he claimed it was a real dream.

Without reproducing the pieces of evidence that Lowes has amassed from his source hunting, I might briefly cite a few. The words holy, haunted and mingled measure appear in close conjunction in a convincing context in Collins. There are descriptions of underground lakes in Bartram and an underground river called Alpheus in Pausanias which is obviously the river Alph in the poem. The caves of ice were found in his readings of Maurice. Further references to Alpheus were found in Seneca which Coleridge had probably read. Lowes' scholarship on this is painstaking and engagingly presented.

Turning to other works, Hans Meier draws parallels with Milton, Spenser and the Bible in an article entitled "Xanaduvian Residues."¹⁹ I find his arguments very convincing. In Book I of Paradise Lost we find the following lines:

Anon out of the earth a Falrick huge
Rose like an Exhalation, with the sound
Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet,
Built like a Temple
(11.709-712)

And in Book IV the following lines appear in rapid succession:

Southward through Eden went a river large
(1.219)
Pass'd underneath ingulft
(1.221)

¹⁹Hans H. Meier, "Xanaduvian Residues," *English Studies*, XLVIII (1967), pp. 145-155.

Rose a fresh Fountain, and with many a rill
 Waterd the Garden; thence winted fell
 (11.225-226)

Down the steep glade, and met the neather Flood
 (11.225-227)

With mazie error under pendant shades
 Ran Nectar, visiting each plant, and fed
 Flours worthy of Paradise
 (11.235-237)

Umbrageous Grots and Caves
 of coole recess
 (11.253-254)

and

Young Bacchus from his Stepdame Rhea's eye;
 Nor where Abassin Kings their issue Guard,
 Mount Amara, though this by som suppos'd
 True Paradise under the Ethiop Line
 By Nilus head, enclos'd with shining Rock
 (11.275-279)

Mount Amara in the manuscript becomes Mount Abora in the poem,
 and Rhea or Cybele may be connected with the "chaffy grain" image, and
 the reference to Abyssinia and the head of the Nile enclosed in the
 shining rock are abvious parallels.

In Book IX of Paradise Lost Milton describes Eve's flowery nook
 as comparable to Earthly Paradise, and to the location of the Song of
Solomon in the following passage:

Spot more delicious than those garden feigned
 Or of revived Adonis,
 Or that, not mystic where the sapient king
 Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian Spouse
 (11.439-443)

which parallels the "could I revive within me" passage of "Kubla Khan."

In Milton again in Book XI of Paradise Lost Coleridge would have read and might have associated with this the preview Adam was given by Michael of the future cities:

Of mightiest empire, from the destined walls
 of Cambalu, seat of Cathaian Can
 (11.388-389)

The parallels Meier draws with Spenser are less convincing, since the idyllic garden scene was a part of standard Renaissance images such as Sidney's Arcadia and the mechanical gardens in Nashe's Unfortunate Traveler which spoofed the whole genre.

Looking at some minor source hunters we find that Henry Pettit in an article entitled "Coleridge's Mount Abora"²⁰ turns to Reverend Clement Crutwell's New Universal Gazetteer, or Geographical Dictionary of 1798, and finds there a reference to a Mount Abur that may have been the source for Mount Abora in the poem.

In an article that brings up the possibility of plagiarism and fabrication by Coleridge, Garland Cannon notes that the mountains near the Himalayas are called the Abor Hills, and he feels that there are too many parallels between Sir William Jones' poem "A Hymn to Ganga," for it to be overlooked.²¹ Notable is the fact that the Ganges in Jones' poem springs from a source high in the Himalayas near the Abor Hills. He believes that Coleridge may have fabricated the "dream" story to cover up his reweaving of Jones' poem.

²⁰Henry Pettit, "Coleridge's Mount Abora," Modern Language Notes, LV (1940), p. 376.

²¹Garland H. Cannon, "A New Probably Source for 'Kubla Khan'," College English, vol. XVLL, pp. 136-142.

T. C. Skeat, in an article in the British Museum Quarterly; notes the discrepancies between the published preface and the note of the Crewe manuscript and discusses the subsequent possibility of a deliberate hoax on the part of Coleridge, one possibility of which has been suggested in the reference to Jones' poem above.²² Skeat also notes that this has implications in throwing light on the creative process of the poem, and he asks why Coleridge insisted that this poem was a fragment if it wasn't.

John Ower in another article compares Coleridge's "sacred river" with the "mazy progress" of Gray's ode "The Progress of Poesy"; and says that there is a significant parallel for the understanding of the symbolic significance of Coleridge's "sacred river."²³ This seems entirely possible if the poem is indeed about Coleridge's waning powers as a poet as some critics have stated.

The question of why Coleridge changed Purchas' number to five in his poem is dealt with in a note on "The Mystical Meaning of Five" by Robert Fleissner²⁴ in which he discusses the use of five from Pythagorean numerology through Sir Thomas Brown's Garden of Cyrus 1658, an English treatise on pentagonal symmetry. He notes its presence in nature as in the five fingers of the hand and in religious rituals (the five wounds of Christ, for example). This kind of interpretive

²²T. C. Skeat, "'Kubla Khan'," British Museum Quarterly, vol. XXVI, pp. 77-83.

²³John Ower, "Another Analogue of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'," Notes and Queries, vol. XIV, p. 294.

²⁴Robert F. Fleissner, "The Mystical Meaning of Five: A Notelet on 'Kubla Khan'," English Studies, vol. XLVI, p. 45.

criticism is seldom very satisfying, because when all is said and done it remains mere speculation. It is, however, the kind of thing that Coleridge might have been interested in, since he said that mystical things were his "darling studies."

And finally we see S. C. Harrex of the University of Tasmania²⁵ suggesting that Coleridge may have found his Dome image in Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village,"

"The dome where pleasure holds her mightnight reign (l.319)."

I believe that several of these sources may be working at once and Coleridge's shifts in imagery may be to emphasize this. Reducing the poem to a single source would destroy the complex structure and interaction between images and sources.

²⁵S. C. Harrex, "Coleridge's Pleasure Dome in 'Kubla Khan'," Notes and Queries, vol. XIII, pp. 172-173.

CHAPTER IV

FREUDIAN AND JUNGIAN CRITICS

We imagine ourselves discovers, and that
we have struck a light, when, in reality,
at most, we have but snuffed a candle.

Anima Poetae
(October, 1803)

In this chapter I will look at what some Freudian and Jungian critics do with the poem. Psychologists and Psychiatrists have a difficult time diagnosing patients in a hospital setting, even when the patients history is well documented and the doctor has the patient, friends and family present for personal interviews, but some critics don't seem to feel the same need for caution that the physician feels. This is where the reluctance of the New Critic to go outside the poem becomes understandable. Not that I believe the critic should not go outside the poem looking for meaning, but he should always be wary of interpretations that lead away from the meaning of the poem or result in arbitrary judgements. In this chapter I will attempt to indicate which interpretations, in my judgement, lead the reader away from the poem and which add to the meaning of the poem.

One example of the extremes of this approach is found in
Beverly Field's Reality's Dark Dream: Dejection in Coleridge:

The connection between Coleridge's female sexuality and his unconscious desire for (and fear of) the phallic woman is that he wanted a woman who was like a man (or a man who was like a

woman); and the archetypal object of his paradoxical desire was of course his mother.¹

She goes on to say:

The explicit cause of danger in the narrator is that 'he hath . . . drunk the milk of paradise,' a declaration that should remove any doubt about the maternal nature of this forbidden paradise or about the infantile nature of Coleridge's rivalry with his father. What he wanted was mother's milk.²

Psychological critics don't waste much time with the milk of human kindness, and perhaps rightly so; but from my view there is a fundamental error in the assumption that a poem can be interpreted by treating it as an unconscious form of patent self-revealing wish-fulfillment.

Freud himself makes this assumption in an article entitled "Wish-Fulfillment and the Unconscious," wherein he talks of art as being almost synonymous with phantasy. He writes of a work of art as if it were an elaborate daydream:

You will remember that we said the daydreamer hid his phantasies carefully from other people because he had reason to be ashamed of them. I may now add that even if he were to communicate them to us, he would give us no pleasure by his disclosures. When we hear such phantasies they repel us, or at least leave us cold. But when a man of literary talent presents his plays, or relates what we take to be his personal daydreams, we experience great pleasure arising probably from many sources. How the writer accomplishes this is his innermost secret; the essential *ars poetica* lies in the technique by which our feeling of repulsion is overcome, and this has certainly to do with those barriers erected between every individual being and all others. We can guess at two methods used in this technique. The writer softens the egotistical

¹Beverly Fields, Reality's Dark Dream: Dejection in Coleridge (Kent: Kent State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 98.

²Ibid., pp. 98-99.

character of the daydream by changes and disguises, and he bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is esthetic, pleasure in the presentation of his phantasies.³

Freud has presented us here with some unexamined assumptions and a limited view of the imaginative process. He, like some of his followers who have criticized Coleridge directly, could have benefited from a careful look at what Coleridge had to say about imagination.

Jung argues with this basic view of literature, and in an attempt to correct Freud's mistake, presents another which gives the work of art a wider base of interpretation, but is just as confining when considered as "the key" to understanding literature. This view tends to interpret symbolism as deriving from racial memory. Myths are looked upon as archetypal rather than personal. Jung explains his argument with Freud in the following paragraph:

If we insist on deriving the vision from a personal experience, we must treat the former as something secondary--as a mere substitute for reality. The result is that we strip the vision of its primordial quality and take it as nothing but a symptom. The pregnant chaos then shrinks to the proportions of a psychic disturbance. With this account of the matter we feel reassured and turn again to our picture of a well-ordered cosmos. Since we are practical and reasonable, we do not expect the cosmos to be perfect; we accept these unavoidable imperfections which we call abnormalities and diseases, and we take it for granted that human nature is not exempt from them. The frightening revelation of abysses that defy the human understanding is dismissed as illusion, and the poet is regarded as a victim and perpetrator of deception. Even to the poet, his primordial experience was "human-all too human," to such a degree that he could not face its meaning but had to conceal it from himself.⁴

³Sigmund Freud, "Wish-Fulfillment and the Unconscious," A Modern Book of Esthetics (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 135.

⁴Carl Jung, "Psychology and Literature," A Modern Book of Esthetics (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 145.

Though I find Jung much more in touch with the chaos of reality, the problem, as I see it, with both of these approaches is that they fail to take into account the possibility of other factors. A symbol that can be explained as sexual wish-fulfillment by a Freudian can be explained as a vestige of the collective unconscious by a Jungian, whereas the author may have made a very deliberate choice of that symbol for purposes of, say, political satire. The most immediate example that comes to mind is Gulliver's Travels, which is a very deliberate piece of political allegory, but has been picked to death by Freudians who have seen only arrested development and anal fixation in the place names used, an extreme example of abuse of a critical tool perhaps, but still prevalent enough in critical writing that it can not just be laughed away. Which is not to say that Freudian and Jungian analysis aren't relevant or even pertinent, but caution is vital in these areas.

New critics would find fault with these interpretations on the grounds that they impose a system from outside the poem. While I agree with this, additionally I find fault with the Freudians because they are in serious danger of limiting what they bring to the poem in tools of interpretation, and with the Jungians because they often don't recognize other levels of meaning in the poem.

Marshall Suther argues for an interpretation of "Kubla Khan" as a cry for Coleridge's loss of religious vision, and in so doing takes issue with the Freudian critics in his book, The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

Just as I think it would occur to no responsible theologian to suppose he could fix certain limits within which are to be found the instrumentalities of contact between man and God, so I should think it would occur to no responsible psychoanalyst to suppose that this therapeutically oriented interpretation of the facts of a man's life exhausts the significance of those facts. If either does hold such a view, it derives from something other than his professional competence.⁵

Suther seems to disregard psychoanalytical interpretations of the poem altogether, although it could be argued that Suther's "religious dejection" interpretation is psychoanalytical as well as biographical in its orientation.

Biographers have dealt with Coleridge's frustrations with love and sex, and Suther devotes a chapter to the effect of love on Coleridge's poetry dealing chiefly with "Dejection: An Ode," a poem that throws some light on Coleridge's frustrations. Biographers generally believe that he married his wife, Sara Fricker, out of a need for domestic peace and for a Pantisocratic helpmate, and was later sorry that he did. When he subsequently fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, his religious feelings became entangled with regret. Hence, most probably, guilt might have played a part in "Kubla Khan," but only if we accept Elizabeth Schneider's rather lengthy argument for a later date for the production of the poem, because he met Sara Hutchinson in 1799. If we accept the traditional date of 1797 given in Coleridge's preface, we cannot possibly accept this interpretation. If we can accept Sara Hutchinson's presence in the poem, this could be the basis of the "bad-mother"--"good-mother" imagery that Fields sees in the poem.

⁵Marshall Suther, The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 66.

If he was sexually frustrated, the imagery makes sense in Freudian terms, though the imagery is somewhat ambivalent when viewed in this light. Gerald E. Enscoe in "Ambivalence in 'Kubla Khan;' The Cavern and the Dome," believes that the two images of the ordered dome and garden, as opposed to the disordered cavern, reflect two images of erotic love. One is confined to a controlled system; and the other is anarchistic. He also notes the discrepancy between "holy and enchanted." The former suggests something untainted by sin, the latter bewitchment or black magic. The erotic impulses centered symbolically in the sacred river (the demon lover of the woman) and the orgasmic upheaval of the earth cannot be restrained by symbolic walls and towers.

The notion that these images have to represent two images of erotic love seems somehow limiting to me. Others have posited equally convincing oppositions. Why not poetry vs. metaphysics, imagination vs. fancy, wild romantic poetry vs. rational poetry? The levels of juxtaposition are many, even beyond endlessly fragmenting psycho- or literary analysis, and perhaps most salient is that they may be all working at once.

The danger of "fixing" symbols with definite meanings is expressed well by Suther:

Coleridge's life obviously offers a rich field for such analyses, and a number have been undertaken, which, to the layman's eye, vary greatly in degree of probability and apparent relevance. Among the less probable and relevant analyses, I should say, is an article by H. S. and D. T. Bliss on "Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'," in which the various images in that poem are translated into what appear to be somewhat stereotyped equivalents (eg. "cedarn cover" = pubic hair); and the conclusion is reached that Coleridge

gave up poetry because he was shocked by its sexual nature. I suspect that many psychoanalysts would agree that post-mortem analyses are of questionable validity at best, but some serious effort should at least be made to determine the special significance of a given image for the individual under analysis.⁶

The following chart from H. S. and D. T. Bliss's article assigns exact parallels to each image in the poem, which reduces the poem to vulgar absurdity, and by implication, all poetry.

"the sacred river"	ejaculation
"caverns measureless to man"	vagina and uterus
"sunless sea"	amniotic fluid
"fertile ground"	womb
"walls and towers"	labia
"gardens bright with sinuous rills"	labia
"incense-bearing trees"	sexual odors and pubic hair (of musk deer)
"forest ancient as the hills"	pubic hair and mons veneris
"sunny spots of greenery"	flesh
"deep romantic chasm"	the portal
"cedarn cover"	pubic hair ⁷

Suther's argument goes on to explain that he isn't against psychoanalytical evidence being brought to bear on the elucidation of a poem, but rather against the manner in which it is often used. He feels that since most literary critics don't have the training to apply it, they use arbitrary a priori psychological categories to determine the meanings of isolated images. They in effect "murder to dissect." Of course, this is also true of psychological critics who dabble at literary criticism. He cites one example of what he considers a legitimate use of psychological evidence in an article found in the International

⁶Suther, pp. 64-65

⁷H. S. and D. T. Bliss, "Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'," American Imago, vol. VI, p. 263.

Journal of Psycho-Analysis by David Beres entitled "A Dream, A Vision, and a Poem: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Origins of the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner!'" Beres diagnosis Coleridge as an "oral character" and says that he was unloved by his mother and turned to reading, phantasy, and food. His repressed hatred found its way into his poems in the form of symbolism and imagery. Suther says that the facts of Coleridge's life bear out this diagnosis and that Beres is at least proceeding from the facts. I find even this a little too neat to accept. It in effect reduces all poets to the state of having been unloved by mothers, since all resort to reading and "phantasy."

In this light the "woman wailing for her demon lover" could be seen to be Coleridge's mother; while Enscoe's article on the ambivalence of the cavern and the dome would lead us to the conjecture that Sara Hutchinson was the woman and Coleridge the demon lover; and still another article by Richard Gerber⁸ argues both that the woman may have been Cybele and represented regeneration from hell, and that the river Alph (Alpha) fits the context of a new beginning of life for Coleridge, or at least his hope for a new beginning. Hans Meier says that the "chasm with ceaseless turmoil seething" is a witch's cauldron, and specifically Medea's "cauldron of regeneration."⁹ Thus, the question occurs as to whether Coleridge was using mythology in a conventionally conscious symbolic way, or whether unconscious Freudian symbolism was at work, or both.

⁸Richard Gerber, "Keys to 'Kubla Khan'," English Studies, vol. XLIV, pp. 321-341.

⁹Hans Meier, "Ancient Lights on Kubla's Lines," English Studies, vol. XLVI, pp. 15-29.

Another Freudian interpretation that runs the gamut in post mortem diagnosis is Eli Marcovitz's "Bemoaning the Lost Dream: Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Addiction,"¹⁰ in which he sees in "Kubla Khan" elements of orality, bisexuality, narcissism, aggression, oedipal nuclear conflict, and a relation to the manic--or depressive. I have never seen a diagnosis this sweeping, even in a mental hospital, though I have seen some walking circuses.

Marcovitz presents us with the opposite extreme to Field's book. He is a psychoanalyst who seems to have a limited insight into how poems are made, and he makes the ironic mistake that several literary critics have made of taking Coleridge's preface at face value. He says at the outset that he will treat it just as he would one of his patient's dreams. He gives us such clever, but unbelievable interpretations as the following:

We can ask then, what is it which is twice five and encircles firmly the pleasure-dome of Paradise? The answer is obvious--the hands of the infant around its mother's breast. We have then all three--hands, mouth and mother's breast.¹¹

The late Professor Branford Millar of Portland State University whimsically suggested to me that if all the symbolic equivalencies were charted, that have been suggested, they would make a Rube Goldberg of human anatomy.

Marcovitz interprets the lines "Could I revive within me/Her

¹⁰Eli Marcovitz, "Bemoaning the Lost Dream: Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and addiction," International Journal of Psychoanalysis, vol. XLV, pp. 411-425.

¹¹Ibid., p. 415.

symphony and song," as Coleridge's desire to return to childhood and hear his mother's lullabies. Most critics regard the Abyssinian maiden as simply a muse figure, which to me also is the most plausible suggestion. Marcovitz even postulates the "demon lover" and the "person from Porlock" as father figures and weaves out of these an Oedipus complex. I believe that this is an excellent example of critical straining at the potty. He has left the poem undigested.

Another critic, James Hoyle, writes in this general vein:

We have not come to terms with Coleridge's preface, I believe because we have approached his 'psychological' curiosity with the wrong psychology. It is not the psychology of opium that will render the experience of 'Kubla Khan' convincing but rather the psychology of elation or hypomania, the strange joyous upswing of the cyclothymic or premanic-depressive personality.¹²

Hoyle contends that the poem was written in 1798 rather than 1799-80 as Elizabeth Schneider contends in Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan. He says that Coleridge's own second thoughts about the attack Charles Lloyd made on him in his satirical novel converted his depression to the elation which is common among cyclothymic characters, and he cites Hamlet as an analogous example. He goes on to say that the reference to taking opium to check dysentery showed up in the images of the poem in the "organ image of the mighty fountain and the deep romantic chasm."

I find this all very interesting and must entertain it as one element of possibility, but, in general, I find Elizabeth Schneider's

¹²James Hoyle, "'Kubla Khan' as an Elated Experience," Literature and Psychology, vol XVI, p. 27.

detailed argument at least tentatively convincing. In this argument, the dating of the poem becomes crucial in understanding it. Schneider contends that what fundamentally shaped the poem were Coleridge's travels in Germany and especially a trip he took through some large caves with rivers, dome-like ceilings and a large hole in the roof where Coleridge could see trees growing on the ground above. Coleridge's affair with Sara Hutchinson also lends credence to the acceptance of the later date, if we accept it as playing a part in the poem's imagery. I find it a little more convincing than the Charles Lloyd argument, though indeed neither may be entirely satisfactory. In my mind, the whole question is still open to argument, if not to settlement.

The question of events in Coleridge's life playing a part in the creation of the poem is given a political as well as a Jungian slant in an article by S. K. Heninger Jr., wherein he points to the disruptive-war passage (ll.29-30) and writes about France's invasion of Switzerland and Coleridge's fear of an imminent invasion of England. This he ties up with what he sees as archetypal myth-making on Coleridge's part:

Since the prophesying voices are 'ancestral,' they may very well belong to our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, who from their own unsettling experience proclaim folly of seeking to know the unknowable, the futility of seeking to intergrate the unconscious.¹³

The notion of original sin is thus brought in, and "knowing"--or "metaphysics" in Coleridge's case--becomes the block that keeps

¹³S. K. Heninger, "A Jungian Reading of 'Kubla Khan'," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. XVIII, p. 358.

him from reviving within him the song of "feeling" or "poetry."

Heninger then goes on to attribute the whole poem to Jungian themes, citing "Kubla Khan" as a vivid illustration of Jung's theory of the individuation of the personality through the integration of the conscious and the unconscious. The self, according to Jung, is frequently symbolized by geometric figures based on the number 4, which he calls "mandalas." Heninger sees Coleridge's concept of "unity in multeity" related to the dissimilar parts that are organized into the unity of the mandala. Heninger cites a quotation from one of Coleridge's letters which illustrates the mandala-making of Coleridge's unconscious, wherein he writes, "Frequently have I, half awake & half asleep, my body diseased & fevered by my imagination, seen armies of ugly things bursting in upon me, & these four angels keeping them off."¹⁴

If we accept this notion, Kubla, in effect, does construct a mandala. The poem's artificial paradise has been said, by Geoffrey Yarlott in his book Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid, to represent reason as opposed to the wild "measureless caverns." This pair could match with Heninger's idea of the ancestral voices prophesying the futility of trying to integrate the unconscious, but only through a kind of magic; and indeed the notion of the mandala fits in with the "demon lover" and the "weave a circle round him thrice" as passages that deal with magic. The "miracle of rare device" which is the second dome, floats on the water and might be interpreted to be the palace of true art as opposed to Kubla's artificial palace.

Perhaps the most influential book in this whole genre of criti-

¹⁴Letters, vol. I, p. 348.

cism is Maud Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry. It is an uneven and sometimes eccentric book, but one which is, nevertheless, acutely suggestive.

She sees the psychological archetypal patterns found in poetry to be meaningful to us because they constitute a form of reality which can be used and have validity transcending our individual circumstances or those of the poet. Since human nature and human needs remain essentially the same, she assumes, all poetry in all times responds to the same images, though clothed in new narratives and incidental details--new wine in old bottles. She sees the concrete objects of the poem misleading the critic who won't let the poem touch the common strings that bind all people, those strings of "The Eolian Harp" that play the music of "the one Life within us and abroad." Bodkin tries to explain her argument against this misled critic:

There would be something gained if critics could agree upon a term by which to designate the kind of validity, distinct from that of science, possessed by the inter-relations of attitude or emotion which a great poem communicates. 'Psychological reality' is the term suggested by Jung. Those archetypal images or patterns that, as he holds, pertain to the collective Unconscious and fixed expression in poetry, are neither to be confused, he urges, with concrete objects nor with characters of the individual psyche, but should be consolidated, outside the individual, as psychological realities--realities because in human life actual and effective.¹⁵

Bodkin traces some of these archetypal patterns through several great poems and finds correspondences for many of the images used by

¹⁵Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 78.

Coleridge.

The archetypal pattern she finds central in the poem is that of Paradise and Hades, or of Heaven and Hell. Here she turns to Milton for the most obvious parallels. She finds the same geography representing Heaven and Hell in the following famous passage from Paradise Lost that presents itself to us in "Kubla Khan."

Southward through Eden went a river large,
Nor chang'd his course, but through the shaggy hill
Pass'd underneath ingulfed, for God had thrown
That mountain as his garden-mould high rais'd
Upon the rapid current, which, through veins
of porous earth with kindly thirst updrawn,
Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill
Water'd the garden; thence united fell
Down the steep glade, and met the nether flood.¹⁶

She sees this Paradise/Hades pattern not as a question of source copying, but a use of an image that already lay in the collective European culture. Though some of the images of this nature in Coleridge's poem are only faintly visualized, she says that we feel the poem deeply because it strums up on our nerve strings organic images already present in our experience.

Western literature has many correspondences to this pattern. In the *Odyssey* we have Mount Olympus as the seat of the gods and that "deepest gulf," "murky Tarturus" as a correspondence to Hell or Coleridge's caverns. She points out in Babylonian myth the story of a mountain "Mashu" which is vast and hollow and a "place of fertility." She indicates that the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic is still found disturb-

¹⁶John Milton, "Paradise Lost," Book IV 11.219-227.

ing and moving to us, because it "half communicates" an experience already present in our unconscious. She suggests that we needn't go to classical myth to find correspondences but only as far as the Christian-Hebraic tradition of Mt. Sinai, and she quotes from Job, "The mystery of God is high as Heaven and deeper than Hell (Job XI.8). Kubla's gardens correspond to the Garden of Eden, and later in Melville's Moby Dick we find Melville using this same Edenic image and spelling out these correspondences for us:

Consider all this; and turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return!¹⁷

Surely this is an admonishment that would have rung in Coleridge's ears if he had ever read it. No "you cant go home again," or "revive within you that song," or return to Tahiti, or recall the "splendor in the grass." The great tragedy of the human condition embodied in images that half conceal the message or clothe it in the luminous luster of "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed" strikes the chords of our common experience in all these works.

Bodkin points out a relation to Coleridge found in the Phaedo of Plato:

Plato pictures the 'true Earth' lifted up fair and pure into the ether, while, piercing right through the whole Earth yawns the great cavern 'wherof Homer maketh mention, saying "Afar off, where deepest underground the Pit is

¹⁷Herman Melville, Moby Dick, ed. Alfred Kazin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. 222.

digged"' . Into this cavern all rivers flow and within it the measureless flood 'swingeth and swayeth up and down, and the air and wind surge with it . . . and even as the breath of living creatures is driven forth and drawn in as a stream continually, so there also the wind, swinging with the flood, cometh in and goeth out, and causeth terrible, mighty tempest!¹⁸

Keeping these images of Plato in mind, and the fact that the song Coleridge couldn't revive represents poetry; and recalling that the pleasure-dome has been variously interpreted to mean either Reason (i.e. Metaphysics or Philosophy) or the pleasure-state of the initial phase of opium addiction, I turn once again to Moby Dick where we see a similar image working in the chapter "Cisterns and Buckets." Here we can see how details and objects are changed while the meaning remains the same.

In this chapter, the whale's head has been cut off and tied alongside, and is being tapped for its precious spermaceti. Assume that the whale's head corresponds here to a pleasure-dome. Tashtego, the Indian falls into the head.

Looking over the side, they saw the before lifeless head throbbing and heaving just below the surface of the sea, as if that moment seized with some momentous idea; whereas it was only the poor Indian unconsciously revealing by those struggles the perilous depth to which he had sunk.¹⁹

Queequeg delivers Tashtego by reaching in and spinning him round so that he could be "born" head first and pulling him out. If the head with its spout corresponds to what some critics feel was Coleridge's mistake of falling into the safe dome of Kubla's metaphysical garden with its fountains and artificial paradise, the ending of

¹⁸Bodkin, p. 103. ¹⁹Moby Dick, p. 269.

Melville's chapter echoes well Coleridge's mistake, and, I'm afraid, also echoes some of those of his critics who have been seduced by the "honey-dew" of their own critical Edens.

Now had Tashtego perished in that head, it had been a very precious perishing; smothered in the very whitest and daintiest of fragrant spermaceti; confined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum of the whale. Only one sweeter end can readily be recalled--the delicious death of an Ohio honey-hunter, who seeking honey in the crotch of a hollow tree, found such exceeding store of it, that leaning too far over, it sucked him in, so that he died embalmed. How many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato's honey head, and sweetly perished there?²⁰

And how many critics with one Tashtego of an idea throbbing in their heads, have embalmed the life of a poem in the "delicious death" of their "georgeous nonsense."

The patterns suggested by Jungian critics seem to be more universally valid than those of the Freudians who don't always take the individual history of the poem into account, but though the Jungian approach may be central to the understanding of a poem, it still doesn't deal with all the layers of meaning, which, in the case of "Kubla Khan," may also need to include biographical, political and drug-oriented criticism to get at its meaning. In the next chapter I'll discuss the drug aspects of the poem.

²⁰Ibid., p. 271.

CHAPTER V

DRUGS AND DREAMS

As we have seen, a great deal of the fascination of "Kubla Khan" lies in the complexity of its creation. The processes of any important poem are complex, of course, but "Kubla Khan" is much like the images in the poem itself, shifting, illusory, with caverns of meaning that seem to promise rich ore and only yield murky darkness and dead ends. The dome shining in the imagination of critics may be seen to be made of fool's gold, when the critical mists have vanished and we see the poem in the cold light of rationality.

Coleridge's magic defies the light, however, and the complexity merely shifts, changing colors much as the iridescent specimens of geologists do under special lights. The lights of source hunters, Freudians, Jungians, New Critics, Orientalists, and drug experts have all been thrown on this poem and it has been declared to be made of sapphires, rubies, brass or tin depending on the viewpoint of the particular critic.

The complexity would be great enough if we had only the unusually large number of possible sources to deal with, but two other factors, namely drug imagery and dream imagery, intrude and are given further complexity by inconsistency, perhaps intentional, on Coleridge's part.

The first important book to deal with the drug problem directly in relation to Coleridge is The Milk of Paradise by M. H. Abrams. The book is limited in certain ways. It was first published in 1934, pre-

ceding much of our present knowledge of opium and its derivatives. His central thesis is that opium creates a dream world where certain images consistently occur. Abrams has traced these patterns through the writings of De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson and Coleridge, all of whom were addicted to opium. Abrams saw the influence of opium in the following way:

The great gift of opium to these men was access to a new world as different from this as Mars may be; and one which ordinary mortals, hindered by terrestrial conceptions, can never from mere description, quite comprehend. It is a world of twisted, exquisite experience, sensuous and intellectual; of 'music like a perfume,' and 'sweet light golden with audible odors exquisite,' where color is a symphony, and one can hear the walk of an insect on the ground, the bruising of a flower. Above all, in this enchanted land man is freed at last from those petty bonds upon which Kant insists: space and time. Space is amplified to such proportions that, to writer after writer, 'infinity' is the only word adequate to compass it. More striking still, man escapes at last from the life of a transiency lamented by poets since time immemorial, and approaches immortality as closely as he ever can in this world; for he experiences, almost literally, eternity.¹

Abrams draws his generalizations about the effects of opium principally from De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater. This book, though written after Coleridge's major work, has been the main source that critics have used to judge Coleridge's drug problems and has been the main source of psychological investigations into opium addiction until very recently, which has, perhaps, delayed the progress of investigation in this area for many years. Elizabeth Schneider, for instance, in Coleridge, Opium and "Kubla Khan" questions the basic

¹M. H. Abrams, Milk of Paradise (New York: Harper & Row, 1934), pp. 4-5.

impression that De Quincey has left us of the effect of opium, and she quarrels with Abrams' basic assumptions, but I will deal with her ideas later.

Abrams cites various passages from the Confessions that seem to parallel the imagery of Coleridge's three major poems.

De Quincey had remarked that the drug recreated a childlike state in which scenes passed through the mind only loosely connected. "Kubla Khan" can be seen as a departure from so called rational 18th century verse in its kaleidoscopic effect, but perhaps this is simply an effect of changes in the style of the Romantic movement in general. Don Juan constantly changes focus, although in a less impressionistic way, and "Alastor" and other poems by Shelley have this shifting dream-like effect. The fact that "Kubla Khan" has been claimed as a dream further clouds the issue. Because of the great mass of attention heaped upon these two avenues of possible explanation, i.e. drugs and dreams, a third possibility, that of deliberate composition--of the more "normal" processes of creativity, even though unusually fecund, has been largely overlooked. If we have learned anything from the art of James Joyce it is that the mind works in this manner as a normal consequence of our thought patterns when we aren't imposing conscious control on it.

However, we need to look at the effects in so-called drug poems to see if there are any other similarities besides those mentioned by Abrams. De Quincey mentions several that must be taken into consideration. One of these is what he calls "the tyranny of the human face," which may explain the "flashing eyes and floating hair" lines in

"Kubla Khan." Abrams points out that this image occurs in the work of every opium author. De Quincey describes faces appearing from the sea by thousands and then by generations. They are described as imploring and despairing faces, which immediately brings to my mind pictures out of Dante and a sense of persecution felt by De Quincey. Paranoia is a common side effect of opium as well as marijuana, LSD, and other hallucinogens under certain conditions, but I don't believe it to be irrefutably demonstrable that Coleridge's images are the result of paranoia. There are just too many explanations for each image in the poem to settle on anything so simple.

Another effect that Abrams suggests, that is more persuasive, to me at least, is the slowing down of time and the opening up of space. Critics have remarked on the impossibility of mapping the topography in "Kubla Khan." Images change shape before our eyes, vanishing and enlarging until we have no rational sense of time and space. I have worked with drug patients in mental hospitals and have witnessed widespread opium addiction in Viet Nam; I find that the effects De Quincey describes parallel what I've observed and what I've had described to me by patients. The reoccurrence of certain colors is also mentioned by Abrams, especially in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. I think it would be useful if some scholar would do a statistical study of the reoccurrence of colors, images, and various grammatical constructions in the Romantic poets both in drug-related and non-drug-related poems. I am not altogether convinced that the images mentioned by Abrams are attributable to drugs. I suspect that many of them are simply common Romantic images, but I believe that a closer look at this

problem would be needed to throw convincing weight one way or another.

Elizabeth Schneider in Coleridge, Opium and "Kubla Khan" flatly contradicts most of Abrams' major assumptions at considerable length. Her book can probably be described as the most ambitious assault on the meaning of the poem since Lowes; the energy and scholarship she brings to her arguments deserve careful and lengthy consideration. Her initial attack is direct. She simply says that De Quincey was wrong, that he was either lying or "romanticising" the effects of the drug. Dismissing De Quincey as an authority, she brings modern psychological tests to bear upon her arguments.

Before I get into this quandary; a passage from A. S. Byatt's Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time is useful in illustrating the medical climate that surrounded Coleridge's use of drugs:

The other major medical problem of their existence was not an illness but a supposed cure--opium. Laudanum--a reddish fluid, a mixture of opium and alcohol--was readily prescribed for every ailment; toothache, travel sickness, general stimulation, consumption. Children were 'soothed' with it, and it was sold under such names as Godfrey's Cordial, Batley's Seductive Solution, Mother Bailey's Quieting Syrup. Infant mortality from overdoses was high. Highly praised doctors recommended it. Dr. Thomas Beddoes of Bristol, father of the macabre author of Death's Jest Book, said to be the best doctor in England, recommended opium to his eminent friends and patients--Coleridge, De Quincey, Charles Lloyd, Coleridge's friend and patron Tom Wedgwood. He edited the Elements of Medicine of Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, who believed in it as a stimulant of the necessary excitability to keep life going. Coleridge and De Quincey became addicts: Coleridge's letters about the terrible physical and mental effects of the drug are among the most dreadful and despairing accounts ever written; De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater is one of the classic descriptions of dream and nightmare. William Wilberforce, the slave trade abolitionist, was also

an addict, and so was Clive of India: the drug was respectable, and Coleridge's addiction sprang from a genuinely well-intentioned medical experiment.²

This climate of acceptance should be sufficient to discount the notion that Coleridge kept the poem hidden because of any shame directly connected to the drug. More likely, I think his motives were imbedded more in fears of what the poem meant. Whether these fears arose from conscious knowledge of the poem's meaning or from what he felt the poem might mean (i.e. if we accept any of the explanations that see the poem as repressed unconscious wish-fulfillment, guilt for adulterous feelings, fear of latent homosexuality, etc.) is a matter of conjecture that can only be answered by answering the larger question of what the poem does mean; and Coleridge has left the poem in too nebulous a state to ever do that with finality. He has done this, perhaps, for both personal as well as poetic reasons.

I cannot do justice to Elizabeth Schneider's book here. Her arguments are too thorough, complex and numerous to deal with more than a few of them. To begin, she refutes Abrams' claim that opium induces or brings with it creative powers. She has researched modern medical studies which lead her to say that the findings of most researchers indicate that stable individuals do not experience "mental pleasure" from opiates, but that unstable individuals often experience pleasure during the early stages of addiction. Coleridge's "stability" may be open to question. Schneider writes:

²A. S. Byatt, Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time (London: Nelson, 1970), p. 90.

One patient, typical of some others, said "it caused a buoyancy of spirits, increased imagination, temporarily enlarged the brain power, and made him think of things he otherwise would not have thought of." The last of these is the nearest we come to finding evidence of creative powers in opium. The explanation lies, however, in the euphoria that it produces, what to De Quincey was "its deep tranquillizing powers to the mitigation of evils" and to Coleridge a green and fountainous oasis in a waste of desert. The relaxation of tension and conflict accompanied by a sense of pleasant ease, occasionally helps to release for a time the neurotic person's natural powers of thought or imagination or (rarely) of action, though it does not give him powers that he did not have or change the character of his normal powers. Coleridge recognized this effect upon himself when he said, in a passage discussed later, that opium by its narcotic effect made his body a fitter instrument for his soul. With some unstable temperaments the euphoria may be intense.³

Schneider points out, as I have, that it is highly unlikely that Coleridge would keep the composition of the poem a secret for fifteen years. Not only was the use of opium accepted, but Coleridge customarily examined his own processes at length in his writings and would frequently repeat unusual events several times over to everyone he came across during his enthusiasm.

Further evidence of a more deliberate fabrication of the story, though not conclusive, seems very convincing to me. To begin, we have a telling passage from Coleridge's own writings pointed out to us in Baker's The Sacred River, in a chapter in which Baker explores Coleridge's theories of imagination and the workings of the unconscious.⁴

³Elizabeth Schneider, Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 40-41.

⁴James Volant Baker, The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), p. 155.

I have long wished to devote an entire work to the subject of Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, Witchcraft, &c., in which I might first give, and then endeavor to explain the most interesting and best attested fact of each, which has come within my knowledge, either from books or from personal testimony. I might then explain in a more satisfactory way the mode in which our thoughts in states of morbid slumber, become at times perfectly dramatic (for certain sorts of dreams the dullest Wight becomes a Shakespeare) and by what law the form of the vision appears to talk to us in its own thoughts in a voice as audible as the shape is visible; and this too oftentimes in connected trains.⁵

Coleridge may be embodying a poem that is about the creation of poetry "in states of morbid slumber" inside a framework of a contrived story of just such an occurrence; much as Pope will criticize a poetic fault while demonstrating it in the same couplet in which he criticizes it. This would lower the poem to an exercise in wit, however, which Coleridge would consider inferior or limiting, in comparison to imagination.

Schneider brings up another possibility, that of direct theft of the idea of the dream composition. A Mrs. Perdita Robinson composed a poem, "The Maniac" in 1791 after taking laudanum. She called her daughter and dictated the whole poem in a half stupor. She was the first recorded admirer of "Kubla Khan" and Coleridge and she became good friends. She died shortly afterwards, and it is possible that Coleridge lifted the idea from her. Schneider also links the preface with Plato who has Socrates say in the Phaedo that he had been told in dreams that he should make music.

Schneider makes another point about the prevalence of certain images in Romantic works in general. Noting that "Genesis" has a

⁵Coleridge, The Friend, I, (London, 1818), pp. 246-247.

serpent, commonly referred to as a part of opium tradition, she says that we could easily fabricate an opium composition theory for the garden of Eden. She goes on:

There was a taste for these things in the last century, an interest in exploring dream worlds; and so people wrote of them, particularly people of certain temperaments. Shelley's "Marianne's Dream" is much more labored than "Kubla Khan," less expert, and much less poetic; yet--though it was not inspired by opium--by comparison with it "Kubla Khan" reads like an exercise in logic. Had Blake been an opium eater, his poetry and art, unaltered from what they now are, would be taken for the quintessence of the exquisitely distorted world of drugs. The "Mad Song" and, in a different medium, the fearful picture of Nebuchadnezzar are straight out of that tortured dream world--or so we should think if we did not know otherwise. But as Blake was not known to be a drug addict, we discuss his imaginings in terms of Swedenborg and symbolism instead. It is this kind of misleading psychological thought behind the opium tradition that may perhaps warrant, if anything can, the marshaling of so many cannon merely against Coleridge's preface to "Kubla Khan."⁶

Schneider then proceeds to marshal several batteries of heavy artillery against the preface. She argues at great length for a later date for the poem than was previously supposed, and her arguments are very convincing. Her arguments are crucial because she attempts to determine the extent of Coleridge's addiction at the time of composition, the likelihood of the Porlock story, and the placement in time of a trip to some ice caves in Germany which would lend a less exotic theory of the genesis of certain images. All her arguments are aimed at the destruction of the idea that "Kubla Khan" was composed either as a result of drugs or in a dream. She sums up her arguments about the date of the poem by saying that the preface has misled us about the

⁶Schneider, pp. 89-90.

creative imagination and that we should place it back where it belongs, that is to say, within the mainstream of the literary tradition and not on a separate shelf as a "psychological curiosity."

She claims that the figure with flashing eyes and floating hair is not a drug-crazed poet but simply an extension of the old Dionysian convention. He is a poet possessed of the influence of milk and honey, and out of his "right mind." This, as she points out, was already an old tradition when Plato tried to describe the poet in the Ion.

She also is of the opinion that the "vivid incoherence" that Lowes admired isn't there, and because of the shifting nature of the imagery the reader has a tendency to ignore the grammatical and rhetorical structure. She notes that the pronouns have obvious antecedents and the thought progresses in a natural and orderly fashion.

To further demonstrate that the poem was the result of deliberate composition she includes a thorough study of the interweaving of sounds that achieves his effects. She notes, especially, the device of foreshadowing terminal rhymes by a preceding echo of assonance or alliteration, all this partly concealed by the interlacing of other patterns; and an oscillation created by the forward movement of meaning played off against the backward glance of the rhyme. This oscillation and floating effect skillfully recreates the mazy motion suggested in the poem and lends power to our impression of it as a dream or drug experience. She then sums up her conclusions:

To my mind, none of this bears the marks of dream composition, though it has co-operated with Coleridge's story of a dream by contributing to the floating effect. It does not sound, either, like any other sort of fully automatic composition.

The intense concentration of the act of composing does indeed bear some likeness to reverie; it is, in fact, reverie in one of Erasmus Darwin's senses, "the poet's reverie" in which the will is active though attention is detached from the outside world. But it is creative will that is at work and not the wish-fulfillment reverie of certain psychologico-aesthetic theories. That will is felt in "Kubla Khan", I think, even though its aim may be only vaguely determined.⁷

Alethea Hayter in Opium and the Romantic Imagination takes a view midway between the extremes of Abrams and Schneider. To begin with, she points out that most of the scientific evidence that Schneider musters to her arguments are based on research not on laudanum, but on opium derivatives such as heroin and morphine. She writes:

Most modern American research is based on addicts who take the opium derivatives heroin or morphine by injection; recent French research sometimes also includes the smoking of opium. But the early nineteenth-century literary addicts all took their opium in the form of laudanum, alcoholic tincture of opium; this has a weaker opium content than morphine or heroin, and its action is affected by the addition of the alcohol. Moreover both the pipe of the opium smoker and the hypodermic syringe of the heroin addict have come to have a mystique of their own, a complex of feeling and ritual which affects the addict's reaction to his drug in a way not known to the laudanum drinker. What the modern addict takes is different in itself, and differently administered; and he takes it in a different climate of opinion.⁸

As De Quincey has pointed out, drugs can only work on what is already in an addict's mind, to the effect the experience of the anxiety ridden "criminal" of today bears little relation to the experience of a Coleridge or a Thompson experiencing the drug in a climate of accept-

⁷Ibid., pp. 276-277.

⁸Alethea Hayter, Opium and the Romantic Imagination (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 37.

ance.

Hayter does not believe that "Kubla Khan" came full-blown out of an opium dream, but unlike Schneider, she feels that it played a part in the creation of images that were later worked into the completed poem. She cites the example of Piranesi, whose engravings Coleridge had described as the closest visual equivalent to an opium vision.

Piranesi contracted malaria and probably took opium for it. She then points out:

The images which were born during his delirious fever were executed and elaborated over many years of fully conscious and controlled labour. I do not believe that a work of art ever actually reaches the point of communication, on paper or canvas or copper, while its creator is in an opium reverie. The vision comes then, the execution later. Much of the argument about "Kubla Khan" is due to confusion about this.⁹

He must have worked on it afterwards Hayter tells us. If this is true one well might ask again, "Why did Coleridge hide the full process of the creation? Why did he pawn it off as something born full bloom from a dream?" I cannot help but conclude, whether I accept Schneider's explanation or Hayter's that Coleridge is hiding something either from himself or us, or perhaps this confusion is deliberate, an extension of the multi-layered construction.

Hayter goes on to explain the part that opium plays in the creative process of writers. Quarrelling with Abrams she writes:

These writers had not been to a new planet, but were being admitted to caves and prisons and secret hiding-places of their own native Earth, places whose existence they had forgotten or ignored or never observed.

⁹Ibid., p. 94.

It is the chance of observing these hiding-places more at leisure, and under a stronger light, that seems to be the chief contribution which opium addiction may make to a writer's imaginative equipment. The experiences of the writers described in this book show that the action of opium may unbare some of the semi-conscious processes by which literature begins to be written. These processes are analogous to, and may even be identical with, the mental processes of reverie, of dreams in full sleep, and of the hypnogogic visions which come on the borders of sleep, and there seems sufficient evidence that opium both intensifies these processes and extends their duration, so that they can be observed while they are happening. The writer can actually witness the process by which words and visual images arise simultaneously and in parallel in his own mind. He can watch, control, and subsequently use the product of the creative imagination at an earlier stage of its production than is normally accessible to the conscious mind.¹⁰

Being a keen observer of his own mental processes, Coleridge may have been confronted with images from his reading while in a opium reverie, and watching these images arise from the "deep well," his own wonder at his creative processes may have transformed the images into symbols of that process. He, in effect, wrote a poem about creation while watching it happen, and the drug may have slowed things down enough to allow this to happen.

Hayter also comments on the fact that opium washes away prosaic categories and allows symbols to melt freely into one another, but I think Coleridge's mind worked in this fashion anyway and that this effect has been overestimated. Coleridge's own imagination has been underestimated on this point, I believe.

One last footnote to the drug question is raised in an article by Ruthven Todd in a 1967 edition of London Magazine entitled "Coleridge and Paracelsus; Honeydew and LSD", which is interesting if for no

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 333-334.

other reason that that this is the only article I've found that deals with the word honeydew. Many articles and books discuss the poem as if Coleridge had written "milk and honey," which he didn't. Todd writes that according to the dictionary one definition of honeydew is "a saccharine deposit found on the leaves of many plants that is secreted usually by aphids or scales but sometimes by a fungus especially of the genus *Claviceps*." This fungus is called ergot and when deposited on rye and eaten causes a disease called ergotism. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were epidemics of this disease which were called among other things "St. Anthony's Fire," which in its extreme forms caused death, and in its milder forms was known to produce hallucinations. In 1943, working with ergot derivatives and compounds, Dr. Albert Hofmann discovered LSD. Coleridge probably knew about ergotism from his readings of Paracelsus.

So we are plunged once again into the deep chasms of speculation, but I believe the whole question of drugs has been overestimated insofar as it applies to the creation of this poem, though I think that I can agree with Alethea Hayter's notion that drugs may have played a part in the initial stages of the creative process of the poem; but I can't agree with Abrams that the symbols in the poem are necessarily drug related. They are too much the property of Romanticism in general, and as Schneider has pointed out, the effect that these symbols produce seems to be carefully and intricately worked out by complex sound patterns that are too well put together to convince me that they are either the direct product of dreams or drugs. As Coleridge says in an October 1803 entry in Anima Poetae, "We imagine ourselves discoverers,

and that we have struck a light, when in reality, at most, we have but snuffed a candle." Perhaps we need a "willing suspension of disbelief" and the ability to not rest in finalities or easy answers in our critical quest. Attributing this complex poem to drugs or dreams is too easy. Coleridge would have the critic assume the same "negative capability" that is necessary to the poet.

CHAPTER VI

OVERVIEWS, UNSETTLED PROBLEMS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

In the Biographia Literaria Coleridge says of the secondary imagination:

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create;
or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at
all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.¹

Some critics have attempted to unify the various parts of the poem and give a larger view. I will look briefly at some of these in this chapter, and deal with a few loose ends and give my own overview in an attempt to unify.

Harold Bloom in The Visionary Company stresses the importance of seeing the poem not as a fragment, "but a vision of creation and destruction each complete" (p. 212). He sees the poem as one of self-recognition and compares it to other poems which have the image of youths doomed in the very throes of their sensibility, such as *Alastor* and, in real life, Chatterton, Smart and others. He further sees the poem as an assertion by Coleridge of the lasting power of the poet who can do what *Kubla* could not, that is, through the reconciliation of opposites, build a paradise in the imagination which would not be transitory or temporal. The "visionary" aspect of this poem that Bloom

¹S. T. Coleridge, from Biographia Literaria Chap. XIII, The Portable Coleridge (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 516.

mentions is somewhat neoplatonic and may be derivative somewhat from Coleridge's enthusiasm for the mysticism of Plotinus. Though I think Bloom's comments are valid, the point he makes about the poem being in the tradition of Chatterton, etc. is overstressed. Coleridge is doing many things with that image at once.

Edward Bostetter in The Romantic Ventriloquists attempts a more ambitious examination of the poem. He starts with an observation close to that of Bloom's by noting Coleridge's own observation of himself when he said that he had "power without strength," a quality that Bostetter notes Southey seconded when he said "You spawn plans like a Herring." He notes that Coleridge had a list in his notebook of "My Works" that contained over thirty projected works which were planned but never completed. Here the criticism that centers around dreams and drugs may be peripherally relevant though I suspect this is, at least partially, a smokescreen. Keats' lines from The Fall of Hyperion point out a conflict that may be within "Kubla Khan:"

The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
The one pours out a balm upon the World,
The other vexes it.

(11.199-202)

Coleridge realized that he was both poet and dreamer and that this was the one example of "sheer opposite" to which he could not find the power of "reconciliation." The mention of the "dream" origin of the poem in the preface, which many have found suspect, may be a metaphorical comment on the poem as a whole. I believe the function of the preface is to set up a whole series of reverberating illusions

that vanish and crumble and reappear under critical scrutiny, just as the images in the poem do. Bostetter notes another function of the preface:

He must, of course, have instinctively known that such a preface would give the poem the special attention which he craved. And finally, at the same time that the preface was evidence that he truly possessed the powers of which he dreamed at the end of the poem, it effectively diverted attention from what was too nakedly expressed there. In the largest sense, it became a justification for his infirmities. Opium is presented as a benign anodyne, responsible for the dream; and the man from Porlock rather than sloth or procrastination interrupts the composition.²

Bostetter further notes that, as Elizabeth Schneider suggests, the poem without the preface has a perfectly normal, logical and conscious meaning. The preface then, which standing by itself seems to be cold, logical observation and direct statement, is that element that creates all illusion necessary to the Romantic poem. Just as Neo-classical writing sometimes liked to create the "illusion" that it was finished, Romantic poetry sometimes liked to create the "illusion" that it was unfinished. Even if Shelley hadn't conveniently drowned I doubt if he would have ever answered the question with which he ends The Triumph of Life, "Then, what is life? I cried." I see him in the words of the poem "fallen, by the wayside" sinking into the water with "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" actualizing the vision of that essential Romantic element that says while opposites can be reconciled in art, in life the resultant beauty is of necessity transitory.

²Edward Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 85.

Among all the Romantic poets only Blake and to some degree Whitman made this into an affirmation, and remained poets while doing it.

However, Coleridge succeeds at the synthesis of these opposites in the poem even while denying that he can do it. As Bostetter says:

Otherwise, time is suspended, and a perfect balance or reconciliation--to anticipate Coleridge's description of the workings of the poetic imagination--is achieved of the primitive and the civilized, the unconscious and the conscious, the elemental passions and the rational mind, nature and art. This is the kind of balance that Coleridge sought as man and artist in his own life. Just such a balance of wilderness and cultivated garden he had dreamed of realizing in the Susquehanna Valley; and it was the juxtaposition of pastoral farms and wild hills that he delighted in at Nether Stowey and later at Keswick.³

Bostetter sees further biographical possibilities in the poem:

Mount Abora (Mount Amara in the manuscript) may be not simply the earthy paradise of Rasselas or the allegoric hill of knowledge with many a holy sod where Inspiration lay murmuring "his diviner strains," but very specifically the ground of Coleridge's pantisocratic dream. The symphony and song may be also the hope of happiness with Sara.⁴

If I wanted to play "associationist" and further this suggestion, I would point out the similiarity between Amara and America.

Bostetter makes a second major point that I think has some merit. He notes that the "unfinished" nature of "Kubla Khan" is symbolic of Coleridge's failure to sustain his own output. Coleridge, as usual his own best critic, faulted himself for what he called "the swell of diction" in some of his poetry. Bostetter notes that Coleridge believed that the necessary language for vision was a frenzied rhetoric.

³Ibid., p. 87. ⁴Ibid., p. 69.

Here he might have profited from Wordsworth's example, as might Shelley who had this same predilection. Bostetter says:

Indeed, in poems like Religious Musings, Destiny of Nations, and Ode to the Departing Year, he used the rhetoric as an incantatory formula through which to invoke the vision for himself as well as for the reader. It was if he hoped that the effort to write sublimely would by some alchemy be transformed into sublime writing. But alas! too often the rhetoric soared empty and uninspired, a substitute rather than a vehicle for vision.⁵

Though I think Bostetter is right in his assessment of the other "incantatory" poems he mentions, I can't agree that the incantation and intensity is inappropriate to "Kubla Khan." Coleridge was both philosopher and poet. Religious Musings was written by the unfinished philosopher. "Kubla Khan" reflects on that "unfinished" philosopher in a fully realized poetry. Critics have confused the dancer and the dance, possibly because Religious Musings has a similar theme, "a dream of power," as Bostetter points out.

Bostetter further posits that Coleridge's disenchantment with the French Revolution led to the fading of the poetic impulse in him. Bostetter says that heretical and anarchistic poetry was difficult for Coleridge, who in his puritan conscience was obsessed with conforming. Once the French Revolution became taboo the power in his poetry faded out and he couldn't write after 1800. I think this is an oversimplification and in some ways simply not true. Some of Coleridge's best poetry was written after 1800: "Dejection an Ode," 1802, "The Pains of Sleep," 1803, "Work Without Hope," 1825, "Phantom or Fact," 1830. Granted his poetical output was largely on negative themes, and though

⁵Ibid., p. 93.

high in quality was low in quantity, but the reasons go far beyond the French Revolution or even opium or his feigned indolence. The metaphysical thinker was just crowding out the poet.

The misunderstanding of the aesthetics behind "Kubla Khan" has continued to the present day. It was started by Coleridge himself but it has been helped along by T. S. Eliot when he says:

The faith in mystical inspiration is responsible for the exaggerated repute of "Kubla Khan." The imagery of that fragment, certainly, whatever its origins in Coleridge's reading, sank to the depths of Coleridge's feeling, was saturated, transformed there--'those are pearls that were his eyes'--and brought up into daylight again. But it is not used: the poem has not been written. A single verse is not poetry unless it is a one-verse poem; and even the finest line draws its life from its context. Organization is necessary as well as 'inspiration.'⁶

I agree with the notion put forth by many that the poem is highly organized. Elizabeth Schneider's lengthy study of Coleridge's structure, which I briefly sampled in the last chapter, is very eye-opening in this regard. Alan C. Purves in an article on "Formal structure in 'Kubla Khan'" goes on to explain how this structure works. Eliot's assertion that it is unorganized simply shows how successful Coleridge was at creating illusions:

The structure of the poem, then, does much to support the general interpretation of "Kubla Khan" advanced by George Watson and Humphrey House, who claim that the poem is not one of "frustration and failure, but a triumphant statement of the potentialities of poetry." [House. p. 117.] From the form, I think, we can see that there is a relationship that is not a

⁶T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), p. 146.

simple opposition, but a close intertwining and differentiation of processes. Kubla decrees, the poet builds; the chasm is associated with a "Woman wailing for her demon-lover," the "dome in air" with a person viewed with "holy dread." Both Kubla and the poet are creators; both are associated with the unearthly. There is with each a paradox of human power and daemonic rule, for Kubla can decree but at the same time hears "ancestral voices prophesying war," and the poet can build "a sunny dome with caves of ice" but in so doing cuts himself off from the human race. The interaction between the two men that is the focal point of the poem, as well as the interaction between their power and their subjection to external forces, is echoed and channeled by the formal elements which serve to make their similiarity and difference so apparent.⁷

This poem has always seemed a little exotic to the casual reader, and was perceived as such even by the critics of Coleridge's time who lived in an age of exotic dreams. The degree to which this is an illusion is pointed out by Geoffrey Yarlott in Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid. We have seen that the meter and structure of the poem are within the bounds of convention, and Yarlott points out that the themes and imagery were not unusual either:

Though Coleridge's 1816 "Preface" to the poem invited us to regard it as an exotic 'psychological curiosity,' "Kubla Khan" in fact grew naturally out of a consistent poetical development. Far from being unique it bore obvious relevance to recurrent Coleridgean themes (such as male isolate, dell/microcosm, shadowy vision, unattainable female, bardic tradition) while its predominante imagery (of prison, blossom, sun, moon, ice, and flowing water) was entirely characteristic.⁸

It might be added that these themes were not only characteristic of Coleridge, but of the Romantic period as a whole. Yarlott, whose

⁷Alan C. Purves, "Formal Structure in 'Kubla Khan'," Studies in Romanticism, I, 1965), p. 189

⁸Geoffrey Yarlott, Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid (London: Methuen & Co., 1967), pp. 150-151.

bent is rather psychological, then proceeds to interpret this imagery in largely Freudian terms, but at more length and with more restraint than the more arduous proponents of this view who seem to stress fixed, one-to-one correspondence between symbols and what they represent. The sexual connotations of the poem's imagery are undoubtedly there, though I think they play a metaphoric role in the larger patterns of meaning in the poem, rather than being the subject. Yarlott's major theme is that the Abyssinian maid was Mary Evans, who was unattainable, but represented the qualities Coleridge couldn't have in his own wife. This isn't a very original observation, but what Yarlott does with the rest of the imagery in the poem is interesting.

He points out that in transcribing from the original source of Purchas to the "preface" to the poem itself, the "house of pleasure" becomes a "palace" then finally a "dome." The diminishing usefulness of these edifices is apparent, as well as "rills" for springs and "gardens" for "meddowes." He feels that Kubla's artificial paradise is not conducive to creativity as is the wild imagery in the rest of the poem and that Kubla and the figure with the "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" are both Coleridge, one domesticated and rational, the other in love with a woman he can't have and poetically in tune with those forces that Coleridge in his poetic/Christian ambivalence sees both as godly and satanic. In the "Eolian Harp" we can see this ambivalence as he sees the harps of mankind trembling into thought by the same breeze that floats the hair in "Kubla Khan," but he goes on in the poem to dismiss this as "shapings of the unregenerate mind (l.55)."

Yarlott argues against the unfinished theory presented us by the preface, and in the "symphony" that could not be "revived" in the poem. He says:

But what more was there to achieve? A fine description perhaps of the actual building of the 'dome in air'? At most, one feels, this would have led merely to another subject/object merger, a further theistic metaphysic of the sort which Coleridge could write to order. . . . Wisely, Coleridge resisted the temptation to treat us to another theistic metaphysic, which would needlessly have underlined what already was sufficiently explicit, and he chose instead to describe superbly the ecstasy of imagined poetic fulfillment. This rather than another 'dome', was what the poem demanded. By leaving the dome 'in air', where it could not disappoint the expectations raised by the excitement generated in the final verse, he avoided the risk of displaying a gimcrack thing which might have stained the radiance of the poem's ending.⁹

A recent article by Charles I. Patterson Jr. on "The Daemonic in 'Kubla Khan'" sees this daemonic aspect of the poem as not being satanic, but rather amoral. The manuscript version spells it daemon rather than demon, and the implication is that Coleridge had in mind the pre-Christian classical daemons who lived in an amoral paradise. Patterson sees both the imagery and the central figures and style of the poem deriving from Plato. In Phaedrus Patterson says that Plato sees poetic creation presided over by Dionysus rather than Apollo. He quotes a passage in Ion that seems to be a direct source for Coleridge's poem:

For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revelers when they dance are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power

⁹Ibid., pp. 149-150.

of music and meter they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves say; for they tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains. . . . For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing . . . the poets are only the interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severally possessed. (Ion 533e-34e)

Patterson says the incantatory style of the poem is an attempt to imitate the original Bacchic poetry of ancient times. This is not the only place that Coleridge uses this imagery:

As J. L. Lowes pointed out, Coleridge well knew that "a daemon and a demon are not one and the same thing," and there is evidence, if indeed evidence is needed, of Coleridge's knowledge of these nonmalicious Platonic daemons and their neo-Platonic descendants. One of them is a major functionary (the tutelary spirit of the deep, who loved the albatross) in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and two of his "fellow-daemons" speak of the mariner's penance (ll.395-409), as is indicated in the marginal gloss (where Coleridge's knowledge of "daemons of earth or middle air" is unmistakable) and anticipated in the prefatory epigraph which Coleridge quoted from Thomas Burnet's Archaeologiae Philosophicae. In "Kubla Khan," written possibly in October 1797 before The Ancient Mariner was completed (though already in progress), Coleridge seems to be making another use of this concept of the daemonic together with Plato's conception of the frenzied poet possessed and carried out of himself by a god other than Apollo (by Dionysus, Eros, or Aphrodite) and therefore able to convey a supreme ecstasy, such as the primordial daemons supposedly experienced.¹⁰

The incantatory nature of this poem, Patterson argues, rules out ideal, spiritual or philosophical interpretations, and I'm inclined to agree. It can't be approached in the same way as Religious Musings or a poem by Wordsworth. I think it is the incantation which makes

¹⁰Charles I. Patterson Jr., "The Daemonic in 'Kubla Khan'," (PMLA, October 1974), p. 1036.

the poem seem fresh to the 18th century mind. Eros and Aphrodite ruled much of 16th and 17th century lyric poetry, and Apollo ruled the 18th century vision, but Coleridge was reintroducing a voice that would be picked up by Shelley and Whitman and Poe and, to bring it nearer to home, Kerouac and Ginsberg; though Coleridge might not wish to acknowledge all the children he fathered while under the influence of Dionysus.

E. E. Stoll in "Symbolism in Coleridge" brings up a major problem that must be dealt with before any other questions can be asked, and I think that many of the critics we've looked at have started with assumptions that don't recognize the complexity of the question. His central concern is whether the poem can be read as allegory or symbolism. Here again we have Coleridge making statements that may clarify or confuse. Criticizing Robert Penn Warren's essay prefacing the 1946 edition of The Ancient Mariner, Stoll says:

Recognizing the distinction between allegory and symbolism, insisted upon by Coleridge (73-74, 78), which is practically that posited in my "Symbolism in Shakespeare" [Mod. Lang. Rev., January 1946, a reply to Mr. Brooks on Macbeth.]--that allegory says one thing but means another, while symbolism means what it says and another thing besides--Mr. Warren rightly objects to "equating the Pilot with the Church and the Pilot's Boy with the clergy, or of the Hermit with the idea of an enlightened religion," and so on (73), though he might well have included in his objection the snakes as opium and the Albatross as the poet's wife; but he then goes out of his way to call the reading of Professor Lowes (who keeps to the poem as, in Coleridge's own words, "pure imagination") a "merely literal reading" (77).¹¹

This, of course, is a twin attack on what Stoll sees as new critical hypocrisy and a symbolic interpretation that he sees as either

¹¹E. E. Stoll, "Symbolism in Coleridge," (PMLA, 1948), p. 216.

too direct or too fuzzy to be useful. He goes on to attack a whole barrel full of critics that he feels have not properly understood Coleridge's own distinctions between allegory and symbolism; among them, besides Warren, are Edmund Wilson, Kenneth Burke and G. Wilson Knight. Stoll essentially sees himself as the voice of common sense putting all this sloppy interpretation of the new symbolist critics under the light of scrutiny that blots out the shadows of personal interpretation. He chastizes them for not examining the works in the spirit in which they were written. He says:

Moreover, Mr. Warren, as above, is flying in the face of Coleridge's doctrine concerning symbolism, which he has himself accepted, that, unlike allegory, it "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible". As Chesterton says, "a symbol is not a disguise but a display; the best expression of something that cannot otherwise be expressed." It is in this respect, even like allegory when effective, which, as Mr. C. S. Lewis observes, is "not to hide but to reveal."¹²

However, I think it important to note that Coleridge didn't necessarily always follow his own doctrines. Stoll speaks of the marginal glosses in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and he asks if allegory or symbolism is intended, why doesn't it appear there? I contend that the function of the marginal glosses are the same as the function of the preface, that is to heighten the illusion. This seems to contradict the point he makes about the purpose being "not to hide but to reveal." While I have to agree with Stoll's assessment that most symbolist critics have gone overboard in their interpretations, I still see Coleridge engaged in some sleight-of-hand. Elizabeth Schneider seems

¹²Ibid., p. 218.

to agree with Stoll and cites Coleridge's preference for Blake's simpler poems over his more complex ones and she concludes that concealed symbolism wasn't compatible with his aesthetics or habits. Here we must make the distinction between Coleridge's rational conscious beliefs and his unconscious ones.

G. Wilson Knight in The Starlit Dome: Studies in the Poetry of Vision undertakes an attempt at symbolic interpretation on a grand scale and comes within the sights of Stoll's guns: He says:

Poetry of any worth is a rounded solidity which drops shadows only on the flat surfaces on philosophical statement. Concretely it bodies forth symbols of which our ghostly concepts of 'life', 'death', 'time', 'eternity', 'immortality' are only very pallid analogies. They are none the less necessary, if we are to enchain our normal thinking to the creations of great literature, and I next translate the domed symbolism of "Kubla Khan" into such shadow-terms corresponding to the original in somewhat the same way as the science of Christian theology corresponds, or should correspond, to the New Testament.¹³

Knight's interpretation then follows and it is one of the most ambitious interpretations attempted and much too complex to deal with adequately here, but he makes a commentary on the "visionary" aspect of the poem that may give us a clue to why the poem contains illusions. Writing of "Phantom or Fact" and other poems, he says:

But, where Shelley has all fire and ardour and Nietzsche a steady--burning confidence, Coleridge is here insecurely poised: his progress is at once tortured and subject to varied allegiances.¹⁴

It might be added that the illusions created may have been to hide

¹³G. Wilson Knight, The Starlit Dome: Studies in the Poetry of Vision (London: Methuen & Co., 1959) pp. 90-91.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 121.

his irresolution from himself as well as us. As a "visionary" poet he may not have felt comfortable in the role as Blake and Shelley did, but rather had moments much like the Wizard of Oz when his Christian conscience told him the poet should not assume to speak as a god.

I don't think I can accept all of Knight's elaborate and confident interpretations, but I can't wholly accept Stoll's notion that we must assume Coleridge practised what he preached either, though Stoll does make a point, that critics should heed, about reading Coleridge's prose in order to interpret his poetry.

The problem of the fragmentary nature of the poem, or the illusion that it is fragmentary, I think, deserves more attention. I see the poem as essentially about the creative process, and a poem that demonstrates that process as it symbolically writes about it. I don't deny that many other interpretations to the poem exist, I just say they are subordinate to it. They in fact support and enhance my argument that this so-called fragment is not fragmentary, but is a splendid little skeleton key that unlocks the doors of one kind of Romantic aesthetics. Coleridge teaches us how to read Coleridge; and in pursuing the meaning of "Kubla Khan" this tiny poem explains itself and in the process explains all the other "unfinished symphonys" to which we have wrongly impugned artistic incompleteness.

Brewster Ghiselin argues, in the introduction to The Creative Process, that if Coleridge had simply shut the man from Porlock out he might have completed the poem. Ghiselin dedicates his book to the man from Porlock, and I think it is significant that he did. I have to disagree with him on his point that the man from Porlock needs to be

shut out. The articles in his book, I think, support the notion that a man from Porlock is necessary and that the poem is finished.

D. F. Rauber in "The Fragment as Romantic Form" asserts that "the romantic artist must deal with formal problems much more difficult than those of the classical artist" because he must embody the infinite in a "finite" and "sequential" medium. He asserts that an abrupt stop of a poem can ruin the effect which in the romantic mode aspires to be an "unending, ascending and widening spiral." He says that the man from Porlock isn't the philistine he has been pictured to be but, as he says, "On the contrary, I suggest that if he did not exist he would have to be invented, for he is in flesh and blood the accidental factor, like the suddenly shut door, which is necessary to create the illusion of the cut short rather than the stopped."¹⁵

Alice Snyder in "Coleridge's 'Theory of Life,'" quotes from a note of Coleridge that is itself a fragment: "Now this 'wonderful and fearful making' is possible under one condition only--viz. That the product is never completed, but always . . . "¹⁶ There the quotation ends and he left a mark by it that meant he intended to use it somewhere. Like "Kubla Khan" this fragment demonstrates what it is saying, while saying it.

So here again we have Coleridge deliberately creating illusions. Max F. Schulz in The Poetic Voices of Coleridge: A Study of His Desire for Spontaneity and Passion for Order attempts to order and categorize

¹⁵D. F. Rauber, "The Fragment as Romantic Form" (Modern Language Queries, 1969), pp. 220-221.

¹⁶Alice Snyder, "Coleridge's 'Theory of Life,'" (Modern Language Notes, 1932), p. 301.

Coleridge's poems into "Voices" such as the prophecy voice, the conversation voice, the confession voice, and the dream voice. Schulz believes that Coleridge deliberately selected appropriate styles for expressing his different topics. Schulz speaks of the myths surrounding Coleridge's poetry and says that "The most persistent of these misconceptions, curiously, considering the admiration felt by this century for the catholicity and methodology of his thought, is that Coleridge is a poet limited to several unique visions rather than a versatile, self-critical artist learning from his predecessors and his own errors." He goes on to conclude that "Coleridge's poems are the work of an artist seeking definite ends, and that they are not an unvarying product of a 'manual somnambulism'--although Coleridge sometimes liked to pretend that they were--but richly varied artifacts."¹⁷ Schulz then categorizes these varied artifacts and puts "Kubla Khan" in the dream voice and compares it with "A Day Dream," "Loves Apparition and Evanishment," "The Pains of Sleep," and many others. A dream voice is an appropriate style in which to write the poetry of "illusion."

Coleridge even seemed to have a little prophetic fun at the expense of the critics he set up with his illusions. In Literary Remains he says:

Many of our modern criticisms on the works of our elder writers remind me of the connoisseur, who, taking up a small cabinet picture, railed most eloquently at the absurd caprice of the artist in painting a horse sprawling. "Excuse me, Sir," replied the owner of the piece, "you hold it the wrong way: it is a horse galloping." (vol. 1, p. 285)

¹⁷Max F. Schulz, The Poetic Voices of Coleridge: A Study of His Desire for Spontaneity and Passion for Order (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1963), pp. 6-7.

The type of critics Coleridge complains about are still with us. He would find them guilty of the critical equivalent of that myopia that occurs when a division of labor or a dissociation of sensibility takes place. One critic handles drugs, one sources, one symbols, one the Id and Superego, etc. These critics are like the three blind men in the fable who touch different parts of the elephant and think that ears, tusks and legs are each separate whole truths. All of these interpretations throw as many shadows as they throw light upon the poem. The interpretations seem to shift and blur and reappear in stark clarity as we peruse them. The unsettled complexity and splendid confusion of the poem's critics may have been what Coleridge intended us to end up with. But the reconciliation of opposites that are the form, subject and metaphor in "Kubla Khan" must be caught by the critic as well. Coleridge is teaching us that the firm, solid, finished dome built by Kubla Khan, with its neatly tended gardens has a reality that rests on a shaky foundation, while the "illusory" dome of art built in air has a reality that lasts. Reality contains illusion and illusion contains reality. The song that welds the dancer and the dance, the heart and the mind, the "phantom" and the "fact" are the same as that sweet "unheard melody" in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn." It cannot be heard by those who deny the chasms and dark forests of "Realities Dark Dream." Wholeness is all, motion is all, Coleridge is telling us. The poem is not a lament but an affirmation. Coleridge is not a fuzzy, foggy-eyed "romantic," but a realist who dares to look with his "flashing eyes" when more timid souls turn their heads away. Like Dylan Thomas, at least when writing poetry, he stands face to face with the tragedies of the human condition and "sings in his chains like the sea."

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