Wesleyan University The Honors College

Flesh and Blood

Repetition and Obscurity in *Gothic Poetry*

by

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Class of 2009

I have wished to keep the Reader in the company
of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing
I shall interest him.

- William Wordsworth

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in English.

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2009

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FAMILY AWAKENINGS

Gothic Poetry as a Dynamic Space

The Gothic poem is based in psychological awakening. It is a dark aesthetic form that crystallizes within the Romantic tradition through an arousal of the past in the present, pleasure in pain, the real in the artificial, and the tragic emotions of pity and fear in the reader. It both perverts and preserves the Romantic spiral[1]: paradoxically advancing the reader's grasp on himself and on reality by promoting a sense of obscurity. The Gothic poem allows the reader to understand only the darkened depths of his mind, and yet this understanding is the source of his aesthetic pleasure.

My aim is to construct a dynamic space in which the reader's psychological experience of a selection of William Wordsworth, Robert Browning, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems may be understood as Gothic. I read these poems as Gothic constructions through an examination of the reader's emotional experience of pity and fear. By applying the aesthetic principle of repetition to both narrative and lyric aspects of these poems, I show that these two emotions are made simultaneous and continuous, and how they work to promote pleasure through psychological obscurity. This "obscurity" is rendered by the reader's uncanny sense of himself as "double" in the poem and by his sense of being torn between the reality that he knows and the artificial world of the poem.

The Romantic era marked a turn away from the Enlightenment in favor of the aesthetic reconciliation of contradictions posed by the world. Put another way, the

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[1] The "Romantic spiral" is literary critic M.H. Abrams' theory, to which I will return. M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 184.

Romantics discovered the value of the arts and the emotions as an alternative means of searching for resolution. Wordsworth, Browning, and Coleridge's poetry takes shape within this context and adheres to the Romantic project of advancing the mind through the emotions.[2] And yet, in a selection of their poems, these poets use the tragic emotions of pity and fear to promote a sense of obscurity as an alternative to a sense of resolution, and it is this exchange that allows them to provide a Gothic twist on the Romantic ideal of reconciliation.

The aesthetic principle of repetition pulls together these opposing concepts of understanding and obscurity, advancement and decline, Romantic and Gothic, and shows them to be, to borrow Ludwig Wittgenstein's term, an aesthetic system of "family resemblances."[3] I situate this repetition in Aristotle's definition of tragedy, Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny, and Coleridge's philosophy of Romantic poetry, and I explore its effects in the reader's experience of the narrative and lyric structures that Wordsworth, Browning, and Coleridge employ. However, I make no claim that my theory of Gothic Poetry precisely represents tragedy, the uncanny, or Coleridge's philosophies, nor do I assume that my particular selection of poets and poems are the only ones in which it operates. Rather, my purpose is to tie together various strands of these intertwined concepts to conceptualize the reader's experience of these poems as psychologically obscure, emotionally pleasurable, and aesthetically Gothic.

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[2] Although the emotions were a central focus of Romantic poetry, the evocation of emotion has long been defined as the object of the poetic impulse, and stems all the way back to its first philosophical inception. Romantic theorists emphasized the connection between the emotional mind and the poetic project: John Stuart Mill, in "What is Poetry?" and John Ruskin in "Definition of Greatness in Art," but most importantly, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. According to Wordsworth, "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and the situation to the feeling." William Wordsworth, Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads* [1800], in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc, 1967), 322. And according to Coleridge, poetry "elevates the mind by making its feeling the object of its reflexion." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Anima Poetae* [1895], in *English Romantic Writers*, 492.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1953], 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1958), 32e.

I understand both poetry and the Gothic to be entirely pleasurable psychological experiences, derived from an imaginative encounter with everything external held in infinite obscurity. The poem is an imitation of the external world, as Aristotle defines, which aims to produce pleasure.[4] And as Coleridge states, "poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood,"[5] or when experienced, in Freud's words, as "something one does not know one's way about in."[6] Because of its obscurity, Edmund Burke writes, poetry has

> a more powerful dominion over the passions than the other art… the obscure idea, when properly conveyed, should be more affecting than the clear. It is our ignorance of things that causes our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions.[7]

Like poetry, the Gothic indulges the natural human pleasure in obscurity, in experiencing a delightful transgression of what was once clear and defined. Indeed, as a concept, the Gothic itself cannot be put into exact theoretical terms. As most literary critics have noted, absolutely defining the "Gothic" is dangerously thorny, for doing so poses the challenge of accounting for its disparities as a literary genre, a theoretical mode, and a historical tradition.[8] For the purpose of my study of emotion in nineteenth-century poetry, I have defined Gothic as an aesthetic composed of the pleasure-pain

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[4] Aristotle, *Poetics* [335-323 BCE], trans. Malcolm Heath (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 3, 6.

[5] Coleridge, *Anima Poetae*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 519.

[6] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," [1919] in *Writings on Art and Literature* standard ed., arranged by Mark Patterson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 195. Freud makes this particular statement in summary of Adolph Jentsch's limited idea of the uncanny, however posits it as a generally correct understanding. Despite Freud's disclaimer against treating "The Uncanny" as a definitive text, his thorough and innovative definition of "the uncanny" still permeates and circulates our contemporary discourse on aesthetics.

[7] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757] (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999), 47.

[8] Anne Williams makes this clear in her study of the Gothic, suggesting that we think of "Gothic" as something intuitive, rather than trying to define it. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

complex, the uncanny, and the sublime,[9] all of which create a single psychological effect in poetry.

As a fundamental concept, repetition forges the most significant bond between poetry and the Gothic. In his *Poetics* (335-323 BCE), Aristotle applied ancient mimetic theory to the art of poetry, which he argued excites our feelings simply because it imitates real experience.[10] In this sense, poetry itself presents a primary repetition: mirroring reality and then manipulating it for us into emotional incantations. And, it seems only fitting that the eighteenth-century Gothic, which originated as a repetitive return to the "past" of all that was Medieval,[11] should produce literature that carries with it the fundamental concept of repetition. For, as Gilles Deleuze states, "the past itself is repetition by default."[12] When it emerged, the Gothic thus referred not only to what is mysterious, supernatural, or terrifying, but also to the psychological obscurity that was derived from the strange familiarity of antiquity and ruin.

In poetry, the effects of repetition make the reader's experience of obscurity pleasurable. Poetry carries with it a "universal pleasure in imitation,"[13] and within its structures, the mere act of recurrence—even the recurrence of something dark, unpleasant, and elusive—can become soothing, calming, and emotionally regulating. For, as Freud states confidently in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), "repetition, the re-

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[9] I include the sublime as a central aspect of the Gothic aesthetic, however my discussion is mainly focused on the pleasure-pain complex and the uncanny. For a description of my interpretation of the sublime in Gothic Poetry, in particular in Browning and Coleridge's poems, see my footnote to the final section of Chapter II, "Kubla Khan."

[10] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 6, 7. Abrams thoroughly discusses the mimetic orientation—the explanation of art as an imitation of aspects of the universe—as the most primitive aesthetic theory in existence. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1958), 8-14.

[11] Jack Stillinger and Deirdre Shauna Lynch, ed., "The Gothic and the Development of A Mass Readership," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt and M.H. Abrams, vol. D, *The Romantic Period*, ed. Jack Stillinger and Deirdre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 577-579.

[12] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [1968], trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 90.

[13] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 6.

experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure."[14] Wordsworth agrees that in poetry, "we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been *accustomed* to be pleased."[15] Not only do "we look for the iteration," Samuel Butler writes, but we "*enjoy* it."[16] According to Paul Valéry, "the music lover cries 'encore' or hums the tune that has delighted him [and] the child wants the story repeated: 'tell it over again.'"[17] Valéry's examples suggest the important point that repetition does not stem from a psychological need for resolution. On the contrary, the pleasure of repetition is based in the human "need to see again, to hear again, to experience indefinitely."[18] Similarly, poetic repetition does not aim to provide the reader with a resolving grasp on something that is obscure, but rather to make its inherent obscurity a continual source of his pleasure.

In the Gothic poem, the pleasurable nature of obscurity is enhanced by the reader's experience of pity and fear as "cyclic" emotions: simultaneously and continuously produced in his mind. Aristotle never fully defined "pity and fear" except as the pivotal emotions of tragedy,[19] and thus it seems appropriate to take them as capable

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[14] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920], trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 42.

[15] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 330. My italics.

[16] Samuel Butler, preface to his translation of Homer's *The Iliad*, viii, quoted in A. Shewan, "Repetition in Homer and Tennyson," *The Classical Weekly* 16, no. 20 (Apr. 2, 1923): 156. My italics.

[17] Freud also interprets this desire in a similar scenario: "if a child has been told a nice story,he will insist on hearing it over and over again rather than a new one; and he will remorselessly stipulate that the repetition shall be an identical one." Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 42.

[18] Paul Valéry, "The Idea of Art," trans. Ralph Manheim in *Aesthetics*, ed. Harold Osborne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 28-29, quoted in Edward Casey, "Imagination and Repetition in Literature: A Reassessment" *Yale French Studies* no. 52, Graphesis: Perspectives in Literature and Philosophy (1975): 266.

[19] Aristotle defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete, and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the *katharsis* of such emotions." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 10. In this passage, I have replaced one word of Heath's translation with the original word that Aristotle used: that is, *katharsis*. Heath translates it as "the purification of such emotions," however since this translation varies and seems to pose problems of interpretation, I would like to adhere only to the word Aristotle originally used. My own interpretation of Aristotle's *katharsis*, and its implications in my discussion, will follow shortly.

of being extended.[20] The reader's "pity," which I extend to his sympathetic identification with both speaker and the poet, directly leads him to feel a permeating "fear," which I extend still further to refer to his uncanny dislodging of "self" and unnerving sense of being overpowered by artifice in the poem. With this fear, the reader is made more vulnerable to sympathetic attachments, and this force in turn leads him into a more intense fright of the poem's dominance over him. I thus extend fear also to an equation with a sense of "awe" at the power at work in the poem.

In this way, these two emotions become intimately interlinked, inextricable, and their combined effect is to throw the reader into a "cycle" in which there can be no Romantic sense of resolution. Rather than directly undermining the Romantic project of levitation, this emotional cycle allows the reader to advance beyond the boundaries of the Romantic ideals of reconciliation and resolution to reach the even higher plane of what John Keats called "being in uncertainties."[21] The emotions produced by these poems, that is, ensure the reader's pleasure by holding him to an "uncertain" sense of obscurity that is definitively poetic, and utterly Gothic.

My psychological inquiry into the Gothic poem takes shape across two intertwining chapters, each of which examines the effects of repetition on the reader's pity and fear and his sense of obscurity. The first chapter dissects the Gothic aesthetic,

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[20] Indeed, as Classics critics such as George R. Noyes have noted, Aristotle's identification of "pity and fear" is itself limiting, and elsewhere he uses them as more flexible terms. Noyes, "Aristotle and Modern Tragedy," *Modern Language Notes* 13, no 1 (January, 1998): 10.

[21] Keats to George and Thomas Keats, December 21, 27 (?), 1817, in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 41-42. In what has come to be known as his "*Negative Capability*" letter, Keats defined the idea of negative capability as "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." This idea is very applicable to my idea of the Gothic poem's ascension to "obscurity" as opposed to Romantic resolution. But what is most interesting about Keats' claim is his direct reference to Coleridge, who he dismissed as cleaving to the idea of reaching resolution: not being "capable," that is, of remaining in obscure mystery. I will return to Keats' qualification of Coleridge at the end of my discussion.

understood as the uncanny and the pleasure-pain complex, in the context of poetry. It then reveals how the principle of repetition inspires the reader's pity and fear through the uncanny obscurity of the "double" in Browning and Coleridge's dramatic narratives "Porphyria's Lover" (1836) and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). In the repetitive narrative structure of circular return in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855), a similar sense of obscurity is shown to be generated by the reader's emotions. A study of these poems shows that the reader's relationship to the poet is the basis of his emotions, and thus initiates a move out of narrative structure and into a lyric realm.

This shift to lyric opens a theoretical landscape for the second chapter, which shows how the poets' techniques of artifice produce the reader's pity and fear out of the more intimate principle of linguistic repetition. The emotional effects of aesthetic repetition are examined through a study of two fundamental elements of language: the recurring patterns of sounds and the combination of words into recurring poetic images. The reader's experience of lyric language is first exemplified by the expressions of Matthew Arnold's "Isolation: To Marguerite" (1857), and then by the recurring sounds of Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break." (1834) The emotional effects are then further examined in the recurring images of Wordsworth's amalgam sonnet-sequence "The Lucy Poems" (1800) and his horror-tale "The Thorn" (1798). In the final instance, the cumulative effect of repetition is revealed to promote a particular Gothic obscurity in Coleridge's deeply moving poetic fragment, "Kubla Khan" (1816). The peculiar nature of this poem brings us full circle, allowing Gothic Poetry to be conceptualized a dynamic, living space, defined by the elegant balance of pleasure and

obscurity within the reader's dark psychological experience.[22]

Although I adopt the emotions of "pity and fear" from Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*, this is not to imply that these Gothic poems are to be equated with the Greek tragedies Aristotle refers to in his fragmented work, nor understood as the Romantic poets' manifestation of tragedy in general. It is important to take into account that despite the prominence of Aristotle's thinking in Western philosophy and the overall value of his work to aesthetics, any contemporary reading of the *Poetics* can be nothing more than a feeble interpretation of his "hints," and any application of these interpretations to later literature should be considered general as opposed to operative.[23] And yet, an important connection can be forged between the Gothic poem and Aristotle's tragedy through a psychological interpretation of what he meant by tragedy's "*katharsis*" of pity and fear. While the lack of consensus with regard to what Aristotle truly meant by this word, which has been variably translated as "purification" or "purgation," has exposed it to a wide range of interpretations,[24] what does seem clear is that Aristotle defined tragedy not only as marked by these emotions, but also as capable of drawing them out of the mind: exciting, stirring, deepening and indulging them. This interpretation is supported by Aristotle's statement in *Politics* [335-323 BCE] that, with

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[22] I have based the idea of constructing Gothic Poetry as a "dynamic space" on the fact that my examination of the form operates, in Deleuze's words, "from the point of view of an observer tied to that space, not from an external position." Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 26. By this, I refer to two levels of "observer": first, the general poetic reader I conceptualized in my discussion, who is psychologically tied to the space of the poems, and second, the reader of my own argument, who I wish to similarly tie to the broad and conceptual space of Gothic Poetry.

[23] Noyes makes these arguments in "Aristotle and Modern Tragedy." Similarly, in his introduction to the *Poetics*, Heath notes that the current text we have of the *Poetics* is most likely incomplete, and that the reader must therefore simply make the most of what it can offer him. Heath, introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), xxxvii.

[24] Heath translates Aristotle's *katharsis* as "purification," while Noyes translates it as "purgation." According to Heath, the interpretation of Aristotle's *katharsis* is such a controversial subject in the study of *Poetics* that even among experts there is no consensus view. Heath, introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics*, lxix.

regard to the emotional effects of music, "for all there occurs *katharsis* and pleasurable relief."[25] A poetic display of pity and fear in tragedy, perhaps he meant, does not remove these emotions, but makes them all the more acceptable—and pleasurable—to the mind.

This interpretation of "*katharsis*" allows Aristotle's definition of tragedy, despite its limitations and fragmentary form, to provide a contextual basis for understanding the effects of pity and fear in the Gothic poem. For in the Gothic poem, the cycle of pity and fear encourages a psychological sense of obscurity in the reader's experience that, like Aristotle's tragedy, deepens his emotions and makes them more pleasurable. The reader's sense of obscurity can be observed in his uncanny feeling of himself as "double" in the narrative structure of Browning and Coleridge's dramatic monologues, and in his equally unnerving feeling of being torn between the real and the artificial in lyric language. Both of these feelings are aroused by the aesthetic principle of repetition that drives the psychological dynamic between reader, speaker, and poet on the surface of the Gothic poem.

In his theoretical prose-work *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge defines the ideal poem as an essentially unified whole, which strives for

> the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still

[25] Aristotle, *Politics* [335- 323 BCE], 1342a4-15, quoted in Heath, introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics*, xxxviii. My interpretation is further supported by the interesting connection that can be drawn between Aristotle's idea of *katharsis* as emotional pleasure and relief, and Freud's similar use of the word 'catharsis' to describe the therapeutic release of unpleasant thoughts in psychoanalysis.

> subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.[26]

Although I have stated that the cycle of pity and fear is, on a purely conceptual level, a perversion of the Romantic ideal of reconciliation and resolution, Coleridge's extensive list of "discordant qualities" that the poem works to balance still contains many important points of departure for a discussion of the Gothic poem. First, the concept of "sameness, with difference" is foundational to the principle of repetition that guides the Gothic cycle of emotion. The idea of something that is both the "same" and "different" insinuates Deleuze and Barbara Hernstein Smith's reciprocal theories that, with regard to recurring systems and structures, it is change, difference, and variation that inspire the most intense emotional response.[27] This idea is continuous with balancing "the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects," a statement which in turn almost precisely anticipates Freud's language in "The Uncanny," as he works to define the operations of repetition in causing the psychological fright of the uncanny based in the recognition of an "unfamiliar familiar."

The poetic unification of "the general, with the concrete" and "the individual, with the representative" is a characteristically Romantic theory, and perhaps best poetically demonstrated by Wordsworth and Coleridge's presentation of the philosophical "truth" of universal human life through the individual man's experiences in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). This joint volume not only offers poems that provide fertile ground for identifying the hybrid form of "narrative-lyric," which reveals the important elements of each form in the construction of Gothic Poetry, but it also catalyzes a Romantic theoretical framework on poetic emotion, artifice, and pleasure in the wake of

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[26] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* [1817] Chap. XIV, in *English Romantic Writers,* 455.

[27] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* and Barbara Hernstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

the "conversation" between Wordsworth in his Preface (1800) to the volume and Coleridge in his response to Wordsworth's Preface in *Biographia Literaria*.

And, since emotion, artifice and the imagination are such serious topics to Coleridge's "philosophy" of poetry,[28] his systematic description of the ideal poem does not fail to emphasize the importance of balancing them. The blending of "idea" and "image" offers both the poet and reader "more than usual order" with "a more than usual state of emotion," and indeed, the balance between "the natural" (or the "real") and "the artificial" (as well as the "supernatural") is a central source of the reader's emotions of pity and fear. However, Coleridge does not explicitly mention what I have found to be the only true "reconciliation" in the reader's experience of emotions in the Gothic poem: the cooperation of the "discordant qualities" of narrative and lyric into the single, unified form of "narrative-lyric."

If the Romantic age was truly "the age of the lyric," in poetic terms this was manifested by the powerful awakening of emotion through the lyricization of the received forms of drama and narrative.[29] The collection of poems into prominent volumes with titles such as *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842)[30] and *Lyrical Ballads* points to the alluring success of this hybrid form. The poems of *Lyrical Ballads* unite narrative and lyric through the musical verse-form: they are self-professed "ballads," in which characters' stories are sung in verse, and they are directly related to the "lyric," in which the poet

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[28] I have put the term "philosophy" in quotations here because the nature of Coleridge's project—literary, philosophical, and psychological (and indeed which way to label it)—is a subject of much debate. Coleridge himself seems aware of this variable quality in his work, and only directs us with statements such as: "no man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher." Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XV, in *English Romantic Writers*, 458.

[29] Georg Lukacs argues that the Romantic lyricization of narrative cumulates in the modern novel. Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1971), quoted in Tilottama Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness" in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism* ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 202.

[30] Here I only generally refer to Browning's famous "dramatic monologue" volume, *Dramatic Lyrics* [1842]. Of Browning's two poems that I discuss, "Porphyria's Lover" first appeared in this volume, however "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" was published later, in his volume titled *Men and Women* [1855].

makes his own feelings musical. However, their narrative lyricism is more complex: not only are the poems written by different authors (Wordsworth and Coleridge), but they are spoken by different characters, such that the temporality of narrative is disoriented and the typically autonomous lyric "voice" in the volume is dispersed, made elusive.[31]

The narrative poet represents events happening over time, and these representations themselves are communicated to the reader as unfolding through time,[32] but the lyric poet is disengaged from temporal succession, offering pure feelings that are suspended in an indefinite moment. Narrative temporality maintains the reader's curiosity in discovering what has happened and/or changed over the course of the poem, and encourages him to forge connections of causation along the logical sequence of cause and effect, such that the elements of suspense and surprise are the driving forces behind the poem's larger pattern of coherence. Although this temporal causality disappears in lyric, the reader nevertheless experiences the poem as a coherent whole, in which rather than concrete actions, his mind is directed by psychological associations and emotional attachments, making the experience of pity and fear possible. In this way, the real "action" of the poem is internalized in lyric, allowing a sense of immediacy: between the reader and the text, and more importantly, between the reader and the poet.

The degree to which the text of the poem mediates the relationship between the reader and the poet, for example through the voice of a character-speaker, is central to

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[31] Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*, 195.

[32] Dramatic poetry is similarly guided by temporality; however, as Wordsworth states in his Preface, the "action is carried on by [the] speech and dialogue" of artificial characters, unmediated by "the Poet [who] does not appear at all in his own person." Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 326. And yet, the drama can be lyricized by foregrounding the character's (and indirectly, the poet's) emotions and feelings. Hence, the Romantic form of "dramatic monologue" championed by Browning. Although I only discuss Browning and Coleridge's standard dramatic narratives "Porphyria's Lover," "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as such, in truth any poem with a characterized speaker could be considered dramatic, and poems such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and Wordsworth's "The Thorn" and "The Lucy Poems" certainly toy with the dramatic monologue form. For the mere presence of a speaker is the presence of the "other" in the poem, which according to Rajan, "makes us aware that all utterance is incipiently dramatic." Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*, 205.

the narrative-lyric.[33] As Charles Bernstein states, "the thickness of writing between the reader and the poem," is not "an obstacle between them, [but rather] their means of communication."[34] The narrative poem, as Aristotle rightly defines, is one in which the poet temporarily adopts the voice of characters. However, Wordsworth's statement that "the Narrator, however liberally his speaking agents be introduced, is himself the source from which everything primarily flows,"[35] opens the gateway between narrative and lyric by foregrounding the poet's creative presence in the poem's communication with the reader. The lyric poet communicates with the reader by adopting his own subjective voice, through which he channels the external world into an internal, or as Jean-Paul Sartre put it, a "shut imaginary consciousness."[36] And yet despite this imaginary quality, by communicating his emotions to a reader, the poet's lyric consciousness is made real, "flowing" back into the external world. Thus, although both narrative and lyric seem to seal the reader in the world of the poem, when the "imaginary" character-speakers are blended into the poet's single elusive "voice" and "imaginary" consciousness, the reader is no longer limited by the internal and external boundaries of the poem, and his psychological experience of the text becomes the open source of communication between himself and the poet.

The communication between the poet and the reader on the surface of the poem lies at the root of its Gothic nature. When the stable, differentiating lines of consciousness fade between poet, speaker, and reader, the latter is faced with a Gothic obscurity of "sameness with difference": his own "voice" in his head runs into the

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[33] Even Aristotle makes this point in his *Poetics*, that "in evaluating any utterance or action, one must take into account not just the moral qualities of what is actually done or said, but also the identity of the agent or speaker, the addressee." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 43.

[34] Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 87.

[35] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 320-311.

[36] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: 1968), 215, quoted in Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*,196.

speaker's, which runs into the poet's.[37] In this way, not only does the poem contain its own "double" as the aesthetic representation of possibility,[38] but it does not stop there: the dynamic and intimate connection between poet and speaker, speaker and reader, reader and poet make them all "doubles," or in a certain sense, "triplets."

The effect of opening this boundary between the reader, speaker, and poet is to obscure the reader's sense of himself and the world of the poem by generating a continuity between his emotions of pity and fear. Whether or not the speaker of the poem is understood as an artificial character, as in narrative, or the poet himself, as in lyric, according to Robert Langbaum in *The Poetry of Experience*, the speaker operates as "a pole for sympathy- the means by which writer and reader project themselves into the poem."[39] And the reader's sympathy for the speaker, Langbaum continues, "frees [him] for the widest range of experience" in the poem, while his "judgment keeps [him] aware of how far [he is] departing"[40] from reality. Coleridge's statement proffers a similar dynamic between the reader's "admiration of the poet," which inspires the fear I equate with a sense of "awe," and his pity, or "sympathy with the poetry."[41] The reader's pity, that is, opens up to him the experience of fear, for his sympathetic identification with the speaker is always checked by his ability to discern what is and is not real. The degree to which the reader judges that the poem carries him out of reality informs the degree to

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[37] Coleridge makes an interesting comment on Wordsworth's poetry in *Biographia Literaria*, complementing the way that Wordsworth always seems to be able to maintain his own "voice" in his poems. "Here," Coleridge writes, "the man and the poet lose and find themselves in each other, the one as glorified, thelatter as substantiated. In this mild and philosophic pathos, Wordsworth appears to me without a compeer. So he *is*: so he *writes*." Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XXII, in *English Romantic Writers*, 488. Italics in original.

[38] Both Aristotle and Smith make the point that possibility is intrinsically linked to the poem, which is in Aristotle's words, "the kind of thing that *would* happen," and in Smith's, "the representation of what might have been," or "a possible utterance of what the poet might say." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 16, and Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 19, 16. I will return to this idea of "possibility" in my discussion of the poetic double.

[39] Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 52.

[40] Ibid., 96.

[41] Here I merely recall the final statements of the previous passage quoted from Coleridge's definition of poetry. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XIV, in *English Romantic Writers*, 455.

which he is involuntarily made to feel even more under its spell. This judgment re-generates his fear, and the cycle continues once again. But, to return to what Wordsworth calls "the grand elementary principle of pleasure,"[42] the reader not only finds pleasure in the Gothic sense of obscurity generated by these emotions, but also from the continual assertion of obscurity through repetition.

In Wordsworth, Browning, and—most of all—Coleridge's Gothic poems, repetition not only promotes the reader's emotional cycle of pity and fear, but also advances a sense of obscurity that deepens his psychological experience. In these poems, obscurity is asserted by the force of repetition, which relates the Gothic, understood as an aesthetic composed by the pleasure-pain complex and the uncanny, to the poem, which foregrounds its artificiality through language.[43] While in a grand sense, it is true that repetition shows the Gothic aesthetic to be poetic, and the art of poetry to be inherently Gothic, the scope of my argument is only to show their direct affinity in some of Wordsworth, Browning, and Coleridge's poems. My aim is to use these poems to divorce the Gothic from its roots in narrative prose by showing its emergence in Romantic narrative-lyrics, and to divorce these narrative-lyrics from their roots in Romantic resolution by revealing their advancement of psychological obscurity through the Gothic. In this way, I use the aesthetic principle of repetition to argue that the reader's experience of obscurity in Wordsworth, Browning, and Coleridge's poems is an experience of Gothic Poetry.

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[42] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 325.

[43] Bernstein makes this point explicitly when he states that poetry "by nature emphasizes its artifice." Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 31.

I

THE GOTHIC SCAR

Narrative Structures of Obscurity

Considering the present preoccupation with horror films, dark fashion, and the indulgence of all mental torments overcrowding the waiting room of a modern-day psychiatrist's office, it seems remarkably naïve to believe that in the eighteenth century, the hunger for what James B. Twitchell has called "dreadful pleasures"[44]—the delight in terror, the thrill of fear, the joy of horror—was somehow confined to the "popular" Gothic narratives of prose; that all the psychological obsession with navigating the darkness of the "self" and the conflicts of the world were channeled into a single literary medium, to the exclusion of all others. That is to say, that the "high" Romantic poetry of the time did not, as many have assumed, hover above the "low" Gothic novels and stories. Rather, as even a brief study of the resemblances between these two forms of literature shows, numerous Romantic poems served as a different outlet for the Gothic impulse.

The standard subjects and characters of the Gothic novels—vampires, ghosts, and nightmares—cropped up across the poems of the time: Lord Byron's Oriental vampire in "The Giaour" (1813) and Coleridge's ethereal blood-sucking *femme fatal* in "Christabel" (1800) undeniably resemble Bram Stoker's dark character of *Dracula* (1897) and Mary Shelley's wretched man-made monster in *Frankenstein* (1818), as do less clearly drawn, more psychologically embedded characters such as Browning's murderous speaker in "Porphyria's Lover," and Coleridge's ghastly undead Mariner in

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[44] This is, in fact, the title of James B. Twitchell's book: *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." And sure enough, just as it has become common knowledge that the idea for *Frankenstein* came to Shelley in a nightmare, "Kubla Khan" makes a similar literary entrance as Coleridge's self-proclaimed poetic expression of "A Vision in a Dream."[45] Similarly, the traditionally Gothic feelings of terror, horror,[46] obsession, paranoia, and melancholia[47] are dominant forces throughout Romantic literature, overshadowing and ultimately controlling all other (ideological and physical) dimensions.[48] Just as these feelings feed directly into the Gothic aesthetic of the pleasure-pain complex and the uncanny, they also serve as the basis for understanding many of the darker impulses indulged by the Romantic poets of the time.

This chapter examines the narrative structures of Coleridge and Browning's poems to understand how the principle of repetition generates Gothic obscurity through

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[45] Indeed, just as Williams describes Coleridge's work as having "transmuted Gothic into pure gold" (Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 4), his poems have for the most part come the closest to being considered truly "Gothic" by literary critics. Jerrold E. Hogel did so in his essay "`Christabel' as Gothic: The Abjection of Instability," *Gothic Studies*, 7 no. 1, (May 2005): 18-28. Similarly, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," with all its supernaturalism, seems to have entered our cultural understanding of Gothic, because it was infamously adapted into a song by the heavy-metal band Iron Maiden.

[46] In her critical essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," famed Gothic novelist (especiallyas author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794]) Ann Radcliffe defines the nuanced difference between "horror" and "terror": while one freezes the mind, thriving on a corporeal experience, the other elevates the imagination, bearing psychological weight that appeals to an emotional experience. Ann Radcliffe, "The Supernatural in Poetry," [1802] in *Gothic Readings: The First Wave 1764-1840*, ed. Rictor Norton (New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 315.

[47] Obsession and paranoia have very often become the detailed and generative subjects of psychoanalysis, and melancholia is of particular interest in literature of the Romantic era, during which unsettling feelings of displacement and the French Revolution contributed to the widespread expression of "melancholy." Indeed, the compulsive nature that we associate with these feelings is inherently repetitive, based on the psychological desire to "repeat."

[48] In *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear*, literary critic Dani Cavallaro defines "Gothicity" schematically, as a concept that can be approached from various different angles: 1) geographical connotations (northern barbarity versus English civilization, and Mediterranean depravity versus Anglican rectitude), 2) ideological connotations (archaic disorder versus modern discipline, medieval darkness versus Enlightenment, anti-classical learning versus (neo)classical ethos, crudeness versus elegance, savage paganism versus refined morality, aristocracy/feudalism versus bourgeoisie/capitalism, and landed classes versus cosmopolitan gentry), 3) physical connotations (bestiality, monstrosity, the hybrid, the grotesque, revulsion, pollution, and disease), 4) stylistic connotations (exaggeration, ornamental excess, surrealist effects, dream language, and tenebrous comedy) and finally, 5) psychological connotations (terror, horror, the sublime, the uncanny, spectrality, secretiveness, obsession, paranoia, psychosis, melancholia, persecution, and claustrophobia). My aim is to show that these latter connotations outweigh the rest in literary importance, and particularly with regard to the poems I will be discussing. Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror, and Fear* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 8-9.

the reader's emotional cycle of pity and fear. However, before entering the poems themselves, I begin by theorizing the Gothic nature of the tragic emotions of pity and fear. I illuminate the delicate relationships between poetry, emotions, tragedy, and obscurity within a wide-ranging theoretical framework—from Aristotle's classical aesthetics, to the Romantic critical tradition; from Freudian psychoanalysis, to contemporary literary theory—to show how pity and fear emerge within the pleasure-pain complex and Freud's uncanny. By examining the principle of repetition in the narrative structures of six poems, I reveal the reader's experience of obscurity through the "double" and the circular return. In the end, I initiate the departure out of narrative and into a dark lyric realm.

The Gothic as a Welcome Unwelcome

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring-
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

— Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner[49]

Freud defines "the uncanny" as the aesthetic fear brought about by the principle of repetition: "one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*."[50] Even when experienced in literature, the uncanny phenomenon causes, as Freud puts it later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "an obscure fear: a dread of rousing something that… is better left sleeping."[51] That is, not only does the uncanny inspire an "obscure" fear through "the constant recurrence of the same

[49] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" [1817], lines 256-259, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed., ed. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (New York: Norton, 2005), 812-828.
[50] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 217. Italics in the original.
[51] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 43.

thing,"[52] but it also awakens something that was always latent within the mind. This psychological awakening is lodged in the reader's sympathetic recognition of himself in the speaker, which first forces him to view himself from the outside as "double," and in turn, to view the poem as a disorienting although pleasurable "return." The double and the return not only produce an irreducible sense of obscurity in the reader's experience of the poem, but they allow him to understand his emotions as potent and submerged forces.

Freud not only uses the principle of repetition as the fundamental structure of his uncanny, but the literature that defined the eighteenth-century Gothic invoked a wave of "fear" that suggests the uncanny nature of its repetitive qualities. With the rise of Gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), critics expressed repulsion at the production of "assembly-line" terror, noting that the plots and themes of these novels were like "recipes" and thus all recurrent, reiterating, and dangerously *repetitive*. Interestingly enough, we might even understand repetition to be engrained in the Gothic because, as Noel Carroll observes, horror itself is connected to the corporeal "recurring sensations" of "muscular contractions, tension, cringing, shrinking, shuddering, recoiling, tingling, frozenness, momentary arrests, chilling."[53] Indeed, the repetitive qualities of the Gothic novel were so detestable during the time that one Anonymous writer in an essay entitled "Terrorist Novel-Writing" (1797) compared it to an illness, or disease, stating: "I hope the insipid repetition of the same bugbears will at length work a cure."[54]

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[52] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 221.

[53] Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), 24, quoted in Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision*, 2.

[54] Anonymous, "The Terrorist System of Novel-Writing" [1797], in Norton, *Gothic Readings*, 299. It is interesting to note the idea of a "cure" here, considering that Freud's aim in psychoanalysis was, in a certain sense, to "cure" the mind of its torments.

Indeed, the Gothic revival of the past in literature makes it an uncanny source of fear in itself. Just as the evil yet vulnerable Miss Furnivall repeatedly chants in her trance-like death-state at the end of Elizabeth Gaskell's "Old Nurse's Story" (1852), there is a peculiar dread surrounding the fact that "what is done in youth can never be undone in age!"[55] William Hazlitt's comment in his 1854 review of Radcliffe's novels that she "makes her readers twice children"[56] eloquently weaves the recurrence of the past with the Freud's idea that repetition is based in child-like instincts.[57] Thus as a literary genre, the Gothic serves as a "historical scar" (to borrow a convenient image from Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits*)[58] that is itself uncanny, reverting to the distant Medieval past only to be reopened by psychoanalysis a century later.[59]

Freud also notes that a fear of the "sleeping" familiar might not have been "originally frightening" but could have "carried some *other* affect,"[60] opening the door to the possibility that what becomes a source of discomfort and fear could have once been an *enjoyable* affect. Indeed, Freud's uncanny forges a link between pleasure and fear that reminds us that in poetry, as in all art, the mere act of imitation—of reflecting or *repeating* life into an art form—brings instinctual pleasure. That is, while Freud

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[55] Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story" appropriately employs the "uncanny" in its setting of a vast and mysterious haunted house and its psychoanalytical emphasis on family tragedy, perversion, the past and the present, and the subject of children. Elizabeth Gaskell, "The Old Nurse's Story" [1852], in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. E, 1222-1236.

[56] William Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists" (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 251, quoted in Jack Stillinger and Deirdre Shauna Lynch, ed.s "The Gothic and the Development of A Mass Readership," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* 8th ed. vol. D, 577-579.

[57] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 13-17.

[58] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits. A Selection* [1966], trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 50, quoted in Dale Townshend, *The Orders of Gothic: Foucault, Lacan, and the Subject of Gothic Writing, 1764-1820* (New York: AMS Press, 2007), 36.

[59] According to Townshend, it was originally Foucault's concept that "Gothicism and psychoanalysis, though temporally separated from one another by at least one hundred years, are cognate with, or similar to, each other because they circulate within the same modern epistemic space." Townshend, *The Orders of Gothic*, 19.

[60] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 217.

emphasizes that the uncanny recurrence is a necessarily "negative" frightening affect,[61] it is simultaneously pleasurable: awakening and indulging natural human instincts and desires. This uncanny indulgence of the strange and the frightening encourages a certain sympathetic ripple effect: one's ability to recognize something that has always been familiar allows one to recognize that same familiar in another.

Thus, Freud's theory of uncanny repetition not only ties the emotion of fear to pleasure and poetry, but also reveals a basis for understanding how pity and fear can be intrinsically linked in the Gothic poem. The continuous nature of these emotions can be best understood through their contextualization within two important aesthetic theories: the Aristotelian account of the instinctive pleasures of mimesis in tragic poetry, and John and Anna Aiken's assertion of the pleasure-pain complex that permeates all Gothic literary experience.

A Paradox of the Heart:
Pity and Fear in Pleasure and Pain

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

— Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner[62]

During the Romantic era, both emotions that Aristotle identifies as central to tragedy—pity and fear—become aesthetically enmeshed within the Gothic pleasure-pain

[61] Freud refers to the uncanny as carrying with it a "negative" effect, which differs, for example, from the standard notion of the sublime, which he considers in a similar way that I consider the sublime towork in my Gothic poems, that is to "levitate" the mind as a "positive" force. Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 194.
[62] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," lines 232-235, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed.

complex: the instinctual human experience of pleasure in pain, and pain in pleasure.[63] Indeed, the connection between pity, fear, pleasure, and pain survived long past the classical era, and remains in our present understanding of the characteristic nature of both tragedy and the Gothic. Aiken and Aiken's essay "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" (1773) provides a Romantic critical standpoint on the Gothic, and states that "the inspiration of terror was by the ancient critics assigned as the peculiar province of *tragedy*," which "has supt full with horrors."[64]

Freud also points to this "peculiar province of tragedy," for in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he explains that:

> Artistic play and artistic imitation… do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. This is convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure-principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind.[65]

This passage recalls a plethora of important concepts surrounding the nature of this aesthetic: the idea of poetry as an imitation of life, the implication of "the spectator" (in poetry, the reader), the pleasure derived from a painful or frightening experience, and the synthesizing principle of repetition: the poem taken as "a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind." Considering these ideas together, we are tempted to take

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[63] A number of critics have identified the consistent theoretical problem of how to interpret pain, which we tend to think of as a physical feeling, within aesthetics, which is directed to the emotions. According to Helen Barnes Savage, many critics have argued that pain cannot be an aesthetic element, or have an aesthetic dimension. Helen Barnes Savage, "Varieties of the Pleasure-Pain Complex in Aesthetic Theory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 21, no. 3 (Mar., 1961): 402-406. But for my purposes, "pain" *can* be understood as an emotional umbrella-term under which the feelings of anxiety, horror, terror, and indeed, fear itself, are grouped.

[64] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 5.5.13, quoted in John and Anna Aiken and Aiken, "On the Pleasure Derived from Object of Terror" [1773], in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 583.

[65] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 17.

Aristotle's lead and consider Freud's argument in light of the reader's psychological experience in poetry.

Both Freud and Aristotle consider pleasure to be the elementary and guiding principle of all human experience. Aristotle argues that pleasure is inherent to imitation, even the imitation of suffering, which he describes as "an action that involves destruction or pain (deaths in full view, extreme agony, wounding, etc)."[66] The poetic pleasure in suffering that Aristotle describes can be connected to Freud's idea that there is an instinctual human desire to resolve—or "automatically regulate"—the tension between pleasure and "unpleasure."[67] In light of these theories, Aiken and Aiken's statement that

> the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror, where… no passion seems to be excited but the depressing one of fear, is a *paradox of the heart*[68]

points to the unstable threshold that lies between pleasure and unpleasure as the particular province of Gothic literary experience.

Thankfully, despite Aiken and Aiken's limitation of this province to Gothic prose narratives, Wordsworth's expression that the aim of "poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure,"[69] not only makes it appropriate to directly apply Aiken and Aiken to Romantic poetry, but also allows for a more informed leap between Freud's psychoanalysis and Aristotle's mimetic project. According to Wordsworth, the exciting pleasures of poetry can actually make the reader vulnerable to an emotionally "disordering" power, encouraging in him "an unusual and irregular state

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[66] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 3.

[67] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 3. The term "unpleasure" has been translated as such from Freud's original term in German: "unlust." Because of its convenient proximity to the word "pleasure," I will from here on adopt this term "unpleasure" and equate it with "pain" insofar as Aiken and Aiken and Wordsworth describe it.

[68] Aiken and Aiken, "On the Pleasure Derived from Object of Terror," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 583. My italics.

[69] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 328.

of the mind; [in which] ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order." He continues that if a poem's "words… images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some *danger* that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds."[70]

The entire vocabulary and argument of Wordsworth's statements are strangely aligned with Freud's in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in treating the ability of "pain" to push "excitement" into the obscure realm of the "beyond." And, like Freud, Wordsworth adopts the idea of "excitement" to indicate the need for a counter-active, calming, regulating power of pleasure in poetry:

> Now the co-presence of something *regular*, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in *tempering and restraining* the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. This is unquestionably true; and hence… from the tendency of meter to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more *pathetic* situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of *pain* connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose.[71]

This long passage divulges yet another important point: like Aristotle, Aiken and Aiken, and Freud (if only indirectly), Wordsworth forges the connection between the emotion of pity, which he implies in "pathetic situations and sentiments," and fear, which, as in the other theorists' work, seems appropriately connected to his idea of over-excitation. Here, Wordsworth seems to desire a poetry that enables a process of temperance and soothing. Yet his equation of emotional excitation with the "over-balance of pleasure" and of the "overbalance of pleasure" with "pain" speaks to the fact that in his particular

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[70] Ibid. My italics.

[71] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 328. My italics.

conception of poetry—as in Gothic literature, and as in Freudian psychoanalysis—what Coleridge might call the two "discordant qualities" of pleasure and pain are, like the emotions pity and fear, utterly inextricable.

Aesthetic imitation allows the unpleasurable to become pleasurable: this has been established. Indeed, the theory of pleasure-in-pain that Aiken and Aiken identify in Gothic literature applies in the Gothic poem, in which the reader can be so delighted by another's pain and suffering that he "chooses to experience it again and again."[72] However unlike the reader of the Gothic novels, who takes pleasure in the frightful descriptions of pain and suffering caused by horrific images and grotesque scenes, the reader of the Gothic poem is made to feel a separate, more affecting and *internal* pleasure and fear that is rooted in his experience of the poem itself. Just as Freud describes that the pleasure-principle is "especially on guard against increases of stimulation from *within*,"[73] the reader's fear of the poem's descriptions and his pleasure in the speaker's pain is dwarfed by the pleasure and fear that the poem inspires through a sense of obscurity felt "from within."

The narrative conventions of Gothic are apparent in three of Coleridge and Browning's poems, and the repetition that is inherent to their structures reveals the reader's internal emotions of pity and fear as their dark lyric products. While each of these poems emerges from a Romantic space, they employ the Gothic aesthetic of pleasure-in-pain and the uncanny to produce the reader's sense of obscurity with regard to himself and his experience of the poem. The structural repetition of the psychological "double" and the circular "return" reveal Coleridge and Browning's narratives to be Gothic promotions of obscurity driven by the reader's emotions of pity and fear.

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[72] Aiken and Aiken, "On the Pleasure Derived from Object of Terror," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 583.
[73] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 77. My italics.

You Say Just What I'm Thinking:
Dramatic Narrative and the Poetic Double

Up! Up! My Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you'll grow double.

— Wordsworth, The Tables Turned[74]

In the experience of dramatic narrative poetry, "any of us could be the man who encounters his double."[75] The reader might "encounter his double" through an uncanny sense that his own emotions are but the mere reflection, or the subjective repetition,[76] of the speaker's: recognizing, effectively, an estranged familiar in the unfamiliar.[77] I argue that in the dramatic monologue forms of Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the Gothic poetic "double" emerges as the reader and speaker become intimately connected on an emotional level. The reader is not only made to pity the speaker's pain, gazing upon his suffering as that of an "other" or alternative self, but he is simultaneously made to fear that he is "double" *within* himself. Not only does the reader fear that he, too, could be the subject of the speaker's pain and suffering, but his corresponding sympathy for the speaker generates his greater fear that he is being separated from his own consciousness. As Freud puts it succinctly it in "The Uncanny":

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[74] Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" [1798], lines 1-2, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 251.

[75] Friedrich Durrenmatt, "Der Doppelganger" (Zurich, 1960), 26, quoted in Harry Tucker Jr., preface to Otto Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), vii.

[76] Indeed, in his psychoanalytic theory of the uncanny, Mladen Dolar considers "the double" to be "the first repetition." Mladen Dolar, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night: Lacan and the uncanny," *October* 58 Rendering the Real (Autumn, 1991): 14.

[77] The theory of the "double" is dynamic, ranging from early philosophy, to literary renderings, and psychoanalytic theories. It extends as far back as the Platonic era, originating in the primitive philosophical concept of the human soul as a duality (the person and his shadow). Harry Tucker Jr., introduction to Otto Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), xvi. In nineteenth century Romantic and Gothic literature it becomes prominent. Right after the turn of the century, Otto Rank produces *The Double* as an in-depth study of the phenomenon. Soon after, Freud adapts Rank's ideas in "The Uncanny," in which the double becomes a significant phenomenon to the uncanny effect, particularly rendered in literature. In my reading of the "double" in poetry, I almost always assume that it carries an uncanny effect, thus wherever I refer to the "double," I refer to the *uncanny* double.

> the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self.[78]

In poetry, this uncanny "doubling, dividing and interchanging" of the reader's self is the result of a narrative dynamic, and is best understood as the offspring of the classic atmospheric "double" of Romantic theory and the fictional character "double" of Gothic prose.

Indeed, just as Aristotle argues that plot is primary to the production of emotion in tragedy,[79] the Romantic poets adopted and adjusted numerous narrative techniques typically found in Gothic novels and stories in their poems. In Shelley's epistolary novel *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's urban tale "The Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde" (1886), a deliberate frame-narrative structure is employed to render the "double" between two characters in the story, each revealed to be a reflective repetition of the other. The estranged scientist Victor Frankenstein is the "double" of his sympathetic yet thoroughly destructive "creature," and the admirable physician Dr. Jekyll is the "double" of the detestable criminal Mr. Hyde. Indeed, even in Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story," the gloomy Miss Stark and Miss Furnivall with their reflective spectacles and beady little eyes seem to be represented as "doubles" of each other. In these Gothic novels and stories, the two characters fill the aesthetic space of "double," and the reader is merely made observer of their psychological traumas, unable to partake in the uncanny experience himself.

In contrast to this literary character "double" of Gothic prose narratives, the Gothic poetic "double" is imaginatively engrained in the reader's psychology, and thus

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[78] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 221.

[79] Aristotle actually titles one of the sections in his discussion of tragedy as "the primacy of plot." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 11.

all the more emotionally effective in his experience of the uncanny. Just as Otto Rank describes the uncanny double as a "shadow" or "reflection" that is "different from those actual figures of the double who confront each other as real and physical persons of unusual external similarity, and whose paths cross,"[80] the reader's psychological sense of the poetic speaker's presence as his "double" is suspended from any explicit character manifestation. The imaginary psychological double allows the uncanny to operate in poetic narrative as a purely emotive and ultimately lyric force. According to Richard M. Meyer, doubles themselves "are sometimes inhabitants of this earth and sometimes belong to some unearthly region."[81] The poetic double is always the latter: abstract, internal, existing only in the reader's psyche.

Now, while the poetic double does emerge out of the favorite Romantic faculty of the imagination, it is not simply out of any imagination that it takes shape, but the tumultuous imagination inspired by an emotionally conflicted mind. Rank notes that, "the figure of the double is more or less clearly shaped but, at the same time, appears as the spontaneous subjective creation of a morbidly active imagination."[82] The use of the word "morbidly" here is very important, for it connects the psychological double to suffering and fear. In Emil Lucka's words, not only does "mental conflict create the double," but "fear shapes from the ego-complex the terrifying phantom of the double," and yet this fear nevertheless "fulfills the secret, always suppressed wishes of his soul."[83] In accordance with this phantasm of the ego, the Romantic double produces fear as an

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[80] Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. and ed. by Harry Tucker Jr. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 12.
[81] Richard M. Myer, *Die deutsche Literatur bis zum Beginn des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1916), 630, quoted in Tucker, introduction to Rank's *The Double*, xiii.
[82] Rank, *The Double*, trans. Tucker, 22.
[83] Emil Lucka, "Dostojewski und der Teufel," *Literarisches Echo,* XVI (December 15, 1913), 6, quoted in Rank, *The Double*, trans. Tucker, 76.

internal emotion, allowing for an uncanny and, indeed, Gothic effect that hinges upon a tension poised within the reader's subjective sense of self.

The dynamic of the poetic "double," in which the reader is made to feel the uncanny anxiety of a self-cleavage, reflects a Gothic take on the deep-rooted Neo-Platonic "fracture" of man.[84] First, the narrative structure of the poem makes the reader aware of the "cognitive" separation between his own mind as the "knowing" subject of the world, and the speaker's omniscient mind as the subject of the poem. This separation makes the reader feel "unknowingly" and fearfully displaced by the speaker. But the reader also experiences a second split that occurs within his own mind: as Coleridge writes, "we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought."[85] That is, the poem awakens the reader to the separation between his natural instincts, desires, and emotions—such as his pity for the flawed and artificial speaker—on the one hand, and his ability to judge and control his experience of the poem on the other.

In a certain sense, Wordsworth was the Romantic pioneer of the psychologically based poetic "double." In *The Prelude* (1799), his narrative "spiritual autobiography," he makes the notion of man's dual nature quite explicit by emphasizing his own personal emotional difficulties of juggling "two consciousnesses." In general, with its empathetic focus on the recurring past, in which present forms and sensations "throw back our life"[86] and evoke our former selves, *The Prelude* contains traces of the Gothic. Indeed, Wordsworth allows the poem to become a peculiar moment in which the subjective self

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[84] For a complete study of the Neo Platonic "fracture" of man, see Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 182.

[85] Coleridge, "The Friend," I, quoted in Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 183. Coleridge's prose-work reveals his absorption in the Neo-Platonic philosophy of divided and unified states of being. As he seems to quite explicitly address the idea of the double, an interpretation of his creation of the poetic "double" should seem appropriate, if not assertively correct.

[86] Wordsworth, "The Two-Part Prelude of 1799," line 462, in *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 1-241.

is made dual: both past and present, and with "more than a singular awareness." And yet, although Wordsworth offers the reader a spiritual sense that his mind contains an ethereal "otherness," in which he feels "conscious of [him]self,/ And of some *other* being,"[87] he describes this doubleness as a "tranquilizing spirit" rather than a psychological torment. Similarly, Wordsworth's pastoral reflections of the "unremembered pleasures" felt by a past and present self in "Tintern Abbey" emphasize "tranquil restoration" as opposed to tumultuous distress.[88] Despite the "double" consciousness of these tearful reflections, that is, there is hardly anything Gothic about Wordsworth's autobiographical verses. Indeed, Wordsworth's Romantic aim of reconciling his *own* two disparate selves in "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude* works against the reader's psychological investigation of *him*self in the narrative.

Thus it is interesting that, unlike the character "doubles" of Shelley and Stevenson's prominent Gothic narrative prose, or the even the psychological "double" self that Wordsworth renders in his autobiographical narrative poems, Browning's and Coleridge's dramatic narratives "Porphyria's Lover" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" involve the reader in a dynamic that inspires him to experience the non-material, imaginary "double" in himself. The double is provoked in the reader through his emotional cycling of pity and fear in relation to the speaker. The reader's emotional participation in the narrative "action" of a poem is necessary for it to have meaning. Just as Porphyria's cheek is left in an everlasting "blush" by her dark and murderous lover's final "burning kiss,"[89] and just as the Mariner's tale leaves the Wedding-Guest as one

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[87] Ibid., lines 25-33. My italics.

[88] Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" [1798], lines 31, 120, and 30, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed, vol. D, 258-262.

[89] Browning, "Porphyria's Lover," line 48, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 8th ed. vol. E.

who "hath been stunned,"[90] the reader is left emotionally changed by his experience of pity and fear in the poems.

Both Porphyria's lover and the ancient Mariner use dramatic narration to seek emotional relief from an irreconcilable moral burden. Porphyria's lover uses the dramatic moment of the poem to confide in the reader, presenting himself as morally conflicted and emotionally unstable: driven to murder by a confusion of lust, love, power and fear. Similarly, the ancient Mariner explains his desperate need to take hold of the dramatic moment as an outlet for narration:

> till my ghastly tale is told,
> This heart within me burns.
> I pass, like night, from land to land;
> I have strange power of speech;
> That moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me:
> To him my tale I teach. (584-590)

However, unlike Wordsworth's reconciliation of his "double" consciousness through narrative in *The Prelude*, neither Browning nor Coleridge's speakers find the emotional resolution that they seek through "speech." Rather, their narratives present them as psychologically suffering, "double" individuals, and thus inspire the reader's sympathetic alignment with them.

The dramatic reader-speaker dynamic that structures these narratives creates a consistent sense of "appeal," through which the mere fact that the reader finds himself in the position of "listening" to the speaker draws him into an emotional alignment with him. This narrative-generated sympathy can be examined in the frame-structure of *Frankenstein*: by handing over much of the narrative to a "natural" supernatural being, Shelley easily asks us to suspend our disbelief, and sympathize not only with the estranged scientist, but with his murderous "monster's" deep and tragic feelings. As in

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[90] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," line 622, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed.

Frankenstein, the reader is sympathetically aligned with the flawed and psychologically tormented speaker despite his clear knowledge that he is merely an artificial figure in the poem.

According to Rank, "man is able to perceive the reality surrounding him mainly only as a reflection, or as part, of his ego."[91] Indeed, this fits in with Wordsworth's philosophy that the successful poet works to "flatter the Reader's self-love by bringing him nearer to a sympathy with that character."[92] The reader may perceive the speaker as a sympathetic reflection of himself simply because, as many theorists have said, the poem presents itself as "pure possibility": in Aristotle's words, "the kind of thing that *would* happen," or in Smith's, "the representation of what might have been."[93] In this way, the reader sympathizes with the speaker's psychological disposition, fearing it to be a "possible" reflection of his own flawed psychology.[94] Thus as the narrative progresses, the reader's pity and fear transfer the speaker's expression of a "double" emotional atmosphere into his own psychology.

A "double" emotional atmosphere is established at the very beginning of both poems, enabling the reader's initial alignment with the speaker's tormented self from the start. In "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker calmly contextualizes his narrative by commenting on the surrounding scenery:

> The rain set early in tonight,
> The sullen wind was soon awake,

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[91] Rank, *The Double*, trans. Tucker, 78. Rank points out that the double has been overwhelmingly associated with self indulgence through the Narssistic theory that the self's unconscious cleavaging—its desire to view itself in another—is a direct result of man's natural love for his own image.

[92] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 332.

[93] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 16, and Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 19, 16.

[94] Although it is clear that Aristotle had no intention of psychoanalyzing the aspects of tragedy that he defined, it is still interesting to consider the way he wrote of the process of "recognition" in plot in light of the phenomenon of the "double": "the recognition is a recognition of some person or persons, some involve the recognition of one person only on the part of the other, when it is clear who the other is, but sometimes there must be a recognition on both sides." This twisting mirror description of "recognition," despite its original implications, looks striking in comparison to Rank's theories. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 19.

It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with a heart fit to break. (1-5)

Here, an emotional tension is already present in the inherent conflict between the subdued, depressed, and dead-beat tone of this last line, and the lively, tearing, spiteful, and vexing world of nature. With regard to narrative technique, this type of tormented atmospheric effect is reminiscent of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which Radcliffe's descriptions of natural power and scenery set the scene for an unstable atmospheric reality forever threatened by the supernatural. Just as Radcliffe uses narrative to fuel the reader's terror through false perceptions and postponed explanations in narrative, these opening lines of "Porphyria's Lover" create a split sentiment that equally pricks the reader's emotional nerves. The simultaneous invitation of anxiety and calmness at once gives birth to the "double" in the poem. This split emotional atmosphere becomes both the context in which Porphyria's lover proceeds to give a more explicit sense of his disparate self, as well as the fertile ground from which the reader's obscure sense of himself as "double" can emerge.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the obscurity surrounding the ancient Mariner's moral decision to kill the Albatross points to his "double" psychological nature, but more importantly, it reveals a split emotional atmosphere in the poem. Like Wordsworth, the Mariner offers up a past and present moral self: the naïve man who shot the bird, and the grey and grizzled narrator-speaker who bears the burden of unusual and traumatic experience. And yet, since his decision to shoot the Albatross is grounded in no explanation, the reader is made to feel that in that moment, the Mariner fell under some strange influence of an "other" self – an evil, wrongdoing self – whose emergence suddenly changed the entire course of his destiny.

The reader's pity for the Mariner is developed through the fact that this struggle of a "double" nature is interpreted, rather than stated explicitly. The reader experiences the poem's "double" atmosphere vicariously through the speaker's description of the voices of the fickle sea-men of his ship, whom the Mariner claims vacillated drastically in their opinion of the deed. First, "Ah wretch! Said they, the bird to slay,/ That made the breeze to blow!" (93-96) and then, "'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,/ That bring the fog and mist" (99-100). A similar sense is produced in the following section of the poem, as its verses are suddenly divided into "first voice," "second voice"; "first voice," "second voice." This collective sway of voices works to create a "double" atmosphere into which the reader is psychologically absorbed, in much the same way that the opening of "Porphyria's Lover" sets a two-sided emotional scene. Thus, when the Mariner describes his own feelings of being emotionally split in the lines "I heard and in my soul discerned/ Two voices in the air" (396-397), the reader is made to pity him, for he too feels an overall "duality" or refracted "doubleness" that permeates the poetic space. In this way, the reader's sympathetic experience of the speaker's narrated world contributes to his fear of similarly falling under the force of the "double" in the poem.

Interestingly enough, it is also Porphyria's lover – and not Porphyria herself – whose "voice" the reader hears in Browning's dramatic monologue. And yet, as this speaker projects his own tormented emotions onto the voiceless Porphyria, who might be understood as the fictional "other" in the poem,[95] the reader not only sympathizes with the lover's guilt, but becomes fearful of his emotional alignment with the villain as opposed to the victim. For example, the speaker self-consciously "explains" to the reader that Porphyria is simply

[95] Porphyria must be interpreted as the latent double of Porphyria's lover, if only because it is *her* name that generates the speaker as both title and subject.

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,
  To set it's struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
  And give herself to me forever. (22-25)

And yet, as the larger context of the poem illuminates, this passage works more acutely as a description of his own "struggling passions": a "weak" excuse for his vain need to have her all to himself. The speaker's stubborn avoidance of any simple statement of his own reasons for strangling his lover reveals his reliance on Porphyria as a means of grappling with his conflicting feelings. Even when he does consider himself as the object of feelings, the reader detects a similar effect of emotional "glossing":

Be sure I looked up at her eyes
  Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshiped me: surprise
  Made my heart swell, and still it grew
  While I debated what to do. (31-35)

By suspiciously instructing the reader to "be sure" of what is said here, by claiming that he "knew" while at the same time admitting that he "debated what to do," the speaker reveals himself to be emotionally insincere, or "double." In this way, it becomes the reader's active sympathetic interpretation of the speaker's faulty, murderous statements – and his understanding of the psychological motivations beneath them – that produces his own anxiety of being emotionally double: pity guiding fear, and vice-versa.

In this dynamic, however, the reader can never divert his eyes from his "double" the way that the speaker seems to avoid looking at his victim.[96] Rather, in both poems, he becomes chained by his own pity to the emotional conflictions of the speaker, and forced to fear this type of "double" nature itself. The double is frustrating, painful, and fearful particularly because the reader is never free of the speaker, but instead is followed

[96] While the speaker states, "Be sure I looked up at her eyes" (31), the reader is made to think otherwise, for not only does his desperate statement seem to beg acceptance to the point of being suspicious, but Porphyria's "eyes," even after he has murdered her, continue to haunt him: "I warily opened her lids: again/ Laughed the blue eyes without a stain." Browning, "Porphyria's Lover," line 31, 44-45, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. E, 1252-1253.

incessantly and invisibly by this "other" self whose narration threatens his own psychological stability. Indeed, his sympathetic sense of the double makes the reader feel, in the ancient Mariner's words,

> Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread.[97]

Rank refers to a scene from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) that similarly serves as a useful analogy for understanding this particular fear and dread of the poetic double. In the scene, protagonist Ivan Karamazov encounters his double and announces to him:

> Not for a minute will I accept you as a real truth… You are the incarnation of myself; but at that, only of one side of me… of my thoughts and feelings, but only of the most hideous and stupid ones… You are I myself, but only in ugly caricature; you say just what I am thinking.[98]

In considering Ivan's agitation in having to perceive himself in an "ugly," one-sided double, we might consider "Porphyria's Lover" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to place the reader in a similar situation: perceiving the dual-natured speaker as an altered, hideous version of himself, whose presence is continually forced upon him by the dramatic narrative technique of the poem. And yet, despite this vexation of the double, the reader nevertheless experiences his own altered self-perception as pleasurable in the poem. Not only is he instinctually pleased, as Aristotelian theory would indicate, by an imitation or "repetition" of real-life emotional possibilities in an artistic form, but he also finds pleasure in the human bond he feels with the speaker.

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[97] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," lines 446-451, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed.
[98] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brother's Karamazov* [1800], quoted in Rank, *The Double*, trans. Tucker, 13.

Thus, the intimate connection that Browning and Coleridge forge between the reader and the speaker inserts the Romantic "double" into the Gothic aesthetic as something both painful and pleasurable. While on the one hand, the dramatic narrative structure of the poem allows the reader to separate himself from those qualities that are detestable to him by projecting them onto the speaker, on the other hand, it encourages him to feel less guilty of his divided emotions, and rather accept them as a natural human quality. The reader's natural distaste for the speaker and his fear of becoming privy to a "double" atmosphere are always, to a certain extent, off-set by his indulgence in the pleasures of sympathy.

However the poetic "double" can be further understood as Gothic, for it also holds him to an uncanny sense of obscurity. Freud quotes Adolph Jentsch when he writes that in literature, "the most successful devices for easily creating the uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton, so that he may not be led into the matter and clear it up immediately."[99] In Coleridge and Browning's poems, the reader is kept in a similar uncertainty regarding the speaker, and the degree to which his "artificial" voice reflects the poet's "real" voice. Indeed, just as Freud writes of how in "The Sandman," E.T.A Hoffman, the "unrivaled master of the uncanny in literature," "creates a kind of uncertainty in [the reader] in the beginning by not letting [him] know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking [him] into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation,"[100] the reader is made unsure as to whether the world of the Gothic

[99] This passage is a reproduction of Jentsch's own statements on the uncanny in literature, which Freud adopts and re-establishes in his analysis of E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Sandman." Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 202.
[100] Ibid., 205.

poem is an imitation of the real world, or is an entirely artificial world empowered by the poetic imagination.

This uncertainty perpetuates the cycling of pity and fear, for the reader both recognizes himself in the world of the poem, trusting it's speaker as a "real" sympathetic human, and yet distrusts it's artificial constructions, fearing the poet's control. The poet's control over the reader offers an entrance into a discussion lyric, for it is the lyric poet who more subtly and yet more effectively exercises the license Freud attributes to the imaginative prose-fiction writer, "that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases."[101]

Return to the Dark Tower:
The Journey and the Gothic Spiral

> The common end of all narrative, nay of all, Poems is to convert a series into a Whole: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a strait Line, assume to our Understanding a circular motion – the snake with its Tail in its Mouth.
>
> — Coleridge, from a letter to Joseph Cottle (1815)[102]

The principle of repetition also works to invoke the reader's sense of obscurity through his psychological experience of the "circular motions" of Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." These poems address the idea of repetition by presenting "a circular motion" of narrative structure, in which the end of the poems returns to or *repeats* the beginning. By arousing

[101] Ibid., 226.
[102] Coleridge, from *Collected Letters*, IV [1815], quoted in a footnote to Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 492.

the readers' emotions of pity and fear, these poems "assume to [his] *Understanding* a circular motion," a motion that itself promotes his sense of obscurity.

The circular narrative form has been extensively explored and theorized in Romantic and Gothic philosophy and literature, and thus can be understood as typical of both genres. The circular return is prominent to the narrative structure of the Gothic novel, and perhaps best represented in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. In Radcliffe's novel, even after four-hundred meandering pages of dark mysteries and apparently supernatural encounters, none of the characters—not even the novel's sympathetic "heroine" Emily—seem to have advanced from the beginning. The Romantic notion of return can be considered as an alternative to the steadfast return of the Gothic novel, for it involves and idealizes some form of spiritual advancement. Abrams calls this progressive return a "Romantic Spiral": a process of development that "fuses the idea of circular return with the idea of linear progress."[103] In Browning and Coleridge's poems, the Romantic Spiral depends upon the circular advancement of the narrating speaker as journeying subject.[104] But, unlike the Gothic heroine, when the speaker returns to a prior site, like Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey," he recognizes that he does so with a greater wisdom and charts the spiritual growth he has achieved along the way. Finally, the spiritual growth that the speaker experiences is aligned with the reader's own psychological awakening in the poem.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," both the Ancient Mariner and Childe Roland narrate a journey in which, despite its physical return to the place it began, he expresses a sense of spiritual ascension that is

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[103] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 184.

[104] Abrams and Romantic critics have argued that the Romantic poets were consciously displaced in time, and that this accounts for their revival of the traditional narrative form of following one man's wandering journey: the type of journey, that is, upon which the speakers of both "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" embark. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 171-172.

simultaneous to this circular structure. The Mariner narrates his nautical adventures to the Wedding-Guest, describing his journeying through a tempestuous supernatural ocean, and expressing his changed outlook upon the safe return to his native country at the end. Similarly, Childe Roland tells of his journey along a barren wasteland to only to find the Dark Tower as a non-material place that, like the Mariner's return to land, represents more of a psychological point of arrival than a physical point of return. However, Browning and Coleridge use the circular form of a narrative journey not simply to reveal their speaker's spiritual advancement along the Romantic Spiral, but to draw the reader into their experiences on an emotional level.

In both poems, as the speaker's exclamations of pain and suffering in their struggles against extraordinary supernatural forces and sublime elements heightens the reader's vicarious experience of their narratives becomes the source of his emotional cycle of pity and fear. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the tempestuous ocean becomes the site of altered perceptions and strange happenings, and the reader is enveloped in a nightmarish world in which disbelief is suspended through his convincing descriptions of suffering. Similarly, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" involves a cryptic journey through a grotesque wasteland in the struggle to endure, and to overcome, both physical and psychological pain. The reader recognizes the supernatural and sublime elements in these poems as artificial, and thus the fear he feels in relation to them is only an external experience, rather than an experience felt "from *within*." And yet, he feels an instinctual human pity for the ancient Mariner and Childe Roland, which cannot be dispelled. This sympathetic alignment, in turn, produces the reader's internal fear of his emotional entrapment in a clearly artificial world.

As these two emotions blend into each other, they awaken in the reader a sense of obscurity that gives a "circular" quality to his understanding of both himself and the

world of the poem. Indeed, the reader's "circular understanding" ascends along a Romantic Spiral similar to that of the speaker's spiritual journey, for it advances his consciousness out of what Keats dismisses as Coleridge's search for resolution,[105] allowing him to find pleasure in obscurity. In Wordsworth's words, that is, these narratives work by "assisting the Reader to approach to that perturbed and dizzy state of mind in which if he does not find himself, he imagines that he is *balked* of peculiar enjoyment which poetry can and ought to bestow."[106] While Browning and Coleridge's speakers ascend in a Romantic Spiral towards resolution, therefore, the effect of their narratives is nevertheless the production of a *Gothic* Spiral that awakens the reader to a more complex, "perturbed and dizzy," yet "peculiar[ly] enjoy[able]" understanding of psychological obscurity.

Both the dramatic double and the circular form thus extract a dark, psychological, *lyric* power of Gothic from the physicality of narrative. The principle of repetition encourages an emotional interiority between reader and speaker that overtakes all definitive elements of Gothic and narrative: causal action, the supernatural, the sublime object,[107] and linear time. And by emphasizing the reader's psychological experience, the speaker's mediating power is eliminated in the poem, placing the reader face to face with the poet himself. This direct confrontation not only makes lyric continuous with narrative, but reveals it to be the dominant force in constructing the Gothic in these poems. In the next chapter, I will show how two forms of linguistic repetition—recurring sounds and images—allow for the lyric power of Gothic to enact a

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[105] Here I again refer to Keats' "*Negative Capability*" letter, in which he wrote that Coleridge's search for resolution was an "irritable reaching after fact and reason," that showed he was "incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge" and the "fine isolated verisimilitude… of mystery." Keats to George and Thomas Keats, December 21, 27 (?), 1817, in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, 42.

[106] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 332.

[107] For a more in-depth description of the sublime's role in Gothic Poetry, as I understand it in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," see my footnote to the final section of Chap. II.

deeper infusion of pity, fear, pleasure, and obscurity in the reader's psychological experience.

II

THE POEM AS FLESH

Dark Artifice in Language and Lyric

While the previous chapter developed the themes that support a Gothic understanding of the reader's psychological experience of the repetitive narrative structures of Browning and Coleridge's poems, this chapter will examine the effects of a more intimate principle of repetition: echoing sounds and recurring images in the artificial language of lyric. In Wordsworth and Coleridge's poems, these forms of linguistic repetition not only intensify the cyclic nature of the reader's pity and fear, but also envelope him in a new obscurity: the sense of being "torn" between the real and the artificial. On the one hand, the repetition of image and sound forces the reader to feel the undeniable aesthetic artificiality of the poem: the hand of the poet as the manipulative craftsman.[108] On the other hand, these artificially imposed structures of language push the reader into a surprisingly "real" emotional realm. In this way, the poet's use of repetitive language to inspire the reader's emotions forces the reader to feel the line between the real and the artificial as obscure.

This chapter will begin by defining the effects of artificial language in the Romantic lyric, and then focus on how the recurrence of images and sounds provokes

[108] Although I have already touched upon the poet's craft in my discussion of the "double" anxiety and the circular journey, in which the reader at least partially understands the speaker's narrative experience to be the result the poet's aesthetic choices, in Chapter II, the varied and delicate implications of enforced artificiality in the face of "real" pity and fear will be more explicitly addressed.

the reader's psychological sense of obscurity through the emotions of pity and fear. The importance of artifice, language, and lyricism to the reader's poetic experience will be examined in light Wordsworth and Coleridge's Romantic theories of poetry, and Bernstein and Langbaum's contemporary theories. In a study of the psychological effects of the recurring sound patterns in Tennyson's "pure" lyric poem "Break, Break, Break," Deleuze and Smith's theories on repetition and variation in poetry will reveal the reader's experience of obscurity through the repetitive structures of artificial language. Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the instinct for "mastery" and the "daemonic force" of repetition will then be applied to show the general psychological underpinnings of recurring images in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*. Finally, what Coleridge refers to in *Biographia Literaria* as "the magical *penna duplex*"[109] or the "double wing" of poetic expression will be examined through the unified power of repetitive sound and image in "Kubla Khan." Indeed, this "excitement of vision by sound"[110] in "Kubla Khan" will conclude my study, allowing aesthetic repetition to emerge as the final conductor of obscurity and the awakening force of Gothic Poetry.

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[109] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XXII *English Romantic Writers*, 479.
[110] Ibid.

Not Less Alone:
The World of Narrative-Lyric

We keep coming back and coming back
To the real… We seek
The poem of pure reality, untouched.

— Wallace Stevens, An Ordinary Evening in New Haven[111]

In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth announced that he "wish[ed] to keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood," that is, to breathe a certain human life into the artificial verse form.[112] It is a timeless and undeniable fact that, as Bernstein wrote *A Poetics*, the art of poetry "by nature emphasizes its artifice."[113] The natural and necessary emphasis on artifice in poetry is, of course, due to its opaque use of language as a technique: arranging sounds and words into particular patterns and images, as if applying the sensibilities of painting and music to the page. Bernstein paraphrases Veronica Forrest-Thompson when he states "it is the quality of a poem's language that makes it both continuous and discontinuous with the world of experience."[114] The Romantic poet's use of language allows him to mediate the boundary between real and the artificial, and to achieve a living continuity between them.

While many nineteenth century poets, such as Arnold and Tennyson, strove to produce "pure" lyric forms, the reader's experience of lyric language is most interesting when it is complementarily blended into narrative. This unification produces the hybrid

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[111] Wallace Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" [1954], quoted in Casey, "Imagination and Repetition in Literature": 264.

[112] Wordsworth continues this trope with the statement that "poetry sheds no tears… but natural and human tears… the same human blood circulates through the veins of (poetry and prose) both." Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 323.

[113] Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 31.

[114] Veronica Forrest-Thompson, *On Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth Century Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 132, quoted in Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 10.

form of narrative-lyric: a "poetry of experience"[115] represented, in part, by the emergence of Browning's "dramatic lyrics" and Wordsworth and Coleridge's "lyrical ballads." If the narrative uses a fictitious story to give a "language" to the external world, and the lyric gives a "language" to internal feeling through artificial expressions, the narrative-lyric offers a "language" which both externalizes the internal and internalizes the external, working steadily to achieve a continuity between the real and the artificial.[116]

In a collaborative and combinatory effort marked by the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*,[117] Wordsworth and Coleridge advocate this continuity, theorizing the new poetic aim of at once producing pleasure and presenting "truth" through the artificial constructions of lyric language. Interestingly, although the idea that the ultimate object of poetry is to reach a philosophical "truth" that is, as Wordsworth puts it in the Preface, "not individual and local, but general and operative"[118] is highly Aristotelian, the motivation behind *Lyrical Ballads* was not to "imitate an action," as Aristotle had prescribed, but rather to aesthetically construct expressions that, in Langbaum's words, "imitated the structure of experience"[119] of "individual and local" men. Diverging from the classic poetic model of imitation, Wordsworth and Coleridge set the Romantic example of achieving the Aristotelian ideal of "truth" by representing the "real" feelings

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[115] The idea of "the poetry of experience" was fully developed by Langbaum in *The Poetry of Experience*. Langbaum's ideas surrounding "experience" in poetry are important and illuminating to my argument because my discussion is similarly centered on the reader's "experience" of the Romantic poems.

[116] In *Anima Poetae*, Coleridge conveyed an interesting thought that relates to this idea of the internal feelings and the external world: "I am looking for objects of Nature while I am thinking as yonder moon dim-gleaming through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for, a symbolical language for *something within me* that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always *an obscure feeling* as if that new phenomena were the *dim awaking of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature*." This thought, although expressed in prose, is very "lyric" in its personal reflection on natural thought, and Coleridge's contemplation suggests the lyric idea of representing the self by seeing the self as a reflection in nature. Coleridge, *Anima Poetae*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 521.

[117] *Lyrical Ballads* was a joint volume of Wordsworth and Coleridge's poems: in Coleridge's words, "the half-child of my own brain." Perkins, head-note to *Biographia Literaria*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 348. The volume represented the poets' mutual desire for experimenting with their new poetic theories, and plays a significant role in the formulation of my argument.

[118] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 325.

[119] Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, 47.

of human experience in poems that might most appropriately be called narrative-lyrics. In their narrative-lyrics, the artifice of language is fore-grounded even as a story is told.

The nature and idea of lyric as the isolation of human feeling through poetic expression could not be better expressed than by the final lines of Arnold's "Isolation: To Marguerite":

> From isolation without end
> Prolonged; nor knew, although not less
> Alone than thou, their loneliness. (40-42)

Arnold expresses his own feeling of isolation here not only by removing it from any direct reference to the external or real world, but also by employing a strange, alienating syntax in his language. This peculiarity of syntax cuts the reader off from direct understanding and meaning, and thus draws him into quite an immediate experience of isolation himself. It was this overwhelming sense of isolation from the external world, so vividly captured by Arnold in these lines, that informed the pre-Romantic opinion that lyricism was the most meager attempt at imitation in poetry.

For centuries, the classic Aristotelian model held that the greatest poetry was that which imitated "real" action through the use of contextual elements such as plot, narrative and character, as opposed to the lyric, which communicated internal feelings that were removed from the external world. The rise Romanticism, however, inspired a sharp turn against this theory, forwarding the new conviction that lyric expression could very much reflect what is "real": not real activities or situations, but rather, real human feelings.[120] Romantic theorists believed that the most "original and native poetry" was, as Sir William Jones put it, "the language of violent passions, expressed in exact measure,

[120] In particular, this turn of belief first came with the Graveyard School of poetry, which focused on the individual feelings of the poet as they arose out of external objects, such as Thomas Gray's "Elegy to a County Churchyard." The Graveyard School, indeed, might be thought of as the direct pre-cursor to my Gothic Poetry.

with strong accents and significant words."[121] That is, lyricism came to be considered an instinctual form of poetic expression,[122] not because it gave way to the raw outburst of feeling, but because it managed to structure and control the complex reality of human feeling into the artificial boundaries supplied by techniques of language. To recall the example of Arnold's lyric lines, it is the peculiarity caused by the *artificial* arrangement of sounds and words that makes his expression of isolation *real*: directly transferring it from the text to the reader.

Sounds and Sights:
Poetic Language and Obscurity

The eye—it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will.

— Wordsworth, Expostulation and Reply[123]

The poem presents itself as an imaginative world, and the reader's ability to navigate its compressed language relies on the simultaneous engagement of his eye and his ear. My examination of the psychological effects of lyric language is thus focused on the repetitive operations of "sounds" and "sights". Wordsworth notes the importance of sound to lyric, asserting that "an accompaniment of music is indispensable" to its full effect.[124] And according to Coleridge, "a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the *recurrence* of sounds" in poetry.[125] I consider the reader's experience of the recurrence of sounds through the affective patterns produced by the poetic conventions of alliteration,

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[121] Sir William Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones* [1807], viii 371, quoted in Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 87.
[122] For a complete analysis of the "instinctual" side to lyric, see Barbara Hardy, *The Advantage of Lyric: Essays on Feeling in Poetry* (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), 1-17.
[123] Wordsworth, "Expostulation and Reply" [1798], lines 17-20, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 251.
[124] Wordsworth, Preface to the Edition of 1815 of *Lyrical Ballads* [1815], in *English Romantic Writers*, 334.
[125] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XIV, in *English Romantic Writers*, 454. My italics.

assonance, and rhyme.[126] Sounds engage the reader's ear as the organic particles of words, which in turn engage his "mind's eye" by crystallizing into visual images.

Like sounds in music, words do not function as closed static units in poetry, but rather combine in a constant motion of depiction, presenting visual images to the reader's mind. The words of a poem are, as Burke states, "the proper manner of conveying the *affections* of the mind from one to another,"[127] and as French philosopher Gaston Bachelard claimed, to be a reader of poetry is to be "a *dreamer* of words."[128] In this sense it is the interaction of words within the reader's mind that allows poetic language to engage his "sight" through the composite forms of images. Moreover, the reader's encounter with the words of poetry is not only psychological but also constructive. As Wordsworth states, poetic images denote both the "operations of the mind… and processes of creation or of composition."[129] Coleridge makes a significant point when he connects images to the reader's imaginative mind and explains that "as soon as [the reader's mind] is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination."[130]

Coleridge here identifies the inspiring power of obscurity in language. As organic elements of expression, sounds and images are intrinsically obscure: psychological "objects" that can only be formulated and exist within the mind. The obscurity of these linguistic elements makes it such that, as Edward Casey argues, they "demand

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[126] It is interesting to note that in his *Poetics*, Aristotle does define lyric poetry as an aspect of tragedy, although he lists it as the second *least* important aspect. But, he does note the pleasure of sounds and rhythm to poetry, in his statement that "by 'language made pleasurable' I mean that which possesses rhythm and melody, i.e. song." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 10.

[127] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757], 46.

[128] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [1961] trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), xi, quoted in Casey, "Imagination and Repetition in Literature": 256. My italics.

[129] Wordsworth, Preface to the Edition of 1815 of *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 333.

[130] Coleridge, *Shakespearian Criticism* [1819] in *English Romantic Writers*, 501.

repetition" and insist on being "re-presented to the mind over and over again"[131] in order gain identity and consistency. That is, the repetition of sounds and words work to create the "real" in language when they search for a certain formation in the reader's mind. At the same time, repetition works to maintain the obscurity in language that Coleridge identifies by allowing the reader's imaginative mind to remain "unfixed and wavering" within the poem.

In the Romantic narrative-lyric, the poet's arrangement of sounds and images into repetitive structures allows him to express feelings in language that, in turn, evoke "new" feelings in the reader. In *The Advantage of Lyric,* Barbara Hardy makes the interesting point that in the lyric, the very structuring of feeling into poetic language causes a prolongation of that feeling, such that over the course of a poem it is actually able to develop and expand into what she refers to as a "new" feeling.[132] I conjecture that this "new" feeling belongs to the reader: manifested by emotions he is made to feel by the text. Understanding this model of emotional reproduction shows how the lyric form intrinsically addresses the idea of repetition, rousing the notion that a feeling can *itself* be the evolving object of recurrence.[133]

The repetitive structures of both sounds and words in lyric language evoke a Gothic sense of obscurity in the reader through his cyclic emotions of pity and fear. On the one hand, the reader experiences the instinctual aesthetic pleasures of sympathetically identifying with the expressions of the speaker and/or poet, and in this way feels the emotion of pity. On the other hand, he feels overpowered by the poem's artifice, aware (as Coleridge notes) that "every line, every phrase, may pass the ordeal of

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[131] Casey, "Imagination and Repetition in Literature": 263.
[132] Hardy, *The Advantage of Lyric*, 13.
[133] This idea of emotions as *evolving* subjects recalls the concept of the "Romantic spiral": the circular pursuit of an upward path, in which progress goes hand in hand with return and renewal. See my discussion of the Gothic Spiral at the end of Chapter I, or Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 184.

deliberation and deliberate choice"[134] on the part of the poet. The reader's awareness of the poet's deliberation inspires his sense of "awe" at the poem's ability to continually interest his emotions, and in turn, a certain fear of the powers of poetic artifice to influence, manipulate, or control his mind. This strange phenomenon of "fear" can be somewhat elucidated through Bernstein's theory that the artificial language of a poem either "absorbs" the reader into it, or keeps him out. The language of Wordsworth and Coleridge's narrative-lyrics continually draw the reader back under the powerful veil of artifice at every turn. Bernstein calls this veil of poetic artifice "flesh."[135]

Maintaining this trope, the narrative-lyric form indeed keeps the reader in the company of "flesh and blood," obscuring his sense of the line between the real and the artificial through the repetitive structures of sounds and words. These patterns of repetition create obscurity by engaging the reader's system of expectations in the poem. The reader feels a sense of control when the poem's fulfillment of his expectations allows him to judge its artificial structures as such. Against this, the recurring structures of sounds and images also exercise the ability to thwart the reader's expectations and awaken him to his inability to control the poem's artifice. Thus repetitive sounds and words work to manipulate the reader's expectations, control his emotions, and darken his psychological grasp on what is real in the world of the poem. While the Gothic sense of obscurity between the real and the artificial is only truly produced in narrative-lyric, the basic psychology behind the reader's experience of linguistic repetition is made most accessible through the patterns of sound in the "pure" form of lyric.

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[134] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XXII, in *English Romantic Writers*, 484-485.

[135] Bernstein adopts this language of the poem's "flesh" from Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* [1964], ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1968), 135. Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 87.

The Trance:
Repetition and Expectation in Break, Break, Break

Tennyson's organization of sounds in "Break, Break, Break" offers the most salient example of the psychological effects of the linguistic structures repetition in lyric. The highly structured form of the poem, the consistent rhyme scheme and the absence of contextualizing scene and imagery generate the reader's overwhelming and unavoidable judgment of these four short stanzas as poetic artifice. But more importantly, the recurring patterns of sound demonstrate the reader's psychological system of expectations, through which he is able to judge even the most emotionally charged expressions as artificial. The reader's clear ability to judge the artifice of Tennyson's pure lyric demonstrates how recurring sounds might undermine a sense of obscurity, and yet this sets the context for a discussion of the recurring sounds and images that *do* promote Gothic obscurity in Wordsworth and Coleridge's hybridized narrative-lyrics.

Coleridge considers the reader's system of expectations in poetry in *Biographia Literaria*, emphasizing that when the pleasurable excitement of "surprise" is lacking, "there must needs be a disappointment felt; like that of leaping in the dark from the last step of a stair-case, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four."[136] In *Poetic Closure*, Smith also discusses the production of surprise within the reader's expectations in a poem, and applies to the effects of variation on poetic structures of repetition. Interestingly, Smith's idea of variation and repetition accords with Deleuze's philosophical examination of "difference" as the "heart" of repetition.[137] Despite the disparate nature of their studies, both Smith and Deleuze identify two basic types of repetition: the repetition of the exact same, which fits into a formulaic pattern, and the

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[136] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XVIII, in *English Romantic Writers*, 467.
[137] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 2.

repetition of change, which slightly diverges from a previously set pattern. Both conclude that the second form carries greater affective value.[138]

In the reader's experience of a poem, any slight alterations of repetitive structures of language allow for the surprise and pleasurable excitement of a "leaping" form. Indeed, without the incorporation of difference and variation, recurring techniques of language have the effect of becoming imperceptible and un-provocative to the reader. The droning nature of unvaried repetitive techniques in language may be best understood as causing what William Butler Yeats describes as the effect of a "trance," which works

> by hushing us with an alluring monotony… to keep us *in that state of perhaps real trance*, in which… rhythm is but the ticking of a watch made softer, that one must needs listen… or grow weary of listening.[139]

The recurring sounds of Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break" seem to induce a rhythmic "trance" that makes reader's experience of the speaker's frustration immediate. There is "an alluring monotony" offered by the title "Break, Break, Break," and by its extended repetition in the opening lines of the first and last stanzas of the poem: "Break, break, break," (1), and once again, "Break, break, break." (13) As the sharp, consecutively reproduced "k" sound maneuvers in a steady motion along these lines, the literal meaning of the violently self-contained word "break" begins to crumble beneath the recurring sound, and its sonic force is "hushed" by this rhythm into a collapse. This collapse points to the speaker's overall feeling of never moving forward, or of being repeatedly pushed against a wall and cut off from life and meaning.[140]

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[138] Smith mainly considers the effect of variation in relation to her theoretical topic: "poetic closure," or "how poems end." However, I have found it appropriate to extend the implications of the satisfaction the reader draws from closure to his entire psychological experience of the poem.

[139] Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry" [1900], in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 159. My italics.

[140] This type of lyrical effect is interesting because it forms a bridge between the poet's purposeful creation of "artifice" through repetition, and the genuine feelings that underlie his decision to express them as such. Like

To a certain extent, as the sharp sounds of the first and last letters "br" and "k" bear down on the reader's ear, the rhythmic weight of these sounds creates a sense of discomfort that allows him to directly comprehend the speaker's emotional frustration. Yet he nevertheless remains, as Coleridge has said, aware of the recurrence as an artificial poetic technique. This clarity of awareness actually works to remove him from these expressions and thus undermine his sympathetic alignment with the speaker. This accords with Yeats' description of the "ticking clock" syndrome: hardened to the repeated sounds, the reader begins to anticipate that this "artificial" rhythm will continue to reverberate in the poem, and his emotions are numbed as his expectations are continually fulfilled.[141]

Like Arnold's "Isolation: To Marguerite," Tennyson's emotionally charged four-stanza poem "Break, Break, Break" is a "pure" lyric form. It is devoid of concrete, real-world objects or characters, and rejects any sense of narrative atmosphere. Indeed, the only real "character" is Tennyson himself as speaker, and all that really exist are his feelings. The recurring alliterative sounds of the second stanza allow the reader to recognize the artificiality of the other "characters" in the poem—the fisherman's son and the sailor lad—who he only "hears" as blurry, distant, "plastic" figures, rather than sensing them as "real." In the lines, "O well *f*or the *fish*erman's boy," "*h*e *sh*outs with *his si*ster," and "O well *f*or the *s*ailor lad," who "*s*ings in h*is b*oat on the *b*ay" (5-8), the repeated f's and sh's, h's, s's, and b's work into a musical progression across the page similar to that of notes on a sheet of music: f, f, sh, h, sh, h, s, s, f, s, s, s, b, b. The

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the reader, whose experience of repetition in poetry often makes him feel caught between real emotions and artificial trappings, the poet's use of repetition allows him to *seem* both in and out of control of his language.

[141] It is interesting to note how the repetitive sounds of the poem, particularly in the line "break, break, break" mimic the beating of the waves on the rocks. This comparison shows how Tennyson's "lyric consciousness" inspired him to take the "real" sensation of being physically over-powered by a natural force of recurrence in the external world (the sea), and twist it into highly artificial language such that it actually becomes an emotionally "numbing" force in the reader's mind.

reader's ability to hear and judge this artificiality satisfies his expectations in the poem, and thus encourages him to feel in control of its world.

In both the first and final stanzas, the recurrence of "ea" and the end-rhyme of "me" allow the reader to sonically follow the speaker's own emotional trail. The "ee" sound of "Sea" brings the reader up out of the monotonous "ayy"s of the "break" sequence, and then the defeated simplicity of its rhyme with "me" brings him back down again. In the first stanza, the word "me" (4) is only slightly lifted by this sound-progression. The speaker's expressive voice moves down from the excitement of "Sea!" (2) to the unfortunate reality of his lyric frustration, as if unable to resist the hammering chant of "break, break, break." And yet, in the final stanza, the phrase "day that is dead" (15) carries yet another "ayy" sound in "day," such that the cumulative weight of "break, break, break" falls even more heavily onto the final world of the poem, "me" (16). Thus while in the first stanza the speaker considers the buoyant possibility of thoughts that "arise" out of his recurrent remorse, in the final stanza, the reality of his frustrating emotional immobility overcomes any false hope of progression. In this way, the "real" stasis of recurrence overcomes the speaker's "artificial" hope of being liberated out of it.[142]

In the end, the structures of repetition are what allow the reader to judge the poet-speaker's "real" human emotions as artificially constructed, and thus nothing remains to him in the world of the poem as fearfully obscure. To a certain extent, there is a sympathy generated by the speaker's lyric expression of frustration, and a natural discomfort born out of the droning nature of his language that allows him to communicate this frustration to the reader. However, through their fulfillment of his

[142] The speaker's frustration in the woeful statement "I would that my tongue could utter/ The thoughts that arise in me," provides a self-conscious take on the lyric: the outright expression of feeling incapable of expression. Tennyson, "Break, Break, Break," lines 3-4, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. E, 1126-1127.

expectations, the forceful artificiality of the structures of repetition allows the reader to maintain a grasp on the artificial world of the poem. This effect is changed in Wordsworth and Coleridge's more complex rendering of lyric language blended into narrative forms, in which variations on the structures of repetition transport the reader out of his expectations, and allow the poem to rekindle his fear by presenting an obscure world that is felt as both artificial and real. In the following narrative-lyrics, reader comes to realize that he himself is the poem one and only "real" emotional puppet.

With A Short Uneasy Motion:
The Ancient Mariner and a Daemonic Force

Unlike the recognizably artificial repetitive structures of sound in Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break," the unsystematic recurrence of poetic images in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" allow Coleridge to place the reader in a more complex position, in which the cyclic emotions of pity and fear obscure his grasp on the boundary between the real and the artificial. This position can be discussed by applying two of Freud's psychoanalytic concepts regarding the nature and the effects of repetition. First, the recurrence of particular images offers the reader the instinctual satisfaction of "mastering" the artificiality of the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest in the poem, similar to the "mastery" Freud describes in his discussion of repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Yet simultaneously, the reader maintains the conscious feeling that the less systematic repetition of the Sun's image operates as a frightfully imposed "daemonic force," similar to that which Freud identifies as characteristic to repetition in "The Uncanny."

Just as the clearly artificial structures of recurring alliterative sounds in Tennyson's lyric allow the reader to judge the fisherman's son and the sailor lad as

artificial, the recurring images connected to the Mariner and Wedding-Guest allow the reader to "master" them as artificial characters. The ancient Mariner is presented to the reader as an inherently *fear*ful character, for his uncanny quality of bridging the gap between life and death, past and present is undoubtedly horror-provoking. Similarly, the Wedding-Guest is a likely candidate for the reader's *pity* for, like the reader, he fills the position of "listener" in the poem. Although it may at first seem that the reader would fear the Mariner, and sympathize with the Wedding-Guest, the recurring images connected to them satisfies his expectations, allowing him to distance himself from them. That is, the reader expects these characters to carry a certain image, and when they continue to carry this image, he is satisfied, pleased, and gains control over them.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud identifies the human "instinct for mastery" through his observations of a child who gains control over the unpleasant emotion of abandonment by repeatedly throwing toys away from himself, such that "each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery [he is] in search of."[143] Following Freud's model, the recurring images of the ancient Mariner's "bright [or glittering] eye," (3; 13; 20; 40; 228) his "long gray beard," (3) and his "skinny hand" (8; 225; 229) make him less frightening than these descriptive qualities suggest. The reader's "mastery" of these images simplify the Mariner into an artificial figure that he expects to appear in a certain way, and can depend upon appearing in precisely that way. Likewise, the repeated image of the Wedding-Guest "beat[ing] his breast" (31; 37) removes him to the realm of artifice, and undermines his sympathetic position in the poem. By "mastering" his image, the reader gains a certain power of judgment over the Wedding-Guest, who is not only compared to "a three year's child," (15) but whom he is also repeatedly reminded "cannot chuse but hear" (18; 37) the Mariner's tale.

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[143] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 42.

And yet, it is precisely this passivity of the Wedding-Guest that points to the reader's in relation to the subtler recurrence of the Sun's embedded image in the repetitive-verse form of the poem. While in Freud's theory of "mastery," the child actively and consciously chose to repeat his experience; the reader's experience of the recurring image of the Sun is entirely involuntary. Rather than truly offering him a sense of "mastery," the Sun's force of recurrence is more akin to that which Freud describes in "The Uncanny:" provoking a "sense of helplessness" against some "'daemonic' force at work" in the poem by forcing "the idea of something fateful and inescapable."[144] The repeated image of the Sun gives the reader the mysterious—one might even say mystical or supernatural—sense of the poem as an obscure world in which he is forced to surrender to a fearfully abstract design.

The unsystematic recurring motions of the Sun produce the reader's obscure fear of the poem's artificial powers. These motions create a structure of images that appears throughout the poem, and yet are almost always in some way detached from the narrative such that, by undermining the reader's expectations, they invoke the feeling of an outer force at work. This "outer force" gives weight to the artificiality of the poetic form, and insists that the reader recognize the power of the poet to manipulate his "visual" experience of the supernatural and obscure world of the poem. As the image of the Sun recurs, it morphs and changes, becoming not only increasingly supernatural in itself—described as "bloody" "in a hot and copper sky" (111-113)—but also following an unexpected structure of recurrence that works against the reader's expectations. The Sun's image is at once supernatural, speeding up the natural motions of time by forcing the reader to imagine its rising and falling within only the few moments it takes to read these lines:

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[144] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 213.

> The Sun came up upon the left,
> Out of the Sea came he!
> And he shone bright, and on the right
> Went down into the Sea. (25-30)

This four-line form immediately establishes a basic system for the reader's expectations of the image, and produces an even greater effect when this supernatural motion is repeated soon after, but in the reverse direction:

> The Sun now rose upon the right:
> Out of the sea came he,
> Still hid in mist, and on the left
> Went down into the sea. (83-86)

Just as Freud explains that the "uncanny" sense of repetition is intensified when the same experiences "happen close together,"[145] the relative proximity of the recurrence of the Sun's image here awakens the reader to the powerful hold of artifice in the poem. The reader is further alerted to the poem's artificial force through the subsequent recurrence of the Sun, which "'gan to stir"

> With a short uneasy motion-
> Backwards and forwards half her length
> With a short uneasy motion. (385-388)

Just as the peculiarity of Arnold's syntax in the final lines of "Isolation: To Marguerite" makes the poet-speaker's lyric sense of isolation immediate to the reader, the two-fold force of repetition in these lines transfers the poem's supernaturalism into the reader's psychological experience. For here, the Sun not only reappears in a structure that differs from that which the reader had anticipated, but it moves twice "with a short uneasy motion," enforcing the connection between the evolving movement of its image and a supernatural sense of unease.

The reader's immediate experience of the supernatural in the poem, therefore, leads him to experience the emotions of pity and fear after all. He sympathizes with both

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[145] Ibid., 214.

the ancient Mariner and the Wedding-Guest: not directly, but through the universal human emotion of fear through the loss of clarity and control. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explains that although the supernatural poem explicitly removes the reader from reality, it nevertheless transfers from his "inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth," which is

> the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real, in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency.[146]

This statement reveals Coleridge's intention of inspiring the reader's pity on the basis of the "real" human emotion of fear: feeling under the control of the supernatural force of obscurity. Indeed, Coleridge explicitly identifies the production of pity, or "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature," as one of "the two cardinal points of poetry."[147] However it is the second "cardinal point of poetry" which sheds further light on the greater idea in *Lyrical Ballads* of balancing the real and the artificial through "the modifying colors of imagination."[148]

Wordsworth's (Un)dead Children: Search and Question

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is perhaps one of Coleridge's most famous representations of the natural-in-the-supernatural, and his powerful exertion of the "modifying colors of the imagination" demonstrates a successful balance of the artificial and the real in poetry. Indeed, the imagination is an important topic to *Lyrical Ballads*,

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[146] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XIV, in *English Romantic Writers*, 452.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.

and Wordsworth takes it in a different direction than Coleridge, adhering rather to the aesthetic philosophy he expressed in the Preface of "throw[ing] a certain colouring of imagination" over the natural events of everyday life.[149] This approach, as Coleridge notes in his response to Wordsworth's poetry, allows Wordsworth to use the natural to "excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural."[150] In Coleridge's equation, therefore, he and Wordsworth both achieve the same ultimate poetic aim of balancing the real and the artificial.

Wordsworth's use of the poetic imagination to achieve this balance is demonstrated by his adaptation of true stories into frightening literary experiences in "The Lucy Poems" and "The Thorn." A study of the recurrence of certain images in these poems demonstrates the psychological underpinnings of poetic repetition in the narrative-lyric form. In both poems, recurring images draw upon what Freud considers to be the instinctual human "compulsion to repeat," and activate the reader's psychology on a sub-conscious—one might even say uncanny—level. For each repeated image in the poem becomes, as Freud puts it in "The Uncanny,"

> in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of *repression*.[151]

By only subtly and progressively revealing a greater poetic meaning over the course of the poem, these images suggest that repetition can cause a certain "repression" of meaning in the reader's experience, from which complex emotions are then produced.

The true meaning behind both the character of Lucy Gray, the embedded subject of the six "Lucy Poems," and the Thorn, the haunting arena of a ghostly

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[149] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 321.
[150] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XIV, in *English Romantic Writers*, 452.
[151] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 217. My italics.

madwoman in "The Thorn," is obscured through repetition and only revealed to the reader in the final instance. This sort of recurrence is itself a source of fear for the reader in the poem, just as a similar effect contributes to building suspense through the narrative technique of "suggestion" in the Gothic novels and stories of the time.[152] Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story" offers a useful example of this technique through the subtle repetition of a "mark" on the ghost-child's right shoulder. Although this mysterious "mark" is mentioned three times throughout the narrative, the reader only becomes aware of its greater meaning at the end of the story, at which point he is forced to recall its familiarity.[153] And, like the detestable character of Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's novella,[154] Wordsworth's two poetic subjects begin as quite formless and faceless to the reader, and each obscures the boundaries between past and present, life and death; the real and the artificial. However, as recurring words and images gain striking meaning, the reader begins to construct their implications out of his own psychological interpretations, unearthing information as a type of "repressed material" that he comes to realize had, in fact, been suggested all along.

In "The Lucy Poems," Wordsworth creates a certain "repressed" meaning for the reader by giving a repetitive structure to the image of "Lucy" that obscures her identity

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[152] This narrative technique of "suggestion" has been theorized as the "disclosure of hints" throughout the story, such that the reader is made to keep guessing at the true meaning or reality of what is happening. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe employs this through the "explained supernatural," postponing the logical explanation of seemingly supernatural events. This technique and its effects are explained well by E.A. Baker in his introduction [1906] to Lewis' *The Monk*, ed. Tom Crawford (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), iii-xiv.

[153] The meaning of the mark is revealed in the final scene of the story, when the Old Lord is about "to strike the little shrinking childe." Gaskell uses repetitive imagery to evoke Freud's idea of the uncanny in "The Old Nurse's Story" on multiple levels. For example, the rolling music that repeatedly yet mysteriously flows out from the organ built into the wall of the mansion breeches the boundary between life and death. Gaskell, "The Old Nurse's Story," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. E, 1236, 1227.

[154] Robert Louis Stevenson's obscure image of the character Hyde makes this famous Gothic story a frightful and "uncanny" experience for the reader by allowing him to effect a similar "repression" of meaning. Like Freud's example of the Sandman in Hoffman's story, Hyde is described as a "damnable" and "hateful" man without explicit reason, and continues to remain "faceless" and obscure. The reader's fear is fully solidified when the narrative finally reveals that Hyde is not, in essence, a "real" person, but rather the incomplete embodiment of Mr. Jeckyll's purely evil nature. Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* [1886] in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. E, 1645-1685.

across the series. Although the lyrical emotions of the speaker are emphasized throughout, offering the sense that he loves Lucy and mourns her loss, very little definite and factual information is actually provided about who "she" is. In the first poem, the speaker relates to the reader only the fact that Lucy is dead, and that this has thrown him into what he calls a "strange fit of passion."[155] In the following poems, (as the speaker states in the second poem) "she live[s] unknown" to the reader, who mostly must rely on the highly obscure first-line titles to gain a sense of her meaningful presence.[156] Through it all, it is the repetition of her name, "Lucy," and the pronoun "she" that connects these poems, and it is the obscurity surrounding her image that gives them a "buried narrative" element.[157] This narrative element is what continues to offer, in Coleridge's words, "the semblance of human interest,"[158] or the reader's sense that by navigating an endless and permeating obscurity, there is some greater "human" truth to be gained.

When the repetitive references to "Lucy" and "she" are finally explained in the last poem, "Lucy Gray; Or, Solitude," the veil of obscurity surrounding her character remains un-lifted. The reader is surprised to learn that Lucy is not the speaker's lover, as he seemed to imply, or even someone that he knew, but rather a small child who disappeared in the woods one snowy evening. And yet, the "imaginative curtain" that

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[155] Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism*, 197.

[156] For reference sake, these first-line titles are: "Strange fits of passion I have known," "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," "Three years she grew," "A slumber did my spirit steal," "I traveled amongunknown men," and "Lucy Gray; or, Solitude." Wordsworth, "The Lucy Poems" [1800], in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 274-279.

[157] It is this "buried narrative" element that makes these poems "narrative-lyric" because there is a sense of something unfolding across an isolated set of lyric expressions. Hardy explains the "buried narrative" in a lyric poetic series further as "a submerged and suggested story whose actions and relationships are often dark… all we are certain of is the feeling, not the characters and conditions." Hardy, *The Advantage of Lyric*, 3. Of course, this accords almost perfectly with Wordsworth's "The Lucy Poems," since the idea of the subject-character "Lucy" is always elusive.

[158] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XIV, in *English Romantic Writers*, 452.

Wordsworth has thrown over this true story remains in the suggestion that "Lucy" lives somewhere beyond the mortal realm:

> Yet some maintain that to this day
> She is a living child:
> That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
> Upon the lonesome wild.
> O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
> And never looks behind;
> And sings a solitary song
> That whistles in the wind. (57-64)

Here, as Lucy gracefully darts into that elusive space between life, death, reality, and the imaginary, the uncanny nature of her character returns with full force,[159] and the reader discovers a certain pleasure in the obscurity that is left in her place. Although Lucy's obscurity allows the poems to disconnect the reader from reality by affecting an uncanny, other-worldly discomfort, the never-ending search for her is actually what keeps him pleasurably engaged: in Aiken and Aiken's words, "chained by the ears"[160] to the speaker's lyric expressions. The repetition of her image forges a sympathetic connection between the reader and the speaker through a mutual experience of loss: while the speaker feels he has "lost" Lucy, the reader's experience of Lucy is always, in a certain sense, "lost." The obscure image of Lucy is indeed made, as Casey generally describes in literature, "phenomenal": demanding to be repeated over and over, again and again.[161] This repetition is based on the instinctual pleasure found in obscurity, which offers truth and certainty as something to be continually strived for, but never gained. "The Lucy Poems" thus reveal that recurring images may indeed affect a fear of the unknown, and that this fear may be intimately connected to poetic interest and pleasure.

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[159] Indeed, while the reader never quite knew what Wordsworth or his speaker meant by "three years she grew," the obscurity of this phrase is recalled and rekindled by this final poem's description of Lucy as "the sweetest thing that ever grew/ Beside a human door!" Wordsworth, "Lucy Gray; or, Solitude," lines 7-8, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 277-279.

[160] Aiken and Aiken, "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 584.

[161] Casey, "Imagination and Repetition in Literature": 263.

A similar emotional effect of repetition takes hold in Wordsworth's "The Thorn," in which the speaker obscures the image of the Thorn by repeatedly connecting it to "an infant's grave": a connection that only bears meaning on the reader's experience at the end of the poem. Like Lucy at the end of "Lucy Gray," the Thorn begins as a representation of the uncanny obscurity between life and death: the desolate spot to which the maddened character of Martha Ray, who is believed to have murdered her daughter, returns "at all times" to mourn her "misery." In the opening stanza, the speaker not only imbues the Thorn with a certain human quality by describing it as "a mass of knotted joints" (8), but he also hints at its being a child's grave, mentioning that it is "not higher than a two year's child" (5) and "like a stone/ With lichens it is overgrown" (10-11). And yet, rather than allowing the Thorn to directly represent the murdered child's grave, this remains as a hidden connection; only revealed as the image continues to appear in the poem.

While when extracted from the poem, the exclamation that the Thorn

> Is like an infant's grave in size,
> As like as like can be:
> But never, never anywhere,
> An infant's grave was half so fair (52-55)

seems to be more explicit in meaning, the reader is still unlikely to speculate that this comparison bears any more significance than merely its figurative connection to death and smallness. Similarly, although the speaker continues to refer to the Thorn as "like an infant's grave in size" (61), or "the hillock like an infant's grave" (91), these repetitive statements are not processed as meaningful because, as Freud notes in "The Uncanny," the realization of an uncanny repetition depends upon the recurring instances "happen[ing] close together."[162] The meaningful connection between the Thorn and the

[162] Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Writings on Art and Literature*, 214.

dead infant is thus "repressed" for the reader by the structure of its recurrence in the poem, only permitting him to realize that the child is buried beneath the Thorn in the final instance with the lines:

> But all and each agree,
> The little Babe was buried there,
> Beneath that hill of moss so fair. (207-209)

This statement allows the previously repeated images that connected the Thorn to an infant's grave to suddenly bear meaning in the poem. The reader's realization of the connection between these images makes the poetic power of artificial repetition to repress and reveal meaning in the poem frighteningly "real." As in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the reader's fear stems from feeling under a "daemonic force" of the poetic artifice in "The Thorn": the psychological sense of being held to obscurity.

The reader's sympathetic identification in the poem, on the other hand, is less straightforward than in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and is best understood by examining a separate set of recurrences: the outstanding and open-ended questions that are strangely repeated throughout the poem. The poem offers, again and again, agitating questions that represent a compulsive desire to *know* the reasons behind these strange events and connections: "now wherefore" (78), "and why" (82), "O wherefore? wherefore? tell me why" (87), "what could she seek? – or wish to hide?" (126). These are perhaps best represented by the cumulative question:

> What's the Thorn? And what the pond?
> And what the hill of moss to her?
> And what the creeping breeze that come
> The little pond to stir? (198-201)

These poems directly pull the reader into the poem to offer him an unsettled curiosity that binds him to the speaker through their mutual sense of uncertainty. For the speaker repeatedly meets the questions he poses with non-answers: "I cannot tell, I wish I

could;/ For the true reason no one knows" (89-90), "More know I not, I wish I did,/ And it should all be told to you;/ For what became of this poor child/ No mortal ever knew" (151-154). What is most interesting is that, even when some sort of information is finally made available with the lines "I cannot tell; but some will say/ She hanged her baby on the tree" (203-204), the reader is *not* joined with the speaker in knowledge. Rather, as in "The Lucy Poems," the line between what is real and artificial is obscured as both reader and speaker are bound to a realm of uncertainty.[163]

In conjunction with the speaker's utterly vague answers, these questions also point to a mutual "compulsion to repeat" between the reader and speaker, and recall the Freudian concept of the human "instinct for mastery" through pleasurable repetition. Although in some circumstances it may be dissatisfying to be constantly made unaware of mysterious circumstances, the reader's continual subjection to the obscurity surrounding the Thorn allows him to gain pleasure through the "mastery" of his own unawareness. The questions and answers offer and deny the reader the satisfaction of "knowing" again and again, because even the act of "asking" is essentially out of his control: the repetition is, after all, merely an artificial poetic device. In this sense, Wordsworth, like Coleridge, uses the powers of poetic repetition to toy with the reader, and awaken his fear in the artificial powers of the poem to throw him into a world of obscurity. And yet, it must

[163] In his introductory note to "The Thorn," Wordsworth elucidates the reasons behind his use of repetition and in aligning the reader with a particularly unknowledgeable, slightly aggravating speaker. First, he states that he wished "to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind." This fits nicely in with my use of "The Thorn" as a demonstration of psychological underpinnings of repetition. Second, Wordsworth writes that the speaker of "The Thorn" is to be understood as a "common" and "superstitious" man, "talkative from indolence," and who "cleave[s] to the same ideas." He chose this sort of speaker, he continues, to show the reader that "the same words cannot be repeated without tautology," for "words, a Poet's words more particularly, ought to be weighted in the balance of feelings and not measured by the space they occupy on the paper." This points to Wordsworth's intense use of repetition in "The Thorn," and certainly warrants my reading into the psychological effects of repetitive words and images in the poem. Wordsworth, introductory note to "The Thorn," in *Lyrical Ballads* [1800], quoted in ed.s footnotes to "The Thorn," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 252.

again be noted how pleasurable this "fear" is for the reader; how delightful the extended forms of repetition allow the poetic veil of obscurity to become.

A Living Force of the Obscure: "Kubla Khan" as Gothic

Poetry rejects all control, all confinement.

— Coleridge, The Grandest Efforts of Poetry[164]

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan; Or, *A Vision in A Dream. A Fragment*" is a living force of the obscure: it is the most Gothic of the Romantic poems that I have discussed. It demonstrates an utterly peculiar literary moment, in which the eighteenth-century Gothic novel's rendering of the physical sensations of horror associated with the natural sublime,[165] as well as the Romantic ideal of regaining unity and finding resolution, are disrupted in lieu of precisely the *poetic* Gothic that I have worked to define. Coleridge's

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[164] Coleridge, "The Grandest Efforts of Poetry," in *Shakespearian Criticism*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 501.

[165] I offer an understanding that in "Kubla Khan," as in Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the complex psychological obscurity that the poems work to promote allows for a particular *poetic* Gothic sublimity to emerge: not in the world of nature or the world of the poem, but in the reader's mind. I argue that the "sublime" force in these Gothic poems is detached from the Burkean sublime of the Gothic novels, and more in line with Immanuel Kant's understanding of it in his *Critique of Judgment* [1790] as a psychological phenomenon based solely in the infinite and the mind. According to David B. Morris, the eighteenth-century "Gothic novel pursues a version of the sublime utterly without transcendence. It is a vertiginous and plunging—not a soaring—sublime." David B. Morris, "Gothic Sublimity," *New Literary History* 16 no. 2 The Sublime and the Beautiful: Reconsiderations (Winter, 1985): 306. The "Gothic sublimity" Morris describes of the novels is aligned with Burke's definition of the sublime in *The Sublime and Beautiful* as a physical, pictorial, tangible sense of fear produced by the human encounter of vast, infinite and overpowering objects of nature. Although Browning and Coleridge's poems offer a Gothic sublime, it is divorced from Burke's theory, and comes closer to Kant's, which seems to incorporate not only the entirely psychological nature of the sublime, but also the human inability to comprehend his own mind. (As Keats might say, his *Negative Capability*). That is, the Gothic sublime of these poems promotes the obscurity I argue to be central to their psychological effects. In *The Orders of Gothic*, Dale Townshend provides a helpful analysis of the version of Gothic sublime I interpret Browning, and most importantly Coleridge, to employ. Townshend forges the connection between the Gothic and the Burkean and Kantian sublimes, and further discusses them in relation to the concept of repetition: "Retrieving the sublime from its Burkean basis in pain, in physicality, and in the subject's corporeal experience of death, Gothic, through repetition and exaggeration, modifies the sublime into something altogether more psychological, something entirely less corporeal." Townshend, *The Orders of Gothic*, 324. This "Gothic sublime" that Townsend describes, particularly in its divergence from that which Morris describes, comes quite close to how I conceptualize the sublime in Gothic Poetry. In brief summary, in Browning and Coleridge's Gothic poems, the reader is offered, in Wordsworth's words, "a sense sublime/ of something far more deeply interfused." Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," lines 95-96, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 258-262.

entire project of "Kubla Khan" seems to throw a thick, pleasurable, flesh-y veil of obscurity over the previous establishments of the Gothic and the Romantic, and to reveal the principle of repetition as the final creative conductor of Gothic Poetry.

Coleridge's opening note to the poem reveals its Gothicity on multiple levels. The note begins as a narrative account of what seems to be the actual moment in which Coleridge himself produced the fragmentary lines of "Kubla Khan." He vaguely refers to himself in the third-person as "the Author" who, in a lyric moment of isolation in "a lonely farm house," experienced the psychological unsteadiness "of a slight indisposition," put himself under the influence of "an anodyne [that] had been prescribed," and thus "fell asleep in his chair."[166] This "narrative" not only divulges the significant fact that he wrote the poem under the dreamy haze of a sudden and "profound"[167] slumber, but it also indicates that he was *involuntarily* thrown into the state of reverie by "the outer"—daemonic force—of opium.[168]

The reverie-state produced by opium causes both an enlightened sense of euphoria and the physical and mental anguish of addiction: it adheres to the pleasure-pain complex. It is a biographical fact that Coleridge suffered from an addiction to the

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[166] In his narrative account, Coleridge also reproduces the sentence from *Purchase Pilgrimage* that he was reading at the very moment he fell asleep: "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." It is interesting to compare this particular sentence that Coleridge states as catalyst for his writing of the poem, to the original sentence that the editor notes from Samuel Purchas's original book of traveler's tales, *Purchas his Pilgrimage* [1613]: "In Xamdu did Culai Can build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground within a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant Springs, delightfull Streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the middest thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure, which may be removed from place to place." The clear differences between Coleridge's sentence and the original sentence sheds light on the inherently psychological nature of the process behind the entire effort that is "Kubla Khan," for it points to Coleridge's imaginative re-construction of the true text: his imaginative re-construction of "reality" even *before* the text of the poem begins. Coleridge, introduction to "Kubla Khan," and ed.s footnote to Coleridge's introduction, both in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 446.

[167] Coleridge, introduction to "Kubla Khan," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 446.

[168] In a manuscript copy of the poem, Coleridge clarifies this substance as "two grains of opium." Ed.s footnote to "Kubla Khan," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 446.

opium he was prescribed,[169] and his explanation of "Kubla Khan" as the direct result of his drug-induced state of mind thus offers a peek into his "true," living, human pleasure-in-pain.[170] Indeed, Coleridge's contextual experience of opium allows us to consider his unique presence as poet-speaker in the final lines of the poem, in which he refers to the consumption of "honey dew" as a magical force of inspiration. Through this eerie exposure of Coleridge's "real," raw psychological mind, the poem behaves like an open "scar," making the inherent boundary between the reader's emotions and the artificial text at once malleable and absorbing, even in a work in which the thick "flesh" of poetic artifice might be expected to keep the reader out.[171]

"Kubla Khan" may be considered a "Gothic fragment" that offers a chiasmic world of past and present, narrative and lyric; real and artificial. And yet, as a self-proclaimed fragmentary whole,[172] it immediately calls into question Coleridge's idea of the creative mind as a unifying, resolving and transcendent power. Coleridge's account of writing the poem imbues it with an immediate as well as an incomplete quality, for upon waking from his dream he notes that he was interrupted and detained "on business," such that the "scattered lines and images" of the current "Kubla Khan" are only the result of "some vague and dim recollection of the general vision."[173] In this sense the

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[169] Ed.s biographical head note to "Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1722-1834," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D., 424.

[170] Coleridge addresses his own destabilized sense of the poem by disclaiming his "merits" as its poet in a note to the text, in which he wrote that "Kubla Khan" was only published as a result of Lord Byron's encouragement, and "as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned, [was published] rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed *poetic* merits." (italics in the original). This suggest that his publishing of an imaginative poetic rendering of an obscure set of visions, under the influence of the "outer" substances he had become privy to, may have been a real autobiographical source of his discomfort with the work. Coleridge, note to the 1816-1829 text of "Kubla Khan," quoted in ed.s footnote to Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 446.

[171] Here I recall Bernstein's term for absorptive poetic artifice: "flesh." Berstein, *A Poetics*, 87.

[172] A fragmentary whole, i.e., the full subtitle that Coleridge gave the poem: "Kubla Khan; or, *A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment.*"

[173] It has been argued by many critics that despite Coleridge's explanation of "Kubla Khan" as a "scattered," momentary recollection of his dream, he actually revised it many times. This speaks to the fact that he

poem is offered to the reader as the inherently imperfect "imitation" of a psychological moment. This moment begins in that otherworldly realm of the dreaming mind, yet can "return" to that elusive state to find an end, or be put to rest. Thus it seems that the poem comes to us as only a half-"repetition" of the original "vision"; productive but not reproductive: the anti-return.[174]

Despite this, Coleridge forcefully aligns "Kubla Khan" with the aesthetic principle of repetition, which he first engages to permit his own conceptualization of the work as a unified "whole." In his introduction to the poem, Coleridge reproduces a selection of lines from another one of his poems, "The Picture" (1802), to describe how despite the disruption to his recollection,

> the fragments dim of lovely forms
> Come trembling back, unite, and now once more
> The pool becomes a mirror.

Here Coleridge uses the metaphorical idea of infinite "reflection," a system of mirroring surfaces, to offer the incomplete lines of "Kubla Khan" to both himself and the reader as a fragmentary yet singular form: a "whole." However, rather than establishing the poem as "one graceful and intelligent whole,"[175] this introductory metaphor formulates it as an *obscure*, unintelligible system in which "a thousand circlets spread/ And each mis-shape[s] the other."[176] In this way, Coleridge harnesses the aesthetic power of repetition

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considered it an incomplete fragment, and indeed attempted to make it whole by some poetic creative, unifying force.

[174] Although the poem's form is, in essence, an "anti-return," this model actually fits in well with Deleuze's idea of the "eternal return," in which only the "different" survives to return, while all that is the "same" is purged from the system. This system of differences in repetition is a helpful way of thinking about Coleridge's poem as a "productive" model of "repetition" in eternal flux, in which it repeats the vision Coleridge had, but only to produce something new—something different. Indeed, this can be compared to the way that variation in repetitive structures of language work to awaken the reader from a trance to a "new" or "different" knowledge of the obscure. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 18.

[175] This formative "whole," Coleridge writes, is true the achievement of true "poetic genius." Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XXII, in *English Romantic Writers*, 455.

[176] Coleridge, "The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution" [1802], lines 98-100, 93-94, quoted by Coleridge in his introduction to "Kubla Khan," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. vol. D, 447.

to construct a fractured and unknowable imaginative "world" that, like the meandering river in the poem itself, seems to "s[i]nk in tumult" (28) to a dark realm of obscurity.

The simultaneously narrative and lyric, experimental structure of "Kubla Khan" enforces its obscurity. It seems to work contrary to the idea of repetition and return in a shape that could be perceived, to reverse Coleridge's words, as "the snake with[*out*] its Tail in its Mouth."[177] The poem progresses unpredictably through four loosely formed stanzas of elaborate, echoing sounds and enchanted, reflective images. It begins on a narrative foot with the statement "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan" (1), and then takes off in a spiraling descriptive tone, "meandering with a mazy motion" (25) through the sublime surroundings of Kubla's majestical palace. In a sudden suspension of motion, the poem rests on "the shadow of the dome of pleasure" (31), and then abruptly leaps, in the ancient Mariner's words, "with a short uneasy motion"[178] into a concrete, seemingly unrelated first-person recollection of "a damsel with a dulcimer" (37). Finally, through an imaginative re-construction of "that dome in air" (46),[179] Coleridge ends with a third-person account of the poet-speaker's magical, dreadful powers. The structure of the poem therefore does not seem to involve a "return" in any sense; rather, it offers the reader the imaginative power to "wander" in and out of the flexible structures of its enigmatic world. Indeed, the reader's wandering mind encourages his progression towards a "higher plane," but towards a plane still higher than the Romantic model due to its incorporation of repetitive obscurity that never "ends" in a peak.[180]

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[177] Coleridge to Joseph Cottle, 7 Mar 1815, in *Collected Letters*, IV, 545, quoted in Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 492.

[178] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," lines 335, 338, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed.

[179] We might confidently assume that the "air" here is the ungrounded, "airy" space of the mind.

[180] This ascension to obscurity warrants a return to Keats' idea of *Negative Capability*, and his dismissal of Coleridge's "irritable reaching after fact and reason." I am willing to challenge Keats' qualification of Coleridge, and offer a slightly different understanding that he was truly, as he stated all men think of themselves, "a separate being," caught between the Romantic sensibility (to idealize and find resolution, truth, and meaning) and the Gothic impulse (to, as Keats posits as the correct "state of being," remain always in

The power of poetic repetition and obscurity to guide and direct the reader's imaginative mind is immediately secured by the combination of sound and image in the simple title, "Kubla Khan."[181] In reading the complicated sounds of this historical name, the reader is immediately forced into a world without clear-cut boundaries: the assonance of the "a" sound softens and appeases the sharply alliterative "K," encouraging the co-existence of rough violence and calm, floating resonance. As in "Porphyria's Lover," there is an atmospheric "split" that can be sensed even in this small grouping of sounds, and that works to cultivate the obscure by promoting a "split" psychological mind. This resonance offers a microcosmic denotation of the reader's experience of what Yeats refers to as "a state of perhaps real trance,"[182] further encouraged by the silent and successive "h" sounds in both words: the "ah" in "Kubl*ah*," and the "kah" in "*Kha*n." Similarly, the image that these sounds describe—Kubla Khan, the first ruler of the Mongol dynasty and superficial subject of the poem[183]—recalls the Gothic impulse to revive the dark and distant past and to imaginatively blend it into the present, opening the boundaries of time in an *obscure* poetic moment. Indeed, the interfused force of repetition and obscurity that is introduced by the sounds and image of Kubla Khan is the force that drives the reader's overall absorption in the artificial language of the poem. For repetition and obscurity not only maintain the reader's interest in discovering meaning behind the elusive descriptions, as in Wordsworth's "The Lucy Poems" and "The

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"uncertainties.") For all its complexities, "Kubla Khan" truly seems to be lodged between these two oppositional forces, and indeed, can be celebrated as Coleridge's final "balance" or "reconciliation" between their "discordant qualities." Keats to George and Thomas Keats, December 21, 27 (?), 1817, in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, 42.

[181] For an experimental linguist's in-depth structuralist reading of the complex system of sounds and words throughout the poem, see William Benzon, "Articulate Vision: A Structuralist Reading of "'Kubla Khan,'" *Language and Style* 18 (1985): 3-29.

[182] Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," in *Essays and Introductions*, 159.

[183] Kubla Khan ruled over a lavishly luxurious court, and Coleridge's focus on him reveals the classic European inclination to fantasize about the Eastern Orient as an exotic and luxurious, almost entirely unknown place, the conceptualization of which allows the imagination the license to become infinite.

Thorn," but their combined psychological power awakens him to the Gothic impossibility of finding truth, resolution, or "meaning."

The recurring structures of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme work together with the mirrored images of sublime nature into a "magical *penna duplex*,"[184] providing a rhythmic sense of obscurity that continually veils subject and meaning. As in "Break, Break, Break," the repetitive structures of sounds lull the reader into a "trance-like" state that revolves around the continual fulfillment of his expectations. Yet when transported out of the system of his expectations by certain variations to these structures, the reader is awakened to the possibility of an imaginative experience that is both infinite and obscure. Thus repetitive structures of language create a system of boundaries within both the poem and the reader's experience of its world, in which the reader can move both within and beyond. It is this precise bound-and-unbound experiential mind that guides his ascent to obscurity.

The consistent alliteration, assonance, and rhyme produce a reverberating echo of sound through the ever-crystallizing, reflective images of Kubla Khan's sublime "dome of pleasure." The first five lines of the poem are presented as a singular unit of sensory experience, adumbrated by end-rhymes, trails of assonance, and alliterative pairs: "*K*ubla *K*han", "*d*ome *d*ecree," "*r*iver *r*an," "*m*easureless to *m*an," "*s*unless *s*ea." The self-containment of these sweeping and satisfying sounds sets in motion a trance-like experience that psychologizes the sublimity of the physical images they describe. Similarly, the recurring sounds of f's, g's, i's, and ee's in "*f*ive m*i*les of *f*ert*i*le *g*round… *g*ird*l*ed round," "*g*ardens" with "tr*ee*[s]… [and] sunny spots of *gr*ee*n*ery" (6-11) allow the reader to trace these images with his ear and to feel satisfied by their fulfillment of expectations in his mind. These hazy, dreamlike sounds are maintained by the further

[184] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XXII, in *English Romantic Writers*, 479.

recurrence of ee's and i's in "c*ea*seless turmoil s*ee*thing" and "br*ea*thing." (17-18) Just as he experiences the poem's structure, the reader experiences these echoing sounds as "*m*eandering with a *m*azy *m*otion" (25) through the structural units of the images, as the humming alliterative quality of the m's in the line suggest. However, his encounter with sets of images that not only recur but, like the supernatural Sun in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," morph and change with recurrence thrusts the reader's mind beyond the structured world of the poem, once again revealing its boundaries as infinite and obscure.

The structured world of the poem depends on the recurrence of the image of "the dome of pleasure,"[185] which is composed by a series of sublime objects of nature. It begins as the place

> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man
> Down to a sunless sea. (3-5)

The entrancing structure of this moving image is reinforced when its "objects" are reverberated in the second stanza:

> Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
> Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
> And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean. (26-28)

The echoing sounds and reflective objects of this repeated image create a circular effect, following the unnerving repetitive principle that an image that appears once can and will appear in some form again. Indeed, this circular motion of returning to "the dome of pleasure" prevents the reader's mind from wandering beyond the bounds of the world of the poem by carrying him back to a familiar scene, and engaging his experience of it once

[185] I.e., Coleridge's imaginative description of Kubla Khan's enchanted palace.

again.[186] Despite this "return," however, a sense of progress emerges: the river *reaches* the caverns and the "sunless sea" transforms into a "lifeless ocean." The reader's experience thus becomes both a regression toward the familiar and a progression from it. To adopt the Mariner's words once again, his mind is made to move back-and-forth with a "short uneasy motion"[187] that furthers his absorption in the poem's flexible "flesh" of obscurity.

When Coleridge suddenly leaps out from the poem in a dramatic move from unidentified speaker to self-identified poet-speaker in the fourth and final stanza, the vast and overpowering "objects" of the dome of pleasure fade into the background, and a new obscurity is formulated on the separate plane of his own powerful mind. With this shift to first-person lyric, the "trance-like" operations of sound and image unravel into a far more concrete description of the "vision" Coleridge once had of "an Abyssinian maid." (39) This dramatic change of voice and subject is visually indicated to the reader by a sudden narrowing, streamlined lineation of the text. This textual channeling of the lines on the page suggests the poet's ability to re-structure his thoughts and offers a sense that, after a looping series of thoughts, he has finally regained expressive and psychological control. Indeed, his "control" seems to be matched with an apparent ability to harness the power of repetition, to push the dominant sounds and images of the previous stanzas in a "new" direction. The alliterative techniques that guide the "d" and internal "m" sounds in "*da*m*s*el with a *d*ulci*m*er" (37) and "*d*eep *d*elight" (44) allow this image and feeling to reflect that of the second line of the poem: "*d*ome *d*ecree" (2). In a similar equation, the smooth hiss of the "s" in "*s*ymphony and *s*ong" (43), recalls the similar sounds in the image of the "*s*unle*ss* *s*ea" (5).

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[186] This action of returning to a familiar scene, or unearthing an image that has already occurred through repetition, re-instating the past, is fundamentally uncanny. It is further reminiscent of the activity of Martha Ray in "The Thorn," who keeps returning to the eerie site of the Thorn.

[187] Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," lines 386, 388, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed.

However, this moment of clarity for the poet-speaker is only an illusion, for both his identity and his control are once again veiled by the unannounced emergence of a strikingly dark third-person "vision" of *himself* as a magically powerful figure. This final visionary step—the fourth in the progression from Kubla Khan, to "the dome of pleasure," to the Abyssian maid—seems to procure a system in which visions operate along an infinite process of repetition: constructed *ad infinitum*.[188] The move from the "real" vision of the Abyssinian maid, brought forth by memory, to the newly constructed and immaterialized "vision" of himself signals the poem's re-entrance into an obscure realm, traced only by the ungrounded movements of his imagination. This final stanza thus offers yet another peculiar Gothic moment, in which Coleridge's "real," living mind seems to engage in a "visionary" awakening that reveals some powerful force within the mind, an obscure force that works to create an infinite set of possibilities.[189]

The infinite nature of this re-visioning process is complemented by the rhythmic change that imbues the repetitive structures of the final lines with a "fleshy," human and emotional tone. The third-stanza line "A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!" (36) is adapted here into two disconnected yet associated thoughts: "That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!" (47) The separation of these two images gives a real-voice tone to the awkward, breathy syntax of the line it reflects. Similarly, the repetitive structure of "And all who heard/ And all should cry" (48-49) offers a "new" type of echo that, for the first

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[188] This system of visionary production and reproduction recalls two important lyric concepts: evolution of feeling from speaker to reader, (see my introduction to Chapter II), and the pleasure derived from repetition and obscurity in language when the mind remains "unwavering" and "unfixed" between images (see my discussion of sights and sounds in Chapter II). Finally, the fact that all these "visions" are productive—that is, something "new" and "different" is created each time—falls in line with Deleuze's theory that "difference" is the only product of the"real" system of repetition. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 18.

[189] Here, too, it is helpful to be reminded that the poem itself is a "possibility": as Aristotle states, "the kind of thing that *would* happen," as Smith puts it, "the representation of what might have been," "a possible utterance of what the poet might say." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Heath, 16 and Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 19, 16. The idea of "possibility" is particularly compelling in "Kubla Khan," because of the dense and ambiguous context Coleridge gives to the poem in his introduction, which immediately obscures the line between what was *really* done, or happened in writing the poem, and what was merely part of the fabricated legend or "story" he developed behind it.

time in the poem, spans only two lines, indicating a chanting rhythm of heightened emotional excitement. The rhythm intensifies this emotional atmosphere further through the even more condensed repetition of "Beware! Beware!" (49), which is mirrored in the following two-part alliterative line "*h*is *f*lashing eyes, *h*is *f*loating *h*air!" (50)

The emotional arousal of the lyric "voice" contained in these echoes recalls Wordsworth's idea that over-excitement can be a disorienting, fearful poetic power.[190] Indeed, the agitated, enlivened atmosphere of these final lines makes it unclear to the reader whether Coleridge's "visionary" presence in the poem has imbued him with more power, as the surface of his statements seem to imply, or whether his projection of the magical poet-speaker reveals that he has lost his senses to the infinite world of the fierce emotions, desires and impulses[191] ; his mind overcome by obscurity. Indeed, the strange and final call to

> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise (51-54)

leaves the reader in a peculiar psychological place, in which his emotions of pity and fear in relation to the poet-speaker and Coleridge himself are made continuous. With the explicit instructions to "close your eyes in holy dread" and "Beware! Beware!", the poet-speaker asks the reader to fear his dark, enchanting and supernatural powers. In a certain sense, this dreadful "awe" may be warranted in light of the highly experimental, genre-

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[190] Here I recall Wordsworth's statement that the aim of "poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure," and throw the reader into "an unusual and irregular state of the mind; [in which] ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order," such that if a poem's "images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, [and] there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds." Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *English Romantic Writers*, 328. Wordsworth's statement should also be emphasized as it identifies the pleasure produced by this disordering excitation. See my discussion of Wordsworth's quotation in Chap. I, "A Paradox of the Heart."

[191] That is, the poet-speaker seems to have succumbed to one side of the "moral" split within his mind: the split between his out-of-control, instinctual mind and his controlling, judging mind. See my discussion of the Neo Platonic "fracture" of man in Chap. I "Dramatic Narratives."

neutral, creative structure and style of the poem itself: its dual-command of the narrative and lyric genres, and its non-linear and anti-systematic structure. These elaborate poetic constructions may suggest the reader would fear the poet as the masterful conductor of artifice; the poem as reaming with his deliberation.[192] However, just as Porphyria's lover's desperate claims for moral acceptance offer the reader a sense of his guilt, rather than fearing the poet-speaker's creative powers, his request to be feared instills a sudden sympathy in the reader—not for the poet-speaker directly—but for the living poet his image represents: Coleridge himself.

The recurring motions of sound and image in these final lines suggest that neither the poet-speaker nor Coleridge himself are in control, and that there is a greater, more fearful "daemonic" force than the poetic mind at work in the poem. The repetitive action of "weav[ing] a circle 'round [the poet] thrice" invokes the sense that there are uncontrollable "outer-forces" manipulating and conducting a magical trance-like spell, and that the poet-speaker is merely the puppet or pawn of this unidentifiable force. Indeed, Coleridge's adoption of the third-person voice suggests his impulse to "hide" behind the image of the poet-speaker, and "mask" his own fright of the irreconcilable world by over-emphasized statements of power. The circle involuntarily woven around the poet awakens the reader to a sense that, similarly, the circular motions of sounds and images throughout the poem were the workings of the same daemonic force; outside the poet's deliberate creative control. Following from the poet-speaker's image, the reverberations of alliteration and assonance in the final stanza—the reflected h and d sounds of "*h*oly *d*read" (52) and "*h*oney-*d*ew"; the meandering h's, f's, o's, and e's of "*fo*r

[192] As Coleridge himself has said, the reader is always aware that in the poem "every line, every phrase, may pass the ordeal of deliberation and deliberate choice," of the poet. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* Chap. XXII, in *English Romantic Writers*, 484-485. However this statement gains new implications in "Kubla Khan," where the poet's deliberation actually seems to be dwarfed by a greater "daemonic" and deliberate power of artifice, namely, the power of the obscure, which actually seems to dominate Coleridge's mind in the poem.

he on *ho*ne*y-de*w *h*ath *fe*d"—cannot be "mastered," judged or grasped as purely artificial by the reader *per se*. Rather, these sounds are experienced as chimerical reproductions guided by some "other," and far more frightening, poetic influence. In this way, the poem makes the reader sympathetically continuous with Coleridge himself, enforcing the mutual feeling that the mind can only operate under the overpowering force of the obscure.

The final effect of aesthetic repetition is to offer a sense that there are uncontrollable "outer forces" at work: not only in the artificial world of the poem, but in the living human mind. Reaching behind and beyond the structures of thought, these "outer forces" provoke a soaring sense of obscurity in the mind, and a pleasure in the "flesh and blood" of the poem. The internal bonds between repetition and obscurity in Gothic Poetry suggest that indeed, the Gothic is a poetic state of mind, and poetry is a Gothic art. What is important is not that this equation exists, but rather that the Romantic ideals had put it to rest and Browning, Wordsworth, and Coleridge's poems gave it life; "woke it up."

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