

**BEAUTIFULLY DAMNED:
RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION IN COLERIDGE AND BYRON**

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of damnation as it appears in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," and in George Gordon Lord Byron's "Cain: A Mystery," "The Giaour," and "Manfred." The concept of imagination is central to each of these texts, and in each case the damnation of the respective protagonists is precipitated by those characters' inability to rightly perceive the world around them—a failure of imagination. While modern criticism has tended to sideline discussion of the theological aspects of the imagination, this thesis joins a recent movement in recognizing that the divorce of religious concerns from Romantic criticism can only result in an incomplete understanding of the texts in question. Christianity played an important role in the lives of both Coleridge and Byron, and the cosmology, ontology, and eschatology that appear in their works are intimately connected to a form of Christian theology (whether orthodox, heterodox, or heretical). For both Coleridge and Byron a theological conception of the imagination—what I call "religious imagination"—lies at the heart of the human experience. Each of the protagonists discussed herein experiences a living hell, yet in each case, it is the degree to which those individuals exercise religious imagination that determines whether their experience will be an endless suffering, or whether it will lead to redemption and thus mark that individual as "beautifully damned."

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Introduction

The concept of imagination is central to Romanticism. The privileging of imagination and, with it, the idea of originality, is one of the key markers delineating the Romantics' revolutionary break from earlier ideas of art as imitation. As M.H. Abrams so famously described it, where art had previously been viewed as a mirror that reflected the universe, the Romantics shifted the focus to the poet as a fountain overflowing or a lamp shedding its light (*Mirror* 57). This Romantic preoccupation with expression over imitation is deeply rooted in the concept of imagination. Largely for this reason, Romantic criticism has, since its inception, been defining and redefining imagination. Most often, scholars have begun this process by examining Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817)—which contains what is probably the most comprehensive Romantic expression of the imagination. Using Wordsworth and Coleridge as a starting point, scholars have attempted to trace the origins of the Romantic imagination, have debated its meaning and purpose, and have explored how other Romantic writers borrowed, adapted, and even rejected the Wordsworthian and Coleridgean conceptions of imagination.

The purpose of this thesis is to add to this ongoing conversation. Despite the tremendous amount of scholarship that has developed around the concept of imagination, every age has its blind spots. It is my intent herein to address a couple of apparent blind spots in the Romantic criticism of the last century. The first of these oversights is in regard to Coleridge's theological understanding of the imagination as the "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (*Biographia* Ch. 13). To marginalize the theological implications of the imagination is like discussing Coleridge's "Christabel" without reference to the character Geraldine—she may frustrate a clear understanding of the poem, but the text would be greatly

diminished without her. The second oversight that I will address is the little-discussed presence of a deeply theological conception of the imagination in Byron's writings. I contend that the theological ambiguity of Byron's portrayals of religion, faith, and the divine should not pre-empt discussion of this theme. On the contrary, this ambiguity is an important part of what makes Byron's contribution to the theory of imagination so original and interesting.

Imagination as a Coleridgean Cosmogony

Critical discussion of Coleridge's theory of imagination has generally tended to focus on the theory's literary implications. In many ways this is appropriate. Coleridge was a poet and literary critic, and the implications of his ideas on literature should be carefully considered.

Unfortunately, this critical trend has led to an effacement of important non-literary aspects of Coleridge's conception of the imagination. In *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion* (2000)

Douglas Hedley notes that "the institutional parameters of twentieth-century English Literature have tended to marginalize the religious and philosophical core of Coleridge's thought" (3). It is not that critics have ignored these religious or philosophical aspects, but they have often relegated them to a place of secondary importance. This is, perhaps, nowhere as evident as in discussions of Coleridge's conception of the primary and secondary imaginations. In his much-debated passage from the *Biographia*, Coleridge writes,

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

and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (*Biographia* Ch. 13)

By alluding to God's statement of identity in Exodus 3:14—"I AM THAT I AM"—Coleridge grounds the imagination in the nature of God. For Coleridge, it is the primary imagination that humans use when they engage in the common process of perception and the simultaneous act of constructing (or creating) the world for themselves. This perceptive and creative act is, for Coleridge, analogous to divine creation. The secondary imagination, then, since it differs from the primary "only in degree," is also intimately connected to divine creation. In light of this passage (the only passage where Coleridge distinguishes between primary and secondary imaginations), it is difficult to think of discussing Coleridge's theory of imagination without connection to his theological beliefs. Because this sort of discussion does not sit well with secular twentieth- and twenty-first century critical values, many scholars have marginalized Coleridge's connection of imagination to divine creation. This has typically been accomplished either by relegating the reference to divine creation to the realm of metaphor, or by choosing to privilege the secondary imagination (which is more clearly connected to literature anyway) over the primary.

The first of these approaches is evident as early as John Livingston Lowes' magisterial work, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (1927). Coleridge Studies is much indebted to Lowes' book for its revival of critical interest in Coleridge, and for its comprehensive examination of the source material for some of Coleridge's major works. In *Xanadu* Lowes repeatedly compares the imaginative process to divine creation bringing order to

chaos (12, 73, 142); however, Lowes' meaning is metaphorical and his discussion of the imagination remains purely literary and non-theological. For Lowes, the imagination is not some form of divine transmission—what he calls “some alien visitant”—but rather is “an agency which operates through faculties of universal exercise upon that streaming chaos of impressions through which we hourly move” (73). It is a sort of genius that is evinced in Coleridge by the ability to bring together diverse sources to create something new. For Lowes, then, the imagination is a universal human faculty that can be understood better through comparison to the divine act of creation in Genesis, but not as being of the same nature as that act.

A similar approach can be found in M.H. Abrams' influential *Natural Supernaturalism* where, as the title suggests, the supernatural is naturalized. Here Abrams writes,

The Romantic enterprise was an attempt to sustain the inherited cultural order against what to many writers seemed the imminence of chaos; and the resolve to give up what one was convinced one had to give up of the dogmatic understructure of Christianity, yet to save what one could save of its experiential relevance and values, may surely be viewed by the disinterested historian as a display of integrity and of courage. (68)

This approach presents the Romantics as less concerned with traditional Christian conceptions of the universe and of God, than with the value of those conceptions as metaphors for human experience. While this is certainly true for some Romantic projects, it is a problematic assertion in regard to Coleridge, and even Byron, because it reverses the importance of the two forms of imagination. If religion exists, as Abrams seems to suggest, to provide a metaphor to help humans understand their existence, then it is, in fact, the secondary imagination that is privileged—for religion becomes a sort of poetic act, a creative expression that stands for something other than itself. If, however, religion exists as a collective perception of reality—that

is, that human belief in God is not merely a desire for something transcendent, but an actual belief in a divine being—then it is the primary imagination that is privileged. Ultimately, then, by limiting religious expression to metaphor, this view effectively achieves the same end as the second approach, which is to elevate the secondary imagination above the primary.

The subordination of the primary imagination to the secondary can probably be traced to Shawcross's 1907 edition of the *Biographia* where he argued that the primary imagination is the "organ of common perception" and the secondary "is the same power in a heightened degree" (272). This interpretation was commonly accepted by many Coleridge scholars including Robert Penn Warren, who saw the secondary imagination as "imagination in its value-creating capacity" (31), as well as I.A. Richards (58), Basil Willey (196-9), and by critics like Thomas McFarland and James Engell who are interested in reading Coleridge in light of his German influences. For example, in *Imagination and Originality* (1985), Thomas McFarland interprets Coleridge's theory of imagination in light of Tetens' thought, which elevates the secondary imagination above the primary (101-3). McFarland applies this to Coleridge, claiming that "the secondary imagination . . . named as such only in chapter 13, seems really to be the imagination Coleridge customarily talks about elsewhere and to be called secondary only because of the primary imagination. The latter is the true newcomer" (106). Similarly, James Engell reads Coleridge in light of the German philosopher Schelling, arriving at the conclusion that Coleridge meant for the secondary imagination to be read as "more important" (307) than the primary.

The conception of the imagination that informs this thesis is in agreement with those listed above in that it defines the primary imagination as the perception of all humans which half-perceives and half-creates the world around us (Willey 195), and the secondary as that which enables poetic creation. Where my definition of the imaginations differs from traditional

Coleridge scholarship, however, is in statements like Willey's that all humans are "'Miniature creators' perhaps . . . But not *poets*: for that, we need something more—the Secondary Imagination" (197). The secondary imagination does not elevate the poet above the average human, and it certainly does not elevate poetic creation above divine creation.

My conception of the two forms of imagination is in keeping with Jonathan Wordsworth's argument in "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being," where he points out the untenable nature of claims for the supremacy of the secondary imagination (26-7). My position is that the secondary imagination is "secondary," not because it is lesser than the primary, but because it serves it. The secondary imagination is similar to a prophetic utterance in that its purpose is to enable "true" perception, to make clear what is already present, but has been hidden from view or distorted. For Coleridge, the primary imagination is what connects all humans to the Creator and what constitutes the world around us—what could be greater for a Christian poet? The secondary imagination, then, is a tool to aid the primary. It functions to place human perception under a new light, "like moonlight . . . diffused over a known and familiar landscape" (*Biographia* Ch 14).

If the primary imagination is, indeed, primary and greatest, then its theological implications must be addressed. It is the purpose of this thesis to join in a recent tradition that has begun to acknowledge the importance of religion to studies of the imagination. Some of the scholars who have begun this movement include J. Robert Barth, Ronald Wendling, and Douglas Hedley. Eminent among these is J. Robert Barth, whose lifetime of Coleridge scholarship focused on the importance of Coleridge's theology to his poetry and conception of imagination. In *Romanticism and Transcendence* (2003), Barth asserts that "imagination is of its very nature a religious act" (1), and it is on this premise that my own endeavour rests. In *The Symbolic*

Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition (2001) Barth describes Coleridgean imagination as “the symbol-making faculty” (34). For Barth, the Coleridgean symbol is a sort of sacrament—i.e., that in which the human and divine interpenetrate; “a sensible sign . . . pointing to something beyond itself” (39). My argument is deeply rooted in this unabashedly Coleridgean understanding of the *religious* imagination. It is my intent to develop this understanding further, however, by exploring the relation and function of the primary and secondary imaginations within this theological framework, and then by grounding my study in both the prose and poetic works of Coleridge. The implications of this restoration of religion to the definition of imagination are considerable and apply not merely to Coleridge studies, but to Romantic scholarship in general. Though my theory of religious imagination has application for each of the major Romantics, the scope of this project forces me to limit my discussion to two of the English Romantics. My selection of Byron as the second poet under examination is a result of what I perceive to be a second blind spot in Romantic criticism.

Byron as a Poet of Religious Imagination

There are a number of reasons why Byron is an ideal subject for this study of “religious” imagination. First, since Byron is a member of the “second generation” of English Romantic poets, his work provides an example of how the later Romantics responded to, borrowed from, and reacted against their predecessors. More importantly, however, Byron’s work provides an excellent opportunity for the study of religious imagination simply because his work has so rarely been discussed in this context. For example, it is significant that a work as seminal to Romantic criticism as M.H. Abrams’ *Natural Supernaturalism* examines all of the canonical male English Romantics, yet leaves out Byron. Abrams explains this move, arguing that in

Byron's "greatest work he speaks with an ironic counter-voice and deliberately opens a satirical perspective on the vatic stance of his Romantic contemporaries" (13). While this may be true of *Don Juan*, a number of Byron's works, including his most gothic and only recently canonical "Manfred," interact in interesting ways with a Coleridgean sort of religious imagination.

The nature of Byron's relationship to religion has been a subject of much debate from his own lifetime until the present. Reviewers during Byron's life seemed to delight in labelling him as an atheist and a heretic. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, critics noting the paradoxical blend of faith and heresy in Byron's works have tended to soften these labels. For example, Paul Barton's *Lord Byron's Religion: A Journey into Despair* (2003) paints Byron's relationship to religion as that of one tormented by a hyper-Calvinistic version of Christianity instilled in him during a dysfunctional childhood. Portraits like this show Byron not as a rejecter of faith, but rather as one who is unable to shake a faith that haunts him. Another popular way of looking at Byron's paradoxical relation to religion can be found in the work of critics like Stephen Behrendt, Leslie Marchand, and Terence Hoagwood who have argued convincingly that Byron belongs neither to a Christian nor an atheistic tradition, but that his works represent a form of scepticism. In his important work, *Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture* (1993), Hoagwood defines the scepticism that he attributes to Byron as "an antiphilosophical philosophy; it is the doubt that culminates in no new affirmation whatsoever" (36). This label of "sceptic" would certainly seem to account for comments like Daniel McVeigh's: "Intellectually Deist, emotionally Catholic, Byron understood the void that might underlie both ways of looking at the world. Faith did not come easily to him—but neither did disbelief" ("Cainne's Cyne" 286). As a philosophical sceptic, Byron would have considered many views, and questioned each one in turn. This approach would also seem to make sense considering the poet's own confession to

his friend John Cam Hobhouse in 1817, as he was revising Act 3 of “Manfred”: “I do not know what to believe—or what to disbelieve—which is the devil—to have no religion at all—all sense & senses are against it—but all belief & much evidence is for it” (Marchand, *Letters* 212). I view this “softer” approach to Byron’s relation to religion as a welcome sign of things to come, and as a promising starting point for my own discussion of Byron’s religious imagination.

Byron did not leave us a *Biographia* in which he discussed the finer points of imagination, and he tended to criticize and even ridicule minute doctrinal discussions like those in which Coleridge revelled. Also, as Terence Hoagwood has so capably demonstrated in his discussion of Byron’s scepticism, Byron seldom, if ever, affirmed *anything* in his works. While I admit the validity of each of these objections, I would like to add one caveat to my general agreement with Hoagwood’s analysis: while I agree that Byron’s work can be classified as belonging to the sceptical tradition, I would also assert that Byron did not rigidly, nor self-consciously, adhere to the strict requirement of the sceptical tradition that a work should not assert any truth. Perhaps the best example of this is that Byron’s works—especially those discussed herein—consistently demonstrate the supremacy of love above all virtues. Each of the texts that I will discuss presents a generally sceptical view regarding concepts traditionally associated with theology or ontology. That said, each of these texts also presents characters whose central struggle is in some way related to their exile from human and divine community, and their movement toward fragmentation rather than unity. In each case this fragmentation is the result of the character’s inability to acknowledge, or act in accordance with, the supremacy of love. This affirmation of love is deeply theological and ontological—for many of Byron’s characters’ very existence and relation to God are defined by their ability or inability to love.

The inability of Byron's characters to act in accordance with the supremacy of love is intimately tied to those characters' lack of creative power (what Barth might call their impotence to create symbols or "give meaning to the world and to his or her life" [*Romanticism* 4]). These protagonists, then, are characterized by their exile from divine and human community, and their movement toward fragmentation and disunity. All of this is the result of their inability to "rightly" perceive the world around them—nature and supernature—through the lens of love's supremacy. In short, they lack religious imagination.

Religious Imagination and the Beautiful Damnation

For Coleridge, the primary imagination is the greatest means by which the individual enters into community with the divine.¹ By describing the primary imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM," Coleridge marks the imaginative act as an endeavour through which humans participate alongside God in his on-going act of creation. As myriad critics have generally agreed, the primary imagination refers to common human perception (*Biographia* Ch. 13), and thus includes any act "that permits the human person to give meaning to the world and to his or her life" (Barth, *Romanticism* 4). The primary imagination is, thus, possessed by all humans. The commonness of this imagination does not, however, suggest its inferiority to the less common secondary imagination. The secondary imagination refers to poetic and creative acts that function prophetically to *serve* the primary imagination. By helping

¹ When viewed in light of Coleridge's mature, Trinitarian theology, this concept of entering into communion with the divine—of being unified with God—takes on even greater significance, for God, in the Trinity, is already a creating community that represents unity and multitude. For Coleridge, the Trinity is a self-generating (*causa sui*) union of three persons (*hypostases*). These three persons are distinct (Father, Son, and Spirit), yet their union is one of interpenetration (*perichoresis*) which enables them to be three and one: both unity and diversity (Hedley, "Coleridge as Theologian" 483-5). This three-fold community is characterised by love and joy, and it is the relationship into which humanity is invited. According to Coleridge, when humans create the world around them through their perception, they join in the pre-existing community of the Trinity as it continues its ongoing creative act.

individuals to see things in a new light, the secondary imagination clarifies human perception and dissolves false dichotomies, thereby resulting in a more “right” act of creation via the primary imagination. While literary critics often focus on the poetic aspect of Coleridgean imagination, a more important aspect is generally overlooked: while artistic creation is important because of how it aids the primary imagination, the *purpose* of imagination is not to create; rather, it is to unify, and thus to bring the individual into divine community. This was one way to account for the unity in diversity that Coleridge observed in nature. Through the imagination, the diversity of human individuals could be brought into unity with God by participating alongside him in creation. At the same time, the individual could be brought into unity with the wider creation by actually becoming a miniature creator.

By using the term “religious imagination,” I simply mean to highlight the theological and spiritual import of both primary and secondary forms of imagination. When I write of characters who lack religious imagination, I mean that these characters need to have their primary imaginations enlivened by the clarifying powers of the secondary imagination. While my agreement with Barth that “imagination is of its very nature a religious act” (*Romanticism* 1) makes it admittedly redundant to refer to imagination as “religious imagination,” I will, nonetheless, persist in using this term. My reason is twofold: first, I wish to distinguish my use of imagination from traditional uses which tend to focus only on the artistic associations of the phrase; and second, one of the primary definitions of “religion” denotes the idea of community²—a concept central to a Coleridgean understanding of imagination which privileges

² The OED defines religion—ironically, it too employs a redundant repetition of the word it is defining—as “the condition of belonging to a religious order.”

the imaginative act as a means by which the individual enters into community with God and with the rest of creation

Overview

This thesis explores the concept of religious imagination as it appears in selected gothic or “supernatural” narratives by Coleridge and Byron. It is in these works that the veil between the natural and the supernatural (if indeed such delineations can be made) becomes most transparent. The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the theological and sceptical climates in which Coleridge and Byron wrote. The second and third chapters discuss the idea of damnation as it appears in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and in “Cain: A Mystery.” I will explore the connection between religious imagination and damnation, and discuss the role of creative acts and human community in the redemptive process. I will argue that both texts are potential examples of “beautiful damnation.” This concept is akin to the convention of *felix culpa*, or “fortunate fall.” Where *felix culpa* suggests that the Fall of humanity was a positive thing because it opened up the possibility for redemption through Christ,³ however, the idea of the beautiful damnation has no such optimistic view of either the Fall of humanity nor of the “falls” of individuals. This conception views any fall as tragic, and posits that it is the judgment—the damning—itself that is “beautiful.” Unlike *felix culpa*, beautiful damnation suggests that redemption is possible prior to the individual’s fall—the damnation is a necessary, not a preferred, route to redemption. The beauty of such damnation comes in the fact that the judgments meted out in these texts are not annihilative or eternal, but corrective. The purpose of

³ The Latin term *felix culpa* first appears in St. Augustine’s writings in the fourth century A.D. and is translated in the Catholic tradition as “happy fault.” According to this (non-orthodox) doctrine, Adam’s “fault” in taking the fruit in Eden is considered “happy” because it had the side effect of setting Christ’s redemption of humanity into motion.

beautiful damnation is the eventual achievement of right perception which leads to unity of the individual and community with God and creation. I recognize that a term like “beautiful,” especially when employed in a discussion of Romantic texts, carries with it many aesthetic connotations. This aesthetic suggestion is not unintended. After all, these are *poetic* and *dramatic* presentations of damnation. By the very nature of their presentation these damnations have an aesthetic quality and, in light of their potential to provide the damned with creative powers, I consider these presentations to be not merely fortunate but also aesthetically beautiful. That said, such aesthetic connections will only be hinted at in this work; further discussion will have to wait for another project.

The final two chapters of this thesis continue to examine “damned” characters, but the discussion here moves away from the beautiful or felicitous nature of judgement. Instead, this section explores the crime and curse of the damned. Chapter 5 examines Coleridge’s fragment “Christabel” and Chapter 6 discusses Byron’s “The Giaour” and “Manfred.” Because “Christabel” was never finished, its fragmented state leaves the reader with an ambiguity as to the result of Christabel’s curse. Though Byron’s “The Giaour” and “Manfred” are complete poems, both end ambiguously, leaving the reader to question whether the protagonists achieve victory or are ultimately defeated. By examining the crime and curse of Christabel, the Giaour, and Manfred, I provide interesting links to concepts established in the first part of this work. The movement toward unity or fragmentation, the supposed boundary between nature and supernature, and the supremacy of love, all play important roles in Chapters 5 and 6, and point toward the functions and necessity of the religious imagination in the Romantic texts under study.

Chapter 1

Faith in the Age of Reason

The De-supernaturalization of Religion

The eighteenth century was a profoundly troubling period for many Christians in England. While previous generations of believers had enjoyed the relatively (and I stress this word) homogenous rule of Christian orthodoxy,⁴ believers in the eighteenth century witnessed a challenge to Nicene Christianity⁵ hitherto unprecedented in Protestant English history.

Not only would doubt be cast upon key doctrines and the authority of the Church, but the very ground of theism itself would be called into question.

As rationalism and empiricism rose to prominence, many foundational Christian beliefs were challenged because of their apparent incompatibility with the intellectual vogues of the time. Belief in miracles was associated with “ignorant and barbarous nations” (Hume, *Understanding* 10.2);⁶ Hobbes’ materialism cast doubt upon concepts like the spirit and soul; and Locke’s attack on innate ideas led to demands for rational proof of matters hitherto accepted on the authority of Scripture.⁷ When the Church did not readily provide rationally viable answers to these challenges, heterodox answers began to rise in their stead. By the time Coleridge started

⁴ The Church of England was not without challenge at this time (the rise of Catholicism during Mary I’s reign, or of Puritanism during Cromwell’s Protectorate are just two examples of serious threats to Church of England hegemony). However, these challenges came from within the Christian tradition and tended to focus on doctrinal or ecclesial matters. The challenges of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, drew even theism into doubt.

⁵ The fourth-century Nicene Creed is the most widely accepted statement of belief within Christianity. It affirms such doctrines as the divinity and resurrection of Christ, the judgment of the dead, and (implicitly) the Trinity.

⁶ Though it is unclear what exactly Hume’s personal beliefs were towards Christianity, his writings were important to both atheists and deists. Hume himself was accused of both atheism and deism, charges that cost him a teaching position at Edinburgh in 1745 (Penelhum 4).

⁷ It should be noted that even though Locke’s attack on innate ideas became a foundational part of Deism, Locke was not a Deist himself but believed in miracles and divine revelation.

writing seriously in the 1790s—more than a decade before Byron’s poetic debut—a powerful intellectual tradition had developed in England which held that in all matters, including matters of faith, one’s beliefs must satisfy the demands of reason and empiricism; no appeal to scriptural authority or divine mystery could change this.

At this time any English person who wished to think seriously about his or her faith had to negotiate a confusing gamut of religious expressions ranging from the Church of England orthodoxy ostensibly taught in college chapels, to the heterodox expressions of many of the age’s great thinkers, to the avowed atheism which was just appearing in print for the first time during the 1780s and 1790s.⁸ Deism is a prime example of how heterodox expressions of faith rose to meet the challenges of the time. With its belief in a “Watchmaker” God who does not meddle in the affairs of his creation, Deism was truly a de-supernaturalized religion. It provided its adherents with a link to the Christian tradition without requiring “irrational” belief in such things as miracles or divine revelation. Though Deist ideas challenged Church of England orthodoxy early in the eighteenth century, Deism fell from favour mid-century, leaving those who were discontented with traditional Christianity to search for spiritual solace among the other heterodox sects that were fast appearing at this time.⁹

While many in England desired to remain connected to the nation’s religious past and to retain the unifying influence of their society’s most vital “myth,” there was also a strong impetus to rid the faith of its “irrational” supernatural elements. The doctrine of Christ’s divinity was

⁸ In *A History of Atheism in Britain*, David Berman argues that the birth of “avowed atheism” in England began with the publication of *Answer to Dr Priestley’s Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* in 1782, and continued until about 1797 (110)

⁹ The 1689 Act of Toleration facilitated this rise in the expression of heterodox belief by allowing nonconformists to have their own teachers and places of worship. As discontent with traditional Christianity grew throughout the eighteenth century, the Act made it possible for nonconformist groups to meet and spread their beliefs. This freedom was not extended to Catholics, however, they would have to wait until the Catholic Relief Act of 1829.

challenged by Arianism and Socinianism,¹⁰ and Trinitarian theology—seen by many as a foolish and illogical vestige of medieval superstition—was confronted with the rise of Sabellianism,¹¹ and later by Unitarianism.¹² It would seem that Deism was just one head of the heterodox hydra faced by orthodoxy—it had been removed, but in an age of growing religious toleration and rational pursuit there would be many “heads” to replace the one that had fallen.

The Re-supernaturalization of Religion

Even as there was a major theological movement advocating the removal of supernatural elements from Christianity, there were also reactions against this trend. Methodism had its genesis in England in 1739, and with its large outdoor meetings, and soulful preaching and hymnody, Methodism fostered a more emotional and experiential approach to Christianity. This movement grew rapidly throughout the century, and in many ways it signalled a growing discontent with the stale rationalism that was so prized by the nation’s intelligentsia. Similar grassroots trends would soon sweep up other Christian congregations, as the theological reaction against “cold” rationalism would continue to intensify, culminating in the final decade of the century in widespread apocalyptic fervour and charismatic revivals.¹³

¹⁰ Based on the fourth-century teachings of Arius, Arianism held that, while Jesus existed before creation as the divine *Logos*, he did not have a personal existence until he was created by God. Socinianism held a similar Christology, but developed a unique identity in the sixteenth century with its insistence on only accepting those doctrines that could be rationally conceived. Both sects were also non-Trinitarian.

¹¹ Sabellianism originated in the third century with Sabellius, who taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct persons, but rather are three different facets, or modes, of the same person.

¹² Eighteenth-century Unitarianism highly privileged human reason. Perhaps most famously taught by Joseph Priestley—and adhered to for a time by Coleridge—Unitarianism denied the divinity of Christ, the existence of miracles, the inspiration of the Bible, and the atonement and resurrection.

¹³ A great heightening of expectation of apocalypse occurred in England near the end of the century. Prophets wandered the streets of London, congregations reported miraculous healings and members speaking in tongues, and many believed that Christ’s return was imminent. This trend, and its literary articulations, has been discussed in a

This sudden revival of interest in the supernatural was not only confined to Christian communities. Further evidence of revived spiritual interest at this time can be found in the dramatic rise of gothic popular fiction. Beginning as early as the 1760s, authors like Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis thrilled their readership with tales that suggested the possibility (as in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) and even the actuality (as in Lewis' *The Monk*) of supernatural happenings breaking into the mundane physical world. A glut of gothic tales followed with images of charnel houses and the walking dead soon becoming common fare in popular literature. In a century when science had explained away and disenchanted so many of the mysteries of life, gothic fiction provided a world that was still filled with enchantment, mystery, and even horror.

These trends, both within the Christian community and in popular literature, are just two examples of the fissures that were forming in the relatively hegemonic, de-supernaturalized rationalism of the eighteenth century. At the turn of the century these fissures continued to grow. When the French Revolution failed to bring about the rational utopia hoped for by many rationalists, or the millennial kingdom anticipated by many "supernaturalists,"¹⁴ both extremes found their paradigms crumbling. Many individuals found both rationalism and supernaturalism unable to offer the answers necessary to cope with the difficulties of the new century. Rationalism had proven unable to restrain the senseless violence of the Revolution. Likewise, supernatural belief and millennial fervour seemed to have led to an apocalypse (the Revolution)

number of recent works including Morton Paley's *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (1999), and Tim Fulford's edited collection *Romanticism and Millenarianism* (2002).

¹⁴ I use this term as a broad category for those who reacted against rationalism and chose to privilege religious experience above reason.

without millennium.¹⁵ For many, a new theological and philosophical outlook was needed to make sense of recent events. Many of Byron's works pivot on these issues as his heroes grapple with their inability to reconcile themselves to this new world. These issues were also an important part of what prompted William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge to publish their era-marking poetry collection, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

“Mariner” and “Cain”: What Happens When Ideals Fail

In his famous passage from the beginning of Chapter 14 in the *Biographia*, Coleridge describes the goals he and Wordsworth set for themselves in writing *Lyrical Ballads*:

it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (*Biographia* Ch. 14)

¹⁵ This trend of apocalypse leading to millennium is a common Christian trope—often referred to as “pre-millennialism”—that has surfaced at various times in Christian history. Again, for more on this trope and its connection with the Romantic period, see Morton Paley's *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (1999), and Tim Fulford's edited collection *Romanticism and Millenarianism* (2002)

In many ways, at least according to Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* was an experiment in obscuring the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. While the eighteenth-century endeavours of the rationalists, on the one hand, and the supernaturalists on the other (whether millenarians, Methodists, gothic writers, etc.), served to widen the chasm between the natural and the supernatural by emphasizing how different the two were, *Lyrical Ballads* did just the opposite. Rather than emphasize the difference between the two, it enchanted the natural and made the supernatural feel common. These poems eroded the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, allowing one to bleed into the other.

Nonetheless, the very fact that Coleridge refers to his own poems as depicting the “supernatural, or at least romantic,” and to Wordsworth’s as “every day,” shows that, while the boundary between natural and supernatural might have been portrayed as more fluid in *Lyrical Ballads*, there still remained a boundary. In many ways the goal of Wordsworth’s poems stressed an ideal: to see “the inexhaustible treasures . . . the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us” (Ch. 14); they privileged a perception of the natural world and mundane life as endowed with a sense of the divine.¹⁶ Wordsworth’s poems portray what he and Coleridge saw as an ideal relation of the subject to the divine and to the biological world. There is no battle between faith and reason here, just as there is no clear demarcation between the natural and supernatural. It is when these dichotomies (faith/reason, natural/supernatural) are reinforced, and one side is privileged to the neglect of the other, that problems occur. This is precisely the reason I have chosen to investigate the poems of Coleridge and Byron, and not of Wordsworth.

¹⁶ One need only to think of the countless discussions of pantheism in Wordsworth’s poems to prove that there is a deeply religious (or supernatural) element to them. Not only do these poems endow the natural world with supernatural elements but Coleridge himself noted that the “young men of strong ability and meditative minds” who admired Wordsworth’s poems, did so with an admiration that was “distinguished by its intensity, I might almost say, by its *religious* fervour” (*Biographia* Ch. 14)

Coleridge's and Byron's works show what happens when the ideal fails. Their poems, particularly Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Byron's "Cain: A Mystery," portray individuals and incidents where false dichotomies prevail. Both poems' protagonists suffer from overly rational worldviews, and fail to properly respect the supernatural, while other characters in the texts are so heavily dominated by faith that they fail to think rationally at all. These texts also portray worlds in which the natural/supernatural boundaries are exaggerated. In Coleridge's poem, the Mariner clearly moves from the natural world of Section I, into a nightmare realm of the supernatural, and then back into the "real world" again at the poem's conclusion. In Byron's play, Cain undergoes a similar journey from "natural" Earth, to the gates of Hades, and then back to Earth once more. Just as these texts *seem* to exaggerate these boundaries, however, they also subvert them. A closer look at both texts will beg the question, just what constitutes the distinction between the natural and the supernatural after all?

Both "Mariner" and "Cain" show that the individual subject cannot be saved by rationalism or supernaturalism. My investigation of these two poems demonstrates that what is necessary to attain an ideal perception of the *whole* world (both natural and supernatural), and to avoid the pitfalls of rationalist and supernaturalist extremes, is religious imagination. This faculty enables one to perceive the interpenetrating¹⁷ nature of apparently dichotomous terms (like natural/supernatural and faith/reason), and also brings the individual into community with nature, with humans, and with the Godhead.

The eponymous heroes of "Mariner" and "Cain" both lack religious imagination, and the consequence of this deficiency is the removal of the individual from community (with the divine,

¹⁷ This word was actually coined by Coleridge (*OED*) and was used in the *Biographia* to describe the dissolution of polarities that leads to unity—interpenetration describes the meeting point "of counteracting powers partaking of both" (*Biographia* Ch 13)

with humans, and with the biological world) While the damnations of the Mariner and of Cain occur for similar reasons, it is ultimately the differences between their punishments that make these texts so interesting to compare While the damning in “Mariner” functions as a chastening that eventually leads to the protagonist’s attainment of religious imagination and thus his redemption, the destination of Cain’s journey is less conclusive At the end of Byron’s text, Cain finds himself damned and exiled, forced out of human and divine community While the end result of Cain’s judgment could be salvific, the play’s conclusion gives no explicit reason to hope this is true “Mariner” and “Cain,” then, are indicative of the different outlooks of Coleridge and Byron on matters of faith

Both “Mariner” and “Cain” ask the same fundamental questions about faith and reason, and both postulate similar views about the inadequacies of privileging one above the other Both portray isolation and fragmentation as a form of personal hell, and both protagonists are sentenced to an exile that brings them through this hell In addition to these similarities, both texts also feature a conspicuous absence of the Christian God—an absence that deepens the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in each text If the similarities between these texts seem striking, this is entirely justified, for Coleridge himself claimed to have begun writing “Mariner” in the wake of a failed attempt to write a narrative titled *The Wanderings of Cain* (Coleridge, *Wanderings* 218) ¹⁸

Coleridge’s “Mariner” functions, in part, as a critique of rationalist and supernaturalist extremes, to some extent, as the poet’s earnest search for answers to the difficulties faced by

¹⁸ In his preface to the fragment *The Wanderings of Cain*, Coleridge tells of a scheme in which he and an unnamed friend were to write a three book work about the wanderings of Cain after he is exiled from his family The existing fragment is Coleridge’s work on the second of these three books He writes that as “I hastened to him [the friend] with my manuscript” he was overcome “with the sense of the exceeding ridiculousness of the whole scheme—which broke up in a laugh and the Ancient Mariner was written instead” (218)

people of faith in his age; and, additionally—especially in its 1834 version—as a powerful assertion of the conviction that there *is* an answer, and that the religious imagination is the faculty by which that answer can be found.¹⁹ It is for this reason that I will use the 1834 version of the poem. Although there has been long-standing debate about whether the original or later versions are superior, I am of the school that sees the poem's many stages of development as evolutionary. In its earliest version, I hold that "Mariner" embodied a critique of rationalism and supernaturalism, and a chronicle of the poet's journey to answer the age's questions regarding those issues. While this version depicted some of Coleridge's answers to these questions, these answers were not yet confirmed in the author's mind and thus, as Coleridge's conviction grew, he necessarily altered the poem to emphasize those points which were already there, but which could now be asserted with greater confidence.²⁰

In contrast, the conclusion of "Cain" is characterized by the theological scepticism of its author. In "Cain" Byron grapples with many of the same issues as Coleridge, but he offers no sincere conviction, except, perhaps, the conviction that certainty is impossible. Nonetheless, while Byron is noncommittal about the existence of God and the ultimate outcome of Cain's judgment (that is, whether it is a salvific, beautiful damnation, or merely a damning punishment),

¹⁹ In many ways, the development of religious imagination was the purpose behind Coleridge's mature writing. In John M'Vickar's "Preliminary Essay" to *Aids*, he writes that what "[Coleridge] ever and chiefly aimed at, [was] namely, that the heart and reason, the one awakened, and the other enlightened, should become a united temple of praise and love [. . .]" (xvi).

²⁰ On this point I respectfully disagree with critics like William Empson who calls "Mariner" "a splendid poem which was mangled by its author for reasons of conscience" (*Selected Poems* 23), David Pirie who writes that the added "marginalia are by their very nature perverting," that "they lie," and even make "nonsense of the poem at its very core" (214-5), and James B. Twitchell who considered at least one aspect of the later version to be "partially sabotaged by a hoodwinked Coleridge" (21). While these scholars offer valid reasons for preferring the earlier version, I do not believe it is fair to reject the later versions as the products of a "hoodwinked" or confused Coleridge. After all, as to the theological themes on which "Mariner" is so heavily focused, Coleridge only became more and more certain—not more confused—as time went on. It is this growing certainty with which I am concerned.

I argue that he does assert a sense of certainty about the primary importance of human community and the role of love in facilitating this community. I demonstrate that love is central to a Byronic view of religious imagination, and that it seems to be the one thing Byron was willing to affirm with some certainty.

In the following two chapters I examine the tension between faith and reason, and explore the boundaries of the natural and the supernatural as portrayed in “Mariner” and “Cain;” I discuss the absence, pursuit, and attainment of religious imagination in each text; and, finally, I investigate the differences in the damnation that occurs in each work. Despite the different conclusions of these works, both protagonists have the potential to be viewed as being beautifully damned. In many ways, it is these different conceptions of what makes a damning beautiful that characterize the works of Coleridge and Byron, and it is also these differences that have allowed these texts to endure, to touch the affections, and to excite the imaginations, of diverse readers in diverse times.

Chapter 2

Coleridge's Mariner

There are indeed mysteries, in evidence of which no reasons can be brought. But it has been my endeavour to show, that the true solution of this problem is, that these mysteries are reason, reason in its highest form of self-affirmation. (Coleridge, Aids to Reflection xlvii)

Finally, Good Sense is the Body of poetic genius, Fancy its Drapery, Motion its Life, and Imagination the Soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole. (Coleridge, Biographia Literaria Chapter 14)

Three Stages toward the Attainment of Religious Imagination

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is an old sailor’s tale of a fateful voyage when his ship is blown off course and becomes trapped amidst Antarctic ice drifts. An albatross appears to the crew and, upon their hearty greeting of the bird, the ship is freed from the ice. Despite this good fortune, the Mariner shoots the albatross and a series of apparently supernatural events unfolds as the crew dies, and the Mariner is kept alive until his eventual redemption, after which his ship sails miraculously back to home port. Though redeemed, the Mariner nonetheless has an unnaturally long life bestowed upon him, and is occasionally seized by an uncontrollable need to tell his tale to passersby. The poem is one such telling of his tale.

In his classic 1946 essay, Robert Penn Warren asserted that “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is “a poem of pure imagination” (21). Despite this essay’s heavy focus on the

imagination, however, it marked a deviation from previous scholarship—like that typified by John Livingston Lowes—which tended to see “*Mariner*” as being completely unmoored from reality (“*Pure Imagination*” 391). Warren posited that the poem is primarily concerned with two themes: “The theme of the ‘One Life,’ of sacramental vision, [which] is essentially religious,” and “the theme of imagination [which] is essentially aesthetic” (41). This chapter works from the premise that both of these themes—sacramental vision and the imagination—are, indeed central to “*Mariner*,” but that, contra Warren, they should not be divided into separate religious and aesthetic categories. It is precisely this sort of dichotomization that Coleridge is working against in the poem. In the albatross, the aesthetic and the religious, the natural and the supernatural, come together, and it is the Mariner’s inability to see this interpenetration of categories that starts him along his terrible journey. One of the primary purposes of the religious imagination is to enable a “true” perception, and in “*Mariner*” this perception is characterized by a sacramental vision that sees the boundary between the natural and the supernatural as fluid and not fixed. Since both sacramental vision and religious imagination are primarily concerned with perception, they are by definition aesthetic as well as religious faculties.

This search for true perception seems to have been one of the great themes of Coleridge’s life. It is what led him, as a youth at Cambridge, to reject the Anglicanism of his childhood for a more rational Unitarianism,²¹ and it is also what led him back to Christianity when the ultra-

²¹ There tends to be a polarization among scholars with regard to this period in Coleridge’s life. While some unduly minimize this Unitarian period by portraying it as a brief “phase” that Coleridge soon grew out of, others overemphasize this period, to the occlusion of Coleridge’s later (and much more voluminous) Christian thought. While this period of a few years is relatively short when compared with his later orthodox Christian period, he nonetheless held his Unitarian faith with immense conviction (he even came within a hairsbreadth of taking a ministerial position with a Unitarian congregation). For these reasons, I prefer to see his time of Unitarian confession as an essential step in the development of his mind. For example, it was at this time that Coleridge became convinced of the importance of reason, even as he grew aware of the limits of reason alone.

rational idealism of the Unitarian creed failed him.²² It was in the midst of this journey—while still ostensibly a Unitarian, but struggling with doubts about that creed—that Coleridge penned “Mariner.” It is not surprising, then, that Coleridge should have chosen “Mariner”—a poem in which the natural and supernatural so dramatically collide—to explore the relation of faith and reason, and the search for true perception.

While the move toward de-supernaturalization was a strong force in eighteenth-century theology, Coleridge’s work argued for a new direction. Much like his contemporary, German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834),²³ Coleridge’s theological expressions, even as early as 1798, portray both a commitment to Enlightenment reason as well as a “Romantic” tendency to find in religion something greater than, and unexplainable by, reason. The mature Coleridge believed that in matters of religion, intellectual difficulties in the intelligibility “of a doctrine need not prevent the acceptance of its truth, provided it has a basis in the practical reason, *or in spiritual experience*” (Wilde 161; italics mine). “Mariner” is in many ways a working out of this belief. The Mariner endures all manner of spiritual experience along his journey toward the attainment of religious imagination, and it is the three stages of this journey that I will discuss herein.

The first stage depicts a sort of “fall” of humanity. It introduces the sacramental quality of nature and shows how both the Mariner and his fellow sailors are unable to properly perceive the world around them. The Mariner is blinded to the supernatural reality at work in the biological world, and his fellow sailors are conversely blinded by their superstition and lack of

²² It was the Unitarian Coleridge who wrote, just months before publishing “Mariner,” that “though all my doubts are done away, though Christianity is my passion, it is too much my intellectual passion, and therefore will do me but little good in the hour of temptation and calamity” (*Letters* 407)

²³ Schleiermacher is often called the “father of liberal Christianity” and is, perhaps, best known for his “Romantic” theology, which privileged human emotion and imagination

reason. The second stage depicts the Mariner's return journey from the South Pole, and the "deep" religious experience that characterizes that trip. This experience serves as a sort of "dark night of the soul" which facilitates the Mariner's eventual attainment of religious imagination. The final stage chronicles the Mariner's return to the European setting where the story began. Here the Mariner—newly endowed with religious imagination—exhibits sacramental vision, as he enjoys deeper communion with God, with humans, and with nature, and encourages others to enjoy the same experience.

The First Stage: Rationalism and Supernaturalism as Crimes against Imagination

Before attending to the text there is one further note that should be made. By insisting upon the importance of sacramental vision in "Mariner," I do not mean to imply that the text can be read as a sacramental allegory in which each element of the poem corresponds to some theological meaning. While there are sacramental aspects to the poem, there are also radically illogical elements that defy allegory. I am thus very much in agreement with James Boulger when he writes that

The world of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is neither a clear presentation of a sacramental universe, nor a merely meaningless nightmare vision, but is rather an original parable in epic structure of the uneasy religious scepticism and faith that has been with us since Newton and Kant. (Boulger 20)

One element of the poem that does have sacramental meaning is the albatross. I agree with Warren that the Mariner's shooting of the albatross is "a crime against imagination" (33), and I also concur with Newton Stallknecht's assertion that this shooting "*must*" be interpreted "as the symbol of reason's conquest over feeling" (564)—though I would perhaps go even further and

call it a conquest of *religious* feeling. Although the albatross appears to be merely a bird, it is attributed numerous spiritual qualities by both the sailors and, in later editions, by Coleridge's own marginal gloss. The Mariner is unable to accept this interpenetration of the natural and the supernatural. His purely rational view of the cosmos blinds him to the fullness of nature, and he only sees things as they appear; he is unable to reflect on the *ding an sich*.²⁴ Rather than yield to a faculty he cannot understand (like feeling, or imagination²⁵), the Mariner chooses to kill what he cannot understand; he is like the eighteenth-century rationalists who sought to excise those aspects of religion that they could not rationally comprehend. It is for this rejection of supernatural reality that he is damned.

To better understand the nature of the blindnesses that precipitate the respective "falls" of the Mariner and his fellow sailors, some explanation and substantiation of my claims about the sacramental qualities of nature are necessary. The word "sacrament" actually means "mystery" and, in its broadest sense, refers to the sign of something sacred (Kennedy). In the case of the sacraments of the Church, the physical emblems not only symbolize a supernatural reality, but are to some degree inhabited by that reality. This is best exemplified in the doctrine of transubstantiation where the bread of the Eucharist is believed actually to become the body of

²⁴ Kant's concept of the *ding an sich* is helpful in understanding Coleridge's portrayal of the supernatural and natural as co-habiting in *phenomenal* objects (like the albatross). Kant called all objects which we can know via our senses *phenomena*, but argued that human speculative reason can never penetrate to see the thing-in-itself (*das ding an sich*). Kant believed in a reality beyond phenomena, but he argued that humans could not intellectually intuit such things (*Reason* 347-50). Though Coleridge would not really come into contact with Kantian thought until his visit to Germany in 1798, "Mariner" evinces an early philosophical leaning toward something quite similar to Kant's *ding an sich*.

²⁵ While Coleridge's and Kant's conceptions of the *ding an sich* are similar, "Mariner" evinces an important difference from Kant's concept (made explicit in his more mature writings). Where Kant stressed the unknowability of things-in-themselves, Coleridge argued that the *ding an sich* could indeed be intuited, but that this must be done via some faculty other than the understanding (Vallins 107, Wilson 51, Wendling 138).

Christ.²⁶ In “Mariner,” Coleridge often invokes elements of nature (like the sun, wind, ice, and albatross) as signs that point to, and are inhabited by, the supernatural. In some cases this supernatural could be God himself, while in other cases the signs seem to point more clearly to a sort of enlivening spirit, much like the “one life,” described in “The Eolian Harp.”²⁷

This sacramental portrayal of nature first appears in the opening lines of the Mariner’s tale to the Wedding-Guest. Here the sun and storm-blast are personified with the pronoun “he” (26, 41).²⁸ The storm is also described as “tyrannous and strong,” as striking with “o’ertaking wings,” and as “chasing” the sailors’ ship (42-4). Although this personification could simply be employed for dramatic effect, these passages should be considered more closely, especially in light of the pantheistic (or panentheistic) elements present later in the poem. If the Polar Spirit is responsible for “ma[king] the ship to go” (380) later in the poem, it does not seem unlikely that there might be a spiritual element also to the storm-blast “who chased [the ship] south along” (42). Whatever the case, it should be noted that nature is here portrayed as animate and as exercising agency over the ship. This is not a passive nature (i.e., *natura naturata*) that the sailors set out to conquer; rather, the sun seems to *choose* when he will grace the sailors with his light, and the personified wind chases the ship at his pleasure, not the sailors’. When one

²⁶ It is difficult to say with certainty the degree to which the natural and supernatural are unified in “Mariner’s” sacramental vision. The more extreme view of the sacraments (exemplified in the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation) in which the physical emblem and supernatural reality become one could be justified in light of the poem’s pre-Reformation setting. At the same time, one could object that Coleridge would not have endorsed such a view in light of Article XXVIII of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* which declares that “Transubstantiation . . . cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture.” Nonetheless, the Church of England Catechism states that “The Body and Blood of Christ . . . are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper” (*Book of Common Prayer* 167). It should be noted that my concern here is not with the degree to which the supernatural is present in the elements of “Mariner”, rather, it is that the supernatural is indeed present.

²⁷ In “The Eolian Harp” this “one life” is described as that power which “meets all motion and becomes its soul” (26-7), it is that which “sweeps” over “all of animated nature . . . At once the Soul of each, and God of All” (44-8).

²⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all line numbers here apply to the 1834 edition of the text.

considers the mature Coleridge's challenge to traditional categories of living and non-living,²⁹ this reading of these early lines becomes even more convincing. Much like the Mariner, however, the reader can only recognize this sacramental rendering of nature in retrospect—the first-time reader, not attuned to the interpenetration of natural and supernatural elements which will later become so evident, is likely to miss these subtle hints of the supernatural already peeking through the text. The sun and the storm, then, are functioning *at least* as sacraments in the broad sense (i.e., as *signs* of something sacred [Kennedy]).

As the sailors journey further away from the city (a centre of commerce and logic, built with the processed materials that even Coleridge would agree are non-living³⁰), the sacramental quality of the world around them becomes more pronounced. In the stanzas immediately preceding the arrival of the albatross, the sailors enter a land of ice and snow where there are no other living creatures. Emerald-green ice-drifts as tall as the ship's mast pass them by and soon the crew find themselves trapped amidst the ice:

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound. (59-62)

There is a distinctly sublime quality about this ice. It is terrifying in that its immense size and power are able to crush the ship, and yet it does not. The ice surrounds the ship, but does not destroy it. Here the ice signifies the boundary that the Mariner and his fellow sailors *believe* exists between them (as inhabitants of the natural world) and the infinite or the supernatural.

²⁹ In his *Theory of Life* Coleridge argues, for example, that gold (in its natural form) and frost on a windowpane are as alive as humans (47).

³⁰ While Coleridge insists in *Theory of Life*, that metals like gold express life, he adds that a processed ingot of gold does not, for “its form is accidental and *ab extra*” (47).

From within the confines of their ship—where the laws of reason have not yet been violated—the ice would seem almost infinite, for individual drifts dwarf the small ship, and the howling, roaring sound would have drowned out the sailors’ loudest shouts. In effect, their existence is all but annihilated, for a close passerby would neither see nor hear them over the ice. In the ice drifts the sailors find themselves confronted by a sacrament of the infinite. Yet this reality only *surrounds* them at this point, it does not yet penetrate their existence (though the sailors will soon enough experience eternity for themselves).

The fact that there is a sacramental quality about this portrayal of ice can be further supported by noting that “Mariner” is not the only work of Coleridge’s in which he depicts the sublimity of ice in a sacramental manner. During the winter after the poem’s publication Coleridge observed a scene of ice skaters in Germany. His description was published years later in *The Friend* under the title “Christmas out of Doors,” and his sublime portrayal of sunlight and the visual and aural qualities of ice is the subject of an essay by Tim Fulford. In this essay Fulford describes Coleridge’s portrayal of nature as representing “the presence of an apparently miraculous and spiritual force operating within nature” (819), and he explores Coleridge’s descriptions as Christological symbols. Although the description of the ice drifts in “Mariner” is not as explicitly religious as the description in “Christmas out of Doors,” both seem to flow from the same Coleridgean belief that nature—especially sublime nature—often serves as the supernatural’s point of penetration in the phenomenal world.

In “Mariner,” when the ship becomes surrounded by ice, the sailors seem to be at the threshold of eternity, with annihilation just beyond the safety of their ship. It is at this point that the albatross appears, and all versions of the poem depict the sailors as hailing it “In God’s name” as if “it had been a Christian soul” (65-6). The sailors feed the bird, and it proceeds to fly

“round and round” (perhaps suggesting a magical circle like that in “Kubla Khan”). It is at this point that “The ice did split with a thunder-fit” and the helmsman steers them through the newly made passage (69-70), much like Moses leading Israel through the parted Red Sea.³¹

Again Coleridge’s description of the ice brings “Christmas out of Doors” to mind. Here Coleridge describes the separation of mist upon the ice in a manner designed to evoke Exodus 14:29 (“But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left”). In “Mariner,” the splitting of the ice to make passage for the sailors seems similarly designed to mirror Israel’s passage through the Red Sea. Could it be that the albatross is a sort of gatekeeper who, adequately greeted by the sailors, performs his magical rite, and opens up a gateway through the ice? Or, phrased less mystically, could it be that the albatross is a symbol for religious feeling, and those who are able to intuit the supernatural qualities of the bird—those who identify it as a saviour, or “Christian soul”—are also able to see the passage out of the physical world in which they are trapped and into the supernatural reality represented by the ice? It may be that the ice was only ever an illusory boundary, and that to gaze on it with “right” perception was to see that that the boundary was less solid than it appeared. Whatever the case, it is the albatross who enables the sailors to see this reality (after all, it is the “believing” helmsman who sees the passage, not the unseeing Mariner).

The albatross is the clearest example of nature as sacrament in the text—while a physical creature, it is clearly depicted as having sacred qualities. The marginal gloss Coleridge added to the editions from 1817 on supports this view, reading that “the Albatross proveth a bird of good

³¹ Fulford draws this comparison in his essay, and even presents evidence from Coleridge’s letters, showing that this Mosaic allusion was the author’s intention in writing this passage in “Christmas out of Doors” (820)

omen” (gloss 169), suggesting that the bird portends something greater than itself. Furthermore, all versions of the poem credit the bird with a power that “made the breeze to blow” (94). The spiritual nature of the bird is further heightened by the fact that it repeatedly returns, no matter the weather, for food and play as well as to perch “for vespers nine” (71-6)—that is, to join the sailors for evening prayer.³² In these early lines, then, the albatross is clearly accepted by the sailors as a spiritual figure. He is hailed as a Christian soul, he is connected in some way with the opening of the ice-passage and the blowing of the wind, he joins the sailors for evening prayers, and—in a move that is perhaps more pagan, or superstitious, than Christian—he is even viewed as a good omen.³³

The sailors’ ability to recognise spiritual qualities in the albatross demonstrates their sense of religious feeling. They “partake” of the sacrament of the albatross as they invite it into their community, and as they pray alongside and take bread with it (67, 73). Unfortunately for the sailors, this sensitivity to religious experience is not tempered by reason. Their spiritual experience is defined by superstition. Where they see the albatross as a good omen early on (93-

³² William Empson has argued that this idea of the albatross joining the sailors for evening prayer is an invention of the older Coleridge, which was not present in the original. He cites the etymology of “vespers,” noting that the word was not used to refer to prayers until post-Reformation (and thus after the events of the poem’s narrative) (“Answer to Warren” 158-9). He argues against the attachment of any spiritual significance to the albatross in the original version of the poem (and even against any attempt at all to make the poem’s “accidents” appear as “punishments calculated by God” [159]). While his points are valid, it should be noted that the Mariner and Wedding-Guest attribute significance to the bird. When the Wedding-Guest notices a change in the Mariner’s countenance and asks “Why look’st thou so?” the Mariner replies “With my cross-bow / I shot the Albatross” (81-2). That the Mariner considers this an explanation for his change of mood and that the Wedding-Guest accepts it with no further comment are noteworthy. If there was no significance to the albatross’ murder this brief exchange would be both pointless, and an anticlimactic ending to Part I.

³³ While many of Coleridge’s revisions serve to “Christianize” the poem, it is significant that the superstitious phrase “good omen” was added later. This addition of a superstitious phrase in describing the albatross seems to suggest that the pagan conceptions of the sailors are as important as the Christian ones. As I have already suggested, the bird represents religious imagination, whether Christian or not, and it is the sailors’ intuition of the supernatural that is important here, not their strict adherence to Christian doctrine—which would avoid talk of “omens.” Their eventual “fall” is not a result of their holding to pagan convictions, it is the result of their fickle, irrational practice of those beliefs that damns them.

6), they later decide that it was right for the Mariner to kill it (99-102), and then later change their mind once more, condemning the Mariner's act (139-42). Their faith is dictated by circumstance; their convictions are swayed by every breeze of fancy. For Coleridge, true faith is characterized by both feeling and reason. Feeling alone can result in superstition, while reason alone cannot account for the mysteries "in evidence of which no reasons can be brought" (Coleridge, *Aids* xlvi).

If the sailors represent the flaw of supernaturalists, then the Mariner clearly enacts the fault of the rationalist. After all, there is no *rational* reason to see anything wrong with the Mariner's murder of the albatross (according to Cartesian mechanism it could not think or feel). To believe otherwise would be (for the sceptic) to permit the existence of the miraculous, or (for the orthodox) to regress into a sort of medieval superstition. To the reader, however, it is abundantly clear that the Mariner's action is motivated, at least in part, by a spiritual bankruptcy that causes him to transgress the poem's clearly stated moral that it is imperative to love "All things both great and small."³⁴ His inhumane act toward the albatross does not de-humanise him; it reveals that, as a purely rational being, he is already somehow less than human.

The Mariner's murder of the albatross evinces his a-spiritual view of the natural world. Within the framework of rational understanding, the murder of the bird—though "inhospitable" as the gloss asserts (170)—does not warrant the judgment that results from it. In fact, for the Mariner's punishment to make any sense at all it must be accepted that the Mariner has transgressed a law that is beyond reason—a law he is unaware of because of his purely rational understanding of the bird, and of the cosmos.

³⁴ Coleridge, "Mariner," 615.

As Part II begins, the Mariner admits that “I had done a hellish thing / And it would work ‘em [the sailors] woe” (91-2). This soon proves true as the wind stops and the sailors find themselves stranded in the Pacific. It is at this point that the consequence of the Mariner’s a-spiritual perception manifests itself and “the albatross begins to be avenged” (gloss 171). At this point the Mariner’s eyes are slowly opened to the noumenal³⁵ world; however, it will take more than an acknowledgement of the reality of the supernatural to expiate his sins. To accept the supernatural as a realm that exists parallel to the phenomenal, but which cannot normally be accessed by humans, would be to perpetuate the problematic dichotomy expressed by the eighteenth-century extremes of rationalism and supernaturalism. Rather than accept an ambiguous, unknowable noumenon, the Mariner must learn to see what Coleridge called “Life,” that is, the “one universal soul, [that] . . . all organized bodies have in common, each after its own kind” (*Aids* 4). In other words, he must do what Kant called impossible: he must learn to intuit the noumenon; he must *know* the *ding an sich* (Kant 352).

After the albatross is killed, the sailors find themselves adrift in a hostile and apparently supernatural space. The supernatural is here evinced by strange weather conditions, the sight of a bloody sun, a sea turned slimy, and the presence of “death-fires” dancing at night (106-28). Some sailors even commune with spirits in their sleep (131-2). Here it is tempting to divide the Mariner’s journey into two opposite parts: one in which logic prevails, and the second in which the supernatural is dominant. However, if the journey could, indeed, fit into such categories it would support the natural/supernatural opposition that Coleridge saw as problematic. In

³⁵ Kant referred to those aspects of reality which cannot be intellectually intuited as *noumena*. While this term is often used synonymously with *ding an sich*, they are not exactly the same. In my usage I refer to *ding an sich* as specific things as they really are (but cannot be perceived), and *noumena* as a general category for the world beyond the reach of empirical observation.

actuality, even during the apparently logical first portion of the journey, the supernatural is always present through the sacraments of nature. Likewise, while the second half of the journey seems to be dominated by supernatural experience, virtually every aspect of it *can* be explained rationally.³⁶ Even those aspects which seem to have no rational explanation—like the death-ship and the reanimated corpses of the sailors—could be explained away as hallucinations in the Mariner’s mind. What truly matters, however, is that the Mariner believes himself to be experiencing the supernatural. And who is to say that he is not? This is the crux of the poem. Like the eighteenth-century rationalists and supernaturalists, some critics have been tempted to find a way to rationalize each element of the poem or, on the other hand, to insist that it is nothing but a nightmare dream-vision with no rational meaning at all. I believe that the poem defies both of these readings. The point is not to try to de-supernaturalize each “miracle” in the poem, it is, rather, to understand that the dichotomy is faulty. Of course the sun, wind, ice, and albatross are phenomenal objects, but for Coleridge, they are also sacramental, and therefore inhabited by the sacred. Even if the Mariner’s experiences with Death, the Polar Spirit, and the reanimated corpses are explained away as hallucinations (he is, after all, malnourished, dying of thirst, and under great stress), it does not make them any less sacramental—for perhaps it is only through hallucination that the Mariner’s rational mind is able to let down its guard and see the world as it really is: as a place of fluid interpenetration between the natural and supernatural.

Whatever the case, it is at this point in the text that both the Mariner and sailors are called to account for their sins. There are numerous echoes of the biblical fall from Eden here. Like Adam in the Garden, following Eve in her sin and then blaming her for his act, the sailors blame

³⁶ John Livingstone Lowes’ *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), explores dozens of examples of apparently supernatural events in “*Mariner*” that were, in fact, inspired by Coleridge’s reading of the journals of various sailors.

the Mariner for their sin. They hang the albatross around his neck in an act that correctly censures his shooting of the albatross, yet which fails to account for their own complicity in the act. On the other hand, the Mariner's sin bears some resemblances to Cain's (remember that "Mariner" was written in the wake of a failed attempt to write "The Wanderings of Cain"). He commits the murder of a "Christian soul" (65) and is consequently exiled from his community and from God. The resemblance of the Mariner's and his crew's sins to the biblical first sin and first murder position these men as everymen figures. Here Coleridge suggests that the sin plaguing humanity, that which causes it to repeat the original sin which separates it from God, is to err to one or the other extreme regarding religious imagination, to privilege feeling at the cost of all reason, or to elevate reason to the negation of feeling.³⁷

The Second Stage: The Return Journey as Dark Night of the Soul

During the return portion of the journey, the Mariner's experience appears to become more and more supernatural. Reason cannot easily account for the events that follow, and numerous commentators have remarked on the "dream-like" logic that seems to govern this portion of the Mariner's journey. He meets both Death and Life-in-Death in person (188-93), observes as the souls "fly" from the bodies of his crewmates (220), overhears the conversation of the spirits who guide his ship (396-7), and is mysteriously sustained many days past when the other mortals perish. The one man on the ship who dares to question the existence of the miraculous now appears to be adrift on a miracle-filled sea. Whether these "miracles" are physical realities, hallucinations, or the products of a dream, is not the point. What does matter here is that the

³⁷ Later in Coleridge's career, this theme of understanding enlivened by imagination would become the dominant theme of his theological writings, standing as the overarching purpose, for example, of *Aids to Reflection*.

Mariner believes these experiences to be real, and that the dichotomy of natural and supernatural becomes shrouded in ambiguity

It should be noted that both the sailors and the Mariner are unprepared for the “deep” religious experience that occurs during the return trip. The sailors’ lack of preparation ends in their annihilation. The Mariner is also unprepared for this experience and yet, for some reason, he is sustained through it. The ensuing experience becomes for him a sort of “dark night of the soul.”³⁸ While unable to save him, the miracles help to precipitate a crisis through which, by the end of the poem, he attains a sort of “union of love with God” (St. John 1).

Why the Mariner is sustained while the other sailors perish is unclear. This could be evidence of Coleridge’s preference for reason over supernaturalism, or, on the other hand, it could be that the sailors’ religious faith (though naive and superstitious) is nonetheless enough that they are permitted to die and go to some sort of heaven, while the Mariner must suffer instead. It could also be simply a case of divine prerogative—God has willed it and it is beyond human reason to understand his ways. Whatever the case, it is the Mariner who is left to experience this dark night of the soul, and that “night” seems to be designed to last as long as it takes to “save” the Mariner.

During this portion of the text, the Mariner shows just how resistant he is to the irrational lesson he must learn. Watching the souls depart from his crewmates and witnessing the appearance of Death’s ship do not bring him to repentance and do not impart religious imagination. After these experiences the Mariner still “despiseth the creatures of the calm” (gloss

³⁸ The term “dark night of the soul” refers to a poem and a treatise on that poem by sixteenth-century monk, St. John of the Cross. The phrase is a metaphor used to describe a period of loneliness and desolation experienced “by the soul in its journey upon the spiritual road to the attainment of the perfect union of love with God” (St. John 1).

175)—which function as stand-in symbols for the albatross³⁹—referring to them as “slimy things” (238). In this condition he finds that he cannot pray, for his attempts yield only “A wicked whisper” (246), and the gloss makes it clear that “the curse liveth” (gloss 175).

As the Mariner’s supernatural experience continues, it seems that his way along the path to unity with God, humans, and nature requires that he first be deprived of communion with all three. Not only is he deprived of communion with God (via prayer), but he also cannot commune with living creatures (for his crew are dead and he cannot yet see non-human creatures as embodiments of “Life”⁴⁰). In a Eucharistic reference added in 1800, Coleridge heightens this theme of non-communion by portraying Fear as taking communion (another name for the Eucharist) with the Mariner—“Fear at my heart, as at a cup, / My life-blood seemed to sip!” (204-5).

The Mariner’s isolation is nowhere more evident than in Part IV. Here his dead crewmates’ bodies litter the deck about his feet (252). Their flesh fails to rot, and their dead eyes stare curses at the Mariner for seven days and seven nights (260-1). The Mariner describes the spiritual depth of his isolation here as he notes that, while “An orphan’s curse would drag to hell / A spirit from on high,” the curse in the eyes of his dead crewmates is “more horrible than that” (257-9). It is at this point that he notices the water-snakes and everything begins to change.

³⁹ These “slimy things” (238) serve the same thematic purpose as the albatross. The Mariner’s initial rejection of them shows that he is still unable to see their sacramental quality. His later blessing of the snakes comes to symbolize his “conversion”—for it is then that he at last exhibits religious imagination.

⁴⁰ Writing about “Life” Coleridge asserts that “This, therefore, all animals possess, and man as an animal” (*Aids* 4), suggesting that this noumenal, in-dwelling of “Life” is present even in animals—and consequently in the water-snakes and albatross.

The water-snakes are described as moving in “tracks of shining white,” as having an “elfish light” flake off of them,⁴¹ and as being trailed by a “flash of golden fire” (273-81). Perhaps the most important aspect of these descriptions is that, where the Mariner earlier described such sea creatures as “slimy things” (238), he now describes them in such a way that they are characterized by light and beauty. Also important to note here, however, is the supernatural quality of these descriptions. The “tracks of shining white” suggest an ethereal or angelic nature not unlike the biblical description of Christ on the mount of transfiguration—“And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow” (Mark 9:3). Likewise, by calling the light “elfish” Coleridge evokes a sense of otherworldliness, while his mention of the “flash of golden fire” (an unnatural image) likewise suggests a sense of the transcendent.⁴² At the same time, the phenomena described are also natural ones. John Livingston Lowes has taken great pains to demonstrate how Coleridge’s descriptions in “Mariner” (particularly those of the water-snakes) are actually based on the real-life reports of sailors (Lowes 31-48). It would seem, then, that the Mariner’s descriptions here demonstrate his newfound sacramental vision, for in these descriptions he attributes supernatural, sacred qualities to natural creatures. The Mariner’s change of heart, or “conversion,” is further evinced by the fact that he is now able to bless the water-snakes (287). While he earlier killed a sacramental creature, he now looks upon the snakes and finds that “A spring of love gushed from my heart” (285). It is only at this moment that he

⁴¹ The word “elf” appears at least as early as *Beowulf* (where it is spelled “ylfe” (112). The word references pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon noumenal beliefs and thus hints at the Mariner’s newfound perception of otherworldly qualities within the natural world, as well as providing another interesting example of the interpenetration of “pagan” and Christian mythologies within this text.

⁴² It is notable that the image of gold (and other precious metals) purified by fire is a common biblical trope for purification (Num 32:22-3, Jer 6:29, Ez 22:18, Mal 3:2-3, etc.). The Mariner has certainly passed through the proverbial fire by this point, so the image seems apt to describe his own recent spiritual journey.

finds he is able to pray again (288). The gloss makes the pivotal nature of this scene even more clear, noting that “the spell begins to break” (gloss 176).

The Third Stage: Communion with the “One Life”

At the moment he blesses the snakes the Mariner is drawn into simultaneous communion with nature (via the snakes) and with God (via his renewed ability to pray). His response to the snakes also seems to purchase his reprieve from suffering as he lapses into a period of sleep—a sleep so potent it “slid into [his] soul” (296). He soon awakes from this “soul” sleep (and from his “dark night of the soul”) and experiences a refreshing rain (perhaps a symbol of his baptism into a true religion) and the presence of a “roaring wind” (309), which signals both his deliverance from being lost on a still sea (just as the wind brought by the albatross earlier rescued the ship), as well as a sort of Pentecost-experience, like that of the apostles who experienced a “mighty rushing wind” (Acts 2:2) when they received the Holy Spirit.⁴³ While the poem has, from the start, been filled with examples of sacramental nature, these examples seem suddenly very obvious (as in the case of the rain and wind). The Mariner is no longer just surrounded by sacraments in nature, he now experiences them.

In the final stanzas of the poem, the Mariner provides the “moral” of the tale:

He prayeth well, who loveth well

Both man and bird and beast.

⁴³ This connection is heightened when one notes that in the biblical Greek the same word (*pneumatōs*) is used for both spirit and wind. Coleridge was well-acquainted with biblical Greek and would likely have been aware of this overlap. Read in this light, the return of wind at this point in the text could also be viewed as a return of a true religious spirit to the Mariner’s hitherto merely rational faith (Christopher 118).

He prayeth best, who loveth best
 All things both great and small;
 For the dear God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all. (612-7)

This moral has been often critiqued (Coleridge himself told Anna Laetitia Barbauld that the poem had “too much” of a moral, and that this was its “only, or chief fault” [446n6]); nonetheless, Coleridge left these lines in subsequent editions of the poem, suggesting that his self-critique was disingenuous (which was not uncommon for Coleridge when discussing his own work). If the Mariner had acted according to the above-quoted maxims, he would certainly not have shot the albatross and would have spared himself a great deal of trouble. Additionally, when this moral is viewed as flowing from Coleridge’s conception of the “One Life,” it makes absolute sense that the loving of birds and snakes would be the ethical responsibility of every Christian.

For Coleridge, the One Life is the animating process in nature (*Theory of Life* 35), it is present in *all natural* things (40, 47), and it is what makes biological life, development and even evolution possible (41-2). This One Life (which he sometimes calls “Nature”) is not God, but it is somehow connected to God as the “handmaid under the eye of her sovereign Master” (85). Coleridge’s mature understanding of “Life” represents an attempt to avoid pantheism (he explicitly states that “Life” is in everything but is *not* God), while providing a divine telos for the universe, and drawing the cosmos together into a mode of interrelationship Coleridge refers to as “unity in *multeity*” (42).

This understanding of the One Life provides a basis for the union of the individual with nature, humans, and the divine. The first part of the Mariner’s journey is characterized by a

movement away from this sort of unity and into isolation, and the second portion is marked by a consistent movement toward communion with all aspects of the One Life. The moral of “Mariner,” then, can be viewed as a practical expression of Coleridge’s rational religion.⁴⁴ It is not in itself a creed, but rather expresses how an individual empowered by religious imagination might act. If one believes that all of nature is indwelt by a divine, creative power which is the servant of the Creator, then one should be bound to love and respect “All things both great and small” for they are sacraments by which one may be pointed toward the Creator. It is this quality, which cannot be empirically tested or rationally discerned, but must be intuited via the imagination, that the Mariner has learned to see. Only once he has intuited this reality can he exhibit the respect and love for nature that will draw him into communion with the One Life.

The Mariner’s newfound connection with the One Life helps to explain the apparently mystical hold that he has over the Wedding-Guest (early on the Mariner “holds him with his glittering eye” [13] and “has his will” [16] as the Wedding-Guest “listens like a three years’ child” who “cannot choose but hear” [15, 18]). Because the post-journey Mariner is in such close communion with the noumenal world, it would seem that he is able to speak directly to the soul of the Wedding-Guest. His parting words to the Wedding-Guest, uttered immediately before he dispenses his moral, are entirely concerned with this concept of true communion:

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been

Alone on a wide wide sea:

So lonely ‘twas, that God himself

Scarce seemèd there to be.

⁴⁴ It would be anachronistic to apply Coleridge’s full, mature conception of ‘Life’ to such an early work as “Mariner”; however, much of the poem does seem to make more sense in light of at least an early, simplified understanding of ‘Life.’

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
 'Tis sweeter far to me,
 To walk together to the kirk
 With a goodly company!—

To walk together to the kirk,
 And all together pray,
 While each to his great Father bends,
 Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
 And youths and maidens gay! (597-609)

Here the Mariner acknowledges his earlier state of isolation from God and from humans, and contrasts this state with his current one in which he enjoys communion with people of all ages before the presence of God. Immediately after this section he proclaims his “moral” in which he connects love of all creatures with prayer, thus completing the triune nature of his communion with humans, God, and nature—“all things both great and small” (615).

Conclusion: The Beauty of Eternal Penance

The epigraph added to “Mariner” in 1817 states that “there are more invisible than visible natures in the universe” (Epigraph 167). For Coleridge, a life that is only able to intuit the visible natures (phenomena) is incomplete. A purely rational religion (like that of the eighteenth-century rationalists) is not enough for Coleridge, for it has no understanding of the sacramental nature of the universe. Likewise, a religious experience that dwells *only* upon the supernatural is also

empty, for it cannot produce true faith and functions as an obstruction to true communion.

Through his portrayal of the Everyman, the Mariner, Coleridge has provided an example of the secondary imagination at work. Here he has placed the faith/reason debate of the late eighteenth century into a different light, dissolving the extreme opposition of these dichotomous positions, and bringing them together in his presentation of the Mariner's mature faith as one that is the culmination of both reason and feeling.

Ultimately, Coleridge's synthesis of reason and feeling functions to posit a faith that admits the importance of human understanding but insists on the necessity of sacramental vision to transcend understanding and allow the individual to intuit noumena. This blending of understanding and sacramental vision, of reason and feeling, is what makes up the religious imagination. The religious imagination is not merely a superstitious acceptance of the supernatural (as depicted in the sailor's judgement), but is rather a Coleridgean "suspension of disbelief" (*Biographia* Ch. 14). Religious imagination employs human understanding, but also admits the limits of reason—like its inability to reveal the true substance of things (the *ding an sich*). It is by this synthesis of reason and feeling that the religious imagination makes it possible for individuals to dwell in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 942-3).

There are two senses in which the Mariner could be considered damned in the poem. The first is when his shipmates die and he is miraculously sustained, and forced to undergo his hellish, "dark night" of spiritual isolation. The beauty of this damnation is quite obvious in light of my reading of the poem: it is a judgement that is not annihilative, but rather serves to facilitate the Mariner's eventual attainment of religious imagination and thus his redemption. The second sense in which the Mariner could be considered damned is that he appears at the end of the poem

to be sentenced to a sort of undead existence in which his life is greatly prolonged (perhaps indefinitely⁴⁵). This is a wandering existence (much like that to which Cain is sentenced in Byron's text) in which his penance is acted out through his repeatedly being compelled to share his story with random strangers. While some might see this as a fate worse than death, I argue that his encounter with the water-snakes at sea has changed this cursed existence into a blessed one. Because of his newfound sacramental perception, his post-voyage existence is a joyous one characterized by his triune communion with the One Life, and filled with a sacramental enjoyment of nature (from his salvific blessing of the water-snakes, to his "baptism" in rain, to his "Pentecost" experience in the wind).

To this man who earlier experienced complete loss of communion, his current, wandering life is a blessing because he has the repeated opportunity to meet with people and tell them the tale that led him to a fuller understanding of and connection to Life. It is of note that this life is even "sweeter than the marriage-feast" (601). While this may suggest that he enjoys his wandering existence even more than attending weddings, it should also be noted that heaven is often referred to in the Bible as "the wedding feast of the Lamb." The Mariner is "damned" in that he cannot enter the wedding feast (heaven), and must spend his existence enacting a penance for his crime. However, by his own confession he states that his "damned" existence has the potential—when lived under the guiding light of religious imagination—to make a heaven out of

⁴⁵ In Kathleen Coburn's edition of his notebooks (1957), Coleridge can be found expressing his frustration at the "blunder" of some engravings of the poem which "represent the An M as an old man on board ship." He writes that the Mariner "was in my mind the everlasting wandering Jew—had told this story ten thousand times since the voyage, which was in his early youth and 50 years before" (*Notebooks* 1 2, Note 45). This comment seems to lend credence to the suggestion that the Mariner may indeed live indefinitely (like the Wandering Jew of Christian tradition).

his earthly hell.⁴⁶ It would seem that, from the Mariner's own confession, he is truly, beautifully damned.

⁴⁶ Some might object to this "happy" characterization of the Mariner's fate by noting that when compelled to tell his tale, the Mariner is "wrenched / With a woeful agony" (578-9), and his "heart within [him] burns" (585). However, who is to say that the presence of discomfort is inherently bad? For instance, when the biblical prophet, Jeremiah, tries to stop himself from speaking of God he proclaims "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20:9).

Chapter 3

Byron's Cain

Choose betwixt love and knowledge—since there is

No other choice (Byron, Cain 1.429-30)

When Byron first published his closet drama “Cain: A Mystery” in December 1821 it was received with generally hostile reviews. Although a few visionaries like Shelley, Scott and Goethe saw “Cain” as “a work of unparalleled genius” (McGann, “Notes” 1071), it was denounced by many as a heretical, or at least atheistic, work. One anonymous reviewer for *Gentlemen's Magazine* wrote that the play “is unquestionably one of the most pernicious productions that ever proceeded from the pen of a man of genius” (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 219). Another anonymous reviewer of “Cain,” writing in the *Eclectic Review*, called Byron an “apostle of infidelity” whose purpose was, in “the very spirit of the fabled sphinx,” to stump believers with “dark enigmas” so that “those who fail to unravel them, may perish” (219).

There is no doubt that “Cain” questions many aspects of early nineteenth-century orthodoxy. Byron's re-telling of the biblical story casts the first murderer as its hero. Here Cain is an almost Promethean character who dares to question God's goodness, and who aligns himself with a remarkably sympathetic Lucifer. Cain's pursuit of knowledge ultimately ends in fratricide, but not before the eponymous character rejects belief in the goodness of God, denounces the doctrine of Original Sin, and criticizes the atonement of Christ. At a time when Church of England orthodoxy had already borne the assault of more than a century of “rational”

doubting, and heterodox challenges,⁴⁷ it is not surprising that many in England saw “Cain” as just another attack against the foundations of orthodoxy. Indeed, many modern-day critics view “Cain” in a similar light⁴⁸—though they are admittedly less concerned by the play’s challenges to Christianity. This view of “Cain” as an attack on orthodoxy is, however, an unfortunate misreading of the text. Far from assaulting the foundations of faith, “Cain” is actually an epic tale of the *tension* between faith and reason, and along with its critique of pious ignorance, it offers a much stronger censure of purely rational approaches to faith.

Byron’s play is not a theodicy nor is it a polemic against the Christian faith; rather, it is “a wandering in those desert regions without Paradise, looking back at Eden with bitterness, and with longing” (McVeigh, “Cainne’s Cynne” 287). There is invective here, but there is also sympathy; God is both challenged and vindicated. It is in this ambiguous place (in the mystery) between bitterness and longing, invective and sympathy, challenge and vindication, that humans dwell. Ultimately, “Cain” is not merely a play about the conflict of faith and reason; rather, it is about the struggle of humans to find happiness despite their uncertainty.

Cain’s stance toward God and faith is a sceptical “doubt that culminates in no new affirmation whatsoever” (Hoagwood 36). Atheism and heresy are by no means affirmed in the text and, to the degree that they are introduced by Cain, they are “dramatically invalidated” (Hirst “Orthodoxy” 253) by Byron’s unsympathetic portrayal of their champion. On the other hand, Byron goes to considerable lengths to avoid an explicit affirmation of God’s goodness—he even alters the biblical record, replacing God’s final appearance with the proclamation of an

⁴⁷ For more on these challenges see pages 16-20

⁴⁸ For example, Paul Cantor argues that “Cain” affirms that “there is evil in the world because its Creator is not good, at least not in any human sense of good” (55). Leslie Marchand argues that, in “Cain,” “the roles of god and devil are reversed, for Lucifer is a champion of the ‘good principle’” (*Byron’s Poetry* 86). Similarly, Edward Bostetter argues that “Lucifer is undoubtedly speaking for Byron” (572), and concludes that the play is a “tragedy of the intellectual rebel who attempts to defy and break free from the traditional faith” (571).

angel, so that he can avoid a Job-like theodical ending. However, Byron's scepticism toward faith does not extend absolutely to all aspects of "Cain." While Byron does not affirm anything about God, he does affirm the primacy of love as the faculty which makes happiness and community possible, despite uncertainty, by enabling individuals to dwell in the mysterious meeting place between faith and reason.

At first glance, "Cain" seems to portray a universe of dualistic conflict between humanity and spirit, or feeling and intellect. It is tempting to see Cain as placed in the impossible position of inhabiting either the human or intellectual side of this dichotomy, forever longing for the unobtainable other half.⁴⁹ However, "Cain," much like Coleridge's "Mariner," is concerned with the reconciliation—not the reinforcement—of these binary oppositions. "Cain" demonstrates the insufficiency of any philosophy that privileges either reason or faith to the neglect of the other. Cain's family appear hard-hearted and ignorant when they operate under faith alone, while Cain appears cold, arrogant, and destructive in his single-minded search for enlightenment. Like "Mariner," "Cain" demonstrates that the undue privileging of either of these positions results in the movement of the individual out of community with God, humans, and the natural world.

Daniel McVeigh notes the dualistic conflict in "Cain," but asserts that Cain is not damned by this fracture, but rather must learn to wander in its "desert regions" ("Cainne's Cynne" 287). This is where the concept of religious imagination enters into my reading of "Cain," for it is only

⁴⁹ This view can be found in Daniel McVeigh's reading which poses Cain as a "divided personality" (283) McVeigh suggests that Cain's ego is fragmented between the human, "gentler half" as symbolized in Adah, and "his own spiritual aspiration" which finds its "affirmation in the speeches of Lucifer" (282-3) Leonard Michaels provides a similar reading which poses spirit and intellect as "virtually equivalent" and forming one side of the dichotomy which posits love on the other side (73) Michaels concludes that, since Cain "finds himself essentially intellect, it is implicit that human love is incompatible with him" (73) William Fitzpatrick describes a similar dualism between humanity and spirit in his assertion that "Cain" portrays "man" in the "intolerable position" of having to "either submit his will to an inscrutable, inaccessible God, or else risk damnation by following the demands and yearnings of his own fallen nature" (615) As I have already mentioned, Bostetter suggests that *Cain* issues a challenge to traditional cosmologies, while also being a play about the intellectual rebel who struggles to no avail against traditional faith (571)

via a renewed perception that the individual can be content with mystery and restored to both human and divine community. However, where Coleridge's "Mariner" demonstrates an elevation of sacramental vision as the means by which an individual attains religious imagination, I argue that Byron's "Cain" suggests love as the means by which happiness and community can be attained, despite the uncertainty of human existence.

Act 1: "Choose betwixt love and knowledge"

In Act 1 Byron sets up a dialectic between Cain and his sister/wife Adah. Here Cain represents the path of isolation, travelled via the pursuit of pure reason, while Adah represents the path of community and happiness found only by subordinating reason to love. By the end of the first act it becomes clear that Cain's single-minded pursuit of reason is incompatible with faith, and that the rift between him and his family is growing in proportion to the degree to which he searches for rational understanding. At the same time, Adah is presented as a possible example of how reason and faith can be united under the banner of love.

Both Cain's obsession with knowledge and his consequent isolation from God and humanity are established in the play's opening scene. While his family offers prayers and sacrifices to God, Cain proclaims that he has nothing to be thankful for (1.1.28). When his family leaves he launches "a cheap-shot at his father" (Eggenschweiler 236), and unleashes a barrage of questions. He wishes to know why he must die, why he suffers for his parent's sin, and (the crux of it all) whether it is true that God's all-powerfulness must also necessitate his being "all-good" (1.1.76-7). While these questions are not evil, Cain's relentless pursuit of their answers makes him unable to dwell—even temporarily—in their mystery. The result is his inability to love God or dwell in peaceful community with his family.

As the act progresses, Cain's pursuit of knowledge intensifies and his sense of alienation from his family grows proportionally. When Lucifer tells Cain that he must "Choose twixt love and knowledge—since there is / No other choice" (1.1.429-30), Cain indicates his decision by abandoning his devoted wife to join Lucifer on a journey to find knowledge beyond the boundaries of the earth. Adah protests against his abandonment of love, entreating Cain to think of his parents and children, but Cain denies feeling love for his parents, and asserts that, besides Adah, "I love nought else" (1.1.433). Even this love is drawn into question, however, for when Adah tells Cain that all she desires is his happiness, he interrupts her saying, "Be thou happy then alone— / I will have nought to do with happiness, / Which humbles me and mine" (1.1.465-7).

Unlike Cain, Adah is able to find consolation in the love of her family and God. She is among the worshippers in the opening scene and she repeatedly voices her love for her family throughout the play. Where Cain questions whether God's "all-powerful[ness]" necessarily entails his goodness (1.1.76-7), Adah confidently addresses the same concern in an affirmative statement when she tells Lucifer "Omnipotence / Must be all goodness" (1.1.390-1). Adah repeatedly appeals to Cain's heart in her attempts to reconcile him to herself, his family, and to God. It would be a mistake, however, to understand Adah as the purely emotional creature who contrasts Cain's pure rationalism, for Adah is also a rational woman. When Lucifer questions her faith in God's goodness, she presents him with ready answers, demonstrating that she has already wrestled with these questions. Also, when she tells Cain that she could not be happy alone, "but with those around us, / I think I could be so, despite of death" (1.1.467-8), she demonstrates that, like Cain, she is concerned by the spectre of death that awaits her; however, unlike Cain, she is

able to face the mystery of death by trusting in the goodness of God and abiding in the love of her family.

What separates Cain from Adah is his refusal to accept that there is anything that cannot ultimately be accounted for by reason; however, as Wolf Hirst has pointed out, “[n]o amount of stoicism, rationalistic argument, or Faustian aspiration will compensate for denial of feeling . . . Redemption can be brought only by wedding the understanding to love.”⁵⁰ This union of understanding and love, and the faith that flows from it, is glimpsed at in Act 1 in Adah’s character.

When the search for answers draws Adah’s love of God or her family into question, she forsakes reason, and chooses love. This is why, when Satan probes her statement about God’s omnipotence necessitating his goodness, she responds “Fiend! tempt me not with beauty; thou art fairer / Than was the serpent, and as false” (1.1.393-4). Knowing that Lucifer is the enemy of her God and of her parents, she refuses to seek answers from him. It is ironic that this choice to elevate love above reason results in her making a choice that is, in fact, quite rational: the choice to dwell in mystery rather than seek answers from the avowed enemy of her family and her God.

While Cain’s approach is, perhaps, the more intellectually honest, it is striking that it is Adah who draws the reader’s sympathy. It is her love that is unrequited, and it is she alone who pursues Cain and seems to love him sacrificially (as shown by her choice to follow him into exile at the play’s conclusion). In contrast, while Cain’s enlightened questioning is perhaps somewhat sympathetic in the opening, his refusal to love those who love him and his cool treatment of his wife cause him to appear heartless and unappealing. Cain’s speeches (which identify valid concerns) come across not “in the spirit of innocent rationality and empiricism [like] one

⁵⁰ Hirst, “Orthodoxy,” 256.

discovers in the [medieval] mysteries”; rather, “they often seem, in their sullen, brutish style intended only to reduce pious feeling to banal reality” (Michaels 72). The questions in “Cain” “represent a repudiation of feeling by intellect” and, if Lucifer is correct that one must choose between the two, then Cain has chosen the entirely undesirable and even absurd, for intellect, as portrayed in Cain’s questioning, “seems to repudiate itself” (73).

The final lines of Act 1 show Lucifer taking Cain on a journey to find knowledge while Adah chases after him, crying “Cain! my brother! Cain!” (1.1.563). This scene generates sympathy for the lover over the seeker of knowledge, and also presents the first of many echoes of the Fall from Eden. When Lucifer offers knowledge to Cain he claims that he will not “ask thee to partake of fruits / Which shall deprive thee of a single good” (1.1.901). Despite his claim, however, it is clear that this moment is in many ways a re-enactment of the Fall. Just as in the Genesis story Cain’s mother, Eve, chose to elevate her desire for knowledge above the call for obedience demanded by her love of God, so too Cain is acting in a sort of unloving disobedience (to Adah’s wishes), by pursuing his own fruit of knowledge. At the end of the first act Byron teases out this theme by showing Lucifer, like the snake, trying to convince a human that the forsaking of love in order to gain the fruit of knowledge will have no negative consequence. At the same time, Byron’s portrayal of Cain accepting Lucifer’s claim “neatly solves the moral problem involved in Cain’s inheritance of his parents’ sin by making him repeat it” (Hirst, “Orthodoxy” 265). Already Cain’s inability to accept aspects of God which seem irrational is leading Cain to refute his own reasoning.

In his essay “Byron’s Cain as Sacred Executioner,” Harold Fisch remarks that in the biblical narratives of Eve and of Cain “we have two Fall stories, two alternative myths of origins” (29). He asserts that the Bible clearly elevates the Fall of Adam and Eve and that Byron

deviates from this precedent by “placing a highly unorthodox emphasis on Cain as hero” (29).

While I agree with Fisch that these stories represent two accounts of the Fall, I disagree that they should be viewed as alternative myths, and that Byron’s emphasis on Cain is a deviation from the biblical emphasis. The biblical story of Cain and Abel is a tale of the recapitulation of humanity into original sin. Cain’s role as agriculturist symbolizes an attempt to regain the Garden of Eden which was lost through his parents’ sin. His own act of hatred in murdering his brother, however, demonstrates that it is not just his mother and father who are responsible for the Fall, but that he too is guilty of “falling.” Byron’s text places great emphasis on this repetition of the original sin. Cain repeatedly argues the unfairness of being punished for his parents’ sin, but then he commits that sin himself. Paul Cantor has even gone so far as to suggest that Cain “completes the Fall, because his crime leads to the fragmentation of the human race, which otherwise might have remained literally one great big happy family, incest and all” (52).

Where Byron’s text deviates from the biblical source is that he emphasizes the repetition of original sin even *more* than the Bible. Byron frames Cain’s sin as flowing from a pursuit of knowledge, making it appear even more similar to his parents’ sin (eating the fruit of knowledge) than the jealous murder committed by his biblical counterpart. By framing Cain’s story in this manner, Byron not only portrays Cain as falling into original sin, but actually names that original sin as the naked pursuit of knowledge. In Act 1, as Cain leaves his pleading wife behind to depart on his search for knowledge, his communion with humanity begins to fracture. He is already out of close communion with God and with his wider family, but his continued search for knowledge now begins to sever the unity of husband and wife.

Act 2: Reason Repudiates Itself

Much like in “*Mariner*,” the protagonist of “*Cain*” becomes isolated from human community as he experiences a “deep” religious experience in an unfamiliar realm where the supernatural appears nakedly before him. In Act 2, Cain’s refusal to dwell in mystery results in his knowledge growing increasingly disproportionate to his ability to love. What is more, as Cain delves deeper into his search for reason, he actually becomes more and more irrational. His stubborn resolution to take nothing on faith ends up constituting an act of faith in itself. This act of faith emerges in Act 2 as a deeply irrational faith in Cain’s own reason. Where his family chooses to trust in their faith in God, and in each other, Cain trusts only in himself. Cain’s family find their answers in reliance on the communal experience of collective humanity (admittedly a small collective) and upon divine revelation. Cain’s rejection of these sources belies his arrogance and a rather striking degree of faith. Above divine revelation and the collected wisdom of the human race, he looks to his own rational mind. This might be considered heroic if, as in the first act, Cain’s views continued to appear plausible in comparison to his family’s views. This is not the case, however; for Cain’s reliance on reason becomes an absurdity. By the end of Act 2, Cain finds himself affirming all manner of paradox in his search to deny the central paradox that an all-powerful, all-good God could allow evil to exist.

Cain’s lack of faith in anything outside himself becomes immediately apparent in the opening lines of Act 2 where Byron parallels the biblical narrative of Peter walking to Christ on the water.⁵¹ Here Cain exclaims that he can “tread on air, and sink not; yet I fear / To sink” (2.1.1-2). In response Lucifer directly invokes the New Testament narrative, telling Cain that a time is coming

⁵¹ Byron’s prefatory claim that his play “has nothing to do with the *New Testament*” (881) seems entirely disingenuous. There are numerous, blatant references to Christ throughout the play, leading one to wonder if Byron was simply teasing his readers, or trying to protect himself against more severe accusations of heresy.

when toss'd upon some water-drops,
 A man shall say to a man, 'Believe in me,
 And walk the waters;' and the man shall walk
 The billows and be safe. *I* will not say
 Believe in *me*, as a conditional creed
 To save thee. (2.1.17-22)

The biblical story of Peter's walking on water is a tale of how the faith of an individual in God can sustain him through what reason would call impossible (i.e., walking on water). Cain has no such faith, but he is sustained nonetheless. Lucifer requires worship, not belief, and he has already explained that by not worshipping God, Cain has chosen to worship Lucifer (1.1.317-20).

Having demonstrated his lack of faith in external sources during the "space-walking" episode, Cain proceeds to establish a sort of faith of his own. During the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, one of the most common arguments for God's existence was a teleological argument based on natural theology.⁵² In essence, this apologetic argued that the presence of purpose in the universe proved the existence of a creator and, from this premise, concluded that creation revealed much about the nature of the creator. In Act 2, as Cain moves through space, he proclaims

Oh God! Oh Gods! or whatsoe'er ye are!
 How beautiful ye are! how beautiful
 Your works, or accidents, or whatsoe'er

⁵² This was most popularly articulated by William Paley in a number of works published around the turn of the century. Arguments for God's existence based upon teleology and natural theology have been common throughout Church history, and have been taught by thinkers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, among many others.

They may be! Let me die, as atoms die,
 (If that they die) or know ye in your might
 And knowledge! (2.1.110-5)

Up to this point Cain has never questioned the existence of God—only his goodness has been doubted—and even Lucifer has repeatedly acknowledged the existence of God. It seems odd, then, that confronted with the beauty of creation Cain should not know who to ascribe this beauty to—“Oh God! Oh Gods! or whatsoe’er ye are!” (2.1.110). Here Cain’s reason leads him into a paradoxical rejection of the belief in God’s existence which has hitherto been affirmed by his family, Lucifer, and even himself. Rather than allowing the beauty of creation to testify to him the existence of a good God, Cain doubts his own pre-established belief in the reality of God (or at least that of the biblical God).

It could be argued that Cain is an exceptionally good empiricist who is here rejecting all presuppositions in favour of the sensory observations before him (i.e., the beauty of the cosmos). However, in the same speech in which Cain doubts the biblical God, he also proclaims his desire to know God—“Let me die . . . or know ye in your might / And knowledge! (2.1.113-5). Although these sound like the words of a good empiricist, Cain never once exerts any energy in the pursuit of the desire his words proclaim. He once asks Lucifer to show him where God dwells (2.2.366), but he never attempts to observe or know God. Cain is not a good empiricist and, as his naivety and, frankly, his ineptitude as a philosopher, become more apparent his rejection of all outside sources of wisdom in favour of his own empirical conclusions seems foolish. That all his knowledge-seeking ultimately leads him to fratricide proves the ultimate absurdity of his philosophy.

Cain's ineptitude as a philosopher again asserts itself when he unwittingly utters one of the most common proverbs used to explain the presence of evil in the universe—that darkness exists so that the light may be rendered more beautiful by comparison. Stricken by the beauty of space, Cain claims that it is “the night, which makes both beautiful / The little shining fire-fly in its flight, / And the immortal star in its great course” (2.1.129-31). Shortly after uttering these words, however, Cain catches his first glimpse of Hades, and curses God, proclaiming “Cursed be / He who invented life that leads to death!” (2.2.18-9). This statement is doubly problematic. First, according to Cain's comment about light and darkness, should not the presence of death render life more beautiful by comparison? Yet he explicitly rejects this argument (2.2.300-5). Secondly, as Cain curses God for creating life only to destroy it, he belies his ignorance that the path he is currently taking will ultimately lead *him* to become death, by visiting it for the first time upon the earth when he kills Abel. Later in this scene Lucifer makes it clear that it is, in fact, Cain's reason that will lead him to bring death upon the earth. He tells Cain, “It may be death that leads to the *highest* knowledge” (2.2.164), and proceeds to explain, rather syllogistically, that because death is more certain than anything else it “leads to the *surest* science” (166). That Cain's first major act after returning from Hades is to commit murder suggests that he has bought into Lucifer's argument that the attainment of the “*highest* knowledge” (164) requires the experience of death.

As Scene 2 progresses, Cain speaks a further unwitting proverb that could be used to defend God against the attacks of reason. When Lucifer challenges Cain's romantic notions of the stars, asserting that Cain has only “seen them from afar,” Cain retorts, “Distance can but diminish glory—they / When nearer must be more ineffable” (2.2.246-8). The same has often been said of God—that the closer one draws to him, the more glorious his ways appear. Again,

Cain's statement seems doubly problematic. To begin with, it is oddly based upon faith or desire, rather than any logical proof—after all he has not empirically proved this belief by observing the stars at close range for himself. Also, since Cain is now the most distant he has ever been from relationship with God his own statement renders him less fit than ever to pronounce judgement on God. As William Fitzpatrick has suggested, “[o]ne of the fundamental causes of the suffering of Cain” is that he does not “talk to God and cannot understand his relation to the world” (616). Cain is too distant from God to hope to understand him—perhaps if Cain drew nearer to God the apparent paradoxes of God would be dissolved. For this to happen either Cain needs to seek God by drawing nearer to him, or God needs to reveal himself to Cain. For those sympathetic to Cain, one of the most frustrating aspects of the play is that the latter never seems to happen. Such a reader might argue that if God is indeed all-good and all-powerful then everything would be made right if he would just reveal himself to Cain. The problem with this argument, however, is that if God is all-good and all-powerful (and thus all-knowing as well) then his refusal to directly reveal himself to Cain *must* be justified. This argument is frustrating to the rational mind, for it is like suggesting that God's all-goodness and all-powerfulness are proved by his choosing not to prove them.⁵³ There seems little doubt, however, that Adah would accept this line of thought. It is this different valuing of love and knowledge that is the difference between Adah and Cain, and it is also the reason that it is Cain, and not Adah, who is cut off from community with God and humanity at the play's close.

Since God seems to have chosen not to reveal himself to Cain, the only remaining option by which Cain could know God enough to ever love him is to draw near to him. Cain seems on the brink of grasping this problem and drawing near to God toward the end of Scene 2 when he

⁵³ In the next section I show that God does, in fact, reveal himself to Cain, though this is done through the persons of Adah and Cain, and not in the sort of theophany the reader might expect.

realizes that the disclosure he has received from Lucifer has brought him no nearer to happiness. Here he admits that God did well in prohibiting the tree of knowledge (2.2.235-6), and he also becomes aware that, having seen much in visiting Hades, he has not seen the whole picture—“show me where Jehovah dwells” (2.2.366), he demands of Lucifer. But Lucifer, of course, will not reveal God and Cain does not press the issue.

Act 3: Cain's Crime and Curse

Despite the fact that Act 2 leaves Cain uncertain about the answers given him by Lucifer, and open, perhaps for the first time, to the possibility that God's revelation could dispel his doubts, he is as abrasive as ever at the start of Act 3. In his frustration that further knowledge has not made him any happier, he proceeds to pick fights with everyone who is happy. He chastises Adah for placing their son to rest under a “gloomy” cypress tree (3.1.5-6), though he hypocritically proceeds to speak melancholy (gloomy) words to the sleeping boy; he rages against God for “flattering dust [humanity] with glimpses of / Eden and Immortality” only to resolve “It back to dust again” (3.1.70-4); and he curses his parents, exclaiming, “they sinn'd, then *let them die!*” (3.1.76). In this (terrifically misplaced) protest of his own intellectual and moral superiority Cain shows the “fruit” of his pursuit of knowledge. He is both arrogant and blind, and his protests—which at the start of the play were plausible attacks on faith—have now deteriorated into “the frightful clichés of grumbling adolescents” (Eggenschweiler 236). Cain cannot see that it is himself, and not God, who will resolve humanity “back to dust again” (3.1.70-4) by the end of the act, and he is likewise blind to the fact that he has, at least intellectually, already repeated his parents' sin by rejecting love in the pursuit of the fruit of knowledge.

Cain further proves the deterioration of his intellectual and moral status when he rails against the future atonement of Christ. When Adah suggests that perhaps one day an atonement will be made that might “redeem our race” (3.1.86), Cain retorts that no atonement can be made “By sacrificing / The harmless for the guilty” (3.1.86-7)—ironic considering he is soon to sacrifice his innocent brother. As God’s love revealed among humanity (1 Jn. 4:9), Christ represents Cain’s essential need to see and hear God—Cain’s rejection of the possibility of Christ’s atonement, then, further indicates just how lost he has become. This theoretical rejection of God’s revelation is soon followed by an act of physical rejection when Cain kills his brother, Abel, who is himself a typological symbol for Christ.

Abel soon appears and, in a rather anticlimactic manner, Cain performs the perfunctory murder of his brother. I suggest that the anticlimactic nature of this scene stems from the fact that Cain has essentially already committed it. In Act 1 he made his choice to value knowledge over love and it was at that point that he effectively “fell.” Cain chose to be the first harbinger of death on earth when he chose to place knowledge before love. The difference between him and his brother, the man of knowledge and the man of love, cannot be more clear than when Abel proclaims, “I love God far more / Than life” (3.1.315-6), immediately before Cain strikes him with a brand and kills him.

Despite the anticlimactic nature of Abel’s murder, the act is, nonetheless, significant. It is this act that “leads to the fragmentation of the human race” (Cantor 52), that seals Cain’s choice to privilege reason over love, and that rejects God’s self-revelation. In Act 2 Cain establishes his need to see God up close, yet when the suggestion of such a revelation is made by Adah, he rejects it. Now, at the play’s culmination, when Abel stands before him as a pre-figuration of Christ, Cain murders him.

That Abel is, in fact, a Christ-figure can be established by his guiltless death, as well as by his final words. Like Christ, who pleaded from the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34), the dying Abel cries out,

Oh, God! Receive thy servant, and
 Forgive his slayer, for he knew not what
 He did. (3.1.318-20)

It is also from the cross that Christ asks John to watch over his mother (Jn. 19:27). Similarly, Abel cries out,

Then may God forgive him [Cain]! Cain,
 Comfort poor Zillah:—she has but one brother
 Now. (3.1.334-6)

In the end, Cain becomes everything he hates. He hates his mother for “falling,” yet he repeats her act. He hates God for being remote, cold and unloving, yet Cain is all these things. Finally, he fears and hates death for the pall it has laid over all of his joys, yet in the end it is Cain—the one who asks Lucifer “what is death”—who becomes death by visiting it for the first time upon humanity (Michaels 76). It is at this point that an angel appears and speaks judgment on Cain. He is to have a mark upon his forehead, sealing him so that none should kill him (3.1.494-7) and, though he begs the angel to let him die, it replies “It must not be” (3.1.499).

It is significant that Byron places Cain’s judgement in the mouth of an angel for the biblical narrative portrays God as speaking it (Gen. 4:9). This highlights the distance of God from Cain, for even at his judgment God does not appear to him. Cain has already made clear his rejection of God, so perhaps God does not appear at this point out of respect for Cain’s choice, or perhaps it is simply because he knows it would make no difference to Cain anyway. Regardless

of God's reason for not appearing, however, this final scene emphasizes the fact that, despite Cain's journey to gain knowledge, he ends the story no nearer to God than he began. His newfound knowledge regarding the cosmos, death, and Hades has not granted him any clearer a picture of his Maker than he had when he began. This judgment is also important because of the angel's response to Cain's request to die—"It must not be" (3.1.499). These words suggest, as many myths and legends have it, that Cain will be unable to die. If this is true, then, just like Coleridge's *Mariner*, Cain's remaining existence is to be a wandering exile—the biblical account says that he will be "a fugitive and a vagabond" (Gen. 4:12).

Cain's petition that the angel take his life in place of his brother's shows genuine grief over Abel's death, but it does not signal any sort of repentance. Cain has no desire to change—"That which I am, I am" (3.1.509). The repetition of the words "I am" signify that Cain will suffer no other God but himself—for he is here taking the divine self-description for himself—"I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). This is a final proof that Cain has chosen solipsistically to place his faith in no one but himself.

Immediately after the judgment speech the angel bids Cain to "fulfil thy days! and be thy deeds / Unlike the last!" (3.1.517-8), but it seems clear that, while the opportunity for Cain to change his ways is yet available, he has chosen his path and will not alter it. The closing lines of the play echo this melancholy conclusion for, as Adah chooses to leave behind everything in order to keep her immediate family together with Cain, she wishes a blessing on Abel—"Peace be with him!"—to which Cain responds with the unfinished comment, "But with *me!*—" (560-1), indicating that he whose life has been without peace is not likely to find it in the days to come.

Death becomes Him

Throughout the play Cain is presented with opportunities to choose his fate. Lucifer bids him “*Choose* betwixt love and knowledge” (1.1.429; emphasis mine), Adah asks him to “*choose* love” (1.1.431; emphasis mine), and Abel twice asks him to *choose* an altar (3.1.210, 212)—to which Cain emphatically answers “I have chosen” (3.1.212). Even the angel who pronounces Cain’s judgment implies that he yet has a free will when he bids him “fulfil thy days! and be thy deeds / Unlike the last!” (3.1.517-8). With each choice, Cain reaffirms his decision to chase knowledge at the cost of love. In the end he gains much knowledge—by causing death he even learns of what Lucifer called “the *surest* science” (2.1.166). This pursuit of pure reason, however, leaves him isolated from God and from humanity; it gives him no joy and it brings him damnation. He must now go into exile without even the eventual hope of annihilation—for he now bears a mark that guarantees him safety (3.1.495). His damnation is perhaps best described by the curse his mother proclaims upon him—that “the woods / Deny thee shelter! earth a home! the dust / A grave! the sun his light! and heaven her God!” (3.1.441-3)—and it is capped by his father’s proclamation that “his spirit be his curse” (3.1.449). Though these parental curses are not uttered with the authority of the angel’s judgment, they nonetheless reflect the nature of Cain’s disconnection from Life. As a wanderer Cain will find no place of shelter; since he cannot be killed he will find no grave in the dust; and since he cannot love he will not likely find his way to God. His father’s pronouncement that his spirit is his curse invokes a sort of living hell, for if his spirit is a curse and he cannot liberate his body from his spirit (via death), then it would seem his existence is now to be one of eternal accursedness of spirit. His mother’s hellish pronouncement, “May he live in the pangs which others die with” (3.1.435), evokes a picture of undying earthly

torment—an existence eerily similar to the state of Coleridge’s Mariner who must also undergo a sort of Death-in-Life.

Ultimately Cain’s damnation is a tragic one, but it is one that he has chosen. This choice is also one which, like Eve’s decision to eat the fruit, will affect his spouse and his descendants after him. He hates his mother for condemning humans to the fate of death and, while it would seem that his pursuit of knowledge has enabled him to avoid personally dying, it has also damned him to an existence much worse than death, an existence in which he has himself become death.

At the end of the text Cain and his immediate family depart into the desolation east of Eden. Part of the great tragedy of the text is that Cain’s wife, Adah, who is the most sympathetic, loving, and pure character in the play, must suffer for Cain’s flaws. In this circumstance, however, she continues to stand in a dialectical opposition to Cain as a positive example.

Although Byron did not directly theorize about a religious imagination, as Coleridge did, “Cain” nonetheless demonstrates the need of individuals for something very similar to a Coleridgean religious imagination. Like Coleridge’s “Mariner,” “Cain” also evinces the need for reason and feeling to work together in harmony. It is not Cain’s reason that damns him; it is his single-minded pursuit of reason. In the end, it is a lack of “right” perception that keeps Cain from finding a middle ground between reason and feeling. In Act 2 he recognizes his need to see God nearer, but he responds to this need by seeking *knowledge of* God. When God is actually revealed to Cain—in Adah’s suggestion of atonement, and in the symbolic person of Abel—Cain rails against it. Like Coleridge’s Mariner, who murders the albatross because he cannot see that it is a sacrament of the divine, so too Cain murders his brother, failing to see that he likewise symbolizes the revelation of God in the phenomenal world.

Also as in Coleridge's "Mariner," the individual who fails to reconcile reason and feeling in "Cain" is characterized by a movement away from community and into isolation. Just as Coleridge portrays isolation and community as the respective consequences of wrong and right perception, so too Byron portrays community being revoked as a result of Cain's wrong decisions. Cain repeatedly chooses knowledge over love, and the result of these choices is his increasing isolation—not to mention psychological fragmentation as his reason causes him to accept intellectual contradictions.

Cain's path is the pursuit of pure knowledge, and it leads to death; Adah's path is characterised by the privileging of love before all else. Though it would seem at the end of "Cain" that both paths lead to tragedy, it is important to note that both paths require a personal choice. Cain's choice is to pursue pure knowledge. This choice leads to undying death, and if the curses of his family are to be trusted, then his fate is also that of enduring torture—of damnation. Adah's choice, on the other hand, is characterised by the privileging of love before all else—she forsakes herself and gives up her own rights in order to follow her husband into his living hell. Cain's choice is characterized by selfishness, and it leads him into increasing isolation and lovelessness. Adah's fate, though immediately similar to Cain's, is governed by the choice to remain constant to her privileging of love. Both paths lead to the desolation east of Eden, but only Adah's provides the present hope of communion with her children and with her God, as well as the eternal hope of peace beyond death. In Cain's damnation there is little but tragedy, while in Adah's there is beauty.

Chapter 4

Believing and Speaking: The Healing of Chaos in “Christabel”

“Christabel” is the first two parts of an unfinished poem Coleridge began writing in 1797. While praying outside her father’s castle one night, the poem’s eponymous heroine meets a mysterious woman named Geraldine who claims to have been abducted from her home. Christabel helps the weakened Geraldine into the castle and the two women share a bed for the night. In a scene cloaked in ambiguity, and fraught with sexual tension, Geraldine gains an apparently magical agency over Christabel and then, in Part 2, she tries to usurp Christabel’s position as beloved daughter of Sir Leoline. The poem ends with Geraldine in a position of power, while Christabel is without agency and unable to speak of Geraldine’s true nature.

Much like Byron’s “Cain” and Coleridge’s “Mariner,” “Christabel” is a poem of religious imagination. While “Mariner” is primarily concerned with a “right” perception that reconciles faith and reason by breaking down the artificial dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural, “Christabel” functions more grandly, addressing binary oppositions and disunity on universal, local, and individual (i.e., psychological) levels. Like Byron’s “Cain,” it is love that enables the movements toward unity and reconciliation in “Christabel,” while the poem’s movements toward disunity are caused by the subordination of love to individual pursuits of fulfillment. From the beginning, the narrative of “Christabel” establishes a world of disunity. Binary oppositions are prevalent, human relationships are characterised by division, and even the psyches of some major characters are fragmented. It is against these circumstances that the religious imagination emerges.

The religious imagination is depicted primarily in the characters of Christabel and the bard, Bracy. When these characters' religious imagination is operating appropriately—i.e., when they are seeing most clearly, or acting in a manner that helps others to see more clearly—the disunity of “Christabel” is healed, and unification and wholeness begin to replace the conflict and fragmentation of the poem's opening. Ultimately, however, religious imagination is thwarted—this is the true tragedy of “Christabel” in its fragmentary form. It is impossible to say where Coleridge would have taken this poem had he finished it (though many have speculated on this topic), but what is clear, is that religious imagination is prevalent, even though it is obstructed at the conclusion of Part 2.

One of the things that makes “Christabel” so interesting for discussions of imagination is that it showcases both the primary and secondary imaginations at work. While, for Coleridge, both forms of the imagination bring the individual into a co-creative relation with the divine (via individual perception,⁵⁴ or by more public creative acts, like poetry and the other arts), “Christabel” demonstrates the insufficiency of the primary imagination to accurately perceive the world without some form of exterior aid, or enlivening. Though the secondary imagination is not the only way this enlivening can be provided,⁵⁵ it is one important means by which this may occur. Religious imagination, then, refers to both the primary imagination that is enlivened to perceive the dissolution of false dichotomies, and the secondary imagination that functions to enliven the primary in this manner. In “Christabel,” the struggle of the primary imagination for

⁵⁴ Remember that, for Coleridge, the act of perception literally “creates” the reality in which an individual lives, and the primary imagination is “the living power and prime agent of all human perception” (*Biographia* Ch. 13).

⁵⁵ J. Robert Barth has argued persuasively in, *Romanticism and Transcendence*, for the importance of prayer in “Christabel” as a means of human connection with the divine. Ronald Wendling has also demonstrated that Coleridgean Reason—a blending of Feeling and Understanding that is achieved through reflection—is another important way by which the apparent opposition between phenomenal and noumenal worlds can be dissolved (161)

right perception can be observed in the character of Christabel, while the battle of the secondary imagination to enliven the primary is evident in the character of the bard, Bracy

At the start of the poem, both Christabel's and Bracy's perceptions are ignorant. They live in a world characterized by disunity, yet neither one seems to perceive this problem. This changes as the poem unfolds but, as in "Mariner" where a change in perception has to be accompanied by a confession of that change (e.g., the blessing of the water snakes), and in "Cain" where the title character needs not just to assent intellectually to love's importance, but to act according to it, so too a mere change in perception is not enough for Christabel or Bracy. The emergence of religious imagination in these two characters, then, is characterized first by a change in their perception, but then is consummated by the confession or action in accordance with that new perception. Interestingly, this pattern also follows the biblical formula for salvation—which requires that individuals believe in their hearts *and* confess with their mouths (Rm 10:9). Every time Christabel and Bracy act in accordance with these dictates of the religious imagination the result is either the movement toward, or the potential for the movement toward, unity.

Despite the prominence of the imagination in "Christabel," the poem is not merely a poem about imagination. For Coleridge, the imagination does not exist simply to celebrate itself, rather, its purpose is always to point to something else.⁵⁶ As the imagination is, by definition, religious, it should not be surprising that its object in "Christabel" is spiritual in nature. Many commentators have noted that the poem is, at some level, a *psychomachia*—a battle for the soul of Christabel. As Virginia Radley so helpfully demonstrated in her classic essay, early readings

⁵⁶ As I argued in my introduction, the purpose of the imagination is not creation—not even poetic creation—but rather to use creative acts as a means by which to draw the individual into universal oneness and divine community.

of “Christabel” tended to fall into one of two categories: 1) a logical reading characterised by a symbolic approach that views the poem as fitting within the genre of medieval ballad or tale of horror; and 2) a psycho-sexual reading, which tends to read the text as autobiographical of Coleridge’s struggles with guilt and sexuality (532). Though quite different in approach, both readings posit Geraldine as a corrupting influence upon Christabel. While more recent scholarship has attempted to move away from these traditional readings, it is still common to see Geraldine as representing something sinister and evil.⁵⁷

My interpretation follows in the tradition of Ulmer and Cooper in that I see Geraldine as representing Original Sin. While I am convinced that “Christabel” “works assiduously to identify its protagonist with Original Sin” (Ulmer 380), however, my reading differs from most in this tradition on one important point: the purpose and meaning of the “bedroom scene.” My reading understands this scene as both beautiful and terrible. The sexual union of Geraldine and Christabel represents a unification of the latter’s psyche—it is her admission, to herself, of her whole being (which is a mixture of sin and innocence). This “admission of guilt” is the first emergence of religious imagination, for it is here that Christabel begins to perceive herself correctly.

In this chapter, then, I examine the function of religious imagination and the meaning to which it points in “Christabel.” I begin by establishing that the world in which “Christabel” takes place is, indeed, a world of disunity. I then discuss how the religious imagination functions

⁵⁷ For example, William Ulmer asserts that the poem “dramatizes Coleridge’s Unitarian understanding of Original Sin. . .” (377), and Andrew Cooper similarly suggests that Geraldine “is like Original Sin” in that she represents “the opportunity for sinning” (89-90). Paul Magnuson calls Geraldine “Imagination disconnected from the good” (100), and Andrew Elfenbein refers to the bedroom scene between Christabel and Geraldine as an event “so burdened with sublime horror that it cannot even be spoken” (177). The most common deviation from this view is the psycho-sexual reading that posits Geraldine as representing repressed desire. Even in this reading, however, Geraldine at least represents the *perception* of something sinister or evil—for why else would Christabel be so horrified by her union with Geraldine in the bedroom scene?

through perception and confession to effect the movement toward unity. To do this I discuss Christabel's self-revelation as an example of the primary imagination at work, and Bracy's general revelation as representing the work of the secondary imagination. Finally, I examine these characters' confession (or lack thereof) of their respective revelations as the culmination of their religious experience (the equivalent to the Mariner's "snake-blessing"). Ultimately, it is clear that, though the religious imagination is thwarted at the close of this fragment, it is, nonetheless, at work throughout, seeking to reconcile false dichotomies, heal human division, and make whole the fragmented psyche.

A World of Chaos

Though exacerbated by the poem's being split neatly into two parts, it is difficult not to notice the stark rendering of binary oppositions in "Christabel." The poem, as a whole, has been noted as being split between night/day, nature/city, and male/female worlds. Similarly, the first part of the poem seems to portray a clear divide between the protected city and the dangerous woods; the natural and supernatural; the holy and unholy; and even between dreaming and waking. What is interesting about all of these dichotomies is how, upon closer examination, each of them breaks down. Though the city is well defended against armies (1.127-8), Geraldine has no trouble penetrating its fortifications. Though there seems to be a clear divide between the natural and supernatural, an unreliable narrator and ambiguous narration blur these lines—is Geraldine carried over the threshold because she is some sort of evil creature, or is she just weak? Does the ghost of Christabel's mother actually haunt the castle, or is her presence only felt *psychologically* (and if so, does this make her any less real)? Does the fire leap up (1.158-9) because of Geraldine's supernatural character, or is it merely affected by the breeze of her passing?

Similarly, while it seems easy to define Geraldine as evil, why is it that she demonstrates moments of concern for Christabel (l 227-32, l 255-9)?⁵⁸ Even the states of dreaming and waking, which appear clearly delineated (Bracy dreams his vision, Christabel goes to sleep after her sexual encounter with Geraldine then awakes in the morning), are ultimately unclear—as is demonstrated, for example, by Paul Magnuson’s reading of the text which sees the entire first part as a dream⁵⁹

This sort of dissolution of apparent binary oppositions is a common theme in Coleridge’s writings and, as already discussed, an important part of “Mariner.” Such oppositions portray two poles in conflict. Coleridge always sought the dissolution of oppositions by a right perception which sees opposites as interpenetrating poles. Where binary oppositions embody conflict, interpenetration depicts unity. This is precisely how religious imagination functions—“It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create, or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify” (*Biographia* Ch. 13)—it breaks down in order to unify. This same logic is at work in “Christabel,” and is most evident in Coleridge’s employment of a patently untrustworthy narrator.

The narrative of “Christabel” is cloaked in ambiguities, with a speaker who often contradicts him or herself. The narrator is, in many ways, the epitome of flawed human perception (not false or bad per se, but corrupted and untrustworthy). It should come as no surprise when the narrator’s repeated assertions and portrayals of apparently solid binary oppositions fall apart upon closer examination. The message communicated by this

⁵⁸ Radley notes these moments of concern and, though she sees Geraldine as having “obviously been commissioned to pervert the goodness of Christabel” (540), she nonetheless asserts that these passages show Geraldine as “a creature capable of love as well as of evil” (541).

⁵⁹ In “Coleridge’s Nightmare Poetry” Paul Magnuson suggests that the entire first part is only a dream, and that Geraldine does not become real until after her bedroom encounter with Christabel.

untrustworthy narrator is that things are not as they appear. In the poem's opening the world appears to be governed by binary oppositions, but by the power of reflection (which Coleridge considered an important aid in attaining right perception) it is clear that things are not as they seem.

The sense of disunity in the world of "Christabel" is further heightened by the sense of division or conflict that characterizes most human relationships in the poem. Regardless of how the relationship between Christabel and Geraldine is interpreted, the majority of critical readings permit that there is a conflict between these women. Likewise, Sir Leoline and Lord Roland are divided by a conflict in their past. Though Christabel's mother seems always to be with her (as a guardian spirit), the two women have been separated since Christabel's birth when her mother died. Many critics have noticed a power play between Geraldine and Leoline that suggests the conflict between masculine and feminine worlds, and there also seems to be a separation between Leoline and his daughter—which can be seen in the former's harsh words to Christabel in Part 2, but is also hinted at by the way that Christabel sneaks in and out of the castle, not wanting to wake him up (1. 164-5). Even Bracy finds himself in conflict as Leoline obstructs him from acting on the strange dream he had the night before (2. 650-2).

While the world of "Christabel" is characterized by division and disunity, perhaps the more striking disunity of the poem is that of Christabel herself. As I have already suggested, my reading asserts Geraldine as a figure of Original Sin, and Christabel as a figure for innocence.⁶⁰ These are not pure categories, however, as with most binary oppositions in the poem this one also breaks down upon closer examination. As William Ulmer has commented, Christabel's

⁶⁰ The separation of Christabel and Geraldine at the start of the text could be said to be a product of their fathers' feud. This becomes especially relevant to any reading of Geraldine as a symbol of Original Sin for, just as Original Sin was inherited from the "first father" (Adam), so too Geraldine, as Original Sin, is an enemy bequeathed to Christabel by her father.

moral state is that of “predominant virtue tainted by sin,” while Geraldine, as Christabel’s double, is that of “predominant evil qualified by a residual good” (388). If Geraldine is a purely evil character, then why is she strengthened when she drinks Christabel’s wine (an act commonly associated with the Eucharistic element) (1.220-3)? Why must she pray before joining Christabel in bed (1.233-4)? Why does she hesitate with “a stricken look” before going to bed (1.255-63)? And why is she portrayed as sleeping peacefully with Christabel as “a mother with her child” (1.300-1)? At the same time, as many critics have wondered, why would the “pure,” innocent Christabel be outside the castle at midnight under a full moon? And why is she so secretive when bringing Geraldine into the castle (1.164-71)?

The breaking down of the sin/innocence dichotomy is a somewhat troubling one for, while most readings of the sexual encounter between these two women see something terrible in the scene, the fact that it dissolves their binary positions and brings unity⁶¹ suggests that perhaps this scene is not all bad. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that the bedroom encounter is framed as a wedding night—with Christabel carrying Geraldine across the threshold (1.129-34), with the explicit mention of wedding bells (1.200-1), with Geraldine clothed (like a bride?) in white, and with the taking of the Eucharist (1.190-3, 220-3) (a common part of a marriage ceremony in both Anglican and Catholic traditions). This marital framing is an important complicating factor when considering traditional views of the bedroom scene as Christabel’s “falling” into sin. This is especially true when one considers how positively Coleridge generally portrayed the dissolution of binary terms, and then considers that the wedding night is

⁶¹ This is further evinced by the fact that Christabel and Geraldine become more and more alike beginning in the morning after their sexual encounter. For example, Christabel assumes serpentine qualities that were earlier attributed only to Geraldine, while Geraldine takes on some of Christabel’s innocent appearance

traditionally viewed as the point at which two become one—“a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gn. 2:24).

I suggest that the portrayal of the sexual encounter in “Christabel” as having elements that are both grotesque and beautiful is representative of the fact that, for Coleridge, the human soul is an admixture of the grotesque to the beautiful. Yes, there is something horrible and dark about Geraldine, but if she represents Original Sin, then she represents the fact that there is something horrible and dark in all of humanity. The union of the two, then, does not represent the tragic fall of Christabel, but rather an admission that she has already fallen—for, as Andrew Cooper has suggested, Geraldine is the sin that “is always already there” (90). Their union represents not that fall of innocence, but the troublesome interpenetration of sinfulness and innocence within the human soul.

From this point on, the two women are altered. Where Christabel earlier carried herself with the boldness and naivety of one who believed herself to be innocent, and Geraldine was the serpentine maiden who often collapsed from weakness, things change drastically in Part 2. Here both women portray serpentine qualities (2.459, 583, 591), and Christabel is now the one whose countenance sways from smiling, to trance-like, to panicked. Although sin and innocence have both always been a part of Christabel’s character, the sexual encounter with Geraldine marks the moment when that reality first becomes apparent to Christabel. She is horrified by this revelation (as attested to by her repeated prayers for forgiveness), and her sense of guilt strikes her mute. While by all accounts this would seem a tragic turn of events, it is actually a positive move. By bringing the disparate parts of her nature together, Christabel is at last in a position to do something about it. Although it appears horrible, the union is really just the actualization of what was already true. Christabel is at last seeing with a right perception.

Two Imaginations

One of the most fascinating aspects of “Christabel” is that it is one of the few places in Coleridge’s work where both the primary and secondary imagination are so nakedly portrayed as operating side by side. Christabel exemplifies the primary imagination, for it is her perception that gives shape to and creates the world around her. Whether one sees Part 1 as a dream sequence or reality, then, becomes immaterial, for in both readings Christabel gains the perception (of herself as both innocence and sinfulness) that precipitates her awakening in Part 2 as a whole being. While her perception of herself has changed, however, her sight is not yet fully right. At this point she is like the Mariner who, finally able to see the supernatural interpenetrating with the natural, had not yet learned to love the reality he so recently learned to see. Similarly, Christabel can now see the sinful part of her nature, yet she has not learned to love the whole self of which sin is a part.⁶² Like Cain, who loved only that which fit into his understanding of “goodness,” Christabel is unable to love that part of herself that is associated with evil.

The result of Christabel’s inability to love her whole self is that, even though she is newly unified, she is mastered by her sinful nature. It is Geraldine who now controls her power of

⁶² At the time of his writing of “Christabel,” Coleridge’s beliefs regarding Original Sin were a sort of blend of Orthodox and Unitarian views. Though he did not accept the idea of hereditary guilt as expressed by the Church of England, he also could not entirely agree with Joseph Priestley’s optimistic, Unitarian view of human nature. In a letter written during this period, Coleridge writes:

Of GUILT I say nothing, but I believe most steadfastly in Original Sin, that from our mothers’ wombs our understandings are darkened, and even where our understandings are in the Light, that our organization is depraved, & our volitions imperfect, and we sometimes see the good without *wishing* to attain it, and oftener *wish* it without the energy that wills & performs—And for this inherent depravity, I believe, that the *Spirit* of the Gospel is the sole cure (*Letters* 1:396)

The unified Christabel represents this view of the human soul. She is imperfect—her understanding “darkened”—yet she is also guiltless. According to this view, her whole self (sin and all) is worthy of love, even though it still needs the perfecting—“the sole cure”—that is provided by “the *Spirit* of the Gospel.”

speech (as I will discuss further in the next section) (2.620), and all of Christabel's energies are now given not to gaining mastery over the part of herself that she seems to hate, but instead to trying to divide herself once more by having Geraldine sent away (2.616-7). This desire to have Geraldine exiled from herself should be understood in a negative light. This is made clear by the fact that the acceptance of Christabel's plea would work against the unifying movement of the entire poem. If Geraldine were sent away, Christabel would be rejecting an essential part of herself, and the restoration of her father's relationship with Lord Roland (which is the *original* sin of the poem) would be sabotaged.

Much like the Mariner, who needed both to see the natural and supernatural interpenetrating, as well as to love that interpenetration, so too Christabel needs to see the divinity and dust (the innocence and sinfulness) that make up her nature and love it. It was love and charity toward Geraldine that first began the poem's movement toward unity. This movement continues at the start of Part 2, when Leoline, inspired by the sight of his daughter and his old friend's daughter together, extends a gesture of love and charity to Geraldine. It would seem that this gesture is calculated to bridge the gap between Leoline and Roland who, though once good friends, now stand "aloof, the scars remaining, / Like cliffs which had been rent asunder" (2.421-2).

In Part 2, Leoline speaks a number of parables that seem to describe curses accrued by individuals divided from human community. Separated from his old friend by a feud, and from his wife by death, Leoline states that consciousness is a form of death—the morning prayer bell "Knells us back to a world of death" (2.332)—and that disunity breeds madness—"to be wroth with one we love, / Doth work like madness in the brain" (2.412-3). Both of these "curses" work upon Christabel as she seeks to separate herself from Geraldine. Part 2 begins with a sort of

symbolic awakening into a world of death for Christabel. It is Geraldine who wakes her just after the matins bells and, as a figure for Original Sin, she is also intimately tied to death.⁶³ Likewise, as Christabel struggles against her recent union with Geraldine, she seems to have become infected by a sort of madness. She swings violently between moods, sees a strange vision of Geraldine, and is even heard hissing at a number of points. Just the previous night it was Christabel who showed love and charity to Geraldine. It was Christabel who asked Geraldine to join her for the night (1.120); it was Christabel who carried Geraldine—groom-like—across the threshold (1.130-2); and it was Christabel who offered the sacramental wine to Geraldine (1.190-3). When Christabel acted out of love, she found herself in the position of authority in the relationship; however, when she acts out of shame or disgust toward Geraldine she finds herself powerless and driven toward madness.

In Part 1, the primary religious imagination is evident in Christabel, working to bring unity, and to dissolve oppositions through love. When that love is revoked, the imagination is bound and the movement toward unity is halted. A similar progression can be observed in Bard Bracy in Part 2. He too has his perception altered in a manner that drives the narrative toward unity and, like Christabel, his imagination is also thwarted.

It is the secondary imagination that is present in the figure of Bracy, and which first becomes evident when he recounts his vision of the entangled dove and serpent—a symbol he interprets as representing Christabel and Geraldine. That his imaginative experience is different from Christabel's, and that it is representative of the secondary imagination, is evinced in a number of ways. While Christabel's imagination is manifested in her direct perception of the

⁶³ That death is a consequence of the Original Sin is a common biblical precept—"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rm. 5:12).

world around her, Bracy's perception is mediated by a dream—a representation secondary to direct conscious experience. That his dream presciently portrays the union of Christabel and Geraldine (for he wakes from the dream just as the action of Part 1 is beginning, and thus before it has taken place [2 555]) seems to suggest that there is more to this vision than just primary human perception—perhaps an element of divine inspiration or poetic genius? Finally, Bracy's imaginative perception differs from Christabel's in its expression. Where Christabel's self-revelation changes the way that she sees the world, Bracy's "revelation" has a public, rather than personal, expression, his vision is a message to the larger community, not just a revelation for himself. In many ways, the bard Bracy is a Romantic poet.⁶⁴

Much like the Romantic poet, Bracy receives a vision of uncommon revelatory insight, which he is charged to share with the wider community via an artistic mode (i.e., playing his harp), for the general benefit of that community (i.e., revealing Geraldine's true nature, and ridding the woods of evil [2 528-54]). While my delineation between primary and secondary imaginations is largely in keeping with the criticism of Thomas McFarland, my interpretation differs from his on one important point.⁶⁵ While McFarland admits that theological concerns were of utmost importance to Coleridge (*Originality* 96-8), he sees the imagination as subsuming the place of the soul in scholarly discourse during the Romantic period (ix-xi). My reading of "Christabel," far from replacing the soul with a secular conception of the imagination, suggests that the imagination functions to *clarify* the nature of the soul. Thus Christabel's right perception revolves around her revelation of the true nature of her soul. Similarly, Bracy's vision should be

⁶⁴ The bard was an important poetic figure for many of the English Romantics (See Blake's "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*) and, Coleridge even referred to himself as a bard ("Songs of the Pixies" 36).

⁶⁵ For more on my agreement and disagreement with McFarland see the Introduction, page 7.

read as a revelation of the nature of Christabel's soul—and not as a warning that Geraldine should be expelled as most interpretations have suggested.

Bracy's dream has often been interpreted as having some sort of moral imperative—that it warns of Geraldine's true nature and thus insists on the need for her to be expelled from the castle. But what if the dream is not about moral imperatives but is actually an imaginative vision whose purpose is simply to reveal the truth? The dream features a troubled dove with a serpent "Coiled around its wings and neck" (2.549-50). After telling of the dream, Bracy asserts that he has vowed to go to the forest, "With music strong and saintly song . . . Lest aught unholy loiter there" (2.561-3). It is easy to see how these circumstances lead to the moral imperative interpretation mentioned above. However, if Bracy's dream is, indeed, to be identified with the imagination, then its primary purpose must be concerned with perception, and only secondarily with moral action. The dream, then, represents a true vision of the character of Christabel. But this is where many interpretations err, for they assume a simple interpretation that associates the snake with Lucifer and/or fallenness, and the dove with innocence. While this interpretation is not without merit, it should be noted that the Bible (the source of the above associations) presents a more complex picture of serpents and doves than those allowed by these interpretations.

Perhaps the best case in point is in the Gospel of Matthew, where Christ states, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16). Two important things should be noted here: first, Christ actually exhorts the disciples to be like snakes; and second, the reason for this exhortation is the fact that the disciples are going into a world filled with wolves. In a perfect world, this snake-like quality (often translated as "shrewd" rather than "wise") would not be necessary; however, because the world

is a fallen one, both dove- and snake-like qualities are required. It should also be noted that the dove is not always a good creature in the Bible. For example, Hosea decries the tribe of Ephraim, claiming that it “is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless” (Hs. 7:11). The bearing of this upon the text of “Christabel” is simple: Christabel’s soul is in actuality both dove- and snake-like. While this may distress her (as it does the dove in the vision), the answer is not for some external force (like her father or Bard Bracy) to cast away the snake—which would likely kill the dove—but is, rather, for the dove to gain sufficient agency so that it is not overmastered by the snake.

Confessions and Prayers of Hope

J. Robert Barth writes that although “much of [*Christabel*] portrays ‘a world of death,’ it is more about love than about death . . . its underlying current is love and its movement is toward union” (*Romanticism* 108). Working from Barth’s premise, William Ulmer suggests that a fundamental part of Geraldine’s character “is her power to block and frustrate love” (377) and, by extension, to frustrate this movement toward unity. This would certainly seem to be the case at the close of Part 1. The poem’s first act of unification occurs in the “marriage” of Christabel and Geraldine, but the latter frustrates this act by binding the speech of the former (1.267-78). It is precisely the binding of speech—for both Christabel and Bracy—that renders the religious imagination impotent at the close of Part 2. This binding of speech is especially important when one considers Coleridge’s explicit link between the imagination and the divine creative act—an act the Bible ascribes to God’s having “spoke[n]” the world “into being” (Ps. 33:9).

The link between the imagination and speaking is evoked in “Christabel” by the restriction of speech which is placed upon the two characters associated with imagination.

Geraldine places Christabel under a spell which prohibits her from speaking about the true nature of their encounter the night before (1.271-8). Bracy is doubly silenced, for not only is he restricted from singing his song in the woods, but his confession of the vision is also rendered impotent by Leoline's failure to fully listen—an action which results in Leoline's reversing the dream's meaning and mistaking Geraldine for the dove. While the poem's "underlying current is love and its movement is toward union" (Barth, *Romanticism* 108), the fragment ends with love and union obstructed. Though the presence of religious imagination starts a movement toward love and unity early in the text, this movement is halted by the restriction of creative speech.

In its unfinished form, "Christabel" ends in a state of tragedy. Imagination is silenced, and all power seems to rest in the hands of the silencer. The lord of the castle, Leoline, lacks right perception and has not submitted himself to the voice of the poet or to the individual of imagination, his daughter.⁶⁶ The fragment ends with Leoline as the only one speaking. He chastises, and then "turns from[,] his own sweet maid" (2.653), enacting the disunification of their family. At the same time he orders Bracy on a mission to go to Lord Roland, thus reaffirming his decision to restrict the bard from singing his song in the nearby forest. The only thing that could be perceived as a movement toward unity here is Leoline's leading of Geraldine away from the throne room; however, this movement also creates disunity, for it requires the division of Christabel and Geraldine.

Her speech prohibited, Christabel is utterly "reduced to passivity" (Magnuson 94), and Bracy's state seems no better. At this point, it would seem that "Christabel" truly is "Coleridge's

⁶⁶ Coleridge's works during this period often parodied and critiqued the government, and it seems likely that Leoline functions as this sort of critique of the English government. Not only does his position of power in the text make him a fitting symbol of political power, but also, the dual reference to a lion in his name seems to be a reference to a particularly British power (Leo being Latin for "lion," and "line" being phonetically similar to "lion")

darkest account of a human soul's powerlessness to resist the forces of evil arrayed against it" (Ulmer 399). Yet it is important to remember that the poem is not finished. Coleridge's notebooks and repeated testimony show that he always intended to finish the poem. Thus it should be kept in mind that the silencing of imagination is not the ultimate end of "Christabel," but rather the poem's central problem to be resolved. The poem is an allegory of imagination and, as the imagination is that which "enables the divine and the human to 'interpenetrate'" (Barth, *Romanticism* 118), it should be noted that Christabel and Bracy are not alone. While the close of Part 2 portrays the "human soul's powerlessness," Christabel and Bracy have both demonstrated that they are not entirely reliant upon their human souls alone. Christabel has demonstrated this by her constant state of prayer (a state that continues even after her union with Geraldine), and Bracy's reliance upon a higher power is demonstrated by the prescient nature of his dream vision.

Some might consider Christabel damned, for she has been reduced to utter passivity, madness seems to be claiming her and, as the poem will never be finished, it would seem that her fate is to dwell in this state forever. Nonetheless, I agree with Barth that prayer functions in "Christabel" as the sign that hope is not lost—for characters can only pray for that which they believe can still happen. Thus, it is important to note that Christabel continues to pray during Part 2 and that, even when she cannot pray (as when the trance overtakes her [581-613]), the narrator prays for her—"Jesu Maria, shield her well!" (2.582). Immediately upon being released from the trance, she "Paused awhile, and inly prayed" (2.614) and, just a few lines later, the narrator invokes the prayers of Christabel's mother for her child (2.628-33). Thus, even as the poem reaches its darkest moments, the prayers surrounding Christabel reach their zenith of intensity, suggesting that hope remains, and that there yet persists the possibility of Christabel's being

freed or strengthened by a higher power. “Christabel” may end with the poem’s figure of political power ensuring Original Sin safe passage through the forest, but the poem does not end without hope. There remain individuals of imagination whose strength rests in a power greater than themselves.

Chapter 5

Dead Men Walking: The Curse and Crime of Cain in “The Giaour” and “Manfred”

“[L]ook—’tis written on my brow! / There read of Cain the curse and crime” (Byron, “The Giaour” 1057-8).

“I do not know what to believe—or what to disbelieve—which is the devil—to have no religion at all—all sense and senses are against it—but all belief and much evidence is for it” [1817 in a letter to Hobhouse] (Byron, Letters 5:212)

Both “The Giaour” and “Manfred” have proven resistant to critical interpretation. Few agree on the nature of the protagonists’ problems, or whether their deaths mark ultimate victory or defeat, and there has even been considerable scholarly doubt as to the critical quality of these texts.⁶⁷ I do not pretend to offer *the* explanation for either of these poems, but I suggest that critical understanding of these poems can be greatly aided by a closer look at the underlying myth of both “The Giaour” and “Manfred”—the story of Cain. Both of these poems’ eponymous protagonists are clearly labelled in their texts as having committed the crime of Cain, and both also suffer under his curse. In many ways, “The Giaour” and “Manfred” pick up where the biblical narrative of Cain leaves off: the fallen murderer is in exile, but he has been marked by God so that no one can harm him. These similarities, in themselves, would not be enough to

⁶⁷ For example, William Marshall’s analysis of the accretive structure of “The Giaour” criticizes many of the poem’s additions and even refers to the final discussion between the Giaour and the monk as “a rather pointless sequence” (509). Similarly, Andrew Rutherford writes critically of “Manfred” characterizing it—and “Cain” along with it—as “blundering frontal assaults” on “Orthodoxy” (92).

press the comparison, except that direct and indirect allusions to Cain, his curse, and his crime are present throughout these texts.

“The Giaour” and “Manfred” both depict the post-exile lives of Cain-figures, and follow these men through to the end of their mortal existences. Considering the importance of the Cain myth to these poems, it is significant that Byron later wrote his own account of the biblical narrative of Cain. This is especially notable when one considers the twists that Byron added to the biblical text. Where the biblical Cain disobeyed God and then killed his brother out of jealousy, Byron’s Cain is much more fleshed out, with more carefully delineated motives than his archetype. Since the Giaour and Manfred are depicted as sharing such close affinity with Cain, it will be helpful to note how their experience compares to the curse and crime of Cain as depicted in Byron’s account of the biblical antihero.

As I have already discussed in Chapter 3, the sin of Byron’s Cain is his refusal to privilege love over his pursuit of knowledge. Though Byron’s Cain claims to love other characters in the text (specifically his wife and son) and demonstrates a strong emotional concern for some (as he does for Abel after striking the mortal wound, or for his son when he is placed under a cypress tree), his love is always limited by his desire for freedom. Cain may *feel* love, but he refuses to submit to it. Whenever love places limits on his freedom, he rejects love. This is, ultimately, why he is exiled: he will not offer a pleasing sacrifice to God because it would impinge on his freedom to choose his own sacrifice; he will not stay with Adah when she pleads with him, because it would impede his freedom to pursue knowledge.

Like Cain, the fatal flaw of the Giaour and Manfred is their inability to “truly” love—that is, to submit to the needs and wants of another. Because the past love affairs of these men are clouded in ambiguity, it would be impossible to evaluate their past ability to truly love; however,

an analysis of the Giaour's and Manfred's ability to love, as it is portrayed in their respective texts, yields some interesting results. At the beginning of "The Giaour" and "Manfred," the only objects of the protagonists' love are those who are already dead—and thus can make no demands of them. When Manfred's love for the deceased Astarte actually does require something of him (when the Witch of the Alps demands his worship in exchange for a possible meeting with Astarte [2.2.155-60]) he refuses to submit because of the imposition this would make upon his freedom.⁶⁸ Besides sharing Cain's fatal flaw of being unable truly to love, a further similarity to "Cain" can be found in the nature of these protagonists' curse. Byron's Cain is exiled from human and divine community, and he even finds himself at odds with the natural world—"Now art thou / Cursed from the earth" (3.1.471-2). Similarly, the sufferings of the Giaour and Manfred amount to an exile from communion with the divine, the human, and the natural worlds. The curses of Eve in Byron's "Cain" are particularly apt to describe the lives of the Giaour and Manfred, and I explore these similarities further on.

By examining the curse and crime of Cain in Byron's version of the biblical narrative, much light can be shed on the nature of the sufferings and eventual deaths of the Giaour and of Manfred. While this study alone would be worth pursuing, however, it would be incomplete if it did not address the psychological aspects of these texts—and particularly of "Manfred." Both texts have been noted for the manner in which the male protagonists internalize an idealized version of their deceased lovers. In many ways, these lost loves become fractured halves of the Giaour's and Manfred's psyches. This fracturing is closely tied to the failure of religious imagination—which is characterized by its movement toward unity rather than fragmentation. To

⁶⁸ This deviation from the Faust myth—Manfred's refusal to make a pact with the devil—has been oft noted as an important element of "Manfred's" originality (Chew 79)

better understand this failure, reference to “Cain” will, again, be instructive, as will some comparison to Coleridge’s “Christabel.” In the latter, love always functions to bring unity, and the frustration of love results in fragmentation. As discussed in Chapter 4 this disunity is epitomized in the fragmentation of Christabel’s psyche. Byron’s poems signal a similar trend only with a twist. As in “Christabel,” these poems portray the absence or abuse of love as resulting in disunity and destruction, as well as in the fracturing of the protagonists’ psyches. Where Christabel is the good-half, trying to deny the existence of her “darker side,” however, Manfred and the Giaour are the opposite: they are the “darker halves” who have excised the good (by placing all goodness in the unobtainable ideal of their dead lovers), making it impossible for them to do, or be, good.

Ultimately, Byron’s “The Giaour” and “Manfred” end with the same question as “Cain”: is there hope for the fallen? By reading these texts as post-exile continuations of the Cain myth that end in the death of their protagonists, it would seem that the answer to this question is negative; nonetheless, both works do contain threads of hope. Both protagonists are eventually reunited with their other halves. Also, just before their deaths, they seem to find some form of earthly solace and a small degree of human community—the very things that have evaded them all of their lives. Could it be that they have found redemption prior to death and that death is, in fact, a unifying experience? Perhaps. But it could just as easily be true that the poems end in the deluded destruction of the protagonists—perhaps it is only their much-attested “madnesses” that make them think they are going to their lovers in death. Ultimately, Byron remains sceptical about redemption and damnation: he is unwilling to affirm anything about the final destinations of his protagonists. As with “Cain,” however, Byron does affirm the power and necessity of love, as well as the damning effects of love lost or abused.

The Curse of Cain

Though “Cain” was not written until four years after “Manfred”—and thus eight years after “The Giaour”—it is useful for understanding these earlier poems because of the way it incorporates and adds to the Byronic Cain myth that develops in these earlier poems. The curse of Cain, as it appears in Byron’s version of the story, can be broadly categorized as a loss of community with the divine, human, and natural worlds.⁶⁹ This curse is made evident in “Cain” via two main iterations: the curse spoken by the angel of God, and the curse spoken by Cain’s mother, Eve.

The angel’s curse highlights Cain’s loss of communion with humanity and nature. It is the angel who proclaims that the agriculturist, Cain, is now “Cursed from the earth,” that the ground will no longer “Yield [to Cain] its strength” (3.1.472, 474-5). The angel’s curse then places Cain at odds with the rest of humanity by proclaiming “a fugitive shalt thou / Be from this day, and vagabond on the earth!” (3.1.475-6). Additionally, the angel suggests that Cain’s own son will one day wish to kill his father (3.1.480-92). This parricide is prevented, however, by the final aspect of the curse, the mark of Cain, which is placed upon his brow “so that he may go forth in safety” (3.1.495). Men may hate him, but they will not be allowed to kill him. Although there is no explicit mention of a loss of divine communion here, it should be noted that, by virtue of Cain’s judgement coming from the mouth of an angel rather than God (as the biblical account has it), the play implicitly suggests that Cain has been isolated from God.

Eve’s curse is not spoken with the authority of the angel’s curse, and because “Cain” ends shortly after her speaking the curse, it remains unclear whether it actually takes effect in

⁶⁹ For further discussion of the three-fold nature of Cain’s curse, see Chapter 3.

Cain's life. Nonetheless, Eve's imprecations against her son bear considerable similarity to the curses of the angel:

May the grass wither from thy feet! the woods

Deny thee shelter! earth a home! the dust

A grave! the sun his light! and heaven her God! (3.1.441-3)

Eve's curse is expressed primarily through the language of exile from the natural world.

Nonetheless, there is also, clearly, an element of exile from the divine (3.1.443), and implicit in Eve's denial of "a home" to her son is an exile from human community. Her request that the dust deny Cain a grave (3.1.442-3) could be read as a further estrangement of Cain from the earth, but it could also be seen as a curse of immortality—that Cain should "live in the pangs which others die with!" (3.1.435), and be unable to escape his torture through death. This three-fold curse of exile represents a reversal of the benefits of religious imagination—which is characterized by movement toward unity and community. This curse is also directly linked to the sufferings of the Giaour and of Manfred.

"The Giaour" opens with a eulogy for a lost Greece. Like a corpse which yet retains its beauty, the Greek isles are depicted as "Edens of the eastern wave" (15) that have been despoiled by humans who have "mar[red] [them] into wilderness" (51). Like Cain—the gardener exiled into a wilderness—the Giaour inhabits a post-Edenic Greece that has become a wilderness. But it was not always this way. Near the end of the text, the Giaour hints at his past, revealing his adulterous affair with Leila, an Arabic beauty who was married to the Muslim lord, Hassan. For this forbidden love, Leila is thrown from a cliff into the ocean, and the Giaour bears the guilt of knowing that she died for him (1035). In revenge, the Giaour lays an ambush for Hassan and his men, and kills all but one who is allowed to flee so that he might tell of Hassan's death. Despite

attaining his revenge, the Giaour remains discontented. He spends the last of his days in a monastery where he does not participate in the religious rites, but is allowed to stay on the premises because of his considerable donation to the monastic order (816-7). Before his death, the Giaour tells his story to one of the monks, and it is here that the Giaour's affinity to Cain becomes apparent. The Giaour himself tells the monk to "look—'tis written on my brow! / There read of Cain the curse and crime" (1057-8). He speaks twice of a burning of his brow (1261-2, 1312-3)—remember that Cain's mark is also accompanied with a burning sensation ("Cain" 3.1.500)—, and the monk explains that the Giaour is "mark'd . . . As death were stamped upon his brow" ("Giaour" 794-7).

Besides this explicit comparison to Cain, the Giaour is further linked to Byron's version of the biblical fratricide by his own curse. After the Giaour has wreaked revenge upon Hassan, the Ottoman narrator curses the Giaour to spend eternity in the Palace of Darkness (750), but before that, he is cursed to be sent to earth as a vampire (756). In this existence, he will be damned to suck the blood of his "daughter, sister, wife," and also of the "most below'd of all" who blesses him "with a *father's* name" (759, 768-9). This curse is a curious one. As one of the earliest mentions of the word "vampire" in English literature, this passage has received considerable attention, yet, within its own narrative it seems strangely disconnected from the text. As far as one can tell, the poem ends without fulfillment of this curse, and the text does not refer to the curse again after this point. As the final recorded utterance of the fisherman narrator, however, the curse is given considerable prominence within the poem, and thus deserves closer attention. The curse can be clearly divided into two parts. The first speaks of the eternal separation of the Giaour from God—though in this case, a Muslim rather than Christian conception of God. This is depicted in the narrator's mention of an eternal damnation in which

the Giaour will “writhe / Beneath avenging Monkir’s scythe” (747-8)⁷⁰ and wander lost in the Palace of Darkness (750). The second part of the curse depicts the ultimate example of a lost communion with humanity, for the Giaour is sentenced to kill those humans who are closest to him. Although this curse only bears passing similarity to the curse of Cain, the manner in which the curse is fulfilled in the text makes its connection to Cain’s curse undeniable.

Although it is possible that the Ottoman’s curse is eschatological in nature, and thus not to take place until after the events depicted in the text, I think this curse is better understood as a poetic description of the Giaour’s mortal existence from the point the curse is spoken, onward. The Giaour’s curse of separation from human community is depicted in that, after achieving his revenge, the Giaour withdraws to a monastery—a place of isolation from the wider world—where he lives among, but does not participate in the daily life of, the monks (802-3). The vampire curse has already come true in the Giaour’s relationship with Leila—she dies because of him—and thus he avoids human community for the remainder of his life. It is difficult to say whether this is because of a self-flagellating desire for isolation, or because he fears to bring further harm to those he loves. Whatever the case, the remainder of his life is marked by isolation from human community. Shortly before his death, the Giaour alludes to an old friend whom he once cared deeply for, but will not speak to, and will not even pray for, for fear that he might prejudice heaven against the man (1242-3). This avoidance of prayer demonstrates the Giaour’s lack of communion with the divine. By choosing not to pray, he loses an opportunity to speak with God; his choice not to partake of confession (803) bars him from forgiveness; and his

⁷⁰ Byron’s notes describe Monkir as one of the angels who prepares the departed for Damnation, often forcibly using his scythe to do so (note 748).

choice not to partake of the sacrament of communion (815) demonstrates both his inability to receive atonement and to “commune” with God.

Although the Ottoman’s curse on the Giaour does not explicitly involve an exile from nature, it should be noted that the imagery used to describe the Giaour’s divine and human exile is that of the destruction of nature. His vampiric drinking of blood is likened to a “drain[ing of] the stream of life” (760), and those whom he is to kill will be like flowers “wither’d on the stem” (766). The Giaour’s exile from communion with the natural world is further evinced in the text by the fact that he comes to serve as a sort of un-creative force in nature. While the text early identifies ancient Greece with Eden, the Giaour’s presence seems to move nature away from that ideal. While the breath of God gives life to dust, making the first man in the Bible (Gn. 2:7), the Giaour is likened to the Simoom,⁷¹ “Beneath whose widely-wasting breath / The very cypress droops to death” (284-5). Hassan’s hall, which was once a sort of garden paradise where “Wealth and Poverty” alike could find rest (344), is reduced by the Giaour to utter desolation, and is described using words such as “Decay,” “Gloom,” “Grief,” and “Desolation” (330-49). The valley in which the Giaour lies in ambush for Hassan is likewise a place of un-creation where “vultures whet their thirsty beak” (554), and “a river’s wintry stream / Has shrunk . . . And left a channel bleak and bare” (557-9).

Both the Giaour’s stated curse and his actual experience testify to his suffering under the curse of Cain which deprives him of community with God, humans, and nature. This is also true of Manfred, whose curse is strikingly similar to the Giaour’s. Like the Giaour, whose pre-curse status as “free” is defined by “a few snatched moments of romantic love in a garden” (Franklin

⁷¹ The Simoom is a strong, dust-laden, suffocating wind that derives its name from the Arabic root, “to poison” (*OED*).

35), so too Manfred is portrayed as having fallen from an Edenic ideal which is characterized by a romantic love affair.⁷² The opening speech of the play connects Manfred to a paradise lost and anticipates Byron's later writing of "Cain," when Manfred states, "The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life" (1.1.12). Like Byron's Cain, Manfred has great knowledge, but has found that it brings him no nearer to happiness. As in "The Giaour," a spoken curse takes a central place in "Manfred," and the experience of that curse makes up much of the action of the text.

Manfred is a young Count with tremendous physical and intellectual powers, yet he feels as though he has lived for ages, and he finds no solace in his many impressive accomplishments or in human society. "Manfred" begins in *media res* with the eponymous hero attempting to commune with his dearly departed Astarte by seeking the help of various spiritual powers. Each of his attempts at communion with Astarte fails, however, and he ultimately dies in the company of a devout Abbot. It is suggested that his death brings him to his beloved Astarte, but this is not definitively stated.

Manfred appears already to be suffering under a curse at the start of the text—presumably begun after the death of his beloved Astarte—yet it is worth examining the spoken curse that occurs in the opening scene. This curse, or "the Incantation" as it is often called, occurs after Manfred's failed attempt to coerce the elemental spirits to summon Astarte from the dead. It is unclear who speaks Manfred's curse; it could be the Seventh Spirit, Manfred's subconscious, Astarte, or none of these. Nonetheless, the curse's authority is not weakened by the ambiguity of its speaker. The imprecations of this Incantation are relentlessly exacted upon Manfred, giving them an aura of divine authorship. Manfred's curse is essentially the same as those of Cain and

⁷² If it is true—as most critics suggest, that Astarte is Manfred's sister—then their relationship was especially Edenic, for Cain likewise mated with his sister.

of the Giaour—which are themselves essentially no different from the curses experienced by the Mariner or by Christabel. Like these other curses, Manfred’s curse is a reversal of the benefits of religious imagination; it is disunity and fragmentation, resulting from a lack, or abuse, of love, and depicted in a loss of communion with nature, humanity, and the divine.

The full content of the Incantation is more complex than can be adequately discussed in the context of this chapter; however, at the risk of over simplifying a complex curse, I would like to note that the sum of the Incantation’s parts can be found in its final two stanzas—which also mark the final stanzas of the first scene. Here the speaker lists Manfred’s apparent failings—his “false tears,” poisonous lips, his “gulfs of guile,” his “shut soul’s hypocrisy,” and his “Brotherhood of Cain” (1.1.232-49)—and then compels Manfred to become his own “proper Hell” (1.1.251). The final stanza elaborates on this living death, adding that it will be Manfred’s “destiny” not “to slumber nor to die” (1.1.254-5), even though he will wish for death (1.1.256-7). Although this incantation does not spell out the details of the curse, it clearly marks it as a living death—much like the vampiric existence of the Giaour, or the wandering exile imposed on Cain by his mother’s curse (may he “live in the pangs which others die with!” [“Cain” 3.1.435]). For the details of the working out of this curse, further examination of Manfred’s actual experience is necessary.

Besides the explicit mention of “the Brotherhood of Cain” (1.1.249) in the Incantation, Manfred is also likened to Cain when he is twice called a “child of Clay” (1.1.131, 133) and when he refers to himself as “Half dust, half deity” (1.2.40). These terms bring to mind the creation of the first man, Adam, out of dust or clay. Manfred’s identification as the son of Adam, marks him as part of the human race, but also links him further to Adam’s more immediate son, Cain. Manfred often borrows phrases from the biblical Cain, and much of the imagery employed

by Manfred is later re-used by Byron in “Cain.” For example, while Manfred is with the Chamois Hunter, he sees blood on the brim of his cup and exclaims “Will it never—never sink in the earth?” (2.1.22), bringing to mind the biblical Cain account:

And he [God] said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand (Gn. 4:10-11).

In the final Act, as Manfred enjoys an old memory of his Edenic past, he recalls the presence of cypress trees (3.4.20). It is of note that cypress trees also make an appearance in “The Giaour,” where drooping cypress trees symbolize the lost Eden of Greece (285), and in “Cain,” where the title character becomes upset that his innocent son should be placed to rest under a “gloomy” cypress tree (3.1.3-4). Similarly, the destructive, middle-eastern wind, the Simoom, also receives mention in all three texts. Added to these similarities with “Cain,” is the fact that Manfred’s actual experience of his curse can be closely identified with the three-fold nature of Cain’s curse.

Though Manfred seems once to have gained joy from nature—“My joy was in the Wilderness, to breathe / The difficult air of the iced mountain’s top. . .” (2.2.62-3)—the mature Manfred finds no solace there. In fact, he tells the Witch of the Alps that “The face of the Earth hath madden’d me” (2.2.39). Earlier in the text, Manfred speaks often of the beauty of nature (1.2.9, 35, 36), but his estrangement from the joys of nature is made clear when he questions nature—even calling the earth his “mother” (1.2.7)—asking, “Why are ye beautiful? I cannot love ye” (1.2.9). Manfred’s rejection of nature as a balm to his spirit functions as a rejection of Romantic idealizations of the natural world, but it bears noting that this rejection derives from his inability to commune with nature. Besides nature’s maddening effect on him, and his inability to love it, his lack of communion is also evident in the fact that he chooses to search for

answers to his deepest longing not in the physical world of nature, but in the transcendent powers behind nature. This is a considerable twist on the Romantic ideal of communing with nature, and even finding divinity within it, by passively experiencing the natural world. Rather, Manfred is only concerned with mastering the powers behind nature in order to see what they might offer him. Though he may speak with the elemental spirits and the Witch, all of whom are behind nature, he has no real communion with them or with the natural world they represent.

Perhaps the most obvious of Manfred's Cain-like sufferings is his exile from human community. He wanders the mountains in solitude, spurns the company of the Chamois Hunter—who himself represents the ideal Romantic man—and even admits to the Witch of the Alps that “From my youth upwards / My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men” (2.2.50-1). Also to the witch, he explains that “with men, and with the thoughts of men, / I held but slight communion” (2.2.60-1). The only exception to this was Astarte, but she is dead, and thus Manfred is completely alone.⁷³ To cure this isolation he looks to supernatural powers, and to the possible resurrection of Astarte, but all three of his appeals to transcendent powers fail. His first appeal, to the elemental spirits, is a plea for oblivion (1.1.144), and its failure ends in his avowal to “lean no more on superhuman aid” (1.2.4). His second and third appeals to the supernatural, then, take the form not of deliverance from his living death (via oblivion), but of attempts to summon up the spirit of Astarte. In this Astarte comes to represent all of Manfred's hopes for communion with humanity—for he has already stated that she is the only mortal he ever communed with (2.2.59)—but the first of these attempts ends in utter failure, and the second is not much better. Though Manfred is able to see Astarte in his final attempt, there is a barrier

⁷³ Astarte is also the Greek name of a Mediterranean fertility goddess. That Manfred's only point of connection with humankind should come in the form of someone who is identified with a goddess highlights his separation from humankind.

between them that is, perhaps, best described as a lack of communion: he speaks to her but she seems not to hear, and she speaks to him, but her utterance has no reference to what he longs to know.

“Manfred” exhibits a striking blend of supernatural expressions, incorporating Neoplatonic, Zoroastrian, and Christian elements into its cosmology. In the action of the play, Manfred consults with beings representing each of these religions. In his essay “The Supernatural Structure of Byron’s *Manfred*,” James Twitchell demonstrates a hierarchical Chain of Being in the play, up which Manfred progressively works his way (607). Whether this movement demonstrates a purely selfish desire to win back his joy and happiness, or Manfred’s “reach[ing] out into communion with the whole,” through his attempt “to realize the harmony and unity in nature” via “the attainment of this spiritual communion” (Chew 79), it is nonetheless obvious that his attempts fail. What is interesting, however, is that for all of Manfred’s apparent communion with the supernatural, the one force that he never calls upon is the highest power. Near the end of Act 2, Manfred alludes to a power higher than Arimanes, “the overruling Infinite—the Maker / who made him [Arimanes]” (2.4.46-7). It is unclear who exactly this “Maker” is, though it would seem to correspond with either the Christian God, the Zoroastrian Ormazd, or the Neoplatonic One (Twitchell 612). Twitchell argues that, whatever the identity of this Maker, his or her existence “establishe[s] the topmost or innermost limit [of Byron’s Chain of Being] as being Good and ultimately victorious,” and that “even in this imperfect universe redemption and salvation are possible to those who resist the compromise with evil” (612). Despite this existence of an ultimate good, however, Manfred is unable to commune with it. His conversation with Arimanes suggests that this Maker requires worship of those below him or her (2.4.46-9) and, as Manfred demonstrated during his time with the Witch of the Alps, he will bow

to no one (2.2.155-9). Thus Manfred only ever makes requests of those supernatural powers that he feels are his equals or inferiors—and thus could not require his submission. When the Abbot tries to save Manfred's soul in Act 3, the latter, like Cain, echoes the biblical statement of divinity ("I AM THAT I AM" [Ex. 3.14]), asserting "wonder not that I / am what I am" (151-2).⁷⁴ Manfred is, it would seem, his own god and, as a result, he never consorts with the Maker. Even at his death scene, he ignores the Abbot's plea to "Pray—albeit but in thought" (3.4.145). In this final sequence, Manfred maintains his independence from the Maker (and all other supernatural powers for that matter), however, despite these almost heroic attempts to remain free, Manfred, in fact, remains "a cursed hero, doomed for all his independence" (McVeigh 604).

The Crime of Cain

The connections between Cain, and the Giaour and Manfred, are striking. However, if it were only the three-fold nature of their curses and a few passing references to Cain that bound the Giaour and Manfred to their biblical counterpart, these similarities would be only of passing interest. What makes this connection to Cain of true scholarly interest is the implications that it bears for our understanding of the crimes of the Giaour and Manfred and for the way we interpret their earthly demises.

It is clear that the Giaour suffers from the curse of Cain, but a simple perusal of the narrative provides little clue as to what his crime has in common with Cain's crime. Most readings of "The Giaour" see the forbidden love affair with Leila, or else the murder of Hassan, as the Giaour's crime. However, a forbidden love affair has nothing in common with either the

⁷⁴ As discussed in Chapter 3, Byron's Cain also makes use of this divine self description ("Cain" 3.1.509).

biblical or Byronic account of Cain⁷⁵ and, while the Giaour is a murderer like Cain, there is nothing to suggest that his murderous act warrants the judgment he receives—especially considering that Hassan is no innocent Abel, but is himself a killer. I suggest that the crime of the Giaour is not his illicit love affair, or his murder of Hassan, but rather his inability to love.

Like the Byronic Cain, the Giaour subordinates love to his own selfish desires. This is evident in that, after Leila's death, when the joys of love are no longer available, the Giaour's love is quickly perverted into hatred and self-pity. It is not love for Leila that leads him to murder Hassan, but rather hatred for the man who removed the Giaour's earthly joy (645-54). His love is not just poisoned by its turning to hate, however, but his conception of love itself becomes perverted. Leila comes to represent, not the memory of a lost loved one, but rather "the unattainable ideal in his internalized individualistic quest for self-completion" (Franklin 38). The Giaour's selfish idea of love reduces Leila to "a ghostly presence in the consciousness of the hero" (40), bringing about a splitting of his psyche: there is Leila, the unattainable ideal who represents everything good about the Giaour ("My hope on high—my all below" [1183]); and then there is the Giaour, the sinful exile who is driven to madness (1191, 1253) and daily experiences a living death (276, 435-8, 912-5, 945-50). Because the Giaour has confined all goodness to his conception of Leila, he seems unable to feel or act in any "good" way. At the same time, Leila is reduced from personhood to the Giaour's "sole source for spiritual meaning in earthly life . . . a secular form of Grace and a means of restoring the lost paradise on earth" (Franklin 44). Daniel Watkins notes that the Giaour "invests his entire moral being in her angelic or nonhuman state" and that he "elevate[s] her into an ideal at the expense of her humanity"

⁷⁵ It should be noted that Byron does allude to the incestuous nature of Cain's love for Adah; however, there is no implication whatever that this relationship is sinful within the context of the play.

(885) By placing his own desire for peace before his love for Leila (exemplified in his search for revenge and his conversion of Leila's memory into a "secular form of Grace" [Franklin 44]), the Giaour has reduced his lover's memory to a personal "crutch" that, in reality, becomes his curse. In the end, Leila is debased and the Giaour suffers, unable to do good and forever longing for a peace (an Eden) that he cannot regain. Leila's goodness, confined as it is in his abstract perception of her memory, is impotent to help him with his torturous existence, and his twisted conception of his loss of her even becomes—in a very Geraldine-like image—"A serpent round my heart wreathed" (1194). The Giaour's crime is not his affair, and it is not murder. The act that makes him guilty like Cain, and that brings Cain's curse upon him, is his subordination of love to his own personal pursuit of fulfillment.

In terms of narrative, "The Giaour" bears considerable resemblance to "Manfred," which similarly features its Cain-like protagonist's exile from human and divine community, and his lifelong suffering from the knowledge that he is responsible for the death of his lost love. Also like "The Giaour," "Manfred" ends with its hero's death and apparent reunion with his lost love,⁷⁶ both occurring shortly after a conversation with a holy man. Though similar to the character of the Giaour, Manfred bears even more similarities to Cain than the former. Like Byron's Cain, Manfred holds audience with spiritual powers, and even journeys into their realm. There are also numerous hints that Manfred's lost love, Astarte, was his sister, which creates a further point of comparison with Cain, whose mate was also his sister.

⁷⁶ There are two reasons that I suggest Manfred is reunited with Astarte. First, by dying he joins Astarte in her deathly existence (if not also in some sort of afterlife). Secondly, the ghost of Astarte tells Manfred that his "earthly ills" will end on the day he dies (2.4.152). Since his earthly ills are self-described as being a result of his separation from Astarte, it might be assumed that he is reunited with her in death.

Like the Giaour, Manfred seems clearly to locate his crime in the fact that he caused the death of his lover—"I loved her, and destroy'd her!" (2.2.117). However, while both men are guilty of this "sin," it is not the crime that earns them their hell. Being present at the death of a lover, and being unable to stop that death, can hardly be the crime that earns one a place in "the Brotherhood of Cain" (1.1.249). Manfred's life is clearly a living hell. His descriptions of the Alps are hellish—

The mists boil up around the glaciers; clouds

Rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphury,

Like foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell. . . (1.2.85-7)

—and he even says that "There is a power upon me which withholds / And makes it my fatality to live" (1.2.23-4). He later tells the Chamois Hunter that he has "the fierce thirst of death" which goes "unslaked" (2.1.48), and that his "days and nights [are] imperishable, / Endless, and all alike" (2.1.53-4). Like the Giaour, Manfred is in exile in the wilderness, and is suffering from the curse of Cain, yet there is no clear connection between his stated crime and that of Cain.⁷⁷ As with the Giaour, I suggest that Manfred's crime, like Cain's, is actually a crime of perception. By twisting Astarte's memory into an unobtainable ideal, he dehumanizes her, and thus fails to truly love her. As with the Giaour, he places all goodness in his conception of his lost lover, which makes it impossible for him to feel or act in any positive manner. In doing this, he fractures his own psyche, relegating all goodness to his conception of Astarte and leaving himself with only the bad. Just as Christabel's refusal to accept her "sinful half" results in the creation of the destructive, independent being, Geraldine, so Manfred's fragmented psyche results in the

⁷⁷ It could be argued that, by causing his sister—assuming that Astarte is his sister—to die, he has become a sort of fratricide, however, as with the Giaour, the described crime does not seem to fit the punishment

creation of a self-destructive being. The difference is that Manfred's goodness is excised to an abstract realm and it is only the "darker half" that lives and breathes on the earth. Astarte becomes his "Romantic epipsyche, a female counterpart of Manfred" (McVeigh 611), and thus functions to keep him in exile from heaven (or even any sort of heaven on earth) by making "goodness" unattainable. Throughout the play, Manfred dehumanizes Astarte by making her into an idealized being. Thus, like the Giaour, his love is perverted into something selfish that enslaves him and debases the memory of his lover.

"... something worse than death"?

One of the most striking of Eve's imprecations against her son is the curse that "death itself wax something worse than death" (3.1.434) upon Cain. "Cain" gives no indication as to whether its title character suffers something worse than death when he dies, and "The Giaour" and "Manfred" are likewise ambiguous on this issue. Although the rest of Eve's curses seem to have wreaked themselves upon these men, Byron remains silent about whether they undergo every curse, or manage to escape this final one. I end this chapter, then, by returning to the question with which it began: is there hope for the fallen?

In Chapter 3 I conclude that Byron ultimately left the ending of "Cain" ambiguous, refusing to commit his text for or against the idea of Cain's damnation as "beautiful." In "The Giaour" and "Manfred" Byron accomplishes much the same effect. I frame these texts as "second halves" of the Cain narrative, and as such, one might think that they would provide the missing ending that the sceptical Byron avoids in "Cain." In actuality, however, these second halves of the Cain narrative serve only to describe the Cain-figure's death—they remain thoroughly sceptical about what comes next.

Critics have reached many conclusions about the nature of the Giaour's, and especially Manfred's, deaths. Daniel McVeigh argues that "Manfred's death is self-redemptive" (610), and Samuel C. Chew's classic exposition of "Manfred" asserts that its "chief message is one of encouragement and hope," as it "tells of the triumph of mind over matter, of soul over body, in that conflict which a dualistic conception of the universe implies" (Chew 84). In contrast, Andrew Rutherford writes that no one could possibly believe Chew's claim about the poem's chief message (88). At the same time, while Alan Rawes sees Manfred's death as the beginning of Byron's search for "answers"—a "beginning that rejects transcendental answers to human problems, but looks instead to resources to be found within human existence" (128)—Stephen Behrendt sees the play as a sceptical attack on intellectual answers, which demonstrates "that 'calm' does not exist in the universe and in the self and that it is experienced not through the metaphysics of philosophy but through the agency of human passion" (124).

I suggest that the reason for so many contradictory explanations of the ending of "Manfred"—not to mention the ending of the "The Giaour"—can be found in Byron's scepticism. Byron seems to have purposely kept both doors open. The Giaour and Manfred are damned to hell, even as they have the possibility of heaven before them. Though the texts seem to end tragically—both men lose their lovers, suffer hellish mortal existences, and ultimately die—there is yet hope. Both men die confident that they will be reunited with their lovers. The Giaour has seen an apparition of Leila who has beckoned him to join her (1298-9). Manfred has also seen an apparition of his lover, and, though she does not answer him whether they shall meet again, Manfred's peaceful composure in the next scene (3.1.6-8) suggests that he believes they will—or at least that he will find rest from the guilt he feels about her death. While these ghostly visitations could easily be accounted for as products of the madness that both characters

attest to being plagued with, there is one further piece of evidence that lends some credence to their hope. The final scene of both texts evinces a reversal of the character's movement toward fragmentation and disunity.

In the final scene of "The Giaour," the eponymous protagonist tells his story to a monk, who seems to have little care for the Giaour. The monk notes that the Giaour has only been allowed to stay at the monastery because of his generous gifts, and asserts that, were he Prior, then "not a day / Should brook the stranger's further stay" (818-9). By the end of the tale, however, the Giaour thanks the monk for his "generous tear" (1322), and consigns the care of his final remains to the monk (1324-5). Though a small detail, this demonstrates a slight movement on the part of the Giaour toward human communion. The fact that he takes the care to confess his tale—he even calls the monk his "Confessor" (1320)—and that the previously impervious monk is moved to tears, suggests some sort of communion. By labelling this act a confession, the Giaour also demonstrates movement toward divine communion, for it was earlier stated that he never "before confession chair / Kneels" (803-4). Finally, if the Giaour's treatment of Leila's memory is read as a division of his psyche then his return to her, whether a spiritual reality or a mad fantasy, represents the reunification of his psyche. In the end, then, though the text is silent about the Giaour's afterlife, there is certainly evidence to suggest that his final day marks a turning point back toward unity and communion.

Similarly, Manfred's final hours seem to mark a turning point in his story. Once assured of his imminent death, Manfred remarks that he feels "a calm upon me . . . which till now / Did not belong to what I knew of life" (3.1.6-8). Shortly afterward Manfred breaks into what sounds like a psalm of praise to the sun. This marks a return to his previous communion with nature as he tells the sun "As my first glance / Of love and wonder was for thee, then take / My latest

look” (3.2.25-7). Just a little later, Manfred is found no longer wishing for oblivion, but actually revelling in an old memory (3.4.10). Perhaps the strongest evidence of Manfred’s reversal toward unity and communion can be found in the final lines of the play when, as he lies dying, he asks the Abbot to take his hand (3.4.149). Numerous critics have noted this final scene as an ultimate rejection of dogmatic or Christian religion by Manfred (Chew 82; McVeigh 610; Watkins 886-7). While it is true that Manfred is never portrayed as speaking to the Maker, and that he even rejects the concept of a human mediating on his behalf (3.1.54-5) (possibly a rejection of Christ), the fact that he asks the Abbot to take his hand suggests at least a movement toward human communion. Considering that the Abbot’s words immediately before this were a request for Manfred to “Pray—albeit but in thought” (3.4.145), this seems to open up the possibility that perhaps Manfred does, indeed, find some sort of divine redemption before he dies.

Although both “The Giaour” and “Manfred” close with some evidence of religious imagination at work in the respective protagonists, the effect of this movement is ultimately “trumped” by the scepticism of the poems’ endings. Perhaps both characters do find unity, wholeness, and redemption before dying, but this means little if there is no life after death, if their accepted cosmologies prove wrong, or if, as Cain often fears, there is a Christian God, but he is either not fully good or not fully powerful. As with “Cain,” it would seem that the only real affirmation that can be gleaned from these texts is the supremacy of love. When love is “right,” it creates an Eden on earth. When love is abused or lost, it perpetuates hell. When both the Giaour and Manfred are disposed to act, even in a minor way, out of love—as depicted in the Giaour’s confession, or Manfred’s taking of the Abbot’s hand—unity and communion may indeed be regained.

Closing Remarks

My interest in the “supernatural” works of Coleridge and Byron was first piqued when I noticed the recurrence in these texts of “undead” characters—that is, of human characters that walked the natural earth yet seemed unable to die. My early explorations of these characters led me to the conclusion that, though they still walked the earth, they were damned. The personal hell experienced by each character was deserved, yet they were peculiar for, in each case, damnation seemed escapable. Coleridge’s and Byron’s undead characters were strikingly similar in that each seemed to have earned its damnation as the result of faulty perception, yet seemed capable of escaping that damnation by acquiring a clearer vision of the cosmos.

For Coleridge, all humans exercise imagination as they perceive the world around them. This perception is never totally clear, and it is only via reflection, prayer, and the enlivening act of the secondary imagination that the individual is able to move closer to clarity. Ultimately, this movement toward clarity allows the individual’s constitution of the external world to become more divine, and thus moves that individual into closer communion with God. The Coleridgean imagination is first and last a religious faculty, for its purpose is divine communion, and its effect like the definition of religion, is concerned with community.⁷⁸

While Byron did not concern himself with writing abstract theorizations regarding the imagination, and some of his works—most notably *Don Juan*—criticize various Romantic tropes, including some conceptions of the imagination, his works nonetheless evince a sense of the religious imagination that is not unlike Coleridge’s. Byron’s repeated return to the Cain myth

⁷⁸ As noted earlier, one of the primary definitions of religion denotes community—it is “the condition of belonging to a religious order” (*OED*).

demonstrates his interest in concepts such as communion, exile, fallenness, redemption, living hell, and damnation. An examination of Byron's Cain figures demonstrates that, though Byron remained highly sceptical about the nature and existence of both God and the hereafter, he nonetheless privileged—like Coleridge—a creative perception of the world that is governed by love and that draws the individual into community and into psychological unity.

Characters like Cain and the Mariner demonstrate the dangers of purely logical pursuit. Although Byron was less certain than Coleridge about the nature of the noumenal, he nonetheless shared the belief that reason alone could not bring peace, nor could it make sense of human experience. The damnation of my title, then, refers to the personal hells of individuals who attempt to make sense of human existence without privileging love or feeling. The beautiful thing about these damnations is that they have corrective potential to lead individuals into a union of reason and feeling, of knowledge and love, that “builds a Heaven in Hell's despair” (Blake, “The Clod & the Pebble” 4).

Like “Mariner” and “Cain,” the narratives of “Christabel,” “The Giaour,” and “Manfred” explore the concepts of damnation and of religious imagination. These three works are of special interest, however, because they provide only a glimpse of the story arc experienced by their characters, and thus provide a greater focus on the events portrayed. These characters are “damned” from the beginning of their texts and, at their end, are never clearly delivered from or surrendered to that state. These characters represent both a Byronic and Coleridgean conception of human existence as a “wandering in those desert regions without Paradise” (McVeigh, “Cainne's Cynne” 287). Regardless of the eschatological fate of the individual, it is the occupation of the imagination to determine whether their desert wandering will be a damned or a blessed one. I suggest that they are “beautifully damned.”

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