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“A Miracle of Rare Device”: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Power of Imagination

Historically, Romantic poetry has frequently been defined in literary theory in regard to its focus on the power and significance of imagination. While contemporary critics, such as Seamus Perry or Jerome McGann, often reject the need for a fixed definition of Romanticism, the importance of imaginative power and the creative abilities it grants us is nevertheless prevalent in the works of the first-generation Romantic poets. This is especially true for the likes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who not only discusses it in his critical autobiography *Biographia Literaria* (1817), but also uses his poetry both to lead by his own creative example and to further illustrate within the poems themselves the dynamic potential of imagination. He does this through his use of supernatural themes and motifs, as is best represented in his poems "Kubla Khan", "Christabel", and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The aim of this essay is to offer an interpretation of these supernatural elements insofar as they change based on the imaginative power represented in the poems, and to explore what Coleridge potentially saw as the true power of imagination.

The division of duties between Coleridge and William Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* serves as the most obvious proof of Coleridge's interest in the extraordinary. When "the thought that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts suggested itself" to them, Wordsworth's poetic subjects "were to be chosen from ordinary life", while Coleridge's endeavors were to be "directed to persons and characters supernatural" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 168). However, his poems had to inspire interest in his readers that would extend beyond the simple "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation", as Wordsworth put it in his later *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (240). This would require the poems to have "a semblance of truth" that would be sufficient enough for the readers "to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 169). The "dramatic truth" of the poems would arise from the emotions which would "naturally accompany" the experiences and engagements with the supernatural, and which would "suppose them real", at least to any human being "who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency" (168). Coleridge, of course, understood that such experiences would resonate with most people, given the historical fact of human preoccupation with things beyond our phenomenological reality.

Three poems in particular – "Kubla Khan", "Christabel", and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" – very effectively illustrate Coleridge's fascination with the supernatural. Not only are they overabundant with supernatural imagery, be it as the presence of supernatural events, characters or scenery, but they are also collectively referred to as daemonic poems, which emphasizes their supernatural aspects. Based on one of his later notebook entries, which for a long time "largely escaped scholarly notice", Coleridge "defines the daemonic by reference to his own fascination with the transnatural", and uses "the daemon" to refer to "the image of a mind fascinated with the transnatural" (Leadbetter 1). In this sense, "transnatural"

would stand for "something supersensuous that exists beyond the order of Nature" (Mahoney 246), or, in other words, "outside the chain of cause and effect, which is of Nature" (Warren 673). Coleridge does use the term "supernatural" as well as "transnatural" (which could allude to a differentiation purposely made), but it seems that there is not a great difference in meaning between the two. A potential explanation might be that the supernatural simply represents phenomenal manifestations of transnatural principles, which (due to their supersensuous, transcendent nature) remain outside of the realm of experience. The supernatural can also be viewed in psychological light, in the sense of an attempt "to bring into the light of conscious experience and knowledge events and experiences that would otherwise remain below the conscious threshold in the realm of the unconscious" (Wheeler 86). Such a reading would allow us to see the supernatural as the representations of attitudes, emotions and psychological states of the characters: on the one hand, personal fears and limitations, and on the other, great spiritual experiences. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive and in fact come together in the poems. However, what the supernatural represents in the poems depends greatly on how the characters themselves see it.

Is it perceived as an external force, or do the characters themselves take on a supernatural form? Is it threatening or enlightening? It seems that the experience of the supernatural is based on the imaginative power of the characters and, in the case of "Christabel", the narrator as well. Namely, for Coleridge, there exist two kinds of imaginative power. One is the primary Imagination, which he "holds to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception"; therefore, all people possess it. It is "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" – allowing the world to be recreated in the mind, but recreated only in the sense of being repeated. The secondary Imagination is "an echo of the former", but it is not as passive and unmediated – it "coexists with the conscious will". It too recreates, but actively so; "it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates", always "struggling to idealize and unify", going beyond that which is simply given to us perceptually. It is dynamic, living, "vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 167). The idea that man can grapple with the transnatural through his imaginative faculty is already implicitly present in this definition. In this way, the secondary Imagination is very reminiscent of Kant's Reason. Leslie Brisman states that if for Coleridge Reason is a supernatural faculty, it is ultimately to be identified with (not just mediated by) the imagination (124–25). On the other hand, Coleridge states that "a debility and dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses render the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism" (*Biographia Literaria* 16). Therefore, for the unimaginative, the supernatural becomes a sinister, dangerous presence, met only with apprehension and fear, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the three daemonic poems.

"Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" can be analyzed alongside one another, given some of their formal and interpretative similarities that separate them

slightly from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Both "Kubla Khan" and "Christabel" were first published together in a pamphlet in 1816, almost two decades after their original composition, and both are, in some sense, considered to be unfinished poems. Coleridge expressed in *Biographia Literaria* that with "Christabel" he should have more nearly realized his ideal (of using supernatural elements to express a kind of truth) than he had done in his first attempt, referring to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (169). However, partly due to the fact that it was not finished, Wordsworth excluded it from the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. As Farrison remarks, Coleridge had a hard time finishing the poem (86), and it was finally published over 16 years later. Leadbetter states that Coleridge always maintained that "Christabel" was unfinished and in 1833 even said: "I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could not carry on with equal success the execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one" (204). However, even before publishing it Coleridge allowed copies of it to be made, and "recited the poem regularly, so that it became his signature poem when in company", unlike "Kubla Khan", which, although written in 1798, remained "surrounded with peculiar secrecy" (Leadbetter 201) before it was published in the 1816 pamphlet at the request of Lord Byron. "Kubla Khan" is described in the Preface to its publication as a fragment of what was originally two to three hundred lines of poetry, a product of what Leask has described "the Poet's unconscious, drugged conception" (1), or an opium-induced "vision in a dream" (as Coleridge himself explains it in the poem's subtitle) whose transcribing was interrupted by a person from Porlock paying a visit to Coleridge. Leask goes on further to argue that the poem's unconscious composition, "given its highly organized structure and form" should be "taken with a pinch of salt", and that the poem may be "resituated in the intellectual climate of the late 1790's", its imperialism and orientalism, as well as Coleridge's particular – namely, radical – political views at that time (2). Such a reading is not only justified based on the arguments Leask presents, but also vital if we wish to avoid divorcing the poet from his historical context. However, Coleridge expressed in the Preface that for him "Kubla Khan" was more of a "psychological curiosity", being a transcription of a drug-induced dream somewhat based on a sentence from *Purchas His Pilgrimages*[1] (which he had been reading). Additionally, "several of his writings in 1797 reveal a serious interest in meaningful dream-visions" (Leadbetter 186). This lends merit to the idea that "Kubla Khan" could, on a meta-level and not just within the poem itself, be an investigation of the effect of supernatural forces on the mind, as the Preface to the poem states that "the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, *given* to him". In this sense, it would be something supernatural that had blessed Coleridge with a poetic vision, the poem itself "a proof of something inwardly achieved; a private affirmation of Coleridge's poetic identity" (Leadbetter 183).

However, within the poem, the supernatural takes on both a negative and a positive meaning. Kubla Khan's impression of the supernatural presence is that it is violent and frightening. Not only does it threaten his pleasure-dome (which

is simultaneously the product of his creative power and the visual representation of the vision he has for his empire), but it also pervades everything around him – nature itself appears to be supernatural. The only exception is the perfectly organized scenery surrounding the pleasure-dome:

> So twice five miles of fertile ground
> With walls and towers were girdled round
> And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills
> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
> And here were forests ancient as the hills,
> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. ("Kubla Khan", lines 6–11)

The nature within the walls is tame, adjusted to human conceptions of utility and beauty; the ground is fertile, the gardens bright. Not even the ancient forests (although subtly reminding us with their longevity of something more permanent than the fleeting empires and fragile palaces made by men) remain dark and impenetrable, as their shade is broken up by the sunlight coming through. Everything savage and untamed is shut out. However, beyond the walls, nature is wild, energetic and powerful beyond Khan's control; "the pleasure-dome, so impressive in the first stanza, is overshadowed by the enormity of its natural surroundings" (Perry 133). The verbs used in lines describing the chasm are dynamic and used to personify the scenery, making it seem alive with energy:

> And from this chasm, with hideous turmoil *seething*,
> As if this earth in fast thick pants were *breathing*,
> ...
> And mid these *dancing* rocks at once and ever,
> It flung up momently the sacred river. ("Kubla Khan", lines 17–18, 23–24, emphasis added)

The "antithetical relationship" between Kubla Khan's order and nature's chaos is emphasized by "the opening word of the second verse paragraph: *but*" and "where the first verse exemplifies the harmonious criteria of beauty and orderliness, the second is full of the mountainous and discordant paraphernalia of the sublime" (Perry 133). This contrast is present in the way water is described, too: in Khan's garden, the "sinuous rills" are mild, seen almost as decoration when compared to the mighty, meandering Alph. That Khan sees nature as wild and supernatural is clear from the adjectives used to describe it:

> A *savage* place, as *holy* and *enchanted*
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was *haunted*
> By woman wailing for her *demon*-lover! (lines 14–16, emphasis added)

The woman wailing for her demon-lover is primarily "mentioned to convey the atmosphere of the deep romantic chasm" (Nethercot and Patterson 929); the

scenery is haunted by a strong energy, brimming with desire, power and passion. The descriptions of the violent chasm, its loudness and force, and the idea of a "sunless" and "lifeless" ocean ("Kubla Khan", lines 5, 28) further evoke a great sense of terror, and are almost a warning to Khan that what he is doing is not right. His vision of the world as a place onto which he ought to project his fantasy is flawed, especially when contrasted with the vision in the last six lines of the second verse, in which Khan's pleasure-dome and wild nature are miraculously combined. As Perry explains, this vision is what one could see if one were to stand half-way down the length of the Alph, where the reflection of the dome is accompanied by the tumult resounding from the caves of ice (the caverns measureless) and the racket of the fountain (134). This is what the character of the Visionary Poet at the end of "Kubla Khan" can imagine – a kind of complex unity that does not seek to reduce everything into the conceptions of one man. In the last 18 lines, the Visionary imagines what would happen if he could recall the song of the Abyssinian Maid and thus bring together in his music "the sunny dome" and "the caves of ice" ("Kubla Khan", line 47) – the fact that it remains a hypothetical statement is evocative of Coleridge's own experience of composing "Kubla Khan" and trying to remember his dream. The supernatural would not present itself as scary or even external at all, but rather manifest itself through him, his floating hair and flashing eyes, which are a notable sign of supernatural power in Coleridge's poems. It would mean that the Visionary Poet could exhibit supernatural qualities precisely because of his imagination.

However, despite their difference, Kubla Khan possess a kind of imaginative power too, only his is more limited when compared to the Visionary's. This is given a theoretical explanation in *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge makes a distinction between the commanding and the absolute genius. Those people who are in possession of the absolute genius "rest content between thought and reality, in an intermundium of which their own living spirit supplies the substance, and their imagination the ever-varying form" (17). Such is the Visionary Poet – his vision is not a physical reality, but it brings together all things, as "there exists" in his mind "an endless power of combining and modifying them". But the men of commanding genius, such as Kubla Khan, "must impress their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality" (17). They have a strong impulse to realize their ideas, but they are not as self-sufficient because of it – realizing their visions requires "appropriating and applying the knowledge of others", which often makes them tyrannical and as such "destined to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of a day" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 17). The fact that men of commanding genius need to turn their visions into physical reality affirms what Coleridge stated about the dimness of imagination and the reliance on immediate impressions. Eventually, the limits of his imagination force Kubla Khan into superstition and fear, so much so that he hears the voices of his ancestors prophesying war in the tumult of the Alph reaching the ocean. The apprehension of war evokes a sense of aggression and

violence, which Coleridge connects to the lack of imagination. In *Biographia Literaria*, he says that such an absence of imaginative power "cannot but produce an uneasy state of feeling, an involuntary sense of fear" of which "anger is the inevitable consequence" (16). What Khan fails to control turns into supernatural threat, or what he perceives to be an unavoidable family curse looming over him.

In "Christabel", it seems not only that the fear of facing the supernatural is not unfounded, but also that its threat finally becomes realized. Geraldine's parasitical intrusion into Christabel's life is truly destructive, or at least leaves the reader with this impression – because "Christabel" is unfinished, there is some potential for a happy ending, but, as has been stated before, Coleridge did not feel that he could successfully execute his idea. Perry explains that "the corruption of Sir Leoline's family that Geraldine works is analogous to the ruin prophesied for Kubla's precarious civilization" (140). However, while he argues that "*unlike* the Khan, Christabel is responsible for bringing these destructive energies into the safe enclave of the castle" (140), it is important to remember that Kubla's wish to subjugate nature to his vision is a conscious act and therefore does make him culpable. Christabel's responsibility lies in the fact that she actively brought the danger within by leaving the safety of her home to go into the woods to pray and by carrying Geraldine over the castle's threshold back inside.

In some ways, Christabel is the apotheosis of innocence – the narrator talks of the "lovely sight" ("Christabel", line 280) of Christabel in the woods as she was "kneeling in the moonlight, /To make her gentle vows" (lines 285–86) and frequently refers to her as "lovely lady Christabel" (lines 23, 38); at one point, even Geraldine calls her "holy Christabel" (line 229). She is good, kind, selfless, praying "for the weal of her lover" (line 30) and quick to help Geraldine in her distress. However, in a line from the first edition of Part I that was omitted in the 1816 publication, it is clear that the dreams Christabel has of her "betrothed knight" are not necessarily pure, as they "made her moan and leap". This might allude to repressed sexual desire, which Christabel perceives to be sinful due to her strong religious beliefs. When Geraldine's dark nature is revealed, Christabel is distraught, convinced that she herself was to blame for her fate ("Sure I have sinn'd!" [line 382]), praying to Christ to "wash away her sins unknown" (lines 389–91). She is accompanied in her religious superstitions by the poem's narrator, who prays throughout the poem to Virgin Mary to shield Christabel. The narrator emphasizes the piousness within the universe of "Christabel" and provides the ultimate frustration for the reader, being a "story-teller who is manifestly unsure of what is going on" (Perry 140). As Wheeler puts it, "the narrative voice is neither objective, authoritative nor impersonal; it continuously reaffirms a limited point of view, a subjective, even prejudiced 'reading' of the situation, recounted by a very singular personality clearly portrayed by Coleridge as naive and superstitious" (90). The unreliability of the narrator allows for non-literal interpretations of Geraldine as "a projection from a dream, an aspect of Christabel's personality" (Taylor 712), or "a kind of personification or symbol of desire, sexuality, or energy" (Wheeler 87).

However, this does not make her any less real within the poem and her supernatural, magical powers have an undeniable effect on other characters. She first appears to Christabel in the forest (which might, just as it does in "Kubla Khan", symbolize the wild and untamed), "on the *other* side" of a "huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree" ("Christabel", line 41–42), a possible representation of the unconscious, which could make the poem a portrayal of Christabel's confrontation with her repressed desire (Wheeler 87), or a simple wish for agency. One of the rare instances in which Christabel takes action is when she sneaks out of the castle, but she has to do it in secret. Her world is filled with limitations: her father's expectations for how she ought to behave, religious morality that forces her to repress her sexual desires for her distant lover, and a lack of intellectual independence and self-knowledge, which leave room for superstitious beliefs and stunt her imagination. Furthermore, the consequences of her lack of imaginative power, her innocence and inability to see through Geraldine's disguise, make her an easy prey – she is vulnerable because she blindly relies on external protection. This is represented in the fact that her guard is a "toothless mastiff bitch" ("Christabel", line 7), whose description reflects the illusion of protection – although it is a big dog, it has no teeth to bite the potential intruders. Similarly, once they are inside the castle, Christabel shows only "resigned obedience" to Geraldine (Taylor 713) and puts all her trust in the spirit of her deceased mother to guard her, as well as the saints, who "will aid if men will call" ("Christabel", line 331). The only meaningful action she takes to try to save herself (telling her father to send Geraldine away) comes too late – the spell she is under makes her attempt completely futile.

Geraldine, on the other hand, is incredibly powerful. She "assumes numerous voices, sighing in sweet weakness, speaking to spirits, summoning powers, vibrating magical force", and eventually "her different voices multiply while Christabel's go mute" (Taylor 713). Geraldine can be seen as "a symbol of unfettered, unguided imagination" (Wheeler 87). Her power is, much like the power of the Visionary Poet in "Kubla Khan", represented by her exhibiting supernatural qualities. That kind of power is frightening, and the narrator's fear for Christabel ("Jesu, Maria, shield her well!" [lines 54, 585]) is similar to people's initial reaction to the Visionary Poet (crying out "Beware! Beware!" in "holy dread" ["Kubla Khan", lines 49–52]). Just like the Poet, she has "large bright eyes" that "glitter" ("Christabel", lines 222, 577). However, unlike him, she uses her power for evil. Her magic triggers a response from the mastiff bitch, and it prevents her from being able to enter the castle without Christabel's help, but both of these warning signs remain ignored. She can communicate with the spirit of Christabel's mother and send it away:

> 'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!
> I have power to bid thee flee.'
> (..)
> 'Off, woman, off! This hour is mine–
> Though thou her guardian spirit be,
> Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.' (lines 206–207, 212–214)

Finally, she exerts control over both Christabel and her father, Sir Leoline. The narrator confirms her control over Christabel when he addresses her directly and says, "O Geraldine! one hour was thine– / Thou'st had thy will!" (lines 306–7) – Geraldine gets what she wants. As Taylor states, "a transfer of power seems to occur; one young woman absorbs another, eradicates her will and her speech, deprives her of the imaginary protective spirit of her mother and the fragile loyalty of her father, and fills her with the underside of her own vicious features" (718). Geraldine takes away Christabel's ability to reveal to Sir Leoline her true nature, and charms him, so that he believes her more than he does his own child. While Christabel catches glimpses of her evil features ("the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head, / Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye" ["Christabel", lines 587–88]), Sir Leoline deems her "sure a thing divine" (line 478). The fact that the source of her magic, her "mark of shame" (line 271) is not described ("a sight to dream of, not to tell" [line 254]) alludes to its transnatural origin. What is unspoken is incomprehensible, at least to human Understanding. Geraldine embodies the transnatural principle of Spirit or Will, the source of human agency. Because it cannot be explained away by the simple law of cause and effect, free will allows for morality and imperfection in judgement. Geraldine can grasp the transnatural because of her imagination, but she is unguided in her use of the supernatural powers it grants her. However, Wheeler and Perry both note that Geraldine cannot be reduced to a simple personification of evil; while "the reader is tantalized with the equation of Geraldine as evil and Christabel as good" (Wheeler 87), it is more likely that Geraldine is "good corrupted, rather than intrinsically wicked" (Perry 140). She does not harm Christabel, but only takes her place and forces her to keep her secret – the poem is focused on exploring "the horror of using other persons as things" (Taylor 720), seeing them as means to an end. For undeclared reasons, Geraldine uses her imagination to overpower Christabel, to eject her from her place in the world. She orchestrates an unfair exchange in which she gets whatever she has set her sights on and transfers all the malice to her victim. Christabel is drained of her agency and becomes snake-like herself – all of her attempts to tell the truth about Geraldine turn into "hissing sounds" ("Christabel", lines 460, 594). Eventually, she is corrupted by hatred she inherited from Geraldine:

> The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
> I know not how, in fearful wise,
> So deeply she had drunken in
> That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
> That all her features were resigned
> To this sole image in her mind:
> And passively did imitate
> That look of dull and treacherous hate! (lines 602–9)

Perry states that "'Christabel', like its partner poems, explores the theme of unity", but it does so "by imagining its perversion" (141) – Geraldine takes on the role of Christabel, and Christabel is forced into becoming like Geraldine. Although

she has a more powerful imagination than Kubla Khan, much like him, Geraldine lacks the understanding of true unity and has to control the people around her to achieve her vision - she can only stay at Sir Leoline's side as long as he is fooled by her disguise. In some sense, her secondary imagination fails halfway in its mission to unify and idealize, and only dissolves and disrupts; her lack of moral guidance turns her imaginative power into a force of destruction. Wheeler offers an explanation for what Geraldine might be lacking:

> Imagination in this sense could be described as that uncontrolled creative force (as imaged for example in the second stanza of "Kubla Khan") which is dangerous until harnessed by moral and religious counterforces. Or, we might say that the figure of Geraldine is Coleridge's way of expressing his early fears that imagination is somehow essentially pagan and non-Christian and must be supplemented by the Christian Will or Reason if it is to be the benison to humankind that we desire it to be. Reason (or Will) and imagination need each other if human beings are to realize their fullest spiritual and creative potential, for reason without imagination is lacking in energy, while imagination without reason and will is energy unshaped, unformed and undirected, and therefore potentially dangerous as a destructive and disruptive force. (87)

Geraldine fails because she only embodies the transnatural principle of Will and does not reflect on it. As Coleridge states in *The Stateman's Manual*, "the human mind is the compass" (368) to a certain gnosis, and Geraldine simply does not utilize it as such. The ultimate knowledge Coleridge has in mind as the end goal of human Reason is what Warren called the sacramental vision of "One Life" (671). While it ties into his Unitarian beliefs, Coleridge also might have derived it from his neo-Platonic studies (Warren 672); inasmuch as it is a Christian vision, it is not aligned with the Christian doctrine (especially of the 1790s), and Coleridge's philosophical inquiries complicate a simple religious understanding of "One Life". Unitarianism presents a vision of the universe as a unity, with God "not as king or lord, but God as a diffused and ubiquitous life" and "immanently present in every aspect of nature" (Perry 136). Perry states that "this sublime and inclusive vision has a troubling corollary": since everything Godly is also good, the existence of evil is ultimately denied (136). However, this assumes that, according to Coleridge, God resides in everything as something already actual, instead of a potential waiting to be realized. Even Plato argues that not all things realize their Being properly – it is a process of becoming, and not something simply given. For Coleridge, God is one of "Objects transnatural" (*The Notebooks*, III 4166) – although he is immanently present in the world, the idea of God is transcendent and can only be grasped through Reason (or imagination) which enables us "to conceive of an order beyond the evidence of the senses" (Leadbetter 9). This daemonic gnosis requires a willful act, a conscious effort, but because the principle of Will or Spirit is transnatural and offends against the order of Nature (the principle of cause and effect which rules the world of the

senses), it also necessarily allows for morality. It is not a path of categorical evil, but the acts of Will must eventually be supplied with knowledge in order not to become destructive. "To leave the appointed station and become daimon" includes both "shame & power" (*The Notebooks*, III 4166); Leadbetter explains that "the transnatural combines a sense of transgression with ideas central to Coleridge's philosophy of human potential" (11).

The story of atonement and the redemptive power of imagination is at last offered in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Perhaps as a sign of Coleridge's firm conviction in its message, this is the only finished daemonic poem. It is a story of change and the process of becoming, as the Mariner moves away from superstition towards a new interpretation of the world. This is also congruent with how Warren explains the "constant contrast between moonlight and sunlight" (676) in the poem, the sun being "the light of understanding", which "shows the familiar as familiar" and is "the light of practical convenience" (678) – in the daylight the Mariner participates in the communal, superstitious, Catholic vision of world, while the moon represents "imagination and the storm of creative vitality" (680); it is at night that he finally grasps the vision of "One Life" and reaches eventual salvation.

The poem frames the Mariner's voyage as a story told from present perspective, when he is telling it to the Wedding-Guest. At this point, he has already experienced his spiritual journey and exhibits supernatural powers in his storytelling: he is referred to as "the bright-eyed Mariner" ("The Rime", I:20,40; VII:105) who holds the Wedding-Guest "with his glittering eye" (I:13); the Wedding-Guest "cannot choose but to hear" (I:18). To put it simply, like Geraldine, "the Mariner hath his will" (I:16). This is in contrast with the beginning of his tale, when he describes the scenery at the start of his voyage; the power lies with nature, which is sublime – terrifying, as well as beautiful:

> And now there came both mist and snow,
> And it grew wondrous cold:
> And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
> As green as emerald.
>
> And through the drifts the snowy clifts
> Did send a dismal sheen:
> Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
> The ice was all between.
>
> 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! (Part I, stanzas 13–15)

The supernatural is, like in "Kubla Khan", perceived as external and frightening, a force to be reckoned with. The albatross that comes is greeted as "a Christian soul" (I:65), perhaps even a godsent, "pious bird of good omen" (as Coleridge calls it in the poem's 1817 Gloss). However, the first sign of change in the Mariner is present in the fact that he abandons the vision of the world he is used to and, like Geraldine, embodies the transnatural principle of Will without supplying it with Reason, shooting the albatross. The Catholicism of the ship's crew fails to provide both them and the Mariner with sufficient moral guidance, as it reverts to a superstitious reading of their situation. When the wind stops blowing, they accuse the Mariner of doing "a hellish thing" by killing the bird "that made the breeze to blow"; when the weather is good, they are thankful that he slew the bird that brought "the fog and mist" ("The Rime", II:9–20). True disaster strikes them with the change in atmosphere and Nature's supernatural response to the Mariner's crime. In some sense, this is the prophecy Kubla Khan hears in the Alph's tumult: nature coming to punish him. The Sun becomes red, the sea, which "like a witch's oils, / Burnt green, and blue and white" (II:47–8) is covered "with slimy things" (II:43) and the ship has no wind to continue on. The crew, slowly dying from thirst, is barely alive when Death and Life-In-Death arrive. The mariners are punished as accomplices in the crime, not only because they condoned the murder of the bird in their superstitious beliefs, but also because they made "man's convenience the measure of an act" (Warren 675), with complete ignorance of the unity of the universe. The Mariner is spared, even though at this point he has not abandoned his superstitions. However, his transgression demonstrated his moving away from a passive existence into an active one, grasping for higher knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, he still does not understand the vision of "One Life"; when the rest of the crew dies, he only sees "the beauty of the dead men, and protests against the fact that the slimy things should live while the beautiful men lie dead" (Warren 675). After his murderous act, the Mariner is struggling to pray, as he is no longer fulfilled by the Catholicism he was raised with, but is also yet to progress to a new order. He is torn with guilt over the deaths of his fellow mariners, and this shame is perhaps what enables him to use his imaginative power to see the world as "One Life". One night, having been mourning the men's deaths for days, he sees the ugly, slimy water-snakes and their tracks of "shining white" ("The Rime", IV:51) flashing like a "golden fire" (IV:58); in other words, they become beautiful in his eyes. At last, he states: "A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware" (IV:61–2) – he can finally pray again, reaching an understanding of the world as one. He is not praying out of guilt or a desire to be saved, but out of love, as he can finally see the world in its unity. At this moment, the albatross, which has hung around his neck as a cross signaling his guilt, falls off his neck and sinks into the sea. The dead men who had cursed him with their looks as they were dying now return to help him get to the shore. However, it is not their souls which return to their bodies to make them alive again, but rather "a troop of spirits blest" (V:58), perhaps coming from a transnatural source. That same source, the Spirit, appears in the form of a force that moves the ship towards land. The Mariner then finally sees the supernatural as helpful, in ways in which

Kubla or Christabel never could. The men eventually become all light, and turn into seraph-men, glowing as "signals to the land" (VI:89); the Mariner has earned his salvation.

There is a sense of loneliness that is a necessary result of imaginative power and the vivid vision of the world it grants. As Leadbetter puts it, "for Coleridge, genius itself involved this nexus of intellectual power and social alienation" (10). In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge states the following:

> It is an old Complaint, that a man of Genius no sooner appears, but the Host of Dunces are up in arms to repel the invading Alien...We need not go to the savage tribes...to learn, how slight a degree of Difference will, in uncultivated minds, call up a sense of Diversity, and inward perplexity and contradiction, as if the Strangers were, and yet were not, of the same kind with themselves...Alienation, aggravated now by fear, now by contempt, and not seldom by a mixture of both, aversion, hatred, enmity, are so many successive shapes of its growth and metamorphosis… (226–27)

The Visionary Poet in "Kubla Khan" evokes both awe and dread in his spectators, but most certainly not empathy. Geraldine can force people around her to accept her and be drawn to her, but she cannot form true connections with people, as every relationship formed as a product of her magic must necessarily be seen as contrived and tyrannical. The lack of imaginative power in other characters in "Christabel", on the other hand, makes them too weak to help each other, despite their pre-existing relationships: Sir Leoline disregards his love for his daughter because she has embarrassed him, Bracy the bard is forced to obey his master even though he has a vision in a dream that Christabel is in danger, and the spirit of her mother stays beyond the physical world, despite the strength of her love for her daughter. The Mariner is also alone after he returns from his voyage, and just like Geraldine, he uses his supernatural powers to draw people in – he forces his listener to stay and hear his story. However, there is an instance of true empathy and human connection that arises from his new vision, one that transcends friendships and familial relationships because it is founded only on their humanity and shared experience – the relationship of the Mariner with the Hermit that saved him. It is the Hermit that encourages the Pilot to save the Mariner in spite of the Pilot's reservations:

> 'Dear Lord! It hath a fiendish look–
> (The Pilot made reply)
> I am a-feared' – 'Push on, push on!'
> Said the Hermit cheerily. ("The Rime", Part VII, stanza 6)

The Mariner considers the Hermit a "holy man" (VII:61), the one who will wash away his sins. The Hermit is holy because he too shares the vision of "One Life"; he sings "loud his godly hymns / That he makes in the wood" (VI: 105–6) – not the

communal religious songs, but his own hymns. Moreover, perhaps he has had to retreat from society precisely due to the transgresiveness and unconventionality of his vision of the world. Nevertheless, the Hermit can grant absolution to the Mariner by recognizing him for the man he has become, a man who has grasped the transnatural idea of God and Truth, and supplied his Will with moral. This is why the Hermit asks the Mariner "What manner of man art thou?" (VII:64); he knows what innocent, inexperienced Christabel could not have known – that a person with sufficient imaginative power can be evil if they do not use their imagination to see the world as a unity, to love "all things both great and small" (VII:102). In some sense, man's ability to unify the world in his mind and supply his spirit with a moral basis might truly be "a miracle of rare device" ("Kubla Khan", line 35) – therein lies the true power of imagination.

In his daemonic poems, Coleridge explores the supernatural and the effect it has on the characters. The way they see the supernatural reflects their perspectives on the world, which vary from a superstitious fear of everything they cannot control or a selfish disregard for others to a higher knowledge which can redeem and connect an individual to the world and his fellow men, especially those who possess that knowledge too. Coleridge's faith in the power of imagination perhaps explains the magnitude of his fear that a loss of imaginative power might be the greatest tragedy for man. The daemonic poems offer a potent lesson for the readers, and the abundance of supernatural elements in the poems encourages them to "dissolve, diffuse and dissipate" the works in front of them to renew their visions of the world too.

End Notes

1 Samuel Purchas was an English compiler of travel and discovery writings who continued the encyclopedic collections begun by the British geographer Richard Hakluyt in *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes; Contayning a History of the World, in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells, by Englishmen and Others* (1625). As an editor and compiler, he sought to interest the general public of his day. During a time when travel literature had the patriotic purpose of inspiring Englishmen to engage in overseas expansion and enterprise, his collections were read with enthusiasm, but they were also frequently the only source of information on important questions relating to geographical history and early exploration. Despite being published almost two centuries earlier, *Purchas his Pilgrimes* was the favorite reading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

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