

TRANSGRESSIVE AGENCY AND THE ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

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ABSTRACT

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The theology of the Protestant Reformation, in particular, that of Calvinism, complicated the English Romantic poets' approach to free will in diverse ways. In particular, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Gordon George Byron, and John Keats were profoundly affected by metaphysical concerns about individual agency. This thesis argues that while the Romantic poets wanted to believe in and advocate for individual liberty, their religious upbringings and subsequent development as reflective thinkers prompted a skepticism about free will and its ability to effect change for the better. In Coleridge and in Byron, individual liberty only affects chaos and, in the end, destruction. Keats, on the other hand, proved more ambivalent. Nonetheless, the critical response to his poetry, especially the long narrative poem *Endymion*, exposes a literary culture uncomfortable with the idea of free will effecting positive change.

KEY WORDS: Lord Gordon George Byron, John Calvin, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Protestantism, Religion, Romanticism

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INTRODUCTION

“Many Romantics,” says Joanne Schneider in *The Age of Romanticism* (2007), “took the notion of free will to an extreme. They suggested individuals should have complete freedom to do as they pleased” (6). According to most scholars, this emphasis on individual liberty is a major identifier of the movement. *The Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era*, for example, in its entry on Christianity, claims that Robert Burns’ work exhibits all of the “familiar ideation of Romanticism writ large, such as nostalgia, Gothicism, medievalism, individualism, idealism, revolution, and concepts of creativity, free will, the infinite, and the symbolic” (931). However, a working knowledge of the English Romantic poets’ influences, philosophical and theological, complicates the issue. The theology of the Reformation had such an effect on Coleridge and Byron that while both of them wanted to believe in the efficacy of individual liberty, they were unable to endorse it as a force for good. Keats, on the other hand, is an outlier. A true neo-pagan, untouched by Protestant anxieties, he rejected the teachings of Christianity, including the idea of Hell, and the negative critical response to his work shows that English literary society as a whole, and not just Coleridge and Byron, believed individual liberty to be that which this thesis will call “transgressive,” which is to say, in violation of the laws of nature and nature’s god.

In order to understand more perfectly the literary culture and sensibilities of the era, this thesis relies heavily on the biographies of the poets as well as the religious writings of the Reformation in order to inform a close reading of the poems and personal correspondences. While books like Calvin’s *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) and Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Dying* (1650) connect these poets to their religious

heritage, modern scholarly labors such as *Emerson's Transatlantic Romanticism* (2012) by David Greenham, “Byron’s Romantic Calvinism” (2012) by Alan Rawes, and “Myth: Keats was Gay” (2016) by Duncan Wu help connect *Transgressive Agency and the English Romantic Poets* to current criticism.

In the early nineteenth century, Great Britain was, for the most part, a Protestant nation, deeply steeped in the founding ideas of the Reformation, especially the theology of John Calvin. Three hundred years after the publication of *The Institutes*, the world experienced a period of political upheaval. One of the many consequences of the revolutions that occurred in America, France, Greece, Haiti, and Ireland was that free will became a politically charged idea, especially for poets, statesmen, and philosophers.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson would write in *The Declaration of Independence* that all men were endowed by their creator with three unalienable rights, one of which is liberty. Fifteen years later, The National Constituent Assembly in France would decree *The Rights of Man*, the first article of which affirmed that men are “born and remain free” (Murray 667). In the century that followed, everywhere, Romantics, “writers and artists, would test notions of individual liberty, often against a turbulent political backdrop where claim and counter-claim was made for the case of liberty itself” (667). The difficulty for Byron and Coleridge was that while they were attracted to the idea of freedom and its ability to change individuals, and even nations, for the better, both of them were raised in the Protestant tradition, a school of religious thought that, as far back as Calvin, saw individual free will as either non-existent or essentially sinful. It was difficult for them to untangle the theological from the political. The first two chapters of this thesis are

concerned with the conflicting nature of their religious influences and their yearning for autonomy.

Chapter one focuses on the religious contemplations of Coleridge. Born the son of an Anglican cleric in 1772, Coleridge was, first, a deist, after that, a pantheist, then, a necessitarian, a Unitarian, and, finally, an Anglican again. After thirty years, and four religious conversions, the statements of faith that he had made, over time, become muddled. In an effort to remedy this, he wrote *Biographia Literaria* (1817), an account of his literary life in which he dissected the internal anatomy of the psyche and created a compatibilist system that he called “The Human Faculties” by which every seemingly incompatible position he had taken over his thirty-year career could be reconciled as internally consistent.

The self-wrought system he made for himself allowed for free will to exist alongside determinism, but any such assertion of that individual liberty was classified as sinful. According to the “Division of Faculties” in *Biographia Literaria*, man’s free will is supposed to only allow him a means of communion with God. It is not supposed to interfere with the natural order. This is why spontaneous actions arising out of man’s spirit are always destructive in Coleridge’s poetry. Examples are given from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), “Kubla Khan” (1816), and Coleridge’s notebooks.

The second chapter, which turns its focus to Byron, explores the way in which individual liberty in *The Giaour* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), and “Darkness” (1816) only serves as a damning indiscretion. Like Coleridge, Byron wanted to believe in the existence of the soul, as well as in its efficacy, but because of his Calvinistic upbringing and the way in which he self-identified as one of the reprobate, his poetry was only ever

able to express a sense of hopelessness, with, of course, a few important exceptions. When one considers that Byron, a self-proclaimed deist with Catholic sympathies, wrote poetry under the influence of Calvinist theology, one would assume, as do most scholars, that he exhibits a Bloomian anxiety of influence. However, another possibility is that the transgressive agency in his poetry is a form of protest. The actions of antiheroes like Conrad, the Giaour, and the prisoner of Chillon are condemned unjustly in his poetry as a means of demonstrating the injustice of sixteenth-century Protestant theology.

For Keats, the concept of free will was not as complicated, but he was not as irreligious as most people think. Keats was heavily invested in Greek myth and adhered to a system of paganism that appears to have been of his own making. In it, salvation was a matter of maturation, not election, and life, according to one of his personal correspondences, was a “Vale of Soul Making” where experiences, both good and bad, would, over time, make a soul of whoever underwent them. After death, that soul would go on to the afterlife where “happiness on Earth” would be “repeated in a finer tone” (*Letters 53*).

These ideas evidently influenced the poems he wrote, especially *Endymion* whose title character undertakes a quest to find the woman he loves and, along the way, experiences everything needed to forge a soul. In the end, his true love reveals herself to be the goddess Diana. He marries her, she turns him into a god, and they, presumably, spend the rest of eternity enjoying the delights of Olympus. Keats’ personal philosophies, the style of the poetry, and the class into which he was born (Keats was a Cockney poet) were all extremely offensive to the reviewers of his day, especially publications like *Blackwoods* and the *Quarterly Review*, magazines that did what they could to destroy his

reputation and the commercial success of *Endymion*. They saw it as an attempt to undermine the English caste system as well as the Christian religion

One of the most important trends in Romantic criticism over the last century has been to perform close readings of individual texts in the context of philosophical and theological works that influenced them. By taking lines from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and comparing them side-by-side with the *Canons of Dort*, Alan Rawes demonstrates that the poetry of Byron was essentially Calvinistic. Besides showing how Protestant ideology inspired Byron's other poems, i.e., "Darkness," a theological reading of Coleridge's philosophical writings and Keats' *Endymion* can inform the influence John Calvin had on the English Romantic poets.

CHAPTER I

Biographia Literaria and Coleridge's System of Compatibilism

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was equal parts confused by and enamored of religion, admitting in the first pages of *Biographia Literaria* (1819) that “at a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year, I had bewildered myself in metaphysics, and in theological controversy” (*BL* 15). This bewilderment seems to have lasted into the later years of his life. In fact, over the course of his writing career, Coleridge's opinions swayed to the point of blatant contradiction. For example, in 1794, Coleridge wrote to Robert Southey about the essayist Charles Lamb's taking the illness of his sister most admirably: "He bore it with an apparent equanimity, as beseemed him who like me is a Unitarian Christian and an Advocate for the Automatism of Man" (Letters 127). Then, thirty-seven years later, in a series of devotional essays titled *The Friend* (1837), Coleridge wrote,

God gave us reason, and with reason he gave us reflective self-consciousness; gave us principles, distinguished from the maxims and generalizations of outward experience by their absolute and essential universality and necessity, and above all, by superadding to reason the mysterious faculty of free-will. (106)

These contradictions have not escaped the notice of Coleridge scholars. In 2005, William Ulner said, “the need to distinguish Necessity from outright determinism has never achieved much prominence in Coleridge studies. If the point has sometimes been noticed, its importance generally has not, and it has certainly not become a matter of consensus” (383) The lack of notice to which Ulner is referring can be seen in the way scholars like Robert Miles, S.F. Gingrich, and even the poet Ted Hughes attribute these seemingly

contradictory statements to Coleridge's psychological instability (Miles 11; Gingrich 69). There is, however, a way to take Coleridge more seriously as a philosopher and a poet. It may very well be that he was attempting to create a system of compatibilism in which a great many of his seemingly contradictory statements could be reconciled.

In the Age of Romanticism, intellectual elites liked to create their own systems of metaphysics. Swedenborg and Blake are perfect examples, having invented new forms of Christianity in the mid-1700s (Otto 95). Keats, in the early nineteenth-century, would do much the same but for paganism. Coleridge came close to creating a metaphysical system of his own in *Biographia Literaria* (*BL*), an account of his development as a poet and a philosopher in which he attempted to reconcile necessitarianism, materialism, determinism, and individual liberty with a compatibilist theory he called, "The Division of Human Faculties."

The Classification and Division of Faculties

In his self-wrought theological system, Coleridge labeled the mind the "imitative power" (*BL* 75) and subjected it, along with the body, to the laws of nature. As a faculty whose only capabilities were response and imitation, it was subjected to the mechanical and, therefore, the inevitability of materialism. On the other hand, the spirit or, as he liked to call it, the "spontaneous conscious" or "imaginative faculty" was responsible for all true acts of creation and, therefore, entirely separate from "the imitative power" (*BL* 172). The necessitarianism and dualism to which he had previously subscribed were, in this way, no longer contradictory.

His division of "The Human Faculties" may have allowed him to save some face, but the goodness of individual free will was a casualty of the system. If a person acts

spontaneously, he or she inevitably does something outside the natural order, thereby transgressing the laws of nature, and, if one is a necessitarian, nature's god. Coleridge may have found a way to believe in individual liberty will, but he could not make himself believe it was a benefit to society.

David Greenham touches on this in *Emerson's Transatlantic Romanticism*. In his chapter on the influence Coleridge had on Emerson, Greenham writes,

[For Coleridge,] will and nature... are necessarily separate for one is free and the other determined, and as such, they are mutually exclusive. Will is supernatural.

Nevertheless, it cannot find its own way because, for Coleridge, man is fallen and, moreover, he is fallen because he is free. (99)

Greenham's discussion of Coleridge is necessarily brief, and a more thorough analysis of Coleridge's division of faculties is as necessary as it is difficult. In his philosophical treatises, Coleridge attempted a great many classifications of the self, each adhering to whatever ideology he happened to belong to at the time. For the purpose of brevity, this chapter will limit itself to the system of classification appearing in Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria*, explaining how Calvinism inspired it and how it incriminates individual agency in Coleridge's poetry.

The Heresy of the Eolian Harp

The setting of "The Eolian Harp" is a conjugal bower in which the poet, Coleridge, and his bride, Sara, recline in opulent indolence, and listen to the wind drift through a lute "placed length-ways in the clasping casement" (108). The sound inspires Coleridge to rhapsodize on the nature of inspiration, respiration, and animation to the point of positing that God is the wind animating the universe and all life in it:

And what if all of animated nature
 Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
 That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (108)

There are (at least) two readings of this passage. Either Coleridge is speaking to the confluence of the mundane and the divine, which, in working together, make art, or he is suggesting that there is, in no wise, another will in the universe than God's, who, like a puppeteer, animates the cosmos. Sara takes him to mean the latter, and upbraids him with a "serious eye" and a "mild reproof" (Coleridge 108). He responds to the chiding by praising her piety. What he does not do is concede the point. The idea that all life is a song that God plays on the instrument that is the universe is, at no point, disavowed. What is more, Coleridge complicates the issue by using "unhallowed" and "unregenerate" as adjectives describing his own thoughts (108). Herein arises one of the poet's many contradictions. If God is animating all things, and the poet is, presumably, one of the things being animated, then the thoughts that the poet produces ought to be hallowed and regenerate just as God is hallowed and regenerative, but the suggestion Coleridge is making, here, in "The Eolian Harp" is the exact opposite.

Criticizing Coleridge

If Coleridge's ideas were in constant flux, adapting every few years to meet this goal of philosophical consistency, large overarching statements about his ideology would have to be fine-tuned to specific periods in his life. This is something Coleridge scholarship has, until now, been unwilling to do. Critics have found it more convenient to

say that he was either insane or misunderstood. Arthur O. Lovejoy argues for the former. In “Coleridge and Kant’s Two Worlds” (1940), he maintains that the poet was unable to articulate himself fully because his ideas were ahead of his time: “Coleridge’s Calvinism was hopelessly at variance with his doctrine of individual freedom” (359), but these contradictions were born out of a desire to combine the ideas of necessitarianism and transcendentalism into something that did not exist yet, Victorian idealism. His writings, according to Lovejoy, were “one of the most important influences in changing the current of English thought from characteristic eighteenth-century determinism and necessitarianism to characteristic nineteenth-century Idealism” (59).

Another explanation for these inconsistencies is that Coleridge was playing an elaborate prank. Robert Miles argues that Coleridge was not serious about converting from Unitarianism to Calvinism, but was, instead, joking. This satirical effort, according to Miles, was directed at the elements of English Protestantism that he felt to be the most unsavory, especially the Dissenters. In *Romantic Misfits* (2008), Miles says that “where the Dissenters were historically singular, in their polished sociability and measured distance from enthusiasm, Coleridge conjures doubleness through hints of excess and a comic Calvinistic doppelganger” (173).

Indeed, Coleridge’s behavior was not in any way that of the typical low-church Dissenter. One need only look to his “buying on credit, piling up debts, enlisting desperately in the army, leaving Cambridge without a degree, failing to finish literary and other projects, and [his] ambivalent attitude towards his marriage,” all of which Ronald C. Wending (1991) attributes to hypochondria and a crippling addiction to opiates (51). Miles argues that because of these indiscretions, Coleridge would not have been welcome

in the tight-knit Dissenter communities that held to the doctrines of election. Therefore, as an outsider, the Calvinism Coleridge ascribed to may have had a satirical edge (53).

Miles' approach is unique. It presents a logical explanation for the variance of Coleridge is accused, especially in regard to individual agency. Most scholars simply write Coleridge off as insane. "There is little doubt that today Coleridge would be diagnosed as suffering from bipolar disorder" (134), says David Ward who argued, as recently as 2013, that his best poems, i.e., "Kubla Khan," were the result of manic episodes. Ward's opinion of Coleridge has been a popular one going all the way back to 1795 when the British army discharged the poet on the grounds of insanity (Vickers 72). Ulner does not go so far as to question Coleridge's stability. Rather, he sees the inconsistencies as a character problem. In 2005, Ulner wrote that "in his 1795 Bristol lectures, similarly, he alternatively declares evil an ontological illusion or a social reality as his polemics veer between theological and political agendas" (373). Ulner suggests that Coleridge had a "chameleon-habit" of "adapting his ideas to the preferences of his correspondents" (373).

Paul Hamilton, on the other hand, argues that while Coleridge's intellect was superb, it did not have what it takes to parse out all the ideas to which it was exposed. In *Coleridge's Poetics* (1983), he sums up the entirety of the poet's philosophical and critical labors by writing that "in discursive criticism, though, the fully responsive critic was often driven, like Coleridge, into open contradiction" (56). In an effort to ameliorate this censure, Hamilton attributes Coleridge's genius to the wild vacillations, appealing to the "flexibility and ambiguity required of poets dealing with so mixed a feeling

necessarily produced a language of considerable range, and poetic structures of subtle dialectical complexity” (56).

Although it can seem belittling to the poet, this is the same point of view S. F. Gingerich holds, and, like Hamilton, he is not convinced that it is entirely a bad thing. In “From Necessity to Transcendentalism in Coleridge” (1983), Gingerich points out that in “Religious Musings,” the poet demonstrates an inability to stick to a single theme. Gingerich writes, “Coleridge's mind was, from the first, essentially eclectic. Since the poet drew material from diverse sources of his extraordinarily wide reading, fragmentary and obscure parts are not fused with the leading ideas, and contradictions appear” (7).

These approaches to Coleridge’s contradictions ignore the long periods of time over which he maintained the same position. Coleridge was not the kind of man who would believe one thing one day and then contradict himself the next. He held to the various creeds for years at a time, and the transitions from belief system to belief system are well documented.

Coleridge’s Ideological Development

One ideology Coleridge adopted but then abandoned was materialism, a point of view through which nothing exists that is not matter and motion. Thomas Hobbes, a party-line materialist and one of the leading voices in the debate over whether or not the soul existed independent of the body, wrote, regarding human thoughts, that “they are every one a representation or appearance of some quality or other accident of a body without us, which is commonly called an object” (qtd in Melchert 363). In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge would do his utmost to discredit Hobbes, not only calling him a liar, but a plagiarist: “I deny Hobbes's claim *in toto*: for he had been anticipated by Des Cartes

[sic], whose work *De Methodo*, preceded Hobbes's *De Natura Humana*, by more than a year. But what is of much more importance, Hobbes builds nothing on the principle which he had announced” (*BL* 92). Coleridge was not always this antagonistic towards Hobbes. In fact, he, on multiple occasions, agreed with Hobbes’ disciple David Hartley, even going so far as to name his firstborn son after him (*BL* 455)

Writing during the late 1700s, Hartley agreed with Hobbes on nearly every point. He saw free will as nothing more than an illusion, the result of a consciousness overstimulated. In his 1749 publication *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, Hartley attributed the effects of poetry to the reader’s emotional baggage and not the poem itself: “I am also inclined to believe, that the method here proposed of considering words and sentences as impressions, whose influence upon the mind is entirely to be determined by the associations heaped upon them in the intercourses of life” (372). This is as much to say that the beauty of a poem is not due to its tapping into existential truths, but rather the positive associations the reader has with the words presented. Yasmin Solomonescu sums up Hartley’s view of aesthetics as follows: “sense impression from the outside world caused ‘vibrations’ that passing along the medullary substance’ of the nerves, set off corresponding vibrations in the brain. The brain then combined the resulting simple ideas into complex ideas according to laws of association” (54). Hartley, thereby, diminishes poetry to a dopamine-inducing aesthetic experience.

Coleridge initially held to this point of view some time before the early 1800s. When he writes to Robert Southey about Lamb’s sister and the “the automatism of man,” he is referring to Hartley’s explanation of human behavior, which is to say that it is

automated. In another letter to Southey, one he wrote while drafting, “Religious Musings” (1794), Coleridge said, “I am a complete necessitarian, and believe the corporeality of thought, namely, that it is motion” (*Letters* 113). Over the next few years, he seems to have become more entrenched in the ideas set down in *Observations on Man*. A 1796 letter to John Thelwall has him denying the idea of personal responsibility: “Guilt is out of the Question—I am a Necessarian [sic], and of course deny the possibility of it” (126). However, something seems to have happened between 1796 and 1798 when he wrote to his brother George that “I believe most stedfastly 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” (242).

It could have very well been his conversion to Unitarianism, but something caused Coleridge to write Humphry Davy (his friend and one of the many men who supplied him opiates throughout his life) about a prospective treatise in which he planned to disprove Hartley and establish the soul as a separate entity from the body, “a work [that] would supersede all the books of metaphysics and all the books of morals too” (347). A month later, he wrote to another anesthiologist, Thomas Poole, that

If I do not greatly delude myself, I have not only completely extricated the notions of Time, and Space; but have overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern Infidels—especially, the doctrine of Necessity. This I have done; but I trust, that I am about to do more—namely, that I shall be able to evolve all the five senses, that is, to deduce them from one sense, and to state their growth, & the causes of their

difference and in this evolvment to solve the process of Life and Consciousness.

(*Letters* 348)

Coleridge wrote these letters under the influence of year-long fever. When he recovered, in 1801, the project was abandoned. In a follow-up letter to Poole, he wrote, “It is insolent to differ from the public opinion if it be only opinion” (352). Although no grand treatise against the proponents of materialism ever appeared under Coleridge’s name, his contentions with the doctrine of necessity did not dissipate with the fever. In fact, a small version of the catalog of senses he promised Poole appears in *Biographia Literaria*.

Coleridge may have turned against Hartley and Hobbes, the philosophical proponents of determinism, but, after abandoning Unitarianism in favor of Anglicanism in 1805, he became a staunch supporter of John Calvin, the theological proponent of determinism. A vehement apologist, especially later in life, Coleridge would write in *Aids to Reflection* (1825) that Calvin was a “man of talent,” defending him from accusations that he was in any way responsible for the murder of Michael Servetus (47). Furthermore, Coleridge attacked the Arminians, the Protestant proponents of free will, the most virulent remarks against them appearing in the marginalia of his 1810 reading of Richard Baxter:

If ever a book was calculated to drive men to despair, it is Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s on Repentance. It first opened my eyes to Arminianism, and that Calvinism is practically a far more soothing and consoling system.... Calvinism (Archbishop Leighton’s for example) compared with Taylor’s Arminianism, is the lamb in wolf’s skin to the wolf in the lamb’s skin: the one is cruel in the phrases, the other in the doctrine. (*Notes* 38)

His attacks on Arminianism and his adoption of Calvinism seem incongruous with his defense of free will, which also seems out of step with his statements in favor of the automatization of man which appear incompatible with the many times in which he insisted that humans have souls. When critics accuse Coleridge of inconsistency, this is what they are referring to.

Biographia Literaria: a System of Compatibilism

Coleridge knew that over the course of his poems, lectures, letters, and discourses he had sent a myriad of mixed signals, and, so, in 1817, he tried to set the record straight. The original premise of *Biographia Literaria* was to introduce a collection of his own poetry and provide the general public with biographical information on a life of letters (*BL* 9). In the first chapter, he states that the purpose of the book is to make “a statement of my principles in Politics, Religion, and Philosophy, and an application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism” (*BL* 5).

Biographia Literaria is not very informative when it comes to the particulars of his life, and what biographical information there is only serves to foreground the theoretical elements. For example, when speaking of his youth, Coleridge does not tell the reader about his mother or father. Instead, he talks about how, when riding a public coach as a child, he would be

delighted, if any passenger, especially if he were dressed in black, would enter into conversation with me. For I soon found the means of directing it to my favorite subjects Of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate, fixed fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute, And found no end in wandering mazes lost. (*BL* 16)

This being lost in wandering mazes presumably continued long after he developed a love for poetry and turned his attention to Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, and, his contemporary, Robert Southey. The second and third chapters of *Biographia Literaria* are dedicated to these poets, lauding their accomplishments and attacking their critics (and critics in general) before returning again to the predominate themes of “providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate, fixed fate, free will, and foreknowledge absolute” (16) in Chapter VIII, the subject of Coleridge’s own self-development resurfaces, once again, in the context of the great necessitarian thinkers of the Enlightenment:

After I had successively studied in the schools of Locke, Berkeley, Leibnitz, and Hartley..., I began to ask myself; is a system of philosophy; as different from mere history and historic classification, possible?...I was for a while disposed to answer the first question in the negative. And to admit that the sole practicable employment for the human mind was to observe, to collect, and to classify. (140)

Coleridge goes on to discuss the writers who influenced him away from materialism and towards a dualism: “George Fox, Jacob Behmen, and even of Behmen's commentator, the pious and fervid William Law” (151) He credits them with “prevent[ing] my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head.... [And] enabled me to skirt, without crossing, the sandy deserts of utter unbelief (151). This is all the justification *BL* puts forward for the ideological shift that took place in between 1796 and 1798.

If there is—in the entirety of *Biographia Literaria*—any admission that he had indulged in open self-contradiction, it is contained in the above-quoted passages.

Coleridge was a man loathe to admit his own faults, and any suggestion of inconsistency

would cause him to lose face, especially since he was going out of his way to style himself as a philosopher poet. While shame may have been one of the reasons he did not acknowledge every incongruity of the past, it may also be the case that the wandering mazes had led him to a metaphysical system by which the various stances he had taken on free will, predestination, and the nature of the soul could be reconciled. The rudiments of this system appear in Chapter XII.

Obtusely titled “A chapter of requests and premonitions concerning the perusal or omission of the chapter that follows” (114), the twelfth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* is about poetry: how it ought to be read, written, and criticized. In a previous section on the imagination, he had pointed out that while he originally agreed with Wordsworth’s idea that imagination and fancy were one and the same, he did so only because of the genius he saw in Wordsworth’s poetry. Coleridge says that “repeated meditations led me first to suspect—and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions, and effects matured my conjecture into full conviction—that Fancy and Imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties” (42). Fancy, as Coleridge defines it, is imitative. Fanciful art does not, in essence, say anything new. Imaginative art, on the other hand, originates. As he says in Chapter IV, “Milton had a highly imaginative, Cowley a very fanciful mind.” In Chapter 12, he ties fancy to necessitarian thought and the imagination to free will, reproducing a division of human faculties that had previously appeared in Southey’s *Omniana* (1812):

These, the human faculties, I would arrange under the different senses and powers: as the eye, the ear, the touch, etc.; the imitative power, voluntary and automatic; the imagination, or shaping and modifying power; the fancy, or the

aggregative and associative power; the understanding, or the regulative, substantiating and realizing power; the speculative reason, *vis theoretica et scientifica*, or the power by which we produce or aim to produce unity, necessity, and universality in all our knowledge by means of principles *a priori* ; the will, or practical reason; the faculty of choice and, distinct both from the moral will and the choice, the sensation of volition, which I have found reason to include under the head of single and double touch. (352).

This is one of the most helpful parts of *Biographia Literaria* when it comes to deciphering Coleridge’s paradoxes, but because of its positioning in the essay and the awkwardness with which it is worded, the “Division of Faculties” has, for the most part, been ignored by Coleridge scholarship. Jefferey W. Barbeau is one of the few critics who uses it. He argues that the “Division of Faculties” shows Coleridge’s debt to Kant and Schelling since the system is so similar to the division of *Wille* and *Willkiir* (583). Other than Barbeau, the only other scholar to deal extensively with the faculties is Thomas R. Simons who also identifies a strong Kantian influence (467). In order to discuss the division of faculties more easily, it helps to break them out of paragraph form and arrange them into a graph (Table 1).

Table 1

The Human Faculties

Senses	Imitation	Imagination	Fancy	Understanding	Speculation	Will
Sight	Voluntary	Shaping	Aggregation	Regulative	Theory	Sensation
Sound	Automatic	Modifying	Association	Substantiating	Science	Volition
Touch				Realizing		

When laid out in a table, the reason Coleridge scholarship has avoided this section of *BL* becomes obvious. Coleridge is using his own undisclosed definitions for well-known terms. Wordsworth himself struggled with the division of faculties, saying in the preface to the 1815 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* that his “only objection is that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and combine belong as well to the imagination as the fancy” (qtd. in *BL* 138).

In the next chapter, Coleridge offers his rebuttal to Wordsworth with what is perhaps the most quoted line in all of *Biographia Literaria*: “The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am” (144). In so doing, Coleridge identifies the imagination as the soul. This is a monumental claim, and although it does not make the division of human faculties any less opaque, it sets imagination apart from something he calls the “Secondary Imagination:”

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.

(144)

The Secondary Imagination recreates, which is to say it imitates. It idealizes, which is to say it realizes. It unifies, which is to say it aggregates. These are three of the items that

appear in the division of human faculties. Therefore, it is not unjustifiable to assume that the Secondary Imagination consists of all the faculties that are not the Primary Imagination. What is more, according to Chapter XIII, they are “fixed and dead” (144). This makes them subject to material necessity.

Biographia Literaria is arduous reading. The ideas are almost always severely out of synch with each other and convoluted to the point of illegibility by Coleridge’s tendency to use his own made-up definitions. As Catherine M. Wallace said in 1981, “there is ample evidence that *Biographia Literaria* is a fragmented disaster whose difficulties can neither be resolved nor understood” (Function 216). Despite its difficulty, *BL* is indispensable to anyone attempting to get inside Coleridge’s head. The connection between the Primary Imagination and the division of human faculties, for example, reveals volumes about the poet’s religious development.

When Coleridge says he is a firm believer in necessitarianism and the automatization of man in the context of Charles Lamb’s sister being sick, he is praising Lamb’s apprehension that the body is mortal and inevitably going to die. The body and apprehension are, according to Chapter XIII, “fixed and dead” (144). Read in the context of *Biographia Literaria*, The Southey letter is not inconsistent with the existence of the soul. By the same token, when he says, “I am a complete necessitarian and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself, but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporality of thought, namely that it is motion,” he is talking about substantiating, which, according to the division of human faculties, is a part of understanding, and therefore subject to mechanical inevitability just like anything else fixed or dead (*Letters* 113).

Coleridge was not someone who changed ideologies as much as current scholarship suggests. Rather, he was someone who collected ideologies and tried to make them fit. In Chapter I, he discusses the initial criticisms his poetry received, and how critics accused him of being too flowery with his language and indulging in “the swell and glitter both of thought and diction” (*BL* 7). Coleridge explains that he was only able to remedy this fault by degrees: “These parasite plants of youthful poetry had insinuated themselves into my longer poems with such intricacy of union, that I was often obliged to omit disentangling the weed, from the fear of snapping the flower” (*BL* 7). He then credits this slow transformation with allotting him the time and space needed to develop his voice, allowing his “natural faculties [to] expand, and my original tendencies to develop themselves—my fancy, and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds” (*BL* 7).

The same can be said for his ideological development. Throughout the 1790s and 1800s, Coleridge was not pruning away troublesome poetic tendencies and ideological difficulties. Instead, he was splinting ideas, making them more compatible with each other by sheer force of will. The inconsistencies that appear throughout his career can, in this way, be read as ideas he had, at that point in his life, yet to reconcile. When Gingrich says that “Since the poet drew material from diverse sources of his extraordinarily wide reading, fragmentary and obscure parts are not fused with the leading ideas, and contradictions appear” (7), he is right. These fragmentary ideas are not fused to their source. Rather, they are fused together to make new ideas, self-wrought system of metaphysics, and unorthodox solutions to the problems of Christian orthodoxy.

The book itself is similarly organized, which is to say it is spontaneously ordered. A legitimate grievance one could possibly hold against *Biographia Literaria* is that it repeats itself. For example, there are passages in Chapter VIII that resemble passages in Chapter XII verbatim. In *The Design of Biographia Literaria* (1983), Catherine Wallace says that “rather than rewrite [Chapter VIII], Coleridge repeats before proceeding” (53). One such repetition of the ideas set down in Chapter XIII gives alternative definitions for the Primary and Secondary Imagination.

The Spontaneous Conscience and the Artificial Conscience

Because he believed that the imagination and the soul were one and the same, Coleridge maintained that the act of creation was not a product of higher reason, as the thinkers of the Enlightenment would argue, but a phenomenon native to the subconscious. Writing decades before Freud, Coleridge did not have standard definitions of the psyche, and so he had to make his own. In Chapter XII, the subconscious and conscience are defined in this wise: “A philosophic (and inasmuch as it is actualized by an effort of freedom, an artificial) consciousness [which] lies beneath or as it were behind the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflective beings” (*BL* 117). Coleridge was always changing his terminology, especially in regard to the parts of the self. In a notebook entry he wrote in 1812, Coleridge referred to the primary imagination (or the spontaneous conscious) as the *noumenon* (*Anima Poetae* 217). Three years later, he would call it the sub-conscious, thus coining the term in English (*Notebooks* 426).

Throughout his philosophical development, Coleridge maintained that the spontaneous conscience is indefinable. Although this is, admittedly, unhelpful, it makes sense. If the *noumenon* could be defined in concrete terms, such a definition would put it

concretely in the realm of necessity, causing Coleridge's separation of primary and secondary imaginations to merge. In Chapter VII, he writes, "We only fancy that we act from rational resolves, or prudent motives, or from impulses of anger, love, or generosity. In all these cases, the real agent is a something-nothing-everything, which does all of which we know, and knows nothing of all that itself does" (*BL* 120). In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge does not clarify exactly how something that is entirely metaphysical, like this spontaneity, interacts with the corporeal, a vagueness he was able to clear up in "Religious Aphorisms" which was published seven years after *BL* as a part of *Aids to Reflection* (1832).

Having had time to perfect his system of the division of human faculties, the description of the psyche's various parts, which appears in "Religious Aphorisms," is much more clearly rendered: "the spontaneous" he says, "rises into the voluntary, and finally after various steps and long ascent, the... animal means... are prepared for the manifestations of a free will, having its law within itself, and its motive in the law—and thus bound to originate its own acts, not only without, but even against, alien stimulant" (*Aids* 167). Coleridge died two years after the publication of *Aids to Reflection*, having taken the majority of his life to articulate his vision of human free will. The spontaneous conscious, as it appears in *Biographia Literaria* and is clarified in *Aids to Reflection*, is not only helpful to the Coleridge scholar not only because it informs the poet's personal ideologies, but also because it explains elements of his poetry, such as the ancient mariner's seemingly motiveless shooting of the albatross.

The Mariner's Motive

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the wedding guest sees a pallor come over the mariner's face a quarter of the way through his story and asks him, "Why frets thou so?" The mariner responds by saying, "With my crossbow. I shot the albatross." (Coleridge 164) No further explanation is proffered; the plot resumes and the reader is left to wonder why the narrator would do such a thing. Most critics are of Robert Penn Warren's persuasion that the avian assassination is "motiveless and gratuitous" (qtd in Justice 126). In fact, the word *gratuitous* appears all over *Ancient Mariner* scholarship. The environmentalist Peter Heymans calls it an "obscenely gratuitous act of violence" (47), and so does Robert Barth, who refers to it as "the mariner's gratuitous killing of the albatross" (93).

Those who want to present the mariner's motives as something other than bare-faced blood-lust are few and far between. John Beer, for example, argues that, by slaying the albatross, is attempting to assert his own individuality from the rest of the crew who—when the bird for food or play came to the mariners' hollow—were doing the feeding and the playing and, as a whole, were in favor of the albatross' not dying: "The Mariner demonstrates his freedom... by ignoring both his shipmates and [their] superstition" (137). But what if the albatross' murder is an act of the spontaneous conscience and, therefore, free from all logical explanation? Irene H. Chayes skirts this possibility in her article "A Coleridgean Reading of The Ancient Mariner" where she argues that

the shooting can be understood as an attempt at perception or a substitute for it, an unplanned and spontaneous but not necessarily violent or 'wanton' effort to

apprehend something for which the proper means of apprehension do not exist, or are not possessed by the mariner.... the Mariner can bridge the distance between himself and the Albatross only by an act of curiosity and appropriation that destroys (88-89)

In short, the mariner does what he does because he has no other means of understanding the bird. Chayes has the mariner killing the albatross in order to know it more perfectly. However darkly comic her assertions, Chayes' supposition is not without its merits, especially in the context of what *Aids to Reflection* and *Biographia Literaria* have to say about the primary imagination.

The mariner acts spontaneously and unpredictably, inventing a solution to a problem he may have not even understood. The act is transgressive. The albatross is described as a Christian soul. It is not killed. It is murdered. The act brings the wrath of God down on the ship, and the vessel sails into a doldrums in which all the sailors, save the mariner, die. In order to see how acts of the spontaneous conscious tend to be transgressive, it is important to understand the transition Coleridge made from Unitarianism to Anglicanism at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Anglican Calvinism

Fifty-four years after John Calvin died, the leaders of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands gathered in the city of Dordrecht (or Dort) to draft a common charter and statement of faith. It was formulated as a refutation of the doctrines of Jacob Arminius, who taught that man is free to accept or reject salvation. In 1963, the American theologians David Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, in a pamphlet titled "The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Documented and Defended," summarized the Canons of Dort with

the helpful mnemonic TULIP: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the Saints (Backus 30). The third and fourth items in this mnemonic refer to the role human agency plays (or does not play) in the saving of the soul.

Limited Atonement is the idea that the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross was only propitiation for the sins of the elect. If an individual were not destined for salvation, from the beginning of time, the sacrifice Jesus made was not for them. Irresistible Grace is the idea that when one encounters the grace of God, which is unto salvation, then there is nothing one can do to reject it (29). Irresistible Grace establishes salvation without the consent of the saved. Limited Atonement, by the same token, makes damnation unavoidable. *The Canons of Dort* and, by extension, TULIP, removed free will from the process of individual salvation.

Although it was written four-hundred years after *The Institutes* (1536), every item in the TULIP scheme was drawn from the theology of John Calvin (De Gruchy 170). However, most modern-day Calvinists, do not adhere to all five points of the TULIP scheme, referring to themselves as four-point Calvinists or three-point Calvinists, and so on. The points most commonly abandoned are Limited Atonement and Irresistible Grace; see Backus 44.

It is this point of Irresistible Grace that the Anglican Church refuted when it stated quite clearly in its founding documents that mankind is capable of resisting the Holy Ghost and, therefore, election. *The 39 Articles* (1563) kept the idea that man was totally depraved, but preserved the Arminian emphasis on personal responsibility. For instance, Article X reads, “The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn

and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith.... we have no power to do good works... without the grace of God by Christ.” (Nichols 309). This is Total Depravity and, therefore, in-line with Orthodox Calvinism. The divergence appears in Article XVI, which reads, “After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives” (310). This is in direct opposition to the Calvinistic doctrine of Irresistible Grace, in which salvation is imparted to the elect without their consent.

From Unitarianism to Anglicanism

Coleridge would eventually affirm all but one of the *39 Articles*, but the process of full immersion into Anglicanism was long and varied. From 1794 to 1805, he was an active Unitarian, lecturing at their chapels, writing in their publications, and even applying, unsuccessfully, for a seminary position (Brandl 224). Coleridge liked their idea of a God who was all-in-all. It agreed with his Romantic sensibilities as demonstrated in “The Eolian Harp.” However, after fourteen years of struggling with their denial of the traditional Godhead—a trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Coleridge—swore off Unitarianism in 1805, saying, “No Trinity, no God!” (qtd in Neville 16). This move away from Unitarianism brought him back, almost by default, to the faith of his childhood, Anglican Christianity, whose tenants, especially the *39 Articles*, he began to study in earnest. In September 1831 he would write in the margins of his *Book of Common Prayer*, “Well! I could most sincerely subscribe to all these articles” (*Notes* 28). He did eventually find fault with the idea of infant baptism, but other than that, he was insistent on complete adherence to the articles of faith, as he would write in a letter to some of his

Anglican friends, “I give you my word as a Gentleman, that I could conscientiously subscribe to all the Articles of Faith... Baptism not included” (18).

This subscription meant that he agreed with the Calvinistic idea that humans could do nothing to save their own souls, as per Article X, but had the power to reject that salvation, as per Article XVI. By affirming thirty-eight of the *39 Articles* he was acknowledging that the sub-conscience could resist—but not accept—the Holy Spirit. He was granting that the *noumenon* could do anything other than that which was redemptive. Coleridge’s conversion to Anglicanism, before writing *Biographia Literaria*, informs the moral alignment of the spontaneous conscious.

The Transgressive Daemon

In 1812, a few years after his rejection of Unitarianism and conversion to Anglicanism, Coleridge wrote a notebook entry titled “Presentiments,” in which he discloses the dark and untrustworthy nature of his own subconscious:

One of the strangest and most painful Peculiarities of my Nature
(unless others have the same, & like me, hide it from the same inexplicable
feeling of causeless shame & sense of a sort of guilt, joined with the apprehension
of being feared and shrunk from as a something transnatural) I will here record—
and my Motive or rather Impulse to do this, seems to myself an effort to eloin
[sic] and abalienate [sic] it from the dark Adyt of my own Being by a visual
Outness—& not the wish for others to see it (*Notebook 551*).

He then goes on to say that whenever he is about to get close to someone, he imagines, in them, a secret vice, and calls it “a sudden second sight” (551). That it is sudden and that it is outside the world of the five senses already suggests that the primary imagination is at

work here. Coleridge goes on to make the connection even more explicit by explaining the means by which he is egged into thinking the worst of others:

[It] urges me on like the feeling of an eddy torrent to a swimmer. I see it as a vision, feel it as a prophecy, not as one given me by any other being, but as an act of my own spirit, of the absolute noumenon, which, in so doing seems to have offended against some law of its being, and to have acted the traitor by commune with full consciousness independent of the tenure or inflected state of association, cause and effect. (*Anima Poetae* 217)

Not only does this passage show Coleridge's isolation and paranoia, but it also reveals how the division of human faculties affected his personal life. Before *BL*, Coleridge called the spontaneous conscious (or the primary imagination) the *noumenon*. It was a part of a previous system of classification he attempted in "Notes on Jeremy Taylor," where he divided the self into two parts, the noumenon and the phenomenon, the latter being the imitative faculty or secondary imagination (*Remains* 217).

In "Presentiments," Coleridge explicitly states that the *noumenon*—by some divine law—is not allowed to intimate anything to the artificial consciousness. Regardless, it still does so, and the end result is disaster, at least for Coleridge's social life. He cannot help but become pessimistic about the character of his new acquaintances because of these supernatural insights.

"Presentiments" forms the foundation of Gregory Leadbetter's *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (2011). Leadbetter uses it as a diagnostic for Coleridge's entire creative process, describing Coleridgean self-election as the process of "willingly putting oneself under influences beyond the mind's deliberate control" (48), a state achieved

when “shame and power coincide.... directing the organic processes of mind and body to the object which they will ingest, thereby actively shaping the self” (46). After two chapters spent establishing the daemonic imagination as being closely aligned with Coleridge’s own destructive tendencies, Leadbetter demonstrates its influences in Coleridge’s poetry. He does not, however, connect it to the division of human faculties in *Biographia Literaria* and, in so doing, misses a great deal of the philosophical and theological complexity behind the transgressive imagination in Coleridge.

Instead of being touched by the muse or otherwise influenced by an external force, Coleridge’s art comes from his imagination and his imagination only or, at least, that is how he understood it. According to Leadbetter’s explanation of Coleridge’s creative process, he would become susceptible to the currents of poetic creation that “eddy” (*Anima Poetae* 217) inside him by intentionally allowing his transgressive spontaneity to have free reign. This invokes the “The Eolian Harp,” wherein unbidden thoughts arise in the narrator’s mind:

Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,
 And many idle flitting phantasies,
 Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
 As wild and various as the random gales. (Coleridge 108)

When “The Eolian Harp,” is read in the context of *Biographia Literaria* and the aforementioned notebook entry, the source of the “uncalled and undetained” thoughts is obvious. It is not God playing on the poet like a harp. It is the *noumenon* or spontaneous conscience acting out and originating novel ideas. When Sara reprimands these musings,

he acknowledges that they are dim, unhallowed, and the product of an unregenerate mind, thus affirming the transgressive nature of free will.

The Spontaneous in Kubla Khan

From its origin story to its final stanza, “Kubla Khan” (1797) demonstrates the transgressive union of the *noumenon* and the corporeal. According to the poem’s preface, it was composed after he had taken a prescribed dose of anodyne and picked up a book about the Mongol Empire:

The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. (qtd. in Sisman 195)

This short *ars poetica* is consistent with the division of human faculties that would appear in *Biographia Literaria* twenty years later in that the external senses, which make up the secondary imagination, have nothing to do with the poem’s creation. The separation of human faculties becomes even more important when Coleridge—because of an untimely interruption—is unable to recall the rest of the poem. To use the turn of phrase that appears in *Aids to Reflection*, the spontaneous had not yet risen into the voluntary. Since, as Coleridge would have it, such congress—between the spirit and the mind—is rare, the last half of the poem could not be remembered because imagination is a separate faculty from aggregation, and aggregation is a part of fancy. Therefore, “Kubla Kan” never existed in his memory in the first place.

The landscape of Xanadu is also highly representative of the division of faculties, almost to the point of being allegorical. If the ten miles round of fertile ground surrounded by walls is, in this case, standing for the body, the river, Alph, that runs through it and down into caverns “measureless to man” into a sea with no sun can stand for the *noumenon*: “But, oh! That deep Romantic chasm that slanted / Down the green hill athwart a cedern cover” (Coleridge 91). Next, this meeting place of the spiritual and material is strange and transgressive, “A savage place! As holy and enchanted as e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon lover” (91). If one were to, hypothetically speaking, have sex with a demon, the act would be, by any strain of Christian orthodoxy, sinful. What is more, it would also produce an aberration of nature consistent with the Nephilim of Genesis 6 and Coleridge’s description, in his notebook, of what happens when free will partakes in unlawful congress with the mind. No sooner has the woman cried out for her demon lover, the flow of water is reversed. The river Alph explodes, in ejaculatory fashion, out of the chasm:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
 As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
 A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
 Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher’s flail:
 And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river. (91)

That this is a reference to the *noumenon* (or spontaneous conscious) is further established by the way in which it takes the mundane and animates it, so much so that the earth itself begins breathing and panting. As the stanza goes on, the poet writes that the Great Khan (while observing the caves of ice created by the geyser, which appear to be standing side-by-side with or even inside the pleasure dome) hears “ancestral voices promising war” (92). This is second sight. To borrow Coleridge’s phrase from “Presentiments,” he sees “it as a vision, and feels it as a prophecy all in a manner similar to Coleridge anticipating the worst in his new acquaintances. The destructive nature of the *noumenon* is further reinforced by the nature of the prophesy. It is not a harbinger of peace, but war.

The next serious hint that the *noumenon* is essentially transgressive can be found in the poem’s final lines, where the narrator conjectures that if he were able to reproduce the Abyssinian maid’s song, those passing by would say, “weave a circle round him thrice / And close your eyes with holy dread / For he on honeydew hath fed / And drunk the milk of paradise” (Coleridge 92). Leadbetter reads this as Coleridge’s acknowledging the rejection he will inevitably experience if he taps into the full powers of his poetic genius, powers simultaneously godlike and demonic. “In foreseeing his fate,” says Leadbetter, “in the ecstatic terms he does, the poet accepts and even exults in his daemonic fusion of shame and power” (183). This fusion is dangerous. If the merger of flesh and the *noumenon* is the same force that which brought the earthquake, the geyser, and the prophecy of the previous stanzas, then “those who heard” who see “His flashing eyes” and “his floating hair” (Coleridge 92) should recognize that the narrator is being animated by a dangerous force and are well within their rights to treat him as a pariah.

The Dark Spark

What was subtly woven through his early, more popular poetry becomes explicit in his later religious poetry. Coleridge, in his waning years, saw the *noumenon* as the drive to sin, calling it “the dark spark.” In “Gently I took that which urgently came,” Coleridge associates the need to unload the heart of vengeance with individual agency. Free will is the “cat’s eye spark” which

Thou wouldst not see, were not thine own heart so dark.

Thine own keen sense of wrong that thirsts for sin

Which blown upon will blind thee with its glare

Or smothered stifle thee with noisome air. (Coleridge 235)

In this entreaty to a friend with whom he has had a falling out, he encourages the unnamed plaintive to resort to Christian forgiveness, saying,

If a foe have kenn’d

Or worse than foe an alienated friend

A rib of dry rot in thy ship’s stout side

Think it God’s message, and in humble pride

With heart of oak replace it (235)

The spark, self-kindled from within, that deviates from the natural order is, barefacedly, the primary imagination, and, in this poem, it, ironically, plunges the addressee into darkness. Night, darkness, and other opacities are Coleridge’s favorite metaphors for the spontaneous self. In “Know Thyself,” this volition is described as a miasmatic entity lost in dimness:

What is there in thee, Man, that can be known? --
 Dark fluxion, all unfixable by thought,
 A phantom dim of past and future wrought,
 Vain sister of the worm—life, death, soul, clod—
 Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God! (157)

This dark fluxion is in no wise corporeal. It is a phantom, “all unfixable by thought.” It is the fluxion wrought of the past and the future invoked in “Presentiments” and described in *BL* as “a something-nothing-everything, which does all of which we know, and knows nothing of all that itself does” (120).

Demonizing the Daemon

Speaking vaguely of his own poetry but more on his early life in general, Coleridge writes in *Aids to Reflection* that “my eager protestations, made in the glory of my spiritual strength I am ashamed of. But my shame, and the tears with which my presumption and my weakness were bewailed, recur in the songs of my thanksgivings. My strength had been my ruin” (145). The self becomes the scapegoat for Coleridge’s past indiscretions. When Coleridge speaks of his addiction to opiates, which he does only rarely—there being no mention of them in *Biographia Literaria*—he never acknowledges outright that he is dependent upon them.

More often than not, he is lauding laudanum’s curative powers, as in his famous letter to Poole in which he tells the physician about the time he was seized with an intolerable pain... I was nearly frantic, and ran about the house naked, endeavoring by every means to excite sensations in different parts of my body, and so to weaken the enemy but not so violently... but I took between sixty

and seventy drops of laudanum and sopped the Cerberus just as his mouth began to open. (*Letters* 173)

In another letter to Poole, he credits it with allowing him to write through the pain of an unnamed illness: “I take twenty-five drops of laudanum every five hours, the ease and spirits gained by which have enabled me to write you this flighty but not exaggerated account” (175).

In one of the letters he wrote to Sara, complaining about his health, Coleridge described everything he drank in one day in an effort to cure the illness affecting his powers of digestion: “purified opium, equal to twelve drops of laudanum, which is not more than an eighth part of what I took at Keswick, exclusively of beer, brandy, and tea, which last is imdoubtedly [sic] a pernicious thing” (413). In the same way that Coleridge believed the tea and not the opium had given him narcotic bowel syndrome, it could very well be said that, looking back on his life from the perspective of old age, he liked to think that it was his imagination, his spark of genius, and fierce sense of individuality that drove him, on multiple occasions, to ruin, social and otherwise. In his own mind, the problem was not a lack of will, but that he had the will, and it was free.

CHAPTER II

Transgressive Agency as Protest in the Poetry of Lord Byron

The English Romantic poets who were most influenced by the theology of the Reformation were, without a doubt, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Lord Gordon George Byron: Coleridge a convert to Anglican Calvinist, and, Byron a Scots Presbyterian by birth. Scots-Presbyterianism is more reformed than its High Church counterparts, which would suggest—as do a great many Byron scholars—that being brought up in a stricter school of Calvinism made him pessimistic about the efficacy of free will. In 1901, A. B. Faust introduced the poet as “Byron, the pessimist of English literature, born a nobleman without adequate means, who lacked the moral qualities, perhaps the ability, to improve his condition” (93). In 1976, Thomas McFarland wrote, “Byron was a pessimist with little regard either for himself or for human possibilities” (693). In 2008, Christine Kenyon Jones called him “an incurable pessimist associated with [the brightest] dreams” (116). Byron himself contributed to the impression that he was not at all a happy man, writing to Ensign Long, “I consider myself destined never to be happy” (*Confessions* 95).

This pessimism is incongruous with the poet’s political advocacy, the most obvious example being his contribution to the Greek War of Independence in which he died a martyr to the rebel cause. If taken at face value, his pessimism and activism seem entirely out of synch. For G.K. Chesterton, they were too out of synch to take any suggestion of pessimism seriously. In *12 Types* (1902), Chesterton suggested that this pessimism was actually a form of protest: “The exuberance of [Byron’s] nature demands for an adversary a dragon as big as the world” (44). Chesterton is vague about what this dragon is that the poet is supposed to be resisting, but if Byron’s depiction of individual

agency as ineffectual is a kind of protest, it is against the ideologies and institutions that hold free will to be ineffective, the foremost of which would be Calvinism.

Bred Amongst Calvinists

In “Byron’s Romantic Calvinism” (2012), Alan Rawes says, “No one, to my knowledge, [has] linked the combination of aspiring to freedom and ‘all-pervading’ gloom that, according to Goethe, so marks Byron’s work to the British poet’s Calvinistic upbringing in Scotland” (131). Hints of this all-pervading gloom appear in Byron’s correspondences. In 1815, he wrote a letter to his future wife, Anne Isabella, the Baroness Wentworth, about his childhood, saying, “I was bred in Scotland among Calvinists in the first part of my life which gave me a dislike to that persuasion” (*Confessions* 103). One of these Calvinists was the family maid, Agnes May Gray, a Scots-Presbyterian nanny who raised him from the age of two till he and his mother inherited Newstead Abbey (Eisler 20). Not only did she personally take responsibility for the young lord’s physical well-being, but she also saw to his religious instruction. Every day, she would read him the Psalms and every day he would recite them until he learned them by heart. Even later in life he would be able to quote verbatim Psalms 1, 8, 23, and 51 (Bloom 32).

Harold Bloom argues that Gray was responsible for forming the young poet’s aesthetics and ideologies: “The family maid introduced Byron to the beauty of the Psalms, even as she preached the doctrine that some people are predestined to evil” (ix). She was a case in point. Gray “beat Byron, drank to excess, and was promiscuous” (x), and—beginning at the age of nine—would “come to his bed and play tricks with his person” (Cochran 148). Paul Barton, Peter Cochran, Joni Rendon and Shannon Mckenna Schmidt all argue that Gray's sexual abuse is the reason Byron grew up to be a sex addict

(71). It can likewise be argued that her dour opinions on man, specifically the insistence that he is a creature of impotence sans the ability to choose right and wrong, likewise affected her young ward later in life. This is one of the major cases made in Barton's *Lord Byron's Religion: A Journey into Despair* (2003). Barton takes on critics who doubt the veracity of the account Byron gave of her abuse and goes so far as to attribute the whole of his antisocial behavior to Gray and her sisters' abuse (27).

Byron undoubtedly suffered from what Max Weber called Puritan anxiety. Though Weber did not coin the term, he gets credit for coming up with the idea that Puritans—especially Calvinists—struggled to convince themselves that they were a part of the elect. In “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” Weber says that “Calvin viewed all pure feelings and emotions, no matter how exalted they might seem to be, with suspicion; faith had to be proved by its objective results in order to provide a firm foundation for the *certitudo salutis*” (6). The more one behaves like one of the elect, the better chance one has of being saved. Unfortunately for Byron, he at no point in his life exhibited the objective results of which Weber writes. According to Anne Isabella, this was the source of all his anxiety. In a letter to her longtime friend, the American novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, Isabella blamed his early absorption of “the gloomiest Calvinist tenets” for the misery he inflicted on himself and on others: “I, like all connected with him, was broken against the rock of Predestination” (qtd. in Stowe 263),

The Damned Antihero

Rawes makes the case that the title character of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is similarly dashed against the rocks of Predestination and is to be read as one of the irreconcilably damned. To do so, he uses article XV of *The Canons of Dort* (1619):

Concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decision: to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish them (having been left in their own ways and under his just judgement), not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins. (qtd. in Klooster 1155)

Rawes' observation is that this system—in which God abandons the reprobate to their own devices, and they, then, damn themselves by their own actions—is uncannily similar to the fall from grace that Childe Harold experienced sometime before the beginning of Canto One. Byron writes,

He, who grown aged in this world of woe,
 In deeds, not years, piercing the depth of life,
 So that no wonder waits him; nor below
 Can love, or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,
 Cut to his heart again with the keen knife
 Of silent, sharp endurance: he can tell
 Why thought seeks refuge in lone caves, yet rife
 With airy images, and shapes whicim'v'vell
 Still unimpair'd, though old, in the soul's haunted cell. (111)

Rawes points out that Harold is “a youth / Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight' (Byron 69)” and argues that this is because the Calvinistic God has denied him “saving faith and grace of conversion” (qtd in Klooster 1156). Therefore, Harold is unable to keep

himself from plunging into a life of “riot most uncouth” (Byron 69). The life he leads is not pleasing to God, and divine wrath is loosed upon him in the form of chains, “gall’d for ever, fettering though unseen” (112). Rawes sums up his argument by saying that “God predestines Harold to damnation by leaving him free to do as he pleases, but Harold brings that damnation about himself by his own free will and by exercising the freedom of choice available to him” (134). If one invests in the popular assumption that the protagonist is a stand-in for Byron, then not only can the adventures of Childe Harold be read as a thinly veiled account of the poet’s own European tour, but the damnation of the poem’s protagonist can also be read as the damnation of its author.

Byron on a “sun-shiny day”

Unlike Coleridge, Byron was not interested in charting the poetic process to its ultimate source, but he did believe that the imagination and the supernatural were, in some way, connected, and, on bright “sun-shiny” days, he would wax poetical about the nature of inspiration: “I am always more religious upon a sun-shiny day; as if there was some association between an kindler of this dark lanthorn [sic] of our external existence” (*Letters* 653). In this same journal entry, he echoes Coleridge’s assertion in the “Eolian Harp” that all inspiration comes from a single source: “for a Creator is a more natural imagination than a fortuitous concourse of atoms. All things remount to a fountain, though they may flow to an Ocean.” Byron did, in fact, read *Biographia Literaria* in 1817 (Garrett 66), and his poetic cosmology, as well as Coleridge’s, understood the spirit to be the source of imagination, and, so, when either poet set a poem in a dream, as they did in “Kubla Khan” and “Darkness,” the unconscious state implies that the poem is a product of the primary, rather than the secondary imagination.

Byron in the Dark

“Darkness” is not the most popular item in the Byron omnibus. Critical analyses of it are scarce; scarcer still are critics who want to diagnose the darkness in “Darkness” as anything other than a result of Mt. Tambora’s eruption. David M. Mazurowski, in his 1977 graduate thesis, saw “Darkness” as a manifestation of Byron’s personal depression (18). Warren Stevenson read it as a poetic articulation of the Freudian death/sex drive, focusing on the way femininity is often associated with opacity and night in Byron’s poetry (334).

Aside from Morikowski and Stevenson, the prevailing trend in Byron scholarship is to read “Darkness” as emblematic of a society moving away from classicism and towards secularism. Morton D. Paley (1999) sees the darkness as a sign of the ensuing skepticism of the nineteenth century, citing nineteenth-century discoveries in the fossil record of entire species that had gone extinct. Paley argues that this caused the Romantics to doubt the goodness of a God who would allow entire species to die out (213). That being said, a Calvinist, who believes himself one of the reprobate, does not need to see extinct trilobites to be convinced that the divine being can be merciless. When the poem is read in the context of Byron’s Calvinism, the connection between God abandoning the world to darkness and the soul’s damnation, as set down in *The Canons of Dort*, becomes apparent. Geoff Payne mentions in a footnote that “Byron may have been aware of Calvin’s arguments regarding the impossibility of anything existing outside or before God” (22), but the Calvinistic aspects of “Darkness” deserve more than a footnote. From the very beginning, the poem is driven by Reformation theology.

The prophetic uncanny of Coleridge's spontaneous conscious comes into play as early as the first line which reads, "I had a dream, which was not all a dream" (Byron 884). If it truly is a product of the *noumenon*, the poem is a vision of the future and not just a fanciful imagining. Another reason the dream could be reality is that the poem was written in the summer of 1816 after the eruption of Mount Tambora and the so-called "Year Without a Summer."

Early on, the Christian apocalypse is invoked, the second line alluding to the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24:3-51 in which Jesus tells his disciples about the end of the world: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (*King James Bible*: Matt 24:29). Another allusion to verse twenty-nine is made in line two: "The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars / Did wander darkling in the eternal space" (884). Furthermore, lines seven, eight, and nine are evocative of verse twelve. Byron writes that "men forgot their passions in the dread / Of this their desolation; and all hearts / Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light" (884). There is a spiritual chill in the Biblical account, as well: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (*King James Bible*: Matt 24:12).

From line thirteen and onward, the details of the Apocalypse according to Byron start to vary from the Biblical account. People begin burning their homes, and even entire cities for light: "The habitations of all things which dwell, / Were burnt for beacons; cities were consum'd" (Byron 884). He then remarks on how fortunate they are who live near volcanoes because they can, at least, see each other. The irony here is that during the summer of 1816, most of the scientific community thought the strange weather was a

result of either a cooling of the earth's internal temperature or a "lack of circulation of the electrical fluid that was believed to move between the surface of the Earth and the atmosphere" (Klingaman 240). For the most part, though, nearly everyone was convinced it was a sign of the end times (241). This is exactly how Byron portrays it in "Darkness," but his is a secular apocalypse. Although the Bible is used as a template, God is not mentioned once. The world of the poem is one that the divine being has entirely abandoned, or, to borrow the Biblical term: it is world He has turned His back upon.

Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" (1815) is a similar case. The Assyrian armies march against Israel and are destroyed to a man, but in the same way that the elect are entirely non-existent in "Darkness," all of Byron's poetic energies are focused on the gentile army. Nowhere in "The Destruction of Sennacherib" does he mention Hezekiah, the king of Judah, or Jerusalem, the city to which Sennacherib was laying siege when the angel attacked. Another difference between Byron's account and the Biblical account is that the Angel of Death kills everyone, even Sennacherib's horses. In the 2 Kings account, the Angel only kills 185,000 men, causing Sennacherib to flee back to Nineveh where he is murdered by his sons (*King James Bible*: 2Kin 19:15-37). As in "Darkness," the Byronic adaption of biblical events is a harsh interpretation of the source material.

This focus on the damned and ignorance of the elect is what allows Rawes' Calvinistic criticism of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to be applied to "Darkness." As the love of many grows cold, humanity descends into anarchy: robbery, murder, and cannibalism. In one city, the last two survivors meet in a church:

And they were enemies: they met beside

The dying embers of an altar-place

Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things
 For an unholy usage; they rak'd up,
 And shivering scrap'd with their cold skeleton hands
 The feeble ashes, and their feeble breath
 Blew for a little life, and made a flame
 Which was a mockery; then they lifted up
 Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld
 Each other's aspects saw, and shriek'd, and died
 Even of their mutual hideousness they died, (885)

This encounter, between the two survivors, is as a much more potent allegory for the damnation of the reprobate than the one Rawes finds in *Childe Harold*. The sun's disappearance can be read as God's decision, as *The Canons of Dort* puts it, to "leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves" (qtd. in Rawes 134). It is, however, their own actions, after being deprived of this light, the "saving faith and grace of conversion" (qtd. in Klooster 1156) that destroys them.

The two survivors meet at an altar, which in the Old Testament sense, is a place on which sacrifices are burned. There, they make a fire using "holy things" (885) as tinder, and Byron calls it a mockery since it is a blatant misuse of the sacred articles. It could also be a mockery because the smoke offers an inadequate sacrifice, a metaphor for Roman Catholicism that would, no doubt, have pleased Calvin.

In speaking of the efforts that the unregenerate take to redeem themselves, Calvin writes, "For what could be more vain or frivolous than for men to reconcile themselves to

God, by offering him the foul odor produced by burning the fat of beasts?... In short, the whole legal worship... is a mere mockery” (406). Not only is the fire set on an altar and lit by religious implements, but it is also entirely ineffectual to save the souls who are literally destroyed by their own evil looks. They, “[beholding] Each other's aspects, saw, and shriek'd, and died / Even of their mutual hideousness they died” (884).

It is helpful to note that Byron attributes the deaths of the last two survivors to their own wickedness and not to their having been abandoned by the sun, which is precisely how Calvin, in the *Institutes* (1536), cleared God of fault in damning the wicked. Calvin denies that the divine being is to blame by appealing to "the greatness of God, whose pleasure it is to inflict punishment on fools and transgressors though he is not pleased to bestow his Spirit upon them. It is a monstrous infatuation in men to seek to subject that which has no bounds to the little measure of their reason" (417). Calvin is explicitly stating here that the reason God is just in judging those whom he caused to sin is unknowable to the finite mind. According to the *Institutes*, God would also be guiltless of the environmental destruction that takes place in “Darkness”:

If the reason is asked, there cannot be a doubt that creation bears part of the punishment deserved by man, for whose use all other creatures were made.

Therefore, since through man’s fault a curse has extended above and below, over all the regions of the world, there is nothing unreasonable in its extending to all his offspring. (109)

Thus the non-human casualties: the burning of the forests, the disappearance of all the sea creatures, and the murder of the crows is, in Calvin’s words, “nothing unreasonable” (109). If Byron is interacting with the *Canons of Dort* and the *Institutes of Christianity* as

closely as Rawes says he is, then the death of the dog who stays by his dead master's side is to be read in the context of original sin's effect on the environment:

In defense of his master's corpse
 The birds and beasts and famish'd men at bay,
 Till hunger clung them, or the dropping dead
 Lur'd their lank jaws; himself sought out no food,
 But with a piteous and perpetual moan,
 And a quick desolate cry, licking the hand
 Which answer'd not with a caress he died. (Byron 884)

The obvious intention of this scene is to incite pathos in the reader. The dog is so faithful that, even after his master dies, it chooses to starve rather than eat the hand that fed it.

The injustice of the dog's fate is a protest against any world-view that would see such an event as "nothing unreasonable" (Calvin 109).

"Darkness" and "Religious Musings"

Coleridge's apocalyptic poem, "Religious Musings" (1794) is nowhere near as dour, but the world still ends in fire and blood, just as it does in "Darkness":

When seized in his mid course, the Sun shall wane
 Making noon ghastly ! Who of woman born
 May image in the workings of his thought,
 How the black-visaged, red-eyed Fiend outstretched
 Beneath the unsteady feet of Nature groans,
 In feverous slumbers--destined then to wake,

When fiery whirlwinds thunder his dread name
 And Angels shout, Destruction! (Coleridge 60)

Coleridge's interpretation of the end times is more sanitized; there is no cannibalism, no rape and murder in the streets, and, what is more, it has a happy ending:

The veiling clouds retire
 And lo! the Throne of the redeeming God
 Forth flashing unimaginable day
 Wraps in one blaze earth, heaven, and deepest hell.
 Contemplant Spirits ! ye that hover o'er
 With untired gaze the immeasurable fount
 Ebullient with creative Deity! (60)

This stands in stark contrast to Byron's "Darkness," in which the clouds are not even the source of obscuration. When they roll back as they do in *Revelation* 6:14, there is no light, only more darkness: "And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need / Of aid from them / She was the Universe" (884). There is no glorious reappearing, no White Throne Judgment, and no mention of the elect. In "Darkness," the abandonment of man is complete.

Matthew Slykhuis (2007) says that it is "tempting to suggest that Coleridge's 'Religious Musings' and Byron's 'Darkness' reflect a transformation of English thought from a Christian worldview to a secular one; however; this interpretation is reductive and misleading" (70). He goes on to argue that Byron was grudgingly religious and the poem while being dour, adequately orthodox. Slykhuis' point is that the two poems show a change in the kind of Christianity people were practicing in England during this time:

“this was merely a transformation of English Christianity out of its previous stages of innocence. This new character of English Christianity would later be voiced by Tennyson, England’s poet laureate, when he wrote, ‘there lives more faith in honest doubt / Believe me, than in half the creeds’” (70). While English Christianity did experience a major shift in between the Romantic and Victorian eras, a better explanation of the differences between “Religious Musings” and “Darkness” is that, although they were both authored by Calvinists, the former was written by someone who considered himself one of the elect, while the latter was written by someone who considered himself one of the irreconcilably damned.

Byron as Self-Aware Reprobate

In any discussion of an author’s religious beliefs, it is helpful to have access to their own words on the subject. Thankfully, Byron’s religious musings are in good supply. Despite his friends burning the lion’s share of his personal papers after his death, a great many letters and journals survive, enough to lend a comprehensive overview of his religious sentiments as they developed. When taken as a whole, his personal letters chart the development of a deist with pagan-leanings who, over time, became a deist with a strong inclination towards Catholicism.

In 1809, Byron embarked on his first European tour, which was expected of any English twenty-year-old of rank. In the April of 1810, he sent a letter home to his mother at Newstead, complaining that she was the only one who ever asked him about his religious beliefs. He told her to stop worrying and that while he was “no ‘good soul,’” he was “not an atheist” (*Confessions* 96) As is to be expected when young boys write home to their mothers, this was not exactly true. “The problem with ascertaining Byron’s

religious attitudes,” writes Peter Chochran, “is that he cannot be trusted. He doesn't want to be known, and always crafts his tone and content in order to tease or to please what he knows to be his reader's predilections and sympathies” (*Byron's Religions* 2).

Byron was no atheist, but he was lying to his mother about her being the only one who asked about his religious convictions. His friends were inquisitive and often inquired after his opinions on matters spiritual, but, more often than not, Byron self-identified as an adherent to various creeds and religions without having to be asked. In an 1807 letter to a friend, he wrote,

You degrade the Creator, in the first place, by making Him a begetter of children; and in the next you convert Him into a Tyrant over an immaculate and injured Being, who is sent into existence to suffer death for the benefit of some millions of scoundrels, who, after all, seem as likely to be damned as ever...I have lived a deist. What I shall die, I know not. (*Confessions* 99)

Even when identifying as a deist, Calvin's influence on Byron is such that the poet, while professing deism and decrying the injustices Christ suffered, automatically denies salvation by good works: “All the virtues and pious Deeds performed on Earth can never entitle a man to Everlasting happiness in a future State; nor on the other hand can such a Scene as a Seat of eternal punishment exist, it is incompatible with the benign attributes of a Deity to suppose so.” (99). This doubt as to the existence of an afterlife is again reaffirmed in an 1811 letter to Francis Hodgson in which he quoted and affirmed Seneca's “*Post mortem nihil est*” or “there is nothing after death” (qtd. in *Confessions* 97). He goes on in that same letter to protest the injustice of Limited Atonement: “Christ came to save men; but a good pagan will go to heaven and a bad Nazarene to hell... who

will believe that God will damn men for not knowing what they were never taught?" (97). The question is rhetorical. Hodgeson was an Anglican, and the *who* he is speaking of here can only be those Anglicans and Dissenters who believed in Limited Atonement.

One of Byron's favorite strategies for maintaining a non-committal stance on any creed was to avoid possessive pronouns when referring to his belief system, referring to Christianity as the faith of the person to whom he was writing. This use of the second person possessive can be found in another letter to Hodgeson where he simultaneously protests the injustice of Limited Atonement and distances himself from Anglicanism, "One remark and I have done, the basis of your religion is injustice" (106). Then, in an 1813 letter to the same, he asks: "How else 'fell the angels' according to your creed" (107). However, according to those closest to him, this position of an outsider was taken only in matters of public discourse.

Byron returned to England and published *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812, launching himself into celebrity and taking full advantage of the benefits of fame. This was the Byron that Lady Lamb labeled "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" (Bloom 4), the Byron who accrued thousands of pounds of debt and married the wealthy heiress Anne Isabella to pay it off. Years after his death, she would write to Stowe that

Lord Byron believed in eternal punishment fully: for though he reasoned against Christianity as it is commonly received, he could not reason himself out of it; and I think it made him desperate. He used to say, "The worst of it is I do believe." Had he seen God as I see him, I am sure his heart would have relented. (*Byron's Religions* 2)

If Byron's heart—which was buried in Greece, and did not return to Anabella with his body (Schmidt 76)—did relent, as she hoped, it would have relented to the Church of Rome. This may have been due to the emphasis Catholics place on free will and the role it plays in the soul's salvation.

Although Augustine's attack on Pelagius is almost Calvinistic in its refutation of individual agency, the Catholic church had more than its fair share of free-will proponents, not the least of which was Thomas Aquinas, who wrote in *Summa Theologica* that “man has free will: otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain” (418). For Catholic theologians like Aquinas, the judgments of God were ameliorative, intended to reform and not destroy the sinner. This is precisely Byron's sentiment when in an 1811 letter to Hodgeson he wrote, “I conceive He never made anything to be tortured in another life, whatever it may in this” (*Confessions* 100).

The difference between the theologies of Aquinas and Calvin, whose *Institutes* Byron was forced to read and believe as a child (Bloom 7), must have appealed to him and may have been the reason for his Catholic sympathies. In 1807, he spoke in favor of the Irish Catholics in their fight for religious freedom, writing, “In religion, I favor the Catholic emancipation, but do not acknowledge the Pope; and I have refused to take the sacrament” (96). Over time, though, the idea of receiving holy communion grew more attractive to him.

In 1816, Byron fled England, over rumors of incest and adultery. After spending a few months in Geneva, where he wrote “Darkness,” he traveled to Venice and there received a letter from his friend John Murray in which the publisher expressed concern

for his health and emotional well-being. In an effort to assuage his friend's fears, Byron replied that he was doing well and promised, although vaguely, to reform. "Besides," he says, "when I turn thirty, I will turn devout; I feel a great vocation that way in Catholic churches and when I hear the organ" (108).

III Corinthians

He may have been joking with Murray about turning papist, but this permanent exile was something of a spiritual journey for Byron. He visited churches, took part in pilgrimages, and even studied in a convent for several months: the Society of St. Lazarus, a monastery of the Armenian Diaspora set on an island in the Venetian Lagoon. After meeting with the monks and admiring the simple lives they led, Byron decided to live and study with them. However, he was not granted a residency. Not to be deterred, he traveled to San Lazzaro every morning by boat almost for nearly four months to study with Fr. Paschal Aucher (Morgan 145).

Under Aucher's tutelage, Byron learned Armenian, excelling so far as to begin translating monastery manuscripts into English. One such item was the gnostic gospel of *III Corinthians*, apocryphal to the Church of England but canonical to Arminian Orthodoxy. Emily Patterson Morgan opens up the possibility that Byron was given *III Corinthians* as a means to pull him away from the fashionably Manichean idea that all religions were essentially the same: "Alternatively, one could hypothesize that Byron's 'spiritual preceptor-pastor', Pascal Aucher, 'a learned & pious soul', had become aware of Byron's fascination with Dualism and, deeming it dangerous, had chosen the Epistles with their refutation of Dualism in order to avert his pupil's heretical tendencies" (144).

Dualism, here, being the Manichean idea that all religions are (to one degree or another) the same, and not the belief in the soul's existence.

The main thrust of the epistle is Paul's (or a pseudo-Paul's) attempt to clarify *I Corinthians* 15:50, where he said, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (*King James Version*). The epistle is short, only about a thousand words long. In it, Paul, writing as a prisoner, contradicts those who are preaching that the resurrection of Christ and, by extension, the dead is strictly metaphorical. Paul says that Christ came to "redeem all flesh by his flesh, and raise us up from the dead in the flesh, just as he has shown us in himself as an example" (qtd. in Hovhanessian 101) The redeeming of all flesh is significant, here, because it implies that everyone is elect unto salvation. Only those who actively reject the gospel, according to III Corinthians, are damned. "And as for that which they say, that there is no resurrection of the flesh, they indeed shall have no resurrection" (qtd. in Hovhanessian 105). According to Vahan Hovhanessian, this system of salvation is incompatible with Catholicism and most strains of Protestantism, but fits snugly within the Armenian Orthodox system of salvation as set down in *The Confessions of Dositheus* (1672):

And we understand the use of free-will thus, that the Divine and illuminating grace, and which we call preventing [or, prevenient] grace, being, as a light to those in darkness, by the Divine goodness imparted to all, to those that are willing to obey this — for it is of use only to the willing, not to the unwilling — and co-operate with it, in what it requires as necessary to salvation, there is consequently granted particular grace. (qtd. in Morris 296)

Particular grace is the doctrine that those who have not heard the gospel are not, by virtue of their ignorance, damned to Hell (114). This is precisely the point of contention Byron had with Hodgeson when he asked, “who will believe that God will damn men for not knowing what they were never taught?” (97). In the context of his aversion to Calvinist doctrine, it makes sense that the gnostic epistles would have impacted him the way they did. Byron’s translation of *III Corinthians* into English marks a softening of his antagonism towards Christianity. Soon afterwards, in an 1819 letter to Gifford, he apologizes for his previous comments about the Church of England, saying that they were made at a time in his life when he was overwhelmed by the insignificance of man. However, his hatred for Calvin and the doctrines of election is still vitriolic:

It was the comparative insignificance of ourselves and our world, when placed in competition with the mighty whole... that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to eternity might be over-rated. This and being early disgusted with a Calvinistic Scotch school where I was cudged to Church for the first ten years of my life afflicted me with this malady for, after all, it is, I believe, a disease of the mind as much as other kinds of hypochondria. (*Confessions* 103)

A shift had taken place. In 1821, when speaking of Muley Molech to Thomas Moore, he said that the former had written “me several letters upon Christianity to convert me; and, if I had not been a Christian already, I should probably have been now, in consequence” (109). Another, profession of Christianity shows up in a letter he wrote to Moore the following year. In it, he mocks the Catholic idea of transubstantiation, but, feeling like he has crossed some line, backpedals, saying, “I am afraid this sounds flippant, but I don’t mean it to be so... I do assure that I am a very good Christian” (119).

These are not simply examples of Byron's chameleon tendencies. A few months earlier, he had written to Murray, demanding that the publisher print his translation of *III Corinthians* in *The Quarterly Review*: "Is it because you are afraid to print anything in opposition to that Cant of the *Quarterly* about 'Manichæism? Let me have a proof of that Epistle directly" (110) Then, addressing Murray's concern that someone like himself was unsuited to the work of translating sacred texts, Byron says, "I am a better Christian than those parsons of yours though not paid for being so" (111). Byron's feelings about religion changed in 1819, and the catalyst seems to have been *III Corinthians*.

"Detached Thoughts"

Although *III Corinthians* opened to Byron a new way of thinking about Christianity, he was by no means a convert. In "Detached Thoughts," an 1821 journal entry, he rejects the resurrection of the body—as imagined in *III Corinthians*—as unsound: "A material resurrection seems strange, and even absurd, except for purposes of punishment; and all punishment, which is to revenge rather than correct, must be morally wrong. And when the World is at an end, what moral or warning purpose can eternal tortures answer?" (112). However, he affirms the pseudo-Paul's statement that the soul is free, or, at least, he expresses a personal desire that it should be so:

Why should not the Mind act with and upon the Universe? as portions of it act upon and with the congregated dust called Mankind? See, how one man acts upon himself and others, or upon multitudes? The same Agency, in a higher and purer degree, may act upon the Stars, etc., ad infinitum" (113).

In his mind, he has already refuted the atheists and the materialists. The only determinists to whom he could be posing this question are the Calvinists.

Byron's Indifference

A chronological reading of Byron's epistolary correspondences exhibits a slow warming to Catholicism, Armenian Orthodoxy, and revealed religion in general, but critics have had good reason to doubt that he ever made good on his promise to take the Rights of Initiation. This lack of religious affiliation, and a few of his more off-handed remarks, have caused the majority of Byron scholarship to read him as entirely indifferent to religion, at which point the Christian elements of his poetry become, more or less, vestiges of early indoctrination. As early as 1893, the Danish critic Georg Brandes criticized Byron for his inability to “give up Christianity as completely as his contemporaries,” by which he means Percy Bysshe Shelley (qtd. in Thorslev 208). Brandes reads Byron as moving away from religion, not towards it.

If Byron is not read as entirely antagonistic towards religion, he is seen as indifferent. Take, for instance, Peter Cochran's introduction to *Byron's Religions* (2011):

Nevertheless, he seems for the most part to be comfortable –if that's the word – with the idea that he is damned. Logical he wasn't: and the idea that, if one accepts and has faith in the Suffering and Atonement of Jesus, one needn't necessarily be damned, had no appeal to him. Indeed, sometimes in straight argument, sometimes in polemical speeches in his dramas, he rejects the Suffering and Atonement, while accepting the idea of inevitable hellfire (4).

Attitudes like this, though popular, are a result of his readers' mistaking tone for substance. It is true that the persona he created for himself was emphatically blasé, but the huge volume of writing he produced on the Christian religion, its pros and its cons, shows that the writer of “Darkness” was anything but indifferent. Also, the idea that he

was comfortable with the proposition that he and everyone like him would go to Hell, as a matter of course, is to disregard the serious protests he makes against the deprivation of individual free will.

If the recent criticism identifying Byron as a sex addict is to be taken seriously, the question arises of how aware he was of his situation. Like Coleridge, he at no point admits to being an addict, but he was aware that his sexual tendencies were something he could not control. For example, in 1821, Thomas Moore wrote him a letter upbraiding him for repeating the same indiscretions that drove him into exile. Byron responded by saying, "As to reform? I did reform what would you have?" but then goes on to justify his past improprieties as a necessary part of the poet's life: "a man must travel and turmoil, or there is no existence. Besides [in making the liaison with Countess Guiccioli] I only meant to be a Cavalier Servente and had no idea it would turn out a romance in the Anglo fashion" (*Confessions* 142). Sexual encounters with women happened, whether he wanted them to or not. It was outside his control.

If one believes Rendon, Schmidt, and Bloom in their assertion that the woman who turned him into a sex-addict was the same one who convinced him that there was no such thing as individual liberty, a strong parallel between Coleridge and Byron emerges. They were both addicts, Coleridge addicted to laudanum, Byron to sex. Both wanted to believe in individual agency. Neither could affirm it as something effective in changing one's life for the better. For Coleridge and Byron, the question of whether or not human beings had free will was the question of whether or not they could recover from their addictions. For them, these issues were profoundly personal.

Transgressive Agency as Protest

The early twentieth-century critic G.K. Chesterton was perhaps the most outspoken opponent of the idea that Byron was a pessimist, arguing, instead, that he was an optimist: “The first of the mistakes about Byron lies in the fact that he is treated as a pessimist. True, he treated himself as such, but a critic can hardly have even a slight knowledge of Byron without knowing that he had the smallest amount of knowledge of himself that ever fell to the lot of an intelligent man” (34). Chesterton makes the case that the energy with which Byron infused his antiheroes undercuts any possibility that the poet was essentially miserable: “Surely it is ridiculous to maintain seriously that Byron’s love of the desolate and inhuman in nature was the mark of vital skepticism and depression” (39).

Chesterton, a poet himself, fleshes out the beauty of all things dark and exquisite, describing the “certain darkness which we see in wine when seen in shadow” and the power of “a night that has just buried a gorgeous sunset” (40), and argues that Byron was a sanguine poet taking pleasure in the melancholic. Men like this, according to Chesterton, “would prefer the sullen hostility of the earth because amid all the cold and darkness their own hearts were flaming like their own firesides” (40). In what is most likely a reference to “Darkness,” he talks about the ways in which Byron attacked institutions:

He went on year after year calling down fire upon mankind, summoning the deluge and the destructive sea and all the ultimate energies of nature to sweep away the cities of the spawn of man. But through all this his subconscious mind was not that of a despairer; on the contrary, there is something of a kind of

lawless faith in thus parleying with such immense and immemorial brutalities.

(42)

Byron was superficially pessimistic. He was not sad. The world was sad, and exaggerating this sadness gave him something to resist: “the exuberance of [his] nature demands for an adversary a dragon as big as the world” (44). Whether it was the rule of a tyrannical government or a system of theology that arbitrarily damns people to Hell, this dragon was injustice.

The Protest of Chillon

In 1816, Byron toured the Château de Chillon in Switzerland where he saw the dungeon in which Francois Bonivard, the Genvois monk, was imprisoned for his part in a failed coup (Schmidt 104). The site inspired him to write *The Prisoner of Chillon*, one of his many long narrative poems. As per usual, Byron changed the historical account. The narrator of *The Prisoner of Chillon* is Bonicard’s son whose father “perished at the stake / For tenets, he would not forsake” (Byron 279). This alteration from political discontent to religious martyr is significant.

The city in which the historical Bonivard lived, worked, and was arrested was none other than Geneva, Switzerland in the mid-1500s which just so happens to be the very same time Calvin was serving on the city council. As it turns out, the real Bonivard got along swimmingly with the Protestant theologian. They carried on an amiable correspondence and even collaborated on the *Chroniques de Genève* (Höpfl 264). In the poem, however, Bonivard seems to have run afoul of the Genevan church and loses his life in the process.

His son, being imprisoned for no fault of his own, experiences a loss of light and sensation. He says, “First came the loss of light, and air, / And then of darkness too: / I had no thought, no feeling—none— / Among the stones I stood a stone” (Byron 281). The parallels to “Darkness” becomes explicit when the narrator compares life in the dungeon to life on a stagnant sea under a dead sky: “There were no stars—no earth—no time... / But silence, and a stirless breath / Which neither was of life nor death; / A sea of stagnant idleness” (281). This is glaringly similar to the end of “Darkness” which reads,

The rivers, lakes and ocean all stood still,
 And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths;
 Ships sailorless lay rotting on the sea,
 And their masts fell down piecemeal: as they dropp'd
 They slept on the abyss without a surge.

In the same way that God turned his back on the world, depriving it of life in “Darkness,” the prisoner of Chillon has likewise been abandoned, but unlike the two men who meet in the church and die of each other’s mutual hideousness, the prisoner is freed and returns again to the light of day. The reason for this release may be found in the sonnet that appeared in the poem’s advertisement:

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
 Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art:
 For there thy habitation is the heart—
 The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
 And when thy sons to fetters are consigned—
 To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,

Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
 And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
 Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,
 And thy sad floor an altar—for 'twas trod,
 Until his very steps have left a trace
 Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
 By Bonnivard!—May none those marks efface!
 For they appeal from tyranny to God. (278)

The heart of liberty and the chainless mind endure abandonment as an appeal to the Almighty. Another such appeal is made in Byron's "The Prophecy of Dante" (1819) wherein the poet foretells Italy's independence from Austria, which did, in fact, occur twenty-four years after Byron's death:

The bloody scroll of our millennial wrongs
 Waves, and the echo of our groans is driven
 Athwart the sound of archangelic songs,
 And Italy, the martyred nation's gore,
 Will not in vain arise to where belongs
 Omnipotence and Mercy evermore:
 Like to a harpstring stricken by the wind,
 The sound of her lament shall, rising o'er
 The Seraph voices, touch the Almighty Mind.

Both poems protest the deprivation of freedom, and these protests are directed at God, He who is supposed to remedy injustice, and, in the case of the *Prisoner of Chillon* and

“Dante’s Prophecy,” does. The Calvinistic reading of Byron's poetry turns the whole idea that he was a pessimist on its head. In truth, he was an activist, and this activism was not limited to protesting what he thought were abuses of kings and earthly authorities. He was protesting an idea that he was forced to believe as a young boy by demonstrating its senseless brutality.

The Antiheroes

Rawes has successfully performed a reading of *Childe Harold* in the context of Reformation theology, but there are still Byronic heroes whose inability to help themselves has not yet been explored in a religious context. The most promising are to be found in the bestselling Turkish Tales (1813-1814) which include *The Corsair*, *The Giaour*, *Lara*, and *The Bride of Abydos*. This chapter will limit itself to the antiheroes who appear in the first two: Conrad from *The Corsair* and the Giaour.

The Corsair

The Corsair is Byron’s pirate poem, written in heroic couplets, and telling the tale of Conrad, a mysterious privateer who rules the seas with his crew of lawless resolute. The only soft spot he seems to have is for his wife Medora who lives with him in a solitary tower on their own private island. In the first canto, the pirates attack the palace of Sultan Seyd—one of Byron’s many Muslim villains—and Conrad is captured. After a short imprisonment, he is freed by Gulnare, one of the sultan’s slaves. They return to the pirate island to find that Medora has died of grief. The poem ends with Conrad setting sail again in “helpless—hopeless—brokenness of heart” (Byron 240).

Since it depicts a confrontation between a tyrant and a disenfranchised mob, *The Corsair* is often interpreted as a political poem. According to Caroline Franklin (2000), it

can be read as an “expression of the poet’s intense desire for political liberty to be extended at home and abroad, yet his pessimistic fear that this would never happen” (Franklyn 56). In the same way, it can be read as an expression of Byron’s intense desire for political liberty and the way in which it was at odds with his Calvinistic pessimism.

Despite its tragic culmination, the beginning of *The Corsair* is surprisingly chipper. The first stanza is a shanty, emphasizing the freedom of being a sailor at sea:

O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
 Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,
 Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
 Survey our empire and behold our home!

These are our realms, no limits to their sway? (224)

It was first William Keach (1986) who observed how ironic it was that the freedom of which the pirates singing does not extend to the poem on a mechanical level since rhyming couplets control the line-endings. Susan Wolfson expanded on this by showing how the technical irony runs throughout the poem: "Indeed, the very words free, range, change, wide, and soar are bound within end-stopped rhymes" (492). However, no linguistic analysis is necessary in order to see the irony of the supposedly free-wheeling pirates’ imprisonment and defeat. The characters—like the lines themselves—are trapped. In the same way that each couplet returns again to the aa/bb rhyme scheme, a character’s freedom is limited to the time between decisions and the foreordained repercussions of those decisions. To quote Wolfson, “The actual imprisonment fulfills the implied constraints of the heroic couplet” (505).

When it comes to explaining why Conrad became a privateer, Byron is not helpful. However, internal impetus behind this unfortunate choice in careers is made explicit:

He had the skill, when Cunning's gaze would seek
 To probe his heart and watch his changing cheek,
 At once the observer's purpose to espy,
 And on himself roll back his scrutiny,
 Lest he to Conrad rather should betray
 Some secret thought—than drag that chief's to day.
 There was a laughing Devil in his sneer,
 That raised emotions both of rage and fear; (Byron 226)

This inner devil in his sneer that has the ability to look into the motives of other human beings and uncannily uncover their purposes is none other than the Coleridgean spontaneous conscious or *noumenon*. It leads Conrad into a life of piracy and, by extension, the sultan's dungeons.

Conrad's inner demon makes an appearance on the battlefield. His "glittering eye, and black brow's sabler gloom / "Glared on the Moslems' eyes some Afrit Sprite, / Whose demon death-blow left no hope for fight" (Byron 231). In keeping with the Oriental mode of *The Turkish Tales*, Byron does not use just any inner demon. It is specifically an Afrit. Afrits are "rebellious fire spirits" (Afrit), the most famous of which is probably the one in Muslim myth that was bound to the will of King Solomon. They also serve the traditional role of an Arabian-Nights genie, granting wishes and performing tasks for a human

master (Afreet). The Afrit, in this way, is perhaps the most potent symbol of imprisoned agency that Byron could have used.

These tragedies of free will are to be read as inevitable: “Yet was not Conrad thus by Nature sent / To lead the guilty—Guilt’s worst instrument—/His soul was changed before his deeds had driven / Him forth to war and forfeit heaven” (226) The same thing happens with Gulnare. She becomes angry with the sultan for his treatment of the pirates and says to Conrad, “I see thee shudder, but my soul is changed—/ Wronged—spurned—reviled—and it shall be avenged” (237). Conrad and Gulnare’s souls are changed first. Then, their deeds lead him to forfeit heaven. This is a similar means of damnation experienced by the two survivors in "Darkness." They are abandoned by the light of the sun, and this abandonment leads them to commit acts so transgressive as to be damning. If the preordination of Conrad's damnation were not obvious enough, Byron uses explicitly Calvinistic language to describe his reprobation in Canto II:

Behold—but who hath seen, or e'er shall see,
 Man as himself—the secret spirit free?
 He knows that he is not one of the elect.
 He knew himself detested, but he knew
 The hearts that loathed him, crouched and dreaded too.
 Lone, wild, and strange, he stood alike exempt
 From all affection and from all contempt. (226)

To be elect, in the Calvinistic scheme, is to be foreordained to salvation. Not to be elect is to be detested of God, so, when Conrad knows himself detested, and knows that hearts loathe him, it could very well be that the divine being is one of his enemies, despite his

own reprobation, he adheres to a strict moral code. A good example of this can be found in passage where Conrad refuses to kill Seyd with the weapon Gulnare smuggled into his cell: “I, in my bark of war, / To smite the smiter with the scimitar; / Such is my weapon—not the secret knife” (238).

Gulnare, seeing that Conrad is resigned to die a prisoner, takes matters into her own hands and stabs Seyd. The role of the avenger and rescuer is not one women usually play in Western poetry. Gulnare is not only disobeying the divine decree “thou shalt not kill,” she is also transgressing gender stereotypes. Geoff Payne notes that Gulnare takes on a masculine sexuality by stabbing Seyd; she “discovers the ability to penetrate the male body and to promote its corporeality, giving her power over it” (196). After the murder has been committed, Conrad realizes that his freedom has come at the price of her damnation: “What she has done no tears can wash away, / And Heaven must punish on its angry day” (239). In working towards their own freedom, Gulnare and Conrad ensure their own damnation. “He was free!/? And she for him had given / Her all on earth, and more than all in heaven!” (239). Like the dog in “Darkness,” Gulnare’s damnation is not what any sane reader would call reasonable. A woman should not go to Hell for stabbing her slave master. On the other hand, Conrad, is being punished for adhering to a strict moral code. By emphasizing their guilt, Byron is protesting the Calvinistic idea that all actions of individual agency are inherently sinful or damning.

The Giaour

Another such despairing antihero is the title character of *The Giaour*. Unnamed, he goes by the Turkish word for non-Muslim, the literal meaning of which is non-believer. Although it implies that the named is a Christian, this is not always the case

(Vrynos 414), a distinction that becomes essential to a Calvinistic reading of *The Giaour*. The Giaour is a Christian by birth, though not necessarily by conviction, and an unbeliever insofar as Islam is concerned.

In the last Canto, the Giaour, after he has killed Hassan, the husband and murderer of Leila, his lover, the antihero finds himself in a monastery, confessing his sins to a priest who appears to have led a mostly sinless life. According to the Giaour, this purity is a result of inactivity: "Father! Thy days have passed in peace.../ To bid the sins of others cease, / Thyself without a crime or care, / Save transient ills that all must bear" (206). He has not sinned greatly because he has not used his agency to the same degree that the Giaour has: "My days, though few, have passed below / In much of / Joy, but more of Woe; / Yet still in hours of love or strife, / I've 'scaped the weariness of Life" (206). He then tells the monk his story and, while doing so, parrots Byron's use of the second person possessive in his letters to Hodgson. The Giaour tells the monk that he should be happy about Hassan's death, "For he was hostile to thy creed! The very name of Nazarene" (207). Christianity is the creed of the monk, not the creed of the Giaour.

Hassan adds homicide to religious bigotry when he drowns his wife Leila by throwing her overboard in a sack weighted with stones. She, like Gulnare, is a guilty woman and, like her *Corsair* counterpart, suffers the consequences of her crimes. Gulnare loses the man she loves. Leila loses her life. The Giaour echoes Conrad in acknowledging the concubine's fault while not going so far as to assign her any blame. He says to the priest, "Howe'er deserved her doom might be, / Her treachery was truth to me; / To me she gave her heart, that all / Which Tyranny can ne'er enthrall" (207). According to the Giaour, Leila was wrong in betraying Hassan, and, because of this

transgressive act of free will—a sin in both the Muslim and Christian traditions—she deserved to die. This, of course, is so cruel as to be absurd. Like Gulnare’s sin in *The Corsair*, it draws attention to the injustice of vilifying individual agency.

The Giaour and Leila are not alone in exhibiting the features of those abandoned by God. Hassan is also reprobate. When the tide of battle turns and he realizes all is lost, the Turk prays to Allah for aid, but to no avail. The Giaour calls this last-minute plea, “The late repentance of that hour / When Penitence hath lost her power / To tear one terror from the grave, / And will not soothe, and cannot save” (207). Allah turns His back on Hassan. The Muslim’s prayer goes unanswered, and the Turk is cut down by the Giaour.

Hassan is not granted access to paradise. Instead, he is transformed into a vampire: “Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent / Then ghastly haunt thy native place / And suck the blood of all thy race” (207), a curse also laid on the reprobate in “Darkness” who are also disinterred: “their bones were tombless as their flesh; / The meagre by the meagre were devour'd” (885). After Hassan has devoured his own flesh, he goes to rave with the “Gouls and Afrits... Till these in horror shrink away / From Spectre more accursed than they!” (204). Vampire Hassan is forced to frolic a dans macabre with the Ghouls and, more importantly, the Afrits, creatures who, in *The Corsair*, represent the demonic *noumenon* of individual agency.

There is perhaps no better example of the way Calvin’s doctrines of election influenced the transgressive agency of *The Giaour* than when the title character says that he has been doomed to a life without light, in this case, the light of “Love; / A feeling from the Godhead caught, / To wean from self each sordid thought” (208), and being so

doomed, he has no other choice but to—like Childe Harold—pile transgression upon transgression:

Why marvel ye, if they who lose
 This present joy, this future hope,
 No more with sorrow meekly cope;
 In phrensy then their fate accuse;
 In madness do those fearful deeds
 That seem to add but guilt to woe? (208)

The Giaour was published three years before Byron's appearance on the island of San Lazzaro, at which point in his life, he was, himself, a kind of Giaour or unbeliever. It would have been difficult for him to imagine himself as some kind of incarnation of his nameless antihero while sitting and discussing religion and philosophy with monks who, like the holy man of *The Giaour*, had lived their lives in quietude. Likewise, it is easy to imagine Byron bringing up his grievances with religion, especially those regarding Calvinism, and Fr. Paschal Aucher handing him a copy of *III Corinthians* as a way to help him differentiate between Armenian Christianity and the strains of Protestantism in which he was brought up.

When Emily Patterson Morgan writes “that Byron's ‘spiritual preceptor–pastor... had become aware of Byron's fascination with Dualism and, deeming it dangerous, had chosen the Epistles with their refutation of Dualism in order to avert his pupil's heretical tendencies” (152), she is leaving out the possibility that Aucher may have offered him *III Corinthians* as a means of contradicting Calvin in addition to the Manicheans. If so, the energy Byron dedicated to its translation and the vehemence with which he championed

its publication can be attributed to his lifelong antagonism towards the doctrines of election.

CHAPTER III

Transgressive Agency and the Critical Response to the Poetry of John Keats

John Keats was profoundly uninterested in Protestant theology. John Barnard writes that Keats could never invest in the “Christian belief in man's innate corruption, but, as an unassertive agnostic, held well short of Shelley's avowed atheism” (38). The innate corruption of which Barnard speaks is original sin, or—to use the Calvinist term—Total Depravity. In no way did the disparaging view of individual agency, held by both Anglican and Dissenting churches, affect Keats’ spirituality. His interests lay elsewhere. James Boulger writes that “He chose his beliefs carefully among pagan and Christian sources with an eye to what was good for poetry” (335). This disregard for religious concerns lead to his writing poetry that rankled the sensibilities of a great many critics, as the *London Quarterly* and *Blackwood Reviews*’ eviscerations of *Endymion* can attest.

Recently, critics have attempted to explain why the literary salons of the early 1800s had such an adverse response to *Endymion*. Marjorie Levinson (1988) argues that *Endymion*’s detractors detected a petty middle-class ambition to wealth and pleasure, Emily Lorraine de Montluzin asserts that the reviewers were biased against Cockneys (1998), Rachel Schulkins (2014) claims that they were offended by passages suggesting masturbation, and Duncan Wu (2015) suggests that Keats’ critical assassination was all a concerted effort to draw negative attention away from Byron.

An unexplored suggestion, which would more perfectly inform this ongoing question, is that Keats may have suffered the press’s censure because of his depiction of free will in a positive light, thus triggering their Puritan prejudices. If Coleridge and Byron are examples of how individual agency was perceived as essentially transgressive

in the Romantic period, then Keats is their foil. His poetry and the critical response to it demonstrate how profoundly Calvin's ideas influenced the literary minds of the early nineteenth century.

Keats' Religious Ambivalence

In 1817, Tom Keats, John's younger brother, fell ill. The disease was respiratory and ultimately fatal. It took him three years to die of what most scholars assume was tuberculosis, and during this time, his primary caretaker was his older brother (Motion 299). It is strongly suspected that John, tending to Tom, became, himself, infected. The affliction would cause Keats to spend his most productive years (1818-1822) suffering increasingly painful symptoms. Surprisingly, he did not embrace religion as a palliative during this time, a response usually expected of those suffering from a terminal illness. The only sign that impending mortality had made him pious is his request that Joseph Severn, his friend in Italy, read him Bishop Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Dying*. This is the same Jeremy Taylor who Coleridge, in the first chapter of this thesis, accused of being a sheep in wolf's clothing. Taylor's insistence that the soul was capable of choosing salvation offended the Calvinist sensibilities that Coleridge had adopted later in life (*Literary Remains* 274).

Severn bought the collection because Keats claimed to be "very much in want of some faith, some hope" and the sermons of Bishop Taylor seemed to help (Brown 98). In her biography of Severn, Sue Brown writes that "though [*Holy Dying*] did not persuade Keats of the reality of a Christian afterlife, its solemn periods accorded well with his steady contemplation of death" (98). Keats' resistance to the proselytizing in Taylor's

sermons may have had something to do with his prepossession of personal theories on the immortality of the soul.

Keats' System of Metaphysics

Keats was first introduced to Taylor by his friend Benjamin Bailey, who always carried a copy of the theologian's sermons under his arm, even while courting.

Describing Bailey's failed wooing of a mutual friend, Marian Reynolds, Keats wrote, "She liked Bailey as a Brother but not as a Husband—especially as he used to woo her with the Bible and Jeremy Taylor under his arm—they walked in no grove but Jeremy Taylor's" (*Letters* 291). Bailey, unlucky in love, was also unlucky in business. In his efforts to raise funds for a young artist by the name of Cripps, he ran afoul of the legendary portraitist Robert Haydon, who, feeling himself slighted, wrote Bailey an apparently cutting letter (Olney 266). The nature of their dispute seems to have been religious, since Keats, in an effort to smooth the situation over, establishes his own neutrality on all things metaphysical.

Keats summed up the discord between Bailey and Haydon as "simply this—two minds meet and do not understand each other in time enough to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party" (*Letters* 51). For his own part, he says, "I am convinced of nothing save the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imaginations. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth" (*Letters* 52). It is in this same letter that Keats famously expresses his longing for a life of sensation rather than thought, but he does so in the context of either Bailey's or Haydon's speculations about the afterlife:

O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is “a Vision in the form of Youth,” a shadow of reality to come—And this consideration has further convinced me,—for it has come as auxiliary to another favourite speculation of mine,—that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in Sensation, rather than hunger as you do after Truth. (53)

Two years later, in an 1819 letter to George and Georgiana Keats, his brother and sister-in-law, he would expand on what he meant by the word *hereafter*:

The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven... Call the-world if you please “The vale of Soul-making.” Then you will find out the use of the world... There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions— but they are not Souls, till they acquire identities.... How then are Souls to be made... but by the medium of a world like this? This point I sincerely wish to consider because I think it a grander system of salvation than the Christian religion.... It is pretty generally suspected that the Christian scheme has been copied from the ancient persian and greek Philosophers. (326-327)

He goes on to list the three components that, when brought together, create the soul. They are the human heart, the intelligence, and the material world. In this system, the heart becomes that which instructs the mind in the process of becoming a person: “Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Mind's Bible” (327). It teaches the mind how to understand the material world and, over time, an immortal soul appears. “As various as

the Lives of Men are — so various become their Souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence” (327).

In his book, *Keats: The Religious Sense* (1976), Robert M. Ryan suggests that Keats was very much like Shelley in that he was attempting to invent his own religion, but that, unlike Shelley, he may have succeeded in forming a system of metaphysics (14). In discussing the “Vale of Souls” letter, Ryan points out that Keats’ system of salvation is not only different from Orthodox Christianity’s, but it is against it. Ryan shows how the “Vale of Tears” is a Christian idiom for the purifying suffering of the Christian life and that *interposition* here can have no other interpretation than the interposition of Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of the world (138). Keats is not only suggesting an alternative to Christianity—he is rejecting Christianity altogether.

It is useful to highlight that for all his skepticism, Keats is a theist, not the deist for which he is often mistaken, especially by Jonathan Guilding and Jennifer Wunder (Wunder 11). To most deists of the Spinozan school, God is a watchmaker who winds up the universe like a clock and lets it tick. He does not get involved in human affairs, and He does not keep the soul alive after death. In Keats’ scheme, however, God is not a distant first-mover. Rather, He is a force that actively shapes the soul through sensations brought on by experience. If that soul chooses to engage with the sensations it is faced with, it is reincarnated.

In presenting this view of the afterlife to Bailey, Keats writes, “And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation, rather than hunger as you do after truth” (53). In the George and Georgiana letter, Keats hints at the fate of the person who

fails to grow a soul during his or her lifetime, and it is not nearly as grim as the one awaiting the reprobate in Orthodox Christianity:

This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of salvation which does not offend our reason and humanity—I am convinced that many difficulties which Christians labor under would vanish before it—there is one which even now strikes me—the salvation of children. In them, the spark of intelligence returns to God without any identity—it having no time to learn of or be altered by the heart—or seat of human passion. Choosing to actively engage in the sorrow and suffering of life, instead of trying to understand it, is the way the soul reaches salvation. The heart is, therefore, the only revealed religion. (327)

Intelligences who fail to find a soul—like those of babies—are recycled. There is no Hell in this system of salvation.

As different as Keats' ideas were from Bishop Taylor's, they did have this in common: both thinkers saw suffering as a necessary part of the soul's salvation. There are quite a few passages in *Holy Dying* that must have comforted Keats as he succumbed to tuberculosis in Shelley's apartment on the Spanish Steps, not because they promised that the suffering of slow asphyxiation would make him more like Christ, but because such agonizing sensations would do a great deal in the way of making his soul ready for the afterlife: "remember that if we be put to suffer, and do suffer in a good cause, or in a good manner, so that in any sense your sufferings be conformable to his sufferings, or can be capable of being united to his, we shall reign together with him" (Taylor 111). The sufferers are glorified in *Holy Dying* as they are in "Ode on Melancholy."

“Ode on Melancholy”

The opening lines of the ode attempt to dissuade the reader from ingesting wolf's bane, night shade, yew berries, and other poisonous plants. In short, they make a case against suicide. The reason such an act ought to be avoided is that it will prevent the intelligence, as Keats calls it, from taking its full measure of sensations and reaching its full potential: “Shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul” (126). According to Keats’ system of metaphysics, the soul must be kept alive. Suffering or—more precisely—the sensation of suffering is meant to fashion a soul out of the intelligence. If one kills oneself, one’s intelligence goes into the afterlife unfinished, which is to say that it returns to God—like the intelligence of an infant—to be reborn. Therefore, to commit suicide is to waste the suffering that one has already experienced.

Keats advises his readers to absorb pain rather than to avoid it. In bad weather, “glut thy sorrow on a morning rose” (126). If one has a falling out with one's mistress, one is to “Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave, / And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes” (126). Keats is not advocating hedonism for the sake of hedonism, but hedonism in spite of suffering. The result of intentionally experiencing all the sensations life has to offer, especially pain, is a refined taste: “Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine, / Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine” (126).

The Vale of Tears becomes the Vale of Soul Making in “Ode on Melancholy” because the soul attains a higher state of being by way of experience: “His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might, / And be among her cloudy trophies hung” (126). In Bishop

Taylor's *Holy Dying*, the soul, after traversing the Vale of Tears, joins God in heaven. In Keats' "Ode on Melancholy," the intellect, after traversing the Vale of Soul Making, joins the goddess Melancholy in her cloudy temple and becomes one of her trophies of which the characters in Keats' narrative poems are excellent examples.

The lovers in Keats' stories go through much the same process. As they traverse the Vale of Soul Making, they are as likely to find joy as they are to find sorrow. There are the tragedies: Lamia seduces Lycius, and he dies when her true form is revealed; Isabella's brother finds out about her love for Lorenzo and then murders him. Then, there are the comedies: Endymion falls in love with the goddess Diana and is not punished for it; Madeline and Porphyro fall for each other despite their family's wishes but manage to escape her clan's castle. When Keats' narrative poems are read alongside Byron's, the former's optimism becomes immediately apparent. Whereas the efforts of Childe Harold, Cain, the Giaour, Conrad, Manfred, Don Juan, and other Byronic antiheroes only meet with frustration and disappointment, Keats' characters are rewarded for their volition as much as they are punished for it.

A Pretty Piece of Paganism

The effort it takes to wring pleasure out of a life of pain transmutes Keats' heroes into a higher form. Perhaps the best example is Endymion who is changed from a lowly shepherd boy into a Greek god. In the first lines of *Endymion*, Keats repeats the idea that pleasure is not merely a means of gratification, but a defense against the pain inherent to the human condition. The *you* and *I* of the first book are building

A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth

Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways. (49)

The poem immediately sets about establishing its Hellenistic theme. Shepherds gather at the altar of Pan. They sing hymns by the light of the sunrise, "Apollo's upward fire" (50). Bugles are blown, pipes are piped, and everything in *Endymion's* first book is hard at work establishing the natural beauty of a long-lost religion (49-51). This was the part of the poem Keats was the most worried about. The only disparaging comment he ever made about *Endymion* is to be found in the poem's preface: "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece and dulled its brightness" (48).

According to Bernard, "*Endymion* is a serious effort to imagine the natural theology of its Greek world" (38). The natural theology of the poem, according to Robert Ryan, was intended as an alternative to Christianity: "Keats intended the opening of *Endymion* to illustrate the attractions of Greek worship as an enlightened natural religion with none of the negative features of Christianity" (158). Ryan finds in Keats' letters an incident where he mocked an English newspaper for the hand-over-mouth way in which it covered a story about a cult of German cannibals who were found performing human sacrifices in the woods. "And do Christians shudder" he wrote "at the same thing in a newspaper which they attribute to their God in its most aggravated form?" (*Letters* 12). Ryan puts forward the argument that *Endymion* expresses "a modern conception of what religion ought to be and thus to demonstrate the defects and inadequacies of Christianity" (12).

The anti-Christian element in *Endymion* did not go over the heads of its readers. William Wordsworth only made it halfway through the first book and was so

unimpressed that he called the “Hymn to Pan” a “very pretty piece of Paganism” (qtd in Ryan 158). The quotation appeared in a newspaper and soon came to Benjamin Haydon’s attention. Haydon defended his friend’s poem, saying that “if Wordsworth’s puling Christian feelings were annoyed—it was rather illbred to hurt a youth, at such a moment” (qtd in Ryan 158). If any puling Christian feelings escaped annoyance in the first book, it is unlikely that they would have made it through books two, three, and four without incident.

Soul Making as Deification

Endymion is unable to join his fellow shepherds in the singing of hymns because he is plagued by dreams of a fair maiden, who just so happens to be the goddess Diana. The second book finds him embarking on a quest to prove himself worthy of her. Along the way, his intelligence experiences enough pain and suffering—which is to say sensations—to make a soul. Throughout the journey, Diana, his Virgilian guide, constantly reminds him that his pangs are not in vain:

I’ve been thy guide; that thou must wander far
 In other regions, past the scanty bar
 To mortal steps, before thou cans’t be ta’en
 From every wasting sigh, from every pain,
 Into the gentle bosom of thy love. (65)

Once he has endured the rigors of his own natural sphere, Endymion discovers that the two women he met and fell in love with along the way are secretly avatars of the goddess Diana. He marries the virgin huntress and is thereby promoted from shepherd boy to deity.

Though rare, a human being becoming a god is not unheard of in Greek mythology. The long list of deified mortals includes the likes of Ariadne, Ganymede, Psyche, and, perhaps, most famously, Heracles. Endymion is not traditionally one of them. Almost every version of his story involves a goddess falling in love with the him, putting him into an eternal slumber, and then raping the shepherd boy while he sleeps. He is only an Olympian in that his tomb—the cave in which he sleeps—is, by some accounts, on Mount Olympus (Bulfinch 204).

Sex in *Endymion*

In Keats' poem, Endymion wakes up before the goddess can get her hands on him, and is, therefore, able to consent. The nuptial life they then enjoy is explicit in the extreme. In describing the blisses awaiting them on Olympus, Diana says to her intended, "O let me melt into thee.../ Let us entwine hoveringly." And Endymion, in reply, tells her how he longs to "in this sweet spot / Pillow my chin forever? Ever press / These toying hands and kiss their smooth excess" (74).

There is a trend in Keats scholarship to read the sexual elements of his poetry as authorial self-gratification and a compensation for sexual inadequacy. Barnard writes that "Keats' vision of neo-Platonic love... is informed more by adolescent fantasy than by any apprehension of Heavenly Love" (45). In *Keats and Embarrassment*, Christopher Ricks (1974) takes the passage in which Endymion says to Diana, "Those lips, O slippery blisses, twinkling eyes, / And by these tenderest milky sovereignties—/These tenderest, and by the nectar wine—the passion" (74), and attributes the perceived awkwardness of the lines to the poet's sexual inexperience (104). Likewise, biographer Nicholas Roe

(2012) reads the narrator's failure to look Arno in the eye in "Fill Me to the Brimming Bowl" as "an unmanly reminder of his short stature and sexual inexperience" (61).

Where Keats is not described as simply shy with women, he is painted as socially awkward to the point of being chauvinistic. In describing an incident where Keats declined to meet a few of his female fans who had read and enjoyed *Endymion*, Margaret Homans infers that he preferred to have his women between the sheets of a book: "These attitudes appear to be the compensatory, defensive forms taken by Keats's feeling of both literary and sexual inadequacy" (72). Not every discussion of *Endymion's* explicit sex is so *ad hominem*. Rachel Schulkins, for example, argues in *Keats, Modesty, and Masturbation* (2014) that the sex in *Endymion* and in Keats' other poems is radical because it treats sexuality as something other than transgressive, even going so far as to allow women to, for the most part, initiate sexual intercourse without derogatory implications, saying that "Keats presents modesty as a repressive act that simply masks female sexuality" (17).

The sex in *Endymion* does much more than tell the reader whether or not Keats was a virgin. It informs the way in which his letters are read and his system of metaphysics understood. When Keats puts forward the idea that "these sparks which are God... have an identity given to them--so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence?" (*Letters* 326), one cannot help but assume he means something along the lines of the bliss experienced by Diana and Endymion in their conjugal life on Olympus, a sex life in which souls as well as bodies are brought into perfect unity. It is perhaps the most literal illustration of what he means in the Bailey letter when he says,

“we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone” (53).

The idea that there will be sex in the afterlife (and that it will be better than the sort to be had on earth) is, not surprisingly, consistent with the paganism practiced by the ancient Greeks. Gary Stilwell writes that the Greeks believed the afterlife—or at least Elysium—was filled with activities resembling the “relative social norms... gluttony, drunkenness, prodigality, gambling, sexual enjoyment or anything that gratifies” (126). Those scholars who put forward the terribly reductive suggestion that Keats was writing pornography for his own use may be onto something here.

In 1818, he was starting to cough blood (Motion 256). Having not met Fanny Brawne at Wentworth Place, he had, up to that point in his life (so far as his biographers know) been rejected by every object of his affection. He considered himself short and unattractive: "I do think better of Womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet height likes them or not" (*Letters* 178). He had no investment in the church, and was breathing “the pure serene” of Chapman's translation of *The Iliad*, (Keats 9). So, it makes sense that he would, at least to some degree, be drawn to the Homeric idea that his suffering was not a result of original sin and Total Depravity but rather a God-ordained means of preparing him for an afterlife full of the pleasures (sexual and otherwise) that everyone in Keats criticism assumes he was deprived of at this point in his life.

Keats could not have committed to a system more opposed to the doctrines of election if that had been his intention. Man is not inherently good. Man is not inherently bad. There is only one afterlife, and it is entirely pleasurable. The only way one can get to

this afterlife is by experiencing every sensation that comes one's way: painful or otherwise. There is no damnation, only souls who return again to God so that they can try once more to gain a soul. On every single point, this runs contrary to the doctrines of election as set down in the *Institutes*, the *Canons of Dort*, and even the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. If that were not enough, Keats neo-paganism indulges the indulgence of earthly pleasure, instead of eschewing them in favor of the pleasures in the world to come, as per the party-line ideologies of orthodox Christianity. Even without the benefit of his personal correspondences, the transgressive nature of Keats' worldview would have been apparent to his readers from his poetry alone.

The Critical Backlash against *Endymion*

Duncan Wu (2015) recently suggested a possible starting point for the swarm of negative criticism that destroyed Keats' career as a poet and any hope he may have had for financial success. That source is Byron. In letters to Murray, Byron accused Keats of writing poems that were "continually in for and filling someone else's body" (*Confessions* 40). He also denigrated Keats as a "self-polluter of the human mind" and referred to his verse as adolescent, calling it "piss-a-bed poetry" (qtd. in Wu 196). Wu finds it highly unlikely that Byron would have been outraged over the sex in *Endymion*, pointing out that his bedtime reading was De Sade's orgiastic *Justine* and that Byron had "done things with adolescent boys Keats had never contemplated" (197). There must be another reason for Byron's attack on Keats other than a schoolmarm's sense of outrage.

In 1818, Byron was living in Venice, writing *Manfred* and translating Armenian manuscripts like *III Corinthians* into English. At this point in his life, he was as scandalized as he would ever be: involved in numerous affairs, labeled "mad, bad, and

dangerous to know” by Lady Caroline Lamb (Bloom 4), forced into exile over rumors of incest, and accused of obscenity and “shameless indecency” by *The British Critic’s* review of *Don Juan* (qtd. in Wu 197). He still had friends among the English critics, though, the foremost of which was John Murray II. Murray was one of the most prestigious publishers and critics of his time, and, when it came to matters of taste, he had the respect of his peers. So when Byron wrote imperatively that he “flay [Keats] alive; if some of you don’t I must skin him myself. There is no bearing the driveling idiotism of the manikin” (*Letters* 458), he was not simply calling for Murray to speak out against Keats’ poetry, but for all the London magazine from *Blackwood* to the *London Quarterly* to mount an anti-Keats offensive.

Wu’s idea is that Byron had Murray and Co. attack Keats as a diversion to draw public attention away from his own scandals, thus giving the public someone else to hate for a change: “No wonder, that Byron, brought up a Calvinist... took the opportunity to expose what he thought to be the most egregious sins in Keats’ verse” (Wu 97). Wu does not explain why Byron’s Calvinist upbringing would cause him to take issue with *Endymion*. Most of Wu’s readers would probably assume that since English Calvinists tended to be prim in the extreme, they would most likely object to the poem’s explicit sexual content, but there is more to *Endymion*, other than the sex, a low-church Protestant would find unsettling. For one, Keats’ poem threatened a social order that the people in power considered God-ordained.

Keats as Threat to the Social Hierarchy

One of the criticisms which is most commonly leveled at John Keats is that his poetry is guilty of Cocknification. This is to say, it exhibited speech markers usually

associated with English people living in London's East End. A significant portion of upper-class reviewers saw Cockney speech patterns as uncouth and did everything in their power to limit the influence of Cockney poets. The most vicious of these papers was *Blackwood Magazine*, whose editor John Wilson liked to brag about destroying the careers of Cockney poets.

In 1829, nine years after Keats' death, which was thought by many, Byron and Shelley included, to have been brought on by harsh reviews, Wilson said, "After killing a Cockney, why run away, and more, especially, in a mask? Let the fair deed be perpetrated at noon day" (Montluzin 87). William Maginn, Wilson's co-editor, was just as unapologetically savage: "That we did smash that pestilent sect we acknowledge with pleasure. A baser crew never spewed over literature" (87). Time and critical opinion have not been kind to Wilson and Maginn. According to Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, the critics who gathered in William Blackwood's bookshop on Prince's Street were bigots "motivated by issues of class, specifically, the fears of the Tory elite of birth and education that the lower-middle-class Cockney social climbers were threatening to invade their privileged order" (88). Unfortunately for Keats, he was as lower-middle-class and Cockney as one could be.

Born in a Moorgate inn, right outside of Whitechapel, Keats was the son of a stable-keeper and a scullery maid, both of whom died, leaving the children in the care of an aunt who secured John an apprenticeship as a surgeon (Motion 30-78). His working class background was not unknown to the *Blackwood* critics, as they mocked his background as a surgeon, saying that his poetry was only read by "six or seven medical students, who chaunt portions of *Endymion* as they walk the hospitals, because the author

was once an apothecary” (qtd. in Montluzin 104). However, they acted as if biographical information was unnecessary, claiming to be able to recognize a Cockney-born poet by his or her choice of language alone.

In panning Leigh Hunt, *The Blackwood Review* accused him of “pretense, affectation, finery, and gaudiness.... Mr. Hunt cannot utter a dedication or even a note without betraying the Shibboleth of low birth and low habits” (91). The use of *shibboleth* here is especially helpful in painting Hunt as an outsider. The name derives its origins, at least in the English tradition, from the eleventh chapter of the Book of Judges where, after the Ephraimite Invasion, wayfarers were asked to say “shibboleth” by Jewish soldiers patrolling the roads. If they could not, they were deemed Ephraimite escapees and executed on the spot (*King James Bible*. Judg 11). Hunt, by virtue of this comparison, is not one of God’s chosen people and neither, for that matter, is Keats.

The Blackwood’s attacks on *Endymion* were extreme. They wrote that it “created such a sickness and nausea, that the mind felt little inclination to analyze the mixture produced.... The phrenzy of the Poems was bad enough in its way; but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy of *Endymion*” (qtd. in Hayden 370). An observation that would strengthen Wu’s argument considerably is how similar the above-quoted passage sounds to Byron’s letter in which he tells Murray to “flay him alive.... There is no bearing the driveling idiotism of the manikin” (*Letters* 458).

Wu notes that Murray used to read Byron’s letters to his circle of friends who just so happened to include John Wilson and William Maginn of the *Blackwood Review*. They were not his rivals, as one may assume since they ran another newspaper. Rather, they

were business partners, with Murray holding a share in their co-venture *Janus Magazine* (Latané 128). The character assassination of John Keats was a concerted effort. The death-blow to *Endymion* was dealt by the Irish statesman and critic John Wilson Croker whose review appeared in the prestigious *London Quarterly*, Murray's own magazine. Croker began his slaughtering of *Endymion* with the phrase, "Reviewers have been sometimes accused of not reading the works which they affected to criticize. On the present occasion we shall anticipate the author's complaint, and honestly confess that we have not read *Endymion*" (qtd. in Haydon 45). Croker asks to be excused on this point because, as he maintains, the poem is unreadable, and the chief reason for this unreadability is its belonging to the Cockney school:

It is not that Mr. Keats, (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his sense would put his real name to such a rhapsody,) it is not, we say, that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius – he has all these; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry. (45)

After attacking Keats' use of heroic meter and quoting portions of *Endymion*—in which he identified the influence of Leigh Hunt and other members of the Cockney school—Croker explicitly attacks its sales:

But enough of Mr Leigh Hunt and his simple neophyte. If anyone should be bold enough to purchase this 'Poetic Romance,' and so much more patient, than ourselves, as to get beyond the first book, and so much more fortunate as to find a meaning, we entreat him to make us acquainted with his success; we shall then

return to the task which we now abandon in despair, and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr Keats. (46)

The effect was devastating. Despite anonymous letters sent to the *Quarterly* by Keats' friends, defending the poet and the poem, *Endymion's* sales plummeted and its four volumes soon disappeared from the shelves of profit-minded book sellers (Roe 276). Two months after Croker's review, Tom Keats died and the symptoms of John's sickness grew worse, leading many to assume that the *Quarterly's* review had crushed him spiritually and physically. In a follow-up letter to Murray, Byron wrote,

Are you aware that Shelley has written an elegy on Keats, and accuses the *Quarterly* of killing him?... I did not approve of Keats's poetry or principles of poetry... but as he is dead, omit all that is said about him in any M.S.S. of mine... I do not envy the man who wrote the article—your review people have no more right to kill than any other foot pads. However, he who would die of an article in a review would probably have died of something else equally trivial. (*Letters* 317)

His effort to distance himself from any wrong-doing is three-fold. He asks that Murray remove any negative criticism he may have offered of Keats from any and all publications, places the blame on Croker, and says that Keats would have probably died of something else anyways. Keats, of course, succumbed to tuberculosis, and his death did not have anything to do with the *Quarterly Review*. Byron was as misinformed of Keats' death as he is guilty of destroying his career.

Wu sees Byron's conspiracy against Keats as an effort to divert attention away from his own infamy, but there may be another reason he could have abhorred the Cockney poet. As the second chapter of this thesis suggests, Byron wanted to believe in

free will, but, due to his Scots-Presbyterian upbringing, could not elude the gloomy tenets instilled in him by May Gray. In Keats, he saw a poet whose work exhibited none of the irony, pessimism, and cynicism of “Darkness,” *The Corsair*, or *The Giaour*, and he hated him for it.

“Jealousy! Pitiful jealousy!” railed the American reviewer Richard Monkton when, in 1848, Byron’s personal letters were published in the United States for the first time. “Yes! Jealousy alone inspired the brutal letter of which we have given an extract” (376). Monkton—who was still operating under the illusion that the *Quarterly* had killed Keats—argued that Byron was jealous of his inventiveness, and, in so doing, stuck near the mark. If Byron envied Keats, it was for his ability to write unencumbered by Puritan anxiety.

Nineteenth-Century Protestantism and Social Mobility

Marjorie Levinson is one of the few critics to take the side of Crocker, Maginn, and Wilson. In her 1988 book, *Keats’s Life of Allegory*, she argued that Byron, *Blackwood*, and the *Quarterly*, were not trying to keep a working-class poet in his place but rather recoiling from middle-class pretensions to wealth and status:

The middle class of his day produced itself as a kind of collective, throbbing oxymoron: achieved by its ambitiousness, hardworking in its hedonism, a ‘being’ that defined itself strictly in its style and ways of having. In the style of Keats’ poetry, we read the dream of masturbation: the fantasy of the ‘perpetual cockstand,’ that solution to castration anxiety. In both the dream and the anxiety, we, like Byron, discern the genetic code of the middle class. (204)

The rich splendor of Keats' poetry is, according to Levinson, a compensation for the financial strains of the middle class. It is all social ambition to her. This reading is reductive, but helpful, at least, in informing the way Keats was read in the twentieth century. Levinson identifies a strain of shame in Keats. The way she sees it, his "poetry blushes more deeply and deliberately than we had thought. It blushes on the level of style" (204). Her line of reasoning is similar to the one taken up by the *Blackwood* critics. She can hear the middle-class pretensions in the same way they could hear the shibboleth. This perceived sense of shame is so subjective as to open up the possibility of reader projection. Keats may or may not be blushing in *Endymion*, but his readers are. A sense of propriety has been violated. There is transgression here, and it would seem—Wordsworth's quip excepted—that the censure of the *Blackwood* and *Quarterly* critics has more to do with the reviewers being annoyed by the presumptions of a Cockney social climber than with any kind of perceived blasphemy. However, when one traces this annoyance to its root, one, once again, finds the doctrines of election.

As mentioned before, the Protestant work ethic was responsible, at least according to Max Weber, for the rapid industrialization of countries like Germany and Britain. This led to what Stephen Innes refers to as "the Protestant dilemma" (226). In discussing the problems that Welsh Calvinists faced when deciding whether or not to emigrate to the colonies, Innes writes that they were tempted "to get out of his place, to strive to grow richer, and eventually seek profit for himself and not for God and community (226).

Whether a venture (economic or otherwise) was an act of transgressive free will or a God-ordained means of glorifying the faithful all hinged on if it was successful or not. These sort of successes, as Weber and Innes observe, were testimonies of election:

"One could never be quite certain of his membership in the elect, the special group of individuals whom the Lord had chosen for eternal life, but outward testimony was available. Notably financial success and personal prosperity would attest that the Lord had smiled upon one's fortune" (Schnall 40).

If a business venture proved efficacious, it was born of God. If it did not, it was a sinful act of one's own volition. The idea that success is a sign of God's favor applied to social mobility as well. In discussing the Christian tolerance of slavery in the eighteenth century, church historian Donald K. McKim writes, "While the doctrine of God's total sovereignty and equal creation of all people suggested the oneness of the human family, the idea of different divinely approved vocations permitted Calvinism to understand social hierarchy and inequalities as God-ordained" (187). Therefore, Calvinists were supposed to accept their place in society and be content.

Calvin, himself, was no advocate of ambition. In his commentary on the Psalms, he references the Genesis account where the serpent tempts Eve:

And what did Satan say when he deceived our first parent? Ye shall be as gods. (Gen. 3:5.) Consequently, all who dare to ascribe more to themselves than God allows are chargeable with exalting themselves against God, as if they declared war against him; for where pride is, contempt of God must be. (*Commentaries* 445)

Milan Zafirovski argues that any system of thought, theological or otherwise, that sees events as preordained will inevitably strengthen the possessing society's caste system: "Calvinis[m] and any pure, primitive or fundamentalist theocracy entails or generates... a slave economy as its proper economic logic and system of primitivism"

(125) Zafirovski's definition of *slave* is quite broad and includes those stuck working jobs with no upward mobility: "These slave-like jobs and settings including sweat-shops and their variations like prison labor... constitute the actual or prospective inhuman"

(310). The dehumanization of the lower classes was a favorite weapon in the arsenal of the *Blackwood* critics who, by de Montluzin's estimation, called the Cockneys "dogs, rats, toads, hedgehogs, bugs, capons, worms, apes, baboons, orangutans, and cockatrices" (99). This depiction of the lower orders as animals is a part of a long tradition of classist dehumanization.

Twenty years after *Endymion*'s publication, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville would recall, in his *Recollections of 1848*, how Blanqui, one of his friends, overheard a conversation between two servants during the Paris Uprising of 1832. One told the other, "Next Sunday... we shall be eating the wings of the chicken. Blanqui was very careful not to hear these little monkeys.... It was not until after the victory that he ventured to send back the ambitious pair to their hovel" (de Tocqueville 198). Because of the turbulent times, the servants' ambition to pleasure, in this case, eating chicken wings instead of chicken feet, constituted a threat to the ruling class. Similarly, Keats was attacked and dehumanized for his ambition to pleasures usually reserved for the gentleman poet, the superfluous man, the kind of wealthy exquisitely-bored aristocrat that Russian literature would satirize in the 1840s. The presumption to pleasures outside his sphere caused him to be perceived as a dangerous social climber. In reality, Keats cared very little for moving up in society. As William Howitt said of the poet in 1847, "on this world and its concerns, he could take no hold and they could take no hold on him" (qtd. in Watson 50). His thoughts and ambitions were not so much concerned with concrete

reality as they were with the world of the imagination and his role in it. Keats did not aspire to titles or land. He aspired to godhood.

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats asks, "What men or Gods are these?" referencing the anthropomorphization of deities in Greek myth. Unless a human figure in an untitled work of Hellenistic art is carrying the emblems of a deity, there is no way to tell whether or not they are divine or mortal and, as previously mentioned, the line was often blurred. This would have no doubt appealed to (or even inspired) in him the idea that humans are divine. In his letter to George and Georgiana, he says, "Intelligences are atoms of perception—they know and they see and are pure, in short they are God.... How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given to them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence?" (Keats 327). The chief end of man is not, therefore, to glorify God (as per the Westminster Catechism) but to achieve deification by way of varied human experience and, afterward, enjoy the pleasures or the bliss of a new state.

"Adonais"

Keats' ambitions were Luciferian in their scope. He wanted to be as God. Though will to power may have been envied by Byron and feared by reviewers like Maginn and Croker, it seems to have been understood and appreciated by Percy Bysshe Shelley. The elegy that Byron spoke of in his letter to John Murray was published as *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats* (1821). In it, Shelley casts Keats as a kind of Endymion character who has been murdered: "pierc'd by the shaft which flies / In darkness" (184). The cause of Adonais' murder is explicitly jealousy since Cain's murder of Abel is invoked: "the curse of Cain / Light on his head who pierc'd thy innocent breast,

/ And scar'd the angel soul that was its earthly guest!" (489). The criticism Keats received—and which Shelley believed killed him—figures into the poem as a draught of poison:

Our Adonais has drunk poison—oh!
 What deaf and viperous murderer could crown
 Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?
 The nameless worm would now itself disown:
 It felt, yet could escape, the magic tone
 Whose prelude held all envy, hate and wrong (494)

The nameless worm here would be Croker whose name did not appear on the *Quarterly's* review of Keats' poetry. Like Endymion, Adonais has a goddess lover, Urania, who speaks of him as "A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift— / A Love in desolation mask'd—a Power / Girt round with weakness" (493). Freed from the weakness of his mortal body, Adonais ascends to an afterlife populated by poets who crown him as their king:

"Thou art become as one of us," they cry,
 "It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
 Swung blind in unascended majesty,
 Silent alone amid a Heaven of Song.
 Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our throng!" (496)

Adonais' ascent to immortality is slightly different than Endymion's. The latter becomes a god because of the way in which sensations shaped him, the former by the glory of his deeds. Regardless, it is consistent with the Keatsian system of salvation which appears in

the poet's personal letters, since *Adonais*' heaven is a meritocracy reached by great efforts of the will and not Unconditional Election. In *Adonais*, Shelley realizes, in verse, the ideas that offended the reviewers of *Endymion*, human deification and that of a Cockney, no less.

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