

ENG 521
Daniela Miranda
September 9th, 2010

The Sublime in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia"

While reading Burke's enquiry on the sublime and the beautiful, I was particularly struck by his ideas on how horror, pain, and danger help to define the sublime and, to a certain degree, awe or wonder. According to Burke, "when danger or pain press to nearly, they are incapable of giving delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful..." (59). Therefore, I set out to find a literary work that fit Burke's description of the sublime, and I immediately came across Poe's short story "Ligeia." As an example of the romantic gothic, this story presents many characteristics that make it awe-inspiring and, consequently, sublime.

One of the most prevalent elements used by Poe to elevate "Ligeia" to the sublime is his masterful depiction of obscurity, both at a literal level and at a more metaphysical one. For instance, obscurity is one of the defining characteristics of Ligeia herself, who the narrator describes as "a shadow." At a more metaphysical level, she is also described as possessing a certain "strangeness" that the narrator cannot explain in spite of his efforts. This strangeness implies a certain obscurity of character in this case, a kind of unearthly quality that defies explanation or categorization. In addition to Ligeia's own darkness, the setting the narrator describes, Lady Tremaine's chamber in particular, is full of obscurity. Her room is decorated with "gigantic sarcophagus of black granite," "an ebony bed" and "jetty black" embroidered curtains. All of these shadows and blackness are meant to heighten the feeling of horror and pain felt by the narrator at the death of his first wife. In Burke's words "To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary" (99).

Besides the shadows and darkness that permeate the story and create a feeling of the sublime Poe's topic is, in itself, sublime due to the amount of pain, horror and despair the narrator has to endure. In fact, one could argue that Poe's treatment of the death of the beloved in this story is extremely cruel, since he not only makes the narrator endure the death of Ligeia but then brings her back as a monstrous being that has consumed and basically reincarnated in his current wife. This extreme suffering on the part of the narrator is awe-inspiring for the reader, who can achieve what Burke terms a "state of the soul, in which all its notions are suspended with some degree of horror" (95) by distancing him/herself from the suffering of the narrator.

To conclude, Poe's use of darkness and his treatment of death (as in Ligeia's poem) are used as way to highlight the horror and pain suffered by the narrator and make this short story a masterful example of the sublime as defined by Burke.

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English 521
9 September 2010

Blake's "The Ecchoing Green"

Continuing with my mode from last week, I'm simply going to revisit a poem that has always touched me on a simple emotional level. I'll offer my own rather formalist reading, then do a bit of research to see what may be learned by comparing my raw emotional encounter to reasoned and researched scholarship.

This is a three-stanza poem from Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. Upon rereading it, I immediately noticed the unusual meter: anapestic dimeter. It is not entirely regular: some iambs appear here and there in place of anapests. But for the most part the feet are anapests. This meter gives the poem a sing-songy feel, and the short lines add to this effect. I like how Blake is using form to compliment the content. The poem describes a scene of children at play, making the simple, musical feel of the meter an appropriate compliment that actually adds to the emotional appeal of the poem. It reads like a child's lullaby.

The poem tells the story of one day, from sunrise to sunset, of children playing in a field while "old folk" look on. Blake is using the setting of a single day to simultaneously signal the cyclical nature of all life. The poem begins: "The Sun does arise, / And make happy the skies" (1-2). The language is simple and sunny. Children are frolicking on the green; it is springtime; the birds are singing and the bells are ringing. Everything is "merry," "happy," and "cheerful." Nature is in reproductive mode, the birds singing in the bush. A happy scene in the first stanza, simple and direct.

The second stanza introduces us to the old folk who are looking on. Old John is old enough to have white hair, but he and the others are cheered and laugh at the children's play. They "laugh away care" while watching the children. They think back to their own youth and see themselves reflected in the children playing on the green. Two important things here: the elderly people may be laughing now, but they do indeed have "care"; they are not children and have lost their innocence. And the old folks' observation that they used to be as the children are now (the echo) causes the reader to reflect that these careless children will themselves one day be old, near death, and beset by cares.

The final stanza finishes the cycle. The kids are tired, the sun is going down, and they are ready for rest. Again, the symbolic force of the simple, sunny description is in the reference to the cyclical nature of life. This enervation and rest is analogous to old age and death, an interpretation supported, I think, by the final line's substitution of darkening for ecchoing, as in "darkening Green" (30). Green is life, but at the end of this poem, that life is darkening. Even as the children represent an abundance of life, the signs of decay and death surround them, both in form of the elderly and in the ending of the day.

Unfortunately, I could find only one article that seemed to be about this poem particularly. And that was unavailable immediately. I've ordered it via Interlibrary Loan, but have not received it yet (I'll update this annotation as needed). The other articles I looked at dealt with it only in the larger context of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. This would be fine, except that they only dealt with "The Ecchoing Green" in passing, usually in one sentence, and often not bothering with much analysis. Am I right this time that this poem is simple? Certainly it is not so simple as it first appears, but I think most people can pick up on the equation of a day with a human life. Perhaps this renders it unfruitful for a scholar to grapple with?

Devon Bailey
521- Annotation
9 September 2010

Explanation and Analysis of John Clare's "Silent Love"

The most captivating aspect of John Clare's poem "Silent Love" is the rhyme scheme. The poem is set up as rhyming couplets, and each couplet is paired with another to create four line stanzas. This pattern is true for the first two and last two stanzas, but the middle, or third stanza, deviates from the couplet pattern to create an ABAB rhyme scheme. This change in the middle is marked by the listing given in this stanza. As the couplet stanzas each complete two thoughts, one for each couplet, the middle stanza on the other hand serves as one extended thought. Nevertheless, each stanza puts forth a different idea or image that is being described, but all of these images involve the anticipation and fear of unspoken love.

The first stanza unveils the imagery of dew as "it trembles on the thorn / Then vanishes so love is born" (Clare, ll. 1-2). This first couplet at first glance can have multiple readings, but after reading the entire poem it is clear that the dew trembling on the edge of the thorn is representative of the anticipation of love, and the danger, of a pointy thorn, which threatens your every move during the state of unspoken love.

The poem continues, "Young love that speaks in silent thought / 'Till scorned, then withers and is nought" (Clare, ll. 3-4). This couplet explains that young love is most vulnerable to the fragility of reciprocation. The fear of the possible pain or possible denial is what Clare symbolizes as the thorn, while rejection is what "withers" the excitement and anticipation of love.

In the second stanza, Clare equates the "pleasure" of love to the "blooming" of flowers, and the "glitter of the morning dew" to "love when it is new" (Clare, ll. 5-8). Both analogies serve to explain the joy and excitement of young love. The next stanza contains the irregular rhyme scheme and also creates a list of three natural insect sounds which he describes as "frail" (Clare, ll. 12). The assumption behind this stanza is that love, especially young love, when it is unspoken is most delicate.

Stanza four explains that when "young love" is kept silent it will grow "weary" with anticipation of future "joy," which will cause the lover to become enveloped in "fancy" "'Till sick of its own heart it dies" (Clare, ll. 13-6). This imagery depicts a sickness, like a kind of lovesickness, where if you do not speak your feelings you will be so consumed by love that you will die (perhaps not literally, but in effect the possibility for love would die).

The final, fifth, stanza brings us back to the imagery of the dew drop suspended in time between requited and unrequited love. Clare puts great emphasis on the spoken knowledge of love. He is purporting through this poem that love must be spoken or sought after, otherwise it fades away, or rather in a more extreme interpretation, you must, as a lover, pursue your love or you will lose the ability to love altogether. This could be meant to urge young lovers to make their feelings known.

The ideas of fear and anxiety expressed in the anticipation of unspoken love seem to coincide with the ideas of the sublime as far as Edmund Burke explains them. The key link between Burke's sublime and Clare's poem "Silent Love" is the idea of fear and terror of the unknown. I have appropriated Burke's viewpoint on this matter, and as a result have identified

the sublime in this poem as the anxiety of anticipation and fear of rejection experienced by silent love.

Clare, John. "Silent Love." *Romanticism an Anthology*. By Duncan Wu. 3rd ed. Malden: Blackwell, 2009. 1239-240. Print.

Jacob Hughes
Annotation #2
Age of Wonder
September 5, 2010

Lost, but Still Moving

O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;
The screaming seabird quits the troubled sea,
But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me,
And suits the mournful temper of my soul.

--Charlotte Smith, Sonnet XII *Written on the Seashore* (XII. 5-8), from *Elegiac Sonnets*

Nothing is more painful to the human mind than, after the feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of inaction and certainty which follows and deprives the soul both of hope and fear.

--Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (72)

I'm still drifting about in snowy seas, not yet ready to return to visit England. Reading *Frankenstein* reminds me of how people often treat grief—through action. Victor, as the second quote suggests, prefers activity and inexorable-yet-mercurial movement to motionless grief. I know many people like this, who prefer to be *doing something* rather than waiting about for funerals; in this soul-searching way they find themselves again. Thus, I'm struck by the applicability of Smith's sonnet. She conveys both a sense of melancholy and of charm; of mourning and hope. The screaming of the wild seabird and the howling of the wind both convey horror and vigorous life. Perhaps at these junctures—the closeness between life and death, dark and light, happiness and sadness—that *life* seems put in its best perspective. Cliché as this sentiment may be, I'm inclined to think that it's true. Whatever "suits the mournful temper" of Smith's soul must in some way destabilize it. Earlier in the poem, we get descriptions of rocks—unmovable sea rocks "On some rude fragment of the rocky shore (XII.1). Are these 'rocks' the source of her melancholy, or what's behind her? Or both? Looking out to the sea, imagining the implications of what's in and beyond it can have a tonic effect, but also amplify pleasure/pain/hope/despair.

Maybe Victor Frankenstein finds himself in the Arctic for more than one soul-searching reason. After all, he dies before taking his revenge out on the monster, and though despite his mistakes, seems relatively unrepentant in terms of his science. With his last words, Frankenstein tells Captain Walton to "avoid ambition," but bitterly recollects his own continued hopes at success: "Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (193). Only a few days before his death, Frankenstein lambasts Walton's crew for wishing to retreat home: "Are you...so easily turned from your design?" (190). The Arctic has become a veritable dumping ground for human anxiety, error and ambition. Victor sees the landscape's potential and yearns after it before he dies. Dying as he did (maybe in a telegraphed way) for science, one would hope that Walton should learn from his example.

The Monster only really converses with Frankenstein surrounded by sublime ideas of the north—glaciers, ice, foggy seas. The Monster is more than the representative of Frankenstein's horrific intellectual and emotional baggage—he's a pastiche of *human* intellectual and emotional baggage. Both the sea and the land structures of the Arctic serve as representations of human ambition and fear. They provide the Monster's primary habitat.

Though this may sound goofy, I'm interested in cognitively separating Walton's Arctic and Frankenstein's version, for the time being. Walton's Arctic comprises of instable seas, icy expanses of ocean, small and only marginally safe spaces of inescapable cold (his ship), possibly blunted ambition, wanderlust, and lack of an interpersonal emotional support system (though voluntarily—this is his expedition). Frankenstein's sublime glacier and his monster, on the other hand, comprise of the monolithic *stability* of death, an icy home away from home, a forced departure of friends and family who are yet in close proximity, giant snow-capped mountains, and the oppressive knowledge (though refusal of acceptance) that he and his creation must die. Both regions are full of promise, yet that promise never fulfills. The "mournful temper" of Walton's soul—his presumed escape from stability—must remain unabated by still seas which will suit him about as well as monolithic and unmovable glaciers. Frankenstein, on the other hand, wants stability yet is oppressed by its inescapable truths.

It should come as no surprise that both men's attitudes are reflected in the period—promise (i.e. the attitudes perpetuated by Joseph Banks) and anxiety (see James Gillray's illustrations). But they are also characterized by broken promises and unfulfilled, yet costly ambition. Again, Smith waxes applicable: "Already shipwrecked by the storms of fate,/Like the poor mariner methinks I stand,/Cast on a rock; who sees distant land/From whence no succor comes—or comes too late;/Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,/Till in the rising tide t' exhausted sufferer dies" (XII.9-14).

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3 September 2010

Gentlemen within Coleridge's "To William Wordsworth"

In the late eighteenth century figures such as William Beckford and Horace Walpole made the term "gentleman" notoriously queer, essentially carving a space within heteronormative society for Byron's status as a promiscuous, bisexual, gentleman celebrity to operate. Within this context, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a poem to William Wordsworth responding to *The Prelude*. Published in 1817 and originally titled "To A Gentleman," Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem to Wordsworth echoes notions of homosociality while demonstrating tropes of sentimentalism. Coleridge emphasizes Wordsworth's understanding of the mind and nature and superior status as a poet and belittles himself and his work in comparison. However, the fact that Coleridge changed his poem's title to eradicate the term "gentleman" as well as the fact that Wordsworth was reluctant to have the poem published in its entirety implies that we must take a closer look at the dynamics of intimacy portrayed within the poem formally known as "To A Gentleman." Despite one of the most direct references to the concern of same-sex erotic expression occurring within Coleridge's own work, the fourteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*, which expresses "Disgust and aversion!" to Virgil and Anacreon's expressions of homosexual love as it displays a "perversion of the proper ultimate end," I contend that "To A Gentleman," though not blatantly queer, carries an implication of perversion due to Coleridge's ambiguous representations of sexuality.

Although the term "gentleman" has been removed from Coleridge's poem, the implications of the term remain; the poem is centered upon the premise of an intimacy between men. While homosocial relationships were quite common, as patriarchal society relied upon them as a means to subordinate women and relegate them to the private sphere, Coleridge relies upon a language of admiration and secrecy to express an ambiguous sexuality. Referencing Wordsworth as "God's great gift to me," Coleridge relies upon a term of endearment comparable to God's gift of Eve to Adam to express the notion of Wordsworth as his partner; because Wordsworth and Coleridge collaborated on *Lyrical Ballads*, the implications of this partnership remain ambiguous. Coleridge continues to emphasize their intimacy by stating that Wordsworth's work will be "dear... to every human heart" but to himself "how more than dearest!" (53-4). By claiming that Wordsworth's work will be the more dear to him than to every other human heart, he is laying claim to Wordsworth himself; through this claim, Coleridge implies that he understands Wordsworth better than anybody else, including Wordsworth's wife. Within his poem, he describes himself as an "understanding mind," grouping himself with Wordsworth as similar while simultaneously excluding others (4).

In her book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick acknowledges the language of secrecy as well as links it to homosocial bonds and the logic of closeted homosexuality. She explains that these bonds concentrate "the fantasy energies of compulsion [and] prohibition," stating that homosocial bonds are "structured by the logic of paranoia... [and] mapped along the axes of social and political power" (Sedgwick 162). Coleridge's "To Wordsworth" incorporates this language of secrecy and fear, relying upon words and phrases such as "revealable," "mysterious fear," and "thy hidden life" to portray an

image not only of friendship, but also of an intimacy of an ambiguous nature (7,9,15). The language of secrecy and fear propagates the notions of shame and having something of which to be ashamed.

Coleridge's removal of the notoriously queer term "gentleman" from the title of his poem follows not only the language of secrecy, but also the notion of shame and having something of which to be ashamed. Although Coleridge's representations of intimacy and sexuality remain ambiguous, they simultaneously reveal the possibility a dimension of Coleridge's character that could revel in a "perversion to the ultimate end!"

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8 Sept 2010
Annotation #2

Shelley's Critique of Travel Narratives

I've read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* once before. Influenced by my own general interests and my understanding of Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley's mother, I'd read the novel through a feminist lens. I analyzed the book in terms of the female characters—how they, especially Elizabeth and Justine, are left behind and disregarded, and ultimately suffer the consequences of the male characters' choices. However, because of the theme of this class, I realized *Frankenstein* was also about exploration and travel. Just as Shelley's novel critiques the more grandiose goals of science, it also investigates the validity and ethics of travel narratives. Shelley constructs this critique primarily through characterization, a shifting international setting, and plot structure.

Just as she shows the dangers of uncontrolled scientific experiment through the character of Victor Frankenstein, Shelley critiques geographic exploration and the resultant travel narratives through the character of Robert Walton. Walton has been on this trip culminating in an attempted voyage to the poles for six years (29). He embarks on his "expedition of discovery" to satiate his "ardent curiosity" (28). When Walton and the ship's crew members encounter Frankenstein, the scientist is "on the brink of destruction," "his body dreadfully emaciated," (35) with "an expression of wildness, and even madness" (36). Yet Walton considers Frankenstein a "noble creature" whom he begins "to love. . . as a brother" (37). When Walton declares his willingness to "sacrifice [his] fortune, [his] existence, [his] every hope to the furtherance of [his] enterprise," (38) Frankenstein gives his history as a cautionary tale, recognizing that Walton shares "his madness" (38). Frankenstein tells Walton to "seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition" (185). Yet Walton reports to his sister that he feels a failure, his "hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision" (183) because he's decided to turn the ship around and escape the ice which threatens to crush the ship. Even though Shelley shows Walton ultimately giving up the final push to the North Pole, this character shows how much explorers were willing to risk for the sake of knowledge and glory, just as Frankenstein's character revealed the same flaw in some experimental scientists.

In addition, Shelley's shifting setting emphasizes that this is a travel narrative as much as a book about scientific experimentation. The Frankenstein family is Genevese and yet lives for a time in both Germany and Italy, and travels through France. Although the family's journeys aren't harmful, they create the expectation that Victor can easily travel. Frankenstein makes his greatest transgressions—building the creature and beginning to build its companion—away from home in Germany and in the far reaches of Scotland. In addition, Victor suffers the greatest consequences of his creation while traveling. Clerval's body turns up with Frankenstein in Ireland and Elizabeth dies in Italy. In addition, the creature kills William Frankenstein and frames Justine while Victor is away, leaving them unprotected. The implication is that if Victor had just stayed home, the creature and its subsequent problems would have never been created. In fact, Victor can't imagine creating a companion for the monster in Geneva; he feels he has to get away. In a final ironic twist, the monster promises that if Frankenstein creates a companion, the two monsters will "quit Europe forever, and every other place in the neighbourhood of man" (131). They'll do this by going to "the vast wilds of South America" (129). Yet Spanish accounts of South America had shown that continent to be full of people. In other words, in this narrative framed by travel, the characters ignore the travels of others.

Finally, the plot structure of the novel undermines the credibility of travel accounts due to its multiple layers of narrators. At the core, this novel is an account given by a traveler, Robert Walton, of his experiences. In other words, its base form is a travelogue. Although Robert Walton is a minor figure in the overall story, he's the primary narrator through whom we receive the main narration. In other words, Walton controls the information received by both the implied reader of the text and his sister, the fictional reader of his letters. Yet Walton doesn't directly experience the tale. Instead he retells an account told to him mostly by Victor Frankenstein and partially by the creature. However, Victor's account includes stories told to him by his father, Elizabeth, and the creature himself. In turn, the creature relays to Victor the stories of the De Lacey family, especially the courtship of Felix and Saphie, "his sweet Arabian" (107). Finally, Felix gives historical accounts from books. In other words, the novel's primary narrator, Walton, is in some cases four retellings away from the story he tells (accounts in a book told by Felix, retold by the monster, retold by Frankenstein, retold by Walton to his sister). Such a narrative structure begs the question—where do travelers get their information? How much is firsthand and what is hearsay?

In conclusion, in *Frankenstein* Shelley engages in the early 19th century debates not only about gender and the aims of science but also about the intents of travel and the reliability of travel narratives.

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Karin Gresham

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English 521

5 September 2010

James Hogg's Early Modern Folklorist Perspective

Early pre-modern English and Scottish fairy lore traditions declined to fix fairies with a specific definition. In James Hogg's lifetime (1770-1835), fairy representations were presented in a wide range of shapes and sizes, from the horse-like kelpie to the elfish brownie to the winged miniature female figure. By the Romantic and Victorian eras, darker, more ominous survivals from medieval legendary were rapidly being replaced by more friendly representations of pixies with gauzy wings and magic dust halos. Benevolent fairies, considered as fallen angels or visions of the dead, could even become personified representations of concepts like love and nature. Hogg, however, even though more positive popular representation was evolving, strove to maintain the earlier traditions of the darker rural fairy whose depictions most likely stemmed from stories told to him as a child. Having been reared upon a farm with little to no formal education, Hogg was acquainted as a child with rural folklore tradition in which fairies sometimes benevolently but more often menacingly interfered in the lives of mortals to shattering effect. One such tale that clearly demonstrates use of the earlier tradition is his short story, "The Brownie of the Black Hags," a cautionary tale that relates the consequences of mistreating a brownie, a figure with vague and unfixed association to evil spirits that links this tale to early modern origins.

After a history of mistreating and even killing her servants, the aristocratic Lady Wheelhope and her husband gain the employment of a peculiar creature. In his description of the new hire, Merdoch, Hogg specifies, "He had the form of a boy, but the features of one a hundred years old, save that his eyes had a brilliancy and restlessness, which was very extraordinary, bearing a strong resemblance to the eyes of a well-known species of monkey" (2). The character described is neither man nor boy; it is otherworldly. Merdoch's description clearly establishes him as a brownie, creatures who were essentially house elves that helped with chores.

In English legend, brownies were said to be helpful around the house unless they were mistreated, at which point they could cause great harm. Hogg's tale illustrates the disastrous outcome of such mistreatment. Suspecting his violent mistress's harmful intent, the brownie warns that any injury she should attempt to cause him will be doubly revisited upon her. Hence it is no surprise when she attempts to poison him that her favorite dog drinks the poison instead; or when she attempts to bludgeon him, a bed-trick causes her to accidentally batter her own son. Ultimately, Lady Wheelhope's desire to kill the brownie leads to her own death. While the Lady is largely complicit in her own demise and evil in her very nature, Hogg suggests at one point, when Merdoch behaves curiously with a bible, that the creature may have demonic motives and/or origins. For fear, one of the servants has greeted the brownie with an open bible as a talisman, and the brownie in anger flings the holy book against a wall and departs. Merdoch's reaction perhaps suggests the response of one banned from heaven and now wreaking havoc upon earth.

While this is a cautionary tale for loathly ladies who mistreat mean-spirited sprites, it is also a tale of vindication for a mistreated servant class and as such no doubt resonated with a romantic readership. As with much early modern fairy lore, however, the outcome of Hogg's intervention resists being categorized as either completely good or bad. We can neither call his brownie evil, despite his negative interaction with the bible, nor say he was benign. While some characters suffered because of his interference, his own hand rarely caused the suffering, and the other servants often benefited from his intervention. Through this equivocal representation of the fairy folk, Hogg maintained the early modern folklore tradition into the Romantic era.

Kyle Thomas
ENG 521
Annotation 2
9/9/10

“Crossing the Alps” from *The Thirteen-Book Prelude Book VI*.

In a reading placing Wordsworth’s “Crossing the Alps” next to Shelley’s “Mont Blanc,” I tried to distinguish some of the differences of approach between the two poems, and also to see the similarities in their composition. “Mont Blanc” begins with creating the imaginative mood: “The everlasting universe of things/ Flows through the mind...” (1,2). It places the reader in the feeling of the moment, and presupposes that this state is necessary to comprehend the vision in the rest of the poem. In contrast, “Crossing the Alps” is Wordsworth’s recollected account of a journey across the Alps that he took with a college friend, and it’s over a decade that he composes the poem. In Wordsworth’s poem, he makes it apparent that this state of mind is not readily accessible to the poet nor reader because as he describes the account he relives the actual encounter with the summit of the mountain, and in the actual ‘seeing’ it, the power of imagination no longer had any effect: “That day we first/ Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved/ To have a soulless image on the eye/ Which had usurped upon a living thought/ That never more could be” (452-456). The “soulless image on the eye” is seeing the object without any agency of imagination.

As common with Wordsworth, he continues to take in the landscape and then proceeds to recall his youth. He makes certain self-mockery of “the truth of young and old” by reflecting on the younger poet as seeing sorrow in everything he observed (477). As they advance, Wordsworth and his friend encounter some travelers which evoke the theme of traveling and exploration during that era, and how the landscape is being explored and charted out by people from all over. The travelers directed them towards the way off of the Alps, and it isn’t until this recognition that Wordsworth is no longer physically on the mountain that awakes his “Imagination! Lifting up itself/ Before the eye and progress of my song/ Like an unfathered vapour” (525-527). The “usurpation” he notices this time is that of the imagination taking over and empowering his mind to now create the image that he can no longer physically see.

The “Power” which Shelly described as that of the sublime in the observer and in “Mont Blanc” is immediately evoked, is a delayed discovery in Wordsworth’s poem. It takes his traveling across the object and the disappearance of that object before he can recognize the sublime power that it created in the mind. Through both poems, the characteristics of the individual self are explored through the medium of the immense landscape. The components that Burke describes as essential for the sublime are studied and investigated by these two poets. In “Crossing the Alps,” it involves more work for the observer/poet to undertake and conquer to discover that sensation which can only be found in the later recollection in solitude.

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9/8/10

Annotation: The Sublime in Coleridge's "Christabel"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's fragmented, Romantic poem, "Christabel," is beautiful and also rather frightening at times, which surprised me. I was particularly struck by the frightening moments in the poem since we have been discussing the Sublime in class. Out of all the other poems I've read by Coleridge, none other has evoked such strong emotions of fear and terror.

As we've read from Burke, the strongest of human emotions is pain, because when we feel it, it consumes our thoughts and bodies completely (Burke 2). Burke explains that whatever is Sublime evokes these types of strong emotions. The most common reaction to pain and death is fear, because we are afraid to die or be in pain. The highest degree of fear is terror, which Coleridge creates numerous times in this poem. One of the arguments Burke makes is that for something to be truly terrible, it has to be obscure: "When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes" (Burke 5). Coleridge leaves much to the fearful imagination in this poem, starting with the first incident of an obscure, frightening nature—the strange noise Christabel hears from behind the oak as she is praying in the woods: "The lady leaps up suddenly,/ The lovely lady, Christabel!/ It moan'd as near, as near can be,/ But what it is, she can not tell,-/ On the other side it seems to be,/ Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree./ The night is chill; the forest bare,/ Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?/ There is not wind enough in the air/ To move away the ringlet curl/ From the lovely lady's cheek" (39-49). Here, Coleridge has set the scene of a vulnerable, fair young woman in a cold, dead wood at night. She is praying, a symbol of her purity and vulnerability, and she hears a sound. Coleridge gives us no other hint but that "it" is moaning and that whatever "it" is, it is very nearby. This seems like a perfect scene from a horror movie, and we are astonished and paralyzed by the potential danger Christabel has found herself in. Christabel has a natural reaction of trying to excuse the strange noise as coming from "the wind," but Coleridge explains that this option is quickly erased as there is not enough wind in the wood to make the noise. We are left in terror by the mystery of what is on the other side of the oak tree.

After Christabel has found the lady, Geraldine, behind the oak tree, Geraldine remains an obscure mystery. The strange evil "mark" under her bosom is never really explained. However, we do start getting some hints that Geraldine is not an innocent victim, she is a kind of sorceress and she intends to bring evil upon Christabel's father's kingdom. We receive another Sublime image when Bracy begs the Baron not to make him fetch Geraldine's father that day, because he had a dream in which he heard a dove moaning in a wood, went to help it, and found a snake strangling the dove (obviously a metaphor for the innocent Christabel and the evil Geraldine). The poem reads, "I stoop'd, methought the dove to take,/ When lo! I saw a bright green snake/ Coil'd around its wings and neck/ Green as the herbs on which it couch'd,/ Close by the dove's its head it crouch'd;/ And with the dove it heaves and stirs,/ Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!" (536-542). This is especially Sublime because, as Burke explains, "There are many

animals, who though far from being large, are yet capable of raising ideas of the sublime, because they are considered as objects of terror. As serpents and poisonous animals of almost all kinds” (Burke 5). The snake is immediately an object of terror, and its killing the innocent dove evokes fear of death and pain. The words Coleridge uses such as “heaves and stirs” create such a clear, horrific image; it is the epitome of Sublime. Even Coleridge acknowledges Burke’s ideas of the Sublime in “Christabel,” when, at the end he writes, “Such giddiness of heart and brain/ Comes seldom save from rage and pain” (663-664). The formula of terror that Coleridge uses in this poem has since been commonly used in horror stories and films, and it was very exciting to find an incident of the horrific sublime which fits so closely with Burke’s description.

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Annotation #2: Wordsworth's "Nutting"

Wordsworth explains that this poem came about through "feelings [he] often had as a boy, and particularly in the extensive woods" (Wu 475). If we, as readers, are to believe this poem as a poem about nature, we have to look at it in terms of sexual nature. "Nutting" is less a poem about gathering nuts, and more about the sexual "feelings often had by boys."

The word choice is very revealing about the type of feelings Wordsworth chooses to recall from his youth. He talks of going out into nature with his tools, and stumbling upon "one dear nook/Unvisited, where not a broken bough/Drooped with its withered leaves" (14, 15, 16). What Wordsworth is describing here is a virgin scene. This nook is not a superb place because it is just nature; it is wonderful and striking because it has not been disturbed—because it is young, fresh, not poisoned with age or lust. Two underlying themes of Romanticism appear in this description: that of sexual nature, and the experimentation with it, and that of youthful beauty.

Reluctance to indulge in sexual curiosity is, at first, very apparent in the poem. Wordsworth writes "Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played" (24). The virginal flowers represent something delicate and beautiful, something forbidden and curious to a boy. And so, the speaker plays first only "among the flowers." Then comes the great caesura, a tiny break in the flow of the line where the reader pauses, and the speaker decides to play "with the flowers." In a moment, the shift from only seeing and being among the virginal scene to touching and handling it takes place.

This poem must be read as a sort of progression. In fact, in light of this particular reading, there is a climax. After playing with the flowers a short time, the speaker desires more: "Then up I rose/And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash/And merciless ravage" (41, 42, 43). At this point (the climax?) sexuality and violence coalesce. The speaker desires to see how he can upset the beauty of the place—taint it and make it unclean, not unlike a rape. The speaker introduces his power to the virginal scene, and with a crash the curiosity of one leads to the devastation of another.

Wordsworth goes on to describe how "the green and mossy bower/Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up/Their quiet being" (44, 45, 46). The nook, once full of youth and beauty, has now become "deformed and sullied," much the same as the victim of a horrible rape.

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Annotation II
09 September 2010

Experiments, Politics, and Shelley's Vegetarianism

In 1886, Shelley published "A Vindication of Natural Diet" which is everything one would hope it would be. It is political, controversial, and full of passion. Shelley captures many of the same reasons why people become vegetarians today: health reasons, social justice reasons, sustainability reasons. He strays away from animal rights reasons, though in the invocation to his muse in "Alastor..." ("Selected Works" 1054), such an argument is implied. (To remain pure for his muse, he must respect the right of all living creatures to live. Consciously injuring a "bright bird, insect, or gentle beast" (ln 13)--which would include eating meat--violates that creature's right and would mar Shelley's standing with his muse.)

"Vindication" becomes intensely political when we recognize the current events of the day. Sir Joseph Banks was collecting human, plant, and animal specimens from around the world, which encapsulates a polar opposite perspective from Shelley's deep ecology. By "deep ecology" I mean the philosophy Arne Naess developed. Contrary to some claims, deep ecology includes two other movements, social justice and nonviolence (Naess 99-104). In other words, it includes rather than excludes the human and human concerns. What I love about Shelley's "Vindication" is that it likewise encapsulates nonviolence, social justice, and deep ecology.

Shelley argues that "The whole of human science is comprised in one question--How can the advantages of intellect and civilization be reconciled with the liberty and pure pleasures of natural life?" (*Natural Diet* 12). Indeed, instead of using human science to become a world power, Shelley wants to use science to discover and articulate how best to live simply on the earth. His notion of "natural" is a bit cumbersome, but he defines "natural" through comparative anatomy. Human colons, digestive tracts, and teeth resemble herbivores, therefore, the argument runs, eating meat is unnatural (14-15).

Shelley intersperses three experiments throughout "Vindication." First, he wants meat eaters to undergo a grotesque test to dramatize how eating meat, without the benefit of fire, is unnatural:

It is only by softening and disguising dead flesh by culinary preparation that it is rendered susceptible of mastication or digestion, and that the sight of its bloody juices and raw horror does not excite intolerable loathing and disgust. Let the advocate of animal food force himself to a decisive experiment on its fitness, and, as Plutarch recommends, tear a living lamb with his teeth, and plunging his head into its vitals, slake his thirst with the steaming blood; when fresh from the deed of horror, let him revert to the irresistible instincts of nature that would rise in judgment against it, and say, Nature formed me for such work as this. (13)

He argues that violence of crime is related to the violence of eating meat, and that "the system of a simple diet...is an experiment which may be tried with success, not alone by nations, but by small societies, families, and even individuals" (15-16). He therefore calls out for England to

adopt a vegetarian diet, and to test whether or not "commerce, with all its vice, selfishness, and corruption, would gradually decline" (20-21). Such reform would enable the poor to have access to more food:

The monopolizing eater of animal flesh would no longer destroy his constitution by devouring an acre at a meal...the quantity of nutritious vegetable matter consumed in fattening the carcass of an ox, would afford ten times the sustenance, undepraving indeed, and incapable of generating disease, if gathered immediately from the bosom of the earth.... The most fertile districts of the habitable globe are now actually cultivated by men for animals. (20)

Perhaps his most audacious argument attacks England's current globalizing of the economy of food. Shelley would rather England adopt a local economy of food, based on an agricultural system, which would lessen the foreign ties that often lead to conflict and exploitation:

On a natural system of diet, we should require no spices from India; no wines from Portugal, Spain, France, or Madeira; none of those multitudinous articles of luxury, for which every corner of the globe is rifled, and which are the causes of so much individual rivalry, such calamitous and sanguinary national disputes. (21)

These arguments reveal that Shelley thought deeply about the ramifications of eating meat. He sought a natural diet not only for health reasons, poetic reasons, or for the rights of animals, but also for social justice issues, political issues, and the well-being of everything which he is interrelated with.

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Annotation II
September 7, 2010

"Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure": Imagination and Transport in "This Lime-Tree
Bower My Prison"

After lamenting his inability to accompany his companions upon suffering an immobilizing injury at the beginning of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," Samuel Taylor Coleridge commences a reverie that directs him to reappraise his condition, not as a restriction, but as a chance to expand his attentions beyond the limits of his senses. The poem terminates with a moment of insight: by extending the range of his thoughts to include vestiges beyond his immediate surroundings, Coleridge achieves a kind of poetic harmony, locating beauty in what he imagines and what he physically perceives. In the following study, I will investigate the processes that lead the poet to experience delight in circumstances that appear adverse, to frame the development of sympathy – an inherently poetic sympathy – as the poem's central transformative device.

Coleridge anguishes over a loss of sensation emergent in a literal detachment from the experiences of his companions, and a paralysis that negates both action and sensation. The poet describes his condition as a sort of numbness more severe than the loss of sense in old age: "I have lost/Beauties and feelings, such as would have been/Most sweet to my remembrance even when age/Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness" (Coleridge 613.2-4). Coleridge speaks to his helplessness in these first lines by referring to his companions as "[f]riends whom I may never more may meet again" – without the ability to determine the whereabouts of his friends, or rise and join them, he has some reason to doubt the possibility that he will see them again (613.6). Yet the poet's distance proves inspirational, as he begins to reflect on what his companions might be seeing, turning his meditation away from despair and toward a kind of cursory exposition. Coleridge describes the actions of his friends as if forming a narrative:

On springy heath, along the hilltop edge,
[They] wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
To that still roaring dell of which I told;
The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
And only speckled by the midday sun [...]
Now, my friends emerge
Beneath the wide wide heaven – and view again
The many-steepled tract magnificent [...] (615.7-22)

The poet directs his focus toward the physical spaces through which his companions travel, deemphasizing their actions, while describing environments of sumptuous beauty – the "o'erwooded" dell, the "wide wide heaven." When he pays attention to a specific associate, Charles Lamb, he concentrates mainly on his misfortunes, and his indefinite imprisonment in "the great city," where he encounters "evil and pain/And strange calamity" (615.30-32). I take it that Coleridge's intent at this point is not to set himself at odds with Lamb, but to consider his friend's situation in a kind of analogy with his own,

with the intention of potentially seeing his circumstances differently. Indeed, the poem's most powerful transition follows Coleridge's blessing to Lamb, to "stand, as I have stood,/Silent with swimming sense [...] till all doth seem/Less gross than bodily, and of such hues/As veil the Almighty Spirit" (615.38-42). In that moment, Coleridge divests himself of his detachment by expressing a desire for Lamb to experience what he has experienced. He also works to enact this desire by imploring the wonders of the physical world to become singularly marvelous: "slowly sink/Behind the western ridge, thou glorious sun!/Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,/Ye purple heath-flowers (615.32-35). This act is compositional as well as spiritual, a poetic expression of awe and a seizure of imagined events – a possession of the scene and its contents. Coleridge makes a narrative of experience, and in doing so, develops a creative sympathy with the observances that fall outside his senses.

The final stanza of the poem sees Coleridge internalizing the process that led him to the imaginative synchrony that he developed in envisioning the travels of his friends, by conceiving his own orientation. The poet's reverie leads him to consider "much that has soothed me" in "[t]his little lime-tree bower": "Pale beneath the blaze/Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched/Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see/The shadow of the leaf and stem above/Dappling its sunshine" (617.47-52). By this point, Coleridge's exposition has unfolded into wonder at – and adoration for – whatever subject he considers. He admits that his "restriction" has been a sort of test: "sometimes/'Tis well to be bereaved of promised good,/That we may lift the soul, and contemplate/With lively joy the joys we cannot share" (617.64-67). At a distance, the poet achieves a form of contact that he may never have considered otherwise, and blesses "the last rook" that he sees, in hopes that it "had a charm/For thee" (617.68, 70, 74-75). By blessing the rook before it flies over Lamb, Coleridge lays claim to a kind of prescience: he sees the bird before his friend. From his position, he enjoys a level of visibility that might not be available to his companions, and when he affirms, "No sound is dissonant which tells of Life," his sympathy reaches its completion, as he declares the unity of life to Charles and to himself (617.75). In lieu of physical contact with the spaces visited by his companions, Coleridge devises a new form of engagement, unmitigated by the distractions of worldly sensation. Without the freedom to move physically, the poet begins a movement of a more ambitious sort, toward a perspective that is not bound to immediate conditions. His reward is a moment of freedom, not from the limitations of the bower, but from his own pretenses about the limits of perception.

Coleridge's liberation – a liberation of mind, finally, rather than body – occurs as a function of understanding, a sensitivity that incorporates thinking differently and the simple yet marvelous act of paying attention to the splendor inherent in all things. The internal debate that leads Coleridge to his conclusion is extraordinary, but I hasten to note that the poet's resolution comes at a cost. As he calls for the earth to unfold its majesty before his friend, and selects the images that will fill his attention, Coleridge demonstrates an unsettling desire for mastery, over his own thoughts, and the sights and sounds that constitute his image of the sensed world. The poem is hopeful, surely, but its central action involves a forcible alteration of thought, and the conjuration of images at odds with what Coleridge's companions actually see. In this reading, Coleridge's "sympathy" amounts to a repudiation of the possible benefits of sensory observation, and a *voluntary* blindness in the singular concentration on abstract forms of contact.

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9/9/10

Annotation of the epigraph and first soliloquy of Manfred in *Manfred, A Dramatic Poem*

I was hoping to have fully completed and analyzed so some extent the whole length of *Manfred*, but a weeklong cold has kept me from moving at my regular pace. So, instead I am going to look a bit at the way that Byron introduces and advances themes that are in the rest of the work. I'm not quite sure if this is allowed in what was hoped for in an annotation—thoughts on an introductory portion of a longer poem—but I was too interested in what I had read to let this opportunity go by. First, I was caught by the epigram: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (896)¹. The footnotes state that the epigraph delineates Byron's position on the metaphysical, of which he was suspicious two years later. I am not a Byron scholar, and I do not know Byron's position on the supernatural or the metaphysical to a great extent, but what interests me is the element of the metaphysical in the fledgling moments of any burgeoning intellectual and academic question. It is a matter of abstract reasoning that allows one to get to the empiricist position, often, and so it does not seem that the supernatural and the metaphysical are synonymous, as their juxtaposition in the footnotes seems to suggest. I wished to distinguish this because I am interested in the traces of the metaphysical, the abstract, the fantastic (all, which, I feel are components of wonder) in Romantic literature.

If I make these premises, there are several other notes of interest in the first soliloquy of *Manfred*. One is that Manfred mourns the “fatal truth” of the “tree of knowledge”, a statement of Biblical relevance in that the knowledge brought through the apple consequently brought the loss of immortality for mankind (lines 11, 12). That being said, I am more interested in the tension of the following few lines: “Philosophy and science, and the springs/ Of wonder, and the wisdom of the world/ I have essayed, and in my mind there is a power to make these subject to itself,/ But they avail not” (lines 13-17). Here, Manfred's words caught my interest in that he found wonder through philosophy and science, aligning the marvel and the spectacle, and the awe one feels in their presence, with the research of science. In terms of position, I suppose, this puts the speaker in a position of the spectator, the person who is feeling the sensation caused by the marvel. What interests me here is how this “position”, if I can so call it, interacts with the different definitions of wonder, for it could mean to ponder/meditate/speculate over/etc., but it could also mean to be dumbfounded and to gape/goggle in relative thoughtlessness. This is probably reading too far into things, but it seems pertinent if the last lines “in my mind there is/A power to make these subject to itself/ But they avail me not” again (lines 15-17). This expresses more than a desire to meditate and speculate—it expresses a desire, and the will, to dominate into authority. Although Manfred acquiesces that “they avail [him] not”, he has still accepted the premise that “there is/ a power” that exists by which he could subject these elements to his mind. This aligns a form of dominance, even if cognitive, with wonder. Are they subsequent processes, or is it all in the essence of wonder? It does not seem accidental that the age of wonder if

¹ Byron, George Gordon. “*Manfred, A Dramatic Poem*” Ed. Wu, Duncan. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Ed. Author. 3rd ed. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006. 896-932. All citations will be to this edition.

accompanied by the age of exploration and the initiation of cataloguing. Although the tale of Manfred is Faustian, it seems like this can be a comment on the human condition and how wonders have captured the world's attention as well as Manfred's and Faust's.

But I have to wonder what comprehension and empirical science does to wonder if wonder is not aligned with this form of cognitive dominance? If something seems to be completely understood, then is it still a "curiosity", because one would no longer be curious in it. This could be brought back to the epigraph, which in some ways reminds me of the Turner thesis and Manifest Destiny. It's a different continent and a different time perhaps, but the theory that man/nation needs a drive towards the unknown, towards wonder, to build a national identity and to maintain the momentum to move forward is a similar idea—even to the extent that in both cases wonder was followed by the desire to make philosophy and science subject to the mind of the spectators. I am not sure if this leads me to make a claim about *Manfred*, but it's important to note the complexities of themes so immediately set up.

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Annotation # 2
9 September 2010

Contemplation and Awe:
On Wordsworth's "[Crossing the Alps]"

When considering my focus for this annotation, I pondered the notions of the vast topic of the sublime. Until this point, I had never considered the true meaning or possibilities of the word or idea. With my reading of Shelley's "Mont Blanc" still fresh in my mind, I flipped through some poems of Wordsworth's and found "[Crossing the Alps]". As I wonder as to the significance or presence of sublimity in the poem, I read it with a sense of awe. The descriptors range from the terrible "soulless image on the eye," (Wordsworth 454) to the animated and fanciful "winter like a tamed lion walks, /Descending from the mountain to make sport" (466-467).

Wordsworth moves from an outward observation of the mountain sight to an inward reflection. The notation in the text mentions Wordsworth "affectionately mocking his youthful self, preoccupied with poetic sorrows" (Wu 553) with his mention of a "willow wreath" (Wordsworth 483) that "sweeten[ed] many a meditative hour" (487). On this journey in the Alps, Wordsworth (or the speaker) is dealing with inner turmoil as well as that of the nature surrounding him. He was so deep in thought and conversation that he hadn't even realized that he and his party "had crossed the Alps" (524). It was then that he was taken aback by the "power,/In all the might of its endowments" (527-528) to be "lost as in a cloud" (529).

After this initial absence from the scene, Wordsworth goes into greater depth in regards to "destiny" and "home" (538), which is "harbor[ed]" (537) in "The invisible world" (536). He speaks to the unreachable sublimity that is present in his poems (Wu 555). Mentally back in the presence of the natural world, the poet again acknowledges the journey as they descend the "gloomy pass" (554) surrounded by "the immeasurable height/Of woods decaying" (556-557). Faced with "torrents" (561) of wind and "rocks that muttered" (562), Wordsworth addresses the wild personality of the natural world. He continues to mix the imagination with the physical with the awe inspiring contradiction of nature. The "Tumult and peace" and "the darkness and the light" (567) are likened to the imagination again, the "workings of one mind" (568) as it struggles to make sense of the vast sights and knowledge brought on by the experience of traversing the Alps.

Though this poem of Wordsworth does not focus entirely on the sublime, it touches on it in a way that is relatable and inspirational. The continual shift between what I read as sublime in the poem and the inward contemplation, even during conversation, provides a means for understand for me. Personal meditation can be a way of make sense of the multitude of sights and experiences that Wordsworth had to contend with on such a journey as in the poem.

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