

1

OF DETOURS, RETURNS, ADDICTIONS AND WOMEN:
COLERIDGE, WORDSWORTH AND NATIONAL IDENTITY¹

Mon desir ne va qu'à la distance invisible/
My desire goes only so far as the invisible
distance

—Jacques Derrida

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover

—*Kubla Khan* (14-16)

A Damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
An Abyssinian maid,
And on her Dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me . . .

—*Kubla Khan* (37-44)

He had a world about him—'twas his own
He made it—for it only lived to him

—Wordsworth,
The Ruined Cottage
(87-88, MS B)

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight . . .
I saw her upon nearer view,
A Spirit, yet a Woman too!

—Wordsworth,
She was a Phantom of delight
(1-2, 11-12)

A Negro Woman like a Lady gay,
Yet silent as a woman fearing blame;

—Wordsworth,
September 1st, 1802 (3-4)

I

What is the purpose of the two female images that Coleridge inscribes into his opium-induced, self-confessedly fragmentary poem, *Kubla Khan*?²

Why are they there, what is their relation to the subject of cultural identity, and how should we read them?

Coleridge's application of the female belongs to a broad cultural discourse of feminine representation and national identity. Through the figure of the female, Coleridge is partly able to construct a return home to the site of domestic desires, more familiar in their strangeness than the foreign, Oriental other of Xanadu. Furthermore, Coleridge's recourse to the female figure is analogous with the addictive fix. The user desires, yet simultaneously fears, the "substance" in question and the loss of control that both the drug and the female supposedly induce. Both female images in the poem comprise visual and aural elements designed to distract the reader, to entrance, enthrall and transport, in much the same manner as an imbibed toxic substance.³ In the case of the second image, that of the Abyssinian maid (39), the poem implicates the reader into itself, speaking directly to us of an addiction shared by all readers.

Moreover, *Kubla Khan* also involves questions of domestic identity and foreignness. Specifically, the Western discourse on Orientalism is at stake. Coleridge's invocation of the Oriental has, again, to do with a fear of losing control. It is a question, as John Barrell puts it with regard to Thomas De Quincey, of ingesting the East as well as throwing it away.⁴ Coleridge attempts to resolve the paradox of the rush of desire and its concomitant lack of control by "injecting" the female into the Oriental vision. Coleridge, when apparently straight as in his introduction to the poem, knows that he cannot direct his responses to the opium when high. He cannot even bring the opium under his discipline once it is in him and of him, although the drug is under his control inasmuch as he decides whether to take it; nor can Coleridge "subdue" the Orient. In this, he typifies and represents the attitude of the English towards the idea of the Orient. This is part of a greater white fear of which the opium is merely a privileged signifier. However, Coleridge seeks to effect domination over his others, as do many Englishmen. He does so through an attempted colonisation in the form of a return to, a detour known as, the female, which is simultaneously both domestic

Wordsworth is always returning. He returns to Nature repeatedly. He returns to Tintern Abbey and its surroundings ("and again I hear . . .") after five years; he returns to the "writers of reformation England," as Geoffrey Hartman reminds us;⁵ to his youth, and to his various performed identities in The Prelude, amongst other poems; to The Prelude itself, through seemingly endless revisions; and to England from France (to comprehend Englishness, we must understand Europe, before the Orient, as England's Other). In fact, all of Wordsworth's life and work is dedicated to, governed and guaranteed by the idea and the promise of the return. To reiterate: the

and foreign. Coleridge's contamination of the Orient with the female permits a partial domestication of the foreign, thus making the Other safe because the presence of the female image as desired object universalises the Other. These are, however, only brief considerations. A more thoughtful and less addicted, less jumpy, response to my initial questions requires two brief detours.

Consider, for instance, the detour that "Coleridge" has always already taken. As he rehearses and performs the growth of his own writerly and poetic identities in the 1790s, Coleridge takes the detour or deviation named William Wordsworth from an originary or essential sense of self. Today, we are unable to read Coleridge except as Wordsworth's Coleridge. There is no Coleridge as poet or writer other than that which is a form of self-translation or sublimation, on Coleridge's part, through what he perceives to be the mastery of Wordsworth, and under which mastery he willingly places himself in subjection. Coleridge cannot avoid the Wordsworthian side-track. It is this detour that, in his Eastern fantasy of 1798, allows us the possibility of reading in the figure of the Khan's stately pleasure dome(2) other architectural structures, written as poetic or allegorical sites of the Romantic imagination.

We can read, for example, the ruins of Tintern Abbey (which had been impinging on Wordsworth's memory for five years) and the ruined cottage and cottages through various manuscripts and versions) of *The Ruined Cottage*,⁶ begun by Wordsworth in the previous year, 1797, the year which Coleridge had mistakenly dated *Kubla Khan*.⁷ We can also read behind the exotic scene the homely cottage wherein Coleridge takes his fix. No matter where the imagination roams, the architecture comforts, even in its desolation, by referring to home, specifically, a safe English home.

Architecture and, especially, ruined architecture is an important figure both in and for the Romantic imagination. Wordsworth com-

return is guaranteed with (and by) Wordsworth; it is, in sum, the very worth of his words. So, the implication of this teleology is that, if the return is guaranteed, the investment is safe. Wordsworth is a sure bet as an, no, the English tour guide.

This question of the guaranteed return leads, however, to an anterior question or two at least; notice immediately how the economic logic of Wordsworth forces itself upon us; we also, always return: What is it that is being invested in by Wordsworth? What does his ineluctable return guarantee?

ments on his own poetry as being architectural. In his "Preface" to *The Excursion*, *The Prelude* is described as being "the ante-chapel . . . to the body of a gothic church," while minor poems are described as "little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices."⁸ As Wordsworth's metaphors of church architecture attest, ruins and architectural decay provide the signature of what is lost and desired, what cannot be named but what is obliquely indicated. What is desired, therefore, may well be an Englishness of identity that is forever lost both to Wordsworth and Coleridge. The architecture of decay insists in Romantic poetics as the haunting, obsessive trace, as another residual effect of the Romantic addiction, of Romanticism as addiction. Of particular relevance in this context is Thomas De Quincey's recollections of Coleridge's description of Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons*, being etchings of the artist's delirious visions.⁹ Mistakenly, but tellingly, De Quincey describes the classical architecture of the etchings (which he had not seen) as gothic. He also recalls from Coleridge's description the labyrinthine and infinite qualities of the imaginary architecture, recalling Piranesi "standing on the very brink of the abyss."¹⁰ De Quincey goes on to remark that the splendours of his opium dreams were chiefly architectural. The Romantic unconscious, an unconscious always hungry for another fix, is filled with exotic architecture, mapped by labyrinthine and abyssal landscapes, inhabited by the ruins of other worlds, which are, we suspect, really our own. In both Coleridge and Wordsworth, in their evening walks, country rambles, and even in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," we can read the desire to return home, to a lost, desired England. We can thus map out motifs of circularity which "can lead one to think that the law of economy is the—circular—return to the point of departure, to the origin, also to the home."¹¹

The other detour, already alluded to, is not particular to Coleridge and is broader than a single signature, however big a name that may be. Orientalism is the deviation in question, considered especially as the

One possible answer to this is national identity, or Englishness which is itself the guarantor of Liberty in the Wordsworthian economy. For the poet Englishness does more than guarantee Liberty, freedom, and other associated concepts and fetishes related to any sense of national Being. In Wordsworth's vocabulary, English identity guarantees freedom because the terms are ideally interchangeable; Englishness is Liberty, and, to be free truly, absolutely, is to be English, regardless of one's actual birthplace or nationality (I shall return to this point). And Wordsworth is so sure of that which constitutes Englishness that he can, unequivocally, confidently corre-

confluence of imperial and commercial discourses. No doubt there is a poetic "value" in the fact that Coleridge's almost cataleptic state—he writes of himself in the third person as being "[t]he Author . . . in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses"¹²—that produced his vision of a labyrinthine, inscrutable other, was induced by his indulgence in opium, *the drug of the "Orient."* It is as if opium transports Coleridge, chemically, against his will, yet because of his desire, to the place where the "anodyne"¹⁴ is grown, harvested and manufactured.¹⁵ It is as though, reading a little obliquely, we can say that the drug carries, traced in its chemical properties, the mythological texts of its imagined, conflated geographical sites; and that the enigmas constructed in the West about its composite Oriental Other are inscribed, sedimented, in the very soil that nurtures the poppy. Taking the opiate transports one back to the supposed origin of the other; except that, this "origin" is, of course, the displaced figure for the desire of the Occidental subject.

There are, then, two possible locations at least as the sources or goals of our detours (deviations that are both ours and Coleridge's). First, the seemingly symbolic architectural structures that figure the following: a gothic excess or decadence (the pleasure dome itself), the broken writing of feudal Catholicism (Tintern Abbey), and the more humble, yet, for Wordsworth, more universal, decaying, familiar habitation of spent, dispersed humanity (the ruined cottage; the cottage is more poignant and, therefore, endowed with greater resonance for Wordsworth because it is non-sectarian). An economy of mordant, yet idealised, spirit remarks each architectural space.

Secondly, yet having to do equally with an issue of spirit, we have an imaginary discursive and (implied) geographical space—at least in Coleridge's fragment which is my main concern—of cultural otherness. If detour, in leading away, always already premises a re-turn, bringing the reader to the architectural and geographical as sites (or even citations) in the poetic imagination of loss, memory, the foreign, alterity, desire, and

spond on that which is proper to an English Garden.

In a letter to Lady Beaumont, written from Coleorton in January 1807, the poet, donning his gardener's hat, gives details of his winter garden.¹⁵ Ignoring the anomaly that, in some cases such as the Laurustinus, he has to refer to plants by their Latin names, Wordsworth writes of the "English winter shrubs and flowers, intermingled with some foreign shrubs as are so common in english (sic.) cottage Gardens as to be almost naturalized" (my emphases). Wordsworth's eye is still able to discern the foreignness of imported plants, despite their being almost naturalized. Yet it is because of their domes-

fear, what is the overdetermining figure for all such configurations and displacements? In sum, what, poetically and economically, historically and philosophically, in Western culture has the greatest exchange value, the greatest exploitative potential as the figuring of all figuration?

The female, or femininity, which, as ultimate object of desire, and as ultimate fix, apparently engendering that desire, haunts poetic structures as both keystone and seismic disturbance.

II

Coleridge, by his own account, published *Kubla Khan* at the request of Lord Byron.¹⁶ (Byron documented his own desire for the female repeatedly, at length, *obsessively*, in his letters from Venice, an archetypal geographical non-space, composed of fluidity and at the commercial conjunction of East and West.¹⁷) Coleridge rejects the poem as poem, reading it instead as a “psychological curiosity” only.¹⁸ Coleridge’s two comments, dismissive and yet desirous of a certain kind of reading, inscribe a lack of will on the poet’s part. Coleridge directs his efforts towards disowning the text. He seeks to displace it as being unworthy of his signature and authority, while attempting also to deflect aesthetic and formal analysis, and any readerly imposition of coherency in the second. The poet tells us how to read and what we should not read.

In the subtitle itself, “Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment,” Coleridge has already begun to direct the reading of his text in particular ways. While we are not to read this as a poem, we are, nonetheless, being policed as readers. Paradoxically, Coleridge desires that, in reading, we read otherwise. The insistence on the interiority of the poem’s genesis, that it is not merely a dream but a vision in a dream, is a violent displacement of responsibility for the vision—and the

tion, that he will allow them to appear, their proximity to English flora and fauna no doubt legitimising and taming them. However despite this touch of infiltration, Wordsworth desires that he should be able to see an “English spire,” the presence of home-grown architecture reassuring him that he is still at home. And it is the inspiration of this sight that leads him to remark: “I would have in all its ornaments entirely English.” The foreign shrubs stay close to the ground where they belong, surrounded and towered over by all things proper to an English cottage garden. To paraphrase John Barrell’s commentary on the title of Thomas De Quincey’s autobiographical

dream—on Coleridge's part. He protests too much, so excessive is his desire. The displacements proliferate, spreading out even as they register a condensation of the dispersed pieces. The vision *in* the dream becomes a ruin or dismembered body, whether architectural or human, in being re-marked as a fragment. Or is it not the vision within which is the fragment but the dream itself? Or both? Or neither?

The problem is that reading, any reading, involves the accretion of components. Yet nothing in this subtitle indicates the possibility for any such accretion, in order that we might be able to read or translate this. In the structure of the subtitle, the phrase, "a fragment," is itself a fragment of the subtitle, being a piece—both connected and disconnected—of the title *Kubla Khan*. "A fragment" is not part of, nor does it belong to any complete sentence. It is an absolutely faithful mimetic figure of and for itself; it names itself, its own function. We get the sense of architectural disarray, of imminent collapse, and the idea that structure is always predicated on its own ruin. Coleridge, having announced the "following fragment," and having insisted on the pathological nature of his text, deflects the poem still further, in a detour of 46 lines of prose. This detour involves the narrative history of the poem's "composition." Coleridge writes of himself in the third person, as if eager to disown the text or any conscious involvement with it. The Author is disturbed from his eager composition²³ and so loses the exact form of the vision. The structure has collapsed and is left in ruins.

Apparently, Coleridge had been reading from the Jacobean travelogue, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, a twenty-plus volume account of the development of trade routes and the "discovery" of the Orient so crucial to the expansion of England's mercantile and maritime imperial power. This had served, along with the effects of opium, as the source of

Confessions, notice how the application of the adjective "English" hopefully makes safe Wordsworth's sense of place.¹⁹

If the Poet has such faith in the English garden, how much more assured must the expression of that national certitude be through the medium of poetry. Wordsworth's clearest expression and celebration of his "confident and unambiguous faith in England"²⁰ is given in the "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty."²¹ As is well known, Wordsworth's return to faith in England had come about as a result of the poet's disillusionment with the French revolutionary cause, and what he saw as France's betrayal of the ideal of English

Coleridge's Eastern vision. Thus, albeit inadvertently, Coleridge collapses nearly 170 years of the imperial narrative in one moment. From reading to writing, via addiction, Coleridge inscribes, and is inscribed by, the history of modern England, and of English Identity as an identity performed by the insistence of voracious, insatiable desire. Yet Coleridge's strategy of displacement is also typically English, having its poetic antecedents in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. We can read Coleridge's introduction, not as a private and individual apologia, but, instead, as engaging with "the most public spheres of British imperial history."²⁴ As Spenser had displaced and deferred masculine desire and the territorial imperative through the national, mythological figure of St. George as Redcrosse in Faerie-land (thereby disowning the violence of the English towards the foreign and the female as being a violence inherent in the male project), so Coleridge disowns himself and his part as an Englishman in such stories. He does so by fictionalising himself as merely a fictive author within the narrative, rather than being the author of that narrative.

Nevertheless Coleridge cannot escape from history, from particular strands or, to put it another way, from the economic circle. The structure of economic reason is circular, argues Derrida,²⁸ always leading us back through the same circuits, endlessly, relentlessly; hence madness. This structural model infests Coleridge's thinking with its own madness as he writes out the poem. The madness is such, however, that the economy of economy not only posits the inevitability of the return but also, with that, a condition of forgetting as part of the economic necessity. As Derrida points out, in a remark fully pertinent to this reading of Coleridge's poem and preface, Coleridge's will to write, caught in its own double bind of forgetfulness, delay, detour and denial, is marked by both:

reason and unreason from the inside and the outside. It is at once reason and unreason because it also manifests that madness of

Liberty,²² hence, in part, the "Sonnets," comprising²⁶ poems written between 1802 and 1806.

Wordsworth's *England of the sonnets* contains "Earth's best hopes" (14).²⁵ The "Men of Kent" are the "Vanguard of Liberty" (1), the "Children of the Soil" (2).²⁶ Freedom is not merely freedom, but has a national character, being "British freedom,"²⁷ subject of the "world's praise" (3). Freedom or death are the only choices for those who speak the "tongue/That Shakespeare spake" (11-12), and whose morals are also Milton's (13); how Wordsworth knows this so confidently is a mystery; unless, of course, he is "truly English,"

the rational *logos* itself, that madness of the economic circle the calculation of which is constantly reconstituted, logically, rationally, annulling the excess.²⁹

We can therefore read Coleridge's poem as fundamentally and ultimately an economic exercise, governed by the law of economic exchange, both internally, in the shaping of its fractured narratives of desire, and externally, in Coleridge's attempts to head its meanings off, before they fall into excess. Paradoxically for Coleridge, in his attempts to annul the excess—that excess which is his and yet which also exceeds him, escapes his control—logically and rationally, he only reveals all the more clearly the excess, the madness, that madness named addiction, always already inscribed in economic reason. As if to emphasize this, at the moment of writing he is interrupted, "called out by a person on business from Porlock."³¹ If the establishment of English business had been the subject, in part, of Coleridge's reading matter before the vision in the dream, then it is business, a refreshingly normal, mundane activity, albeit of an unspecified nature (perhaps the "person" is a drug dealer?), that completes the circuit. If this economic fantasy should seem fanciful, notice the alliterative tying of loose ends by Coleridge. We begin with *Purchas his Pilgrimage* and end with a person from Porlock.

The first syllables of "Purchas" and "person" are alike, while the name of the first traveller suggests commercial acquisition and transaction. Further, both "pilgrimage" and "Porlock" take up the sounds "p" and "l." Notice how Coleridge takes both his readers and himself on a detour, a pilgrimage, a journey that returns home, back to the safety of England. This recalls Coleridge to familiar surroundings apparently against his will. I say "apparently" because we are returned before we "set off" to Xanadu. Thus we are made safe, returned safely, brought home to—and by—the familiarity of business, upon which another trav-

and therefore in touch with the spiritual national identity manifested by the nation's canonical authors). "In everything," writes Wordsworth, "we are sprung/Of Earth's first blood" (13-14).³⁰ English identity, in being so decidedly rooted in the blood and the soil, eschews mere metaphysics, amounting to a self-affirmation of the nation as destiny. In retrospect, and after Auschwitz, this all seems too chillingly modern, too eagerly anticipatory of the major spiritual-political thrust of the twentieth century.

As a consequence of such an affirmation and awareness of such a privileged position, is it any wonder that the "ancient English dower" (5) is one

eller had set out almost two hundred years earlier, and upon which that traveller (and others like him) had encountered the Oriental; and, presumably, opium.

III

Coleridge's title, *Kubla Khan*, and the fragmented, unreadable structure of the subtitle, hint at the foreignness that his introduction seeks to resist. Coleridge's other is not, however, the Orient; it is not out there, geographically, but is *in* him, *of* him. Coleridge's other is Coleridge-on-drugs, Coleridge-addicted. We should not, at this juncture, think of Coleridge-addicted, as being the essence of Coleridge. To name "Coleridge-on-drugs" is to name what Avital Ronell describes as a "special mode of addiction"³⁷ or a "toxic drive,"³⁸ for which "drugs" is only one metaphor. My term, "Coleridge-addicted," names something beyond Coleridge. It names, to quote Ronell again, that "structure that is philosophically and metaphysically at the basis of our culture."³⁹ Coleridge's attempt to escape addiction leads back to the same structure of which Ronell speaks, for the poet "shift[s] dependency to a person, an ideal."⁴⁰ The metaphorical drug has shifted to the equally metaphorical female, another name for the desires that mobilise our cultural structures. Nevertheless, Coleridge is so addicted to the structure of detour (not realising that such a fabrication is still a part of the general economy of structure in our culture), that he desires to evade responsibility.

Coleridge's vision is not his but incorporates him. This is, at least, the story that the poet would have us believe. The vision in the dream is, strictly speaking, *unheimlich*. It is uncanny, not at home; hence the circumscribing fear remarked by the poet in his introduction. Yet tellingly, what is also being re-presented is the repressed of that which is most familiar. The *unheimlich* is the figure of domestic identity *par excellence*. As a necessity of the *unheimlich*, where the self has also departed from

of inward happiness" (6)³² Inevitably, of course, England, Wordsworth's "dear country" (13)³³ on which rests the Evening Star (1-2), has been populated, we are told, by "Great Men [who] have been among us" (1);³⁴ men such as Sidney, Marvell, Harrington and Milton (3-4).³⁵

It is no surprise then, that Wordsworth chooses to return to England from France, which country "hath brought forth no such souls" as those "great men" already named (1).³⁶

As Wordsworth returns to England, to Dover, returning from tyranny to Liberty, he notices a "fellow-passenger" (1).⁴¹ This is a "Negro Woman" (2,

familiar surroundings, Coleridge writes in *Kubla Khan* of the un-remarkable, the supposed other, the silence the other side of Eurocentric rationality. In effect, the poem always implies this rational discourse, although it is rendered mute and made absent by the mapping of Xanadu. Coleridge seeks to recuperate rationality.

Rationality is not available to us, however, even though the un-remarkable is given excessive enunciation. Were we to impose a rationale on the fragmentary discourse, we would be denying its visionary provisionality. We would also be imposing the architecture of European reason as an overarching structure with which to recuperate otherness. Throughout the poem, we are informed of the sacred, of the sunless, the lifeless, and that which is measureless. This is a lexicon of proliferating negation, which, in a manner suitable to the historical and literary discourse on colonial otherness, anticipates Conrad's narrator, Marlow, of *Heart of Darkness*. The text reiterates phrases, as the sunless sea is transformed into the lifeless ocean (recalling "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"). We read also of caverns, walls, chasms, cedarn covers, enfoldings, the "mazy motion" of the river, of sinking, shadows, and ghostly voices. Coleridge plays with the ebb and flow of associative and reflexive imagery, where each figure either anticipates or repeats, in whole or in part, every other. Everything that is, is not in this realm; or, at least, it is that which is somehow either partially or wholly absent, remarkable only in its not being solidly present. The shadows are merely signifiers of absence as the desire for presence. This is also true of the ghostly voices. Yet despite the figuring of such absence that might seem to suggest tranquility, we are, climactically, in the "presence" of the tumultuous (38-39), taken up and re-sounded, recited, in the shadowy cries of war.

The sacred—and, therefore, unknowable—river is always moving in a labyrinthine fashion before its final consumption into the death that the ocean offers. This finality is not a singular moment. It is part of the poem's unending cycle through otherness; through being-addicted

10), who has been "driv'n from France,/Rejected like all others of her race" (10-11). Wordsworth identifies the woman as a fellow passenger, yet maintains her strangeness, her foreign otherness. Indeed, in beginning the poem "We," the poet has constructed an unidentified, observing and exclusive community from which the woman is held by the clinical registration ("Negro Woman") of her difference.

The woman is composed of a cluster of signs which, circulating around her figure in the first nine-line sentence, do not domesticate her. She is framed, imprisoned and thereby marginalised by the doubled phrase, "Negro

that is mapped, by the figures mentioned above, as part of a “toxicogeography—an imaginary place where literature c[an] crash against its abysses and float amid fragments of residual transcendency.”⁴² The constructions, both of nature (chasms, caverns, covers) and the Khan’s palace (the walls, the dome), belong to the toxicogeography. The constructions and their component parts perform concealment, burial, and other figural engulfings. Each of the figures and features in question dissolves absolutely fixable referents. As the sometimes visible, sometimes obscured river displaces the land, the topography becomes drawn by the poet’s refusal—or inability—to accede to its mapping. Topography here is, strictly speaking, impossible, because the text acknowledges and inscribes Xanadu as *u-topos*, as non-place (as Coleridge has asserted that the poem is not a poem). The confirmation and inscription are the two sides of the poet’s paradox, anticipated in the introductory note. The poet says that he cannot say. He knows that he will write what he has said he was unable to write. Nevertheless he attempts to pen it down, thereby fixing it. This is Coleridge’s fixation and his fix, his addiction, also.

Nevertheless, despite—or, perhaps, because of—Coleridge’s obsession with the abyssal and labyrinthine, the images of women are resolutely *there*. They reside in the poem, insisting on their presence, offering for the poet, for the Khan, for the (implicitly) male reader, who are all the same, hopelessly entrapped in the “mazy” motion of masculinity’s imaginary, a disruptive meaning, itself composed of hidden pleasures, seductive abysses, and the threat of the unpredictable; for the figure of the female is the figure of unending metamorphosis within the realms of phallogocentric discourse. Its certainty is its uncertainty as a single, definable figure. Coleridge needs the image of the female to perpetuate his reliance on an “external” stimulus. The female is always already that stimulus in Western discourse, and so it is inevitable that Coleridge must have recourse to the universal addiction. Without his addiction, without partaking of his “drug,” Coleridge can have no sense of subjec-

Woman.” *If domestication for Wordsworth is not possible—for this is no Abyssinian maid of some erotic, hallucinogenic dream—neither is there to be read in the cluster of signs any respect on Wordsworth’s part for alterity, or any ethical attempt to comprehend the woman as capable of self-dignity, or of having an identity which is neither French nor English. The signs with which Wordsworth reads the woman partake of the discourse of the exotic female other, whilst also being drawn from a general Western, white European (implicitly, if not explicitly racist) taxonomy of African people.*

The woman is “gaudy in array” (2). Although “like a Lady gay” (3),

tivity, however displaced. It is thus the female image that legitimates Coleridge's inscription of the dream. Coleridge excuses his addiction and his inability either to control his vision or to finish his poem by the inclusion of the female. Desire for the other constitutes the constantly rebuilt structure of male subjectivity, and, without which desire, such subjectivity is merely a dead shell, a memorial, a decaying architecture of Romanticism's detumescence.

Were we to discount a poetics of tumescence as a dominant discourse in *Kubla Khan*, we would do well to remember not only the humorously phallic image of the pleasure-dome itself but also the poem's "sinuous rills," its blossoms, the "mighty fountain momentarily . . . forced" with its "half-intermitted burst," accompanied by "fast, thick pants" (8, 9, 19, 20, 18). We should also recall the flinging up of the sacred river that, ultimately, reaches the "caverns, measureless to man," sinking into a lifeless ocean (24-27). We have approached the poem's image of war that, at this stage, can be read as another expression within the economy of male desire. Coleridge's lifeless ocean, a figure for female sexuality which, before, had been merely a sunless sea, now swallows up the masculine flow of the sacred river, into death. It is the implicitly male subject, however, who is experiencing the orgasmic moment. Interestingly, the moment is not static, not a singular instance, but a continual dissemination.

Concomitantly, the "deep romantic chasm" (12), which is also a "savage place" (14), suggests traditional art representations of female sexuality, as do other images in the poem. Notice, also, how Coleridge prefaces the chasm with the climactic "But oh!" (12). Coleridge provides an ambiguous inscription with the exclamation. "Oh" may well be the breathless remark of a subject in awe of the presence of his desire, as well as being the intimation of climax (for whom? the reader? the poet? or both, in a shared moment of masculine loss of control?). However, the sound implies the fifteenth letter of the alphabet, a symbol

she is not one, but merely a simulacrum. She is observed to be "meek" and "pitiably tame" (5). The latter term amplifies the former, whilst implying that she has perhaps been deprived of a "native quality" such as fierceness; that she is no longer untamed or unbroken, wild even. Thus the implication is that the French have broken her spirit, curtailed her "animality"; which of course returns us to Wordsworth's understanding of the black woman as originally savage and bestial. Wordsworth's poetry hints at more than a little quasi-anthropological interest in the woman, rather than any direct or genuine sympathy or solidarity. Furthermore, we are told that her speech is lan-

both of enclosure and teleology, yet also of absence, nullity, the abyss and, therefore, of a certain phallogocentric enunciation of the representation of female sexuality. From this moment we are led directly to the first female image.

Through this image Coleridge suggests multiple hauntings, all of which are the reiterated traces of the female figure. Multiple hauntings are implied by the line:

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted (15)

which makes clear the possibility of other similar scenes. The poem presents the reader with the age-old male fear of female sexuality acquiring its own power in the vision of the savage chasm with its cedarn cover (13, suggestive possibly of pubic hair) being haunted by the wailing woman. Here the woman is merely an extension of her sexuality, a sexuality that both threatens to engulf and is also spectral. The always-returning female spectre imposes the "irrational" and "hysterical" voice,—“wailing”—such non-sense being the sign of a triple citation (the savage, the holy, the enchanted) whereby Coleridge attempts to recuperate the Other. These are the poet's translations as he seeks to fix female meaning in an effort to elide his being-caught-up, his addictive urge or toxic drive. From the figure of the woman in the chasm, the poet constructs a chiasmatic inversion of the image, through which the location is made holy and enchanted, not by the poet's application to a discourse of female sexuality, but by the wailing woman, whose presence and voice makes the site savage.

Thus Coleridge seeks to escape responsibility again. He catches himself in the lie, however, through the ostensibly antinomian binarism of “holy” and “savage,” which marks the moment of deconstruction in the poet's text, being the polar extremes of conventional representations of female sexuality. Despite this, though, Coleridge is encouraging

*guid, her eyes and face motionless (8-9); both descriptions are typical in white representations of black men and women.*⁴⁵

Thus this woman is only a symbol for Wordsworth of French tyranny; so foreign is she for him, that he is unable to transform her into a figure travelling towards England, the land of Liberty. Nor does the poet think to offer England as a refuge and home to the woman. England remains tellingly absent from this sonnet.

The compassion offered by Wordsworth is little enough; merely “proffer'd kindness” (7). Yet, because the woman responds only with languid

us to read only the metaphysical transformations (holy, enchanted) that are left in the wake of female non-rational otherness. We are enticed, by a poet already hooked, in a state of being-addicted, to disregard female presence in favour of a disturbing female trace. The disturbance, resulting supposedly out of enticement, leaves us free of guilt, of culpability, because we are unable to resist the violence that our bodies undergo when transformed by the female fix. We cannot "just say no." Yet this apparent violence, supposedly outside ourselves, supposedly induced by both the female and Oriental, is determinable as emanating from the interior of the desiring self, being a sign of the Other-within. This determines our state as always already being-on-drugs, always addicted to the figure of the female as that which fuels desire. Thus the trace of the woman is readable as that which, in any culture, is already there, *in* our discourses, as a fundamental part of the cultural unconscious, that displaces rationality and logic, calm and sensible discursive structures.

Interiority has, of course, already been predicated in the subtitle of the poem, which speaks of a vision in a dream. It is reasonable to connect the subtitle of *Kubla Khan* to the second line of the third verse that also mentions a vision (38). Whether the third verse *is* the vision is open to question. However, in the vision is the "damsel with a dulcimer" (36). The choice of the word "damsel" implies a young, unmarried woman of noble origin. That she is both young and unmarried are intimations of virginity, a reading borne out by Coleridge's choice of the word "maid." She is, then, all the more appropriate to the dream of male desire. Coleridge's choice of Abyssinia for the maid makes plain that we are still in the Orient of the white imagination, in the discourse of Orientalism as the West's Other. Coleridge displaces the desire for the African woman onto the Khan, away from himself, by the introduction of the first person pronoun. This displacement belongs to a double troping whereby, in the imaginary, the reader is, simultaneously, Kubla Khan and yet, also, not the Asian Emperor. If the Khan speaks here then it is not of our—

speech and motionless face, this expression of compassion in the poem seems more intended to highlight Wordsworth's sensibilities; to quote Robin Jarvis on the rhetoric of compassion in a Thatcherite context, Wordsworth's "proffer'd kindness" is ultimately "in the service of one's own self-image or self-regarding humanity."⁴⁴ Indeed, the entire sonnet seems little more than an excuse for self-promotion, concurring in subtle ways with ideologies of Tory-liberalism in the nineteenth century, and the New Right in the Twentieth.

Wordsworth's view of the black woman concurs with the ideology of the New Right because it is an oblique statement of nationalist self-interest. The

that is to say the English readers'—desire. Khan's desire is merely an expression of his Oriental "nature." However, "I" implicitly gathers up the reader and the poet in its community of enunciation. We may disown the "I" as that of the foreign barbarian, yet, when reading, we automatically assume the same subject position, whether or not we reject that location as disinterested readers of poetry. We are always implicated in the desire of the female other.

This second female image is at the heart of whatever displaced subjectivity we are able to comprehend. The third verse's inclusion of the first person pronoun, takes both poet and reader (and Kubla Khan), as shared subjectivity, inside; inside the text, inside the dream, inside the vision in the dream. The female is not there, not, at least, as presence. She is only remembered by the speaker/reader. She is a vision in a vision; which vision is not of the moment but in an indefinable past, as registered by the phrase, "once I saw." The male spectator desires a return to the moment of the vision, to revive the female music within the vision, which would "win" him to "deep delight" (44). The female image is constructed as infinitely deferred and, moreover, ineluctably desirable because deferred. Male desire strains after the woman's music, desiring to make the music and, therefore, the woman, his, so that he might, with the aid of the female, *erect the pleasure dome*. Read in this way the text becomes a yearning after lost masculine power represented by the expression of the male's desired return to virility. Tellingly, it is the female who makes possible male power; without the female fix the male has no power. The possibility for a recovery of such power—and, through power, a definition of subjectivity—regresses without end, into the non-place of the abyss.⁴⁵

IV

Turn and re-turn, tour as detour, the Odyssean narrative⁴⁶ in the thrall of cravings and the premise of an imperfectly realised, always

woman is thus fetishised, which serves the interests and affirmation of national identity to which the return home is directed psychically. Because Wordsworth has equated Englishness with Liberty throughout the sonnets, Englishness has become sublated, made over into a transcendent nationalism. Yet as I have already mentioned, for Wordsworth it is a spiritual identity rooted in the earth and blood; to be English does not depend on "birth, nor citizenship, nor geography nor race" (to borrow from Derrida's analysis of Fichte's conception of German identity).⁴⁶

However, not everyone can belong to this philosophical-nationalism, as the

already collapsing national identity. These are the traces that most commonly mark Coleridge's writing influenced by Wordsworth's wanderings. These traces are also those that inevitably affect any thinking about the Romantic scene of writing.

In conclusion, I shall turn back again to particular traces—the tracks of certain needles, paths leading back home—that speak of addiction throughout this essay.

Kubla Khan appears to exist outside history in mythological and imaginary space. At the same time it is a text enclosed by its own play. Relentlessly interiorised, it hides itself from the historical. This self-enclosure and exclusion are no accident on Coleridge's part. It is the very sign of the poem's historicity, its cultural moment. Coleridge's poem is a document of English identity's imaginary relationship to the Orient, expressive as the poem is of a national fear brought about by imperial and colonial incursions into the foreign.

If the imperial and colonial agendas are concerned with making other territories and other peoples English, then accompanying this is the fear that Englishness might be spread a little too thinly, its essence diluted, corrupted, lost, through being repeatedly employed as the narcotic by which foreigners lose their own identities. Wordsworth seeks to avert this fear by refusing to encounter it, by always already returning to that which is English for him; and thereby, hopefully, condensing and strengthening Englishness.

Coleridge, on the other hand, does not envision the return so clearly. In the fluidity of metaphor and metonymic figure Coleridge writes an excess that is conventionally associated with the supposed decadence and luxury of the Orient, typical, in Western narrative, of that which cannot be assimilated by the European mind. In doing so, he also unveils a condition of domestic identity, its crucial double bind.

Coleridge's "vision"—a vision he disowns—is driven by the desires, addictions and anxieties of white mythology. What the poet hides

sonnet makes clear; for the sonnet sequence, as the political context of the sonnet on the black woman, attempts to elevate Englishness from a mere ideology into a philosophy of spirit, claiming to represent or embody "the universal essence of man."⁴⁷ And it is at this point that the woman is left behind, excluded from a safe English home, by the poet of modern national identity. Thus Wordsworth, in returning home from France, returns himself from a position of powerlessness (being an Englishman abroad) to one of apparent power, sacrificing the black woman on the way. To borrow from Frances Ferguson, he moves from a "position of abject powerlessness"—which powerlessness is displaced onto the black

throughout his non-poem is white, masculine, English identity, peering eagerly, with a mixture of fear and fascination into the distorted mirror of its own obsessions. Coleridge obscures his national and historical identity to encompass the Oriental Other, to subjugate it to the white gaze, whilst trying to maintain the power of whiteness through invisibility.

It is precisely this gambit, though, that threatens to undermine power because if the white man—in this case Coleridge—is invisible, if he has given up responsibility, then he cannot have any claim to power. This, in turn, presents Coleridge with another problem.

For Coleridge, the problem at hand is to effect a return to a “properly” constituted subjectivity, an English bourgeois subject who can carry on business-as-usual, freed from the guilt of both addiction and desire (dealers and pushers are, after all, merely phenomena of a free market, enterprise culture); and, importantly, from desire *as* addiction. The successful completion of such a project—itsself a manifestation of desire—is, strictly speaking, impossible. Coleridge, in order to locate this subjectivity, must create a place, a world of his own as Wordsworth puts it, where the subject—i.e., himself, his *self*—can exist. Coleridge’s being-on-drugs, however, opens up the non-place of the unconscious or imaginary, figured as England’s Orient, on which national economy depends. Coleridge is thus faced with the paradox of “this topology of a certain locatable non-place, at once necessary and undiscoverable.”⁵⁰ By the very logic of the non-place, all is on the verge of the abyss, on figural-topographical borders to a site without boundaries. In such a place the subject Coleridge imagines—a “proper” subject—would be impossible. Therefore Coleridge attempts to rewrite the topology of the non-place through the inscription of the female as a point of reference, a familiar structure by which to gather his bearings. Coleridge introduces the female as stabilising, calming, familiar anodyne.

The female as domestic Other translates foreign narrative. The problem is that, as I have suggested, the discourse on the female re-

woman—“to one of absolute power.”⁴⁹ Wordsworth transfers abject powerlessness onto another, victimising her in the process. Such a repositioning is an effort to return to a particular truth, free of ideology; it is a return home to the supposedly value-free site of the identity called Englishness, a return from the “ideology” of being French. Yet this return is one which opens for us the lengths to which English identity will go to hide its own ideologies, and the lengths to which it will go in order to make Englishness seem “natural” and therefore unassailable by analysis, unavailable to internal critique. Wordsworth’s return leads us to a necessary point of departure.

introduces, returns to, takes the ineluctable detour of, the economy of the undiscoverable. So Coleridge finds himself again, always already, hooked, back at the point of departure. This, as Derrida has commented, is the very nature of the subject and the return of the subject.⁵¹ In order for the subject to return to be rewritten as the reiteration of a position or place there must be that structure, figure, architecture or toxic substance that constitutes “the possibility of this kind of repetition one calls a return.”⁵²

No matter how much Coleridge desires escape, his escape will only lead him back to his own ruins, to his addicted self. No matter how much we may wish to dissociate our “selves” from right-wing versions of English identity, we are somehow connected. It is with this double bind that we must engage, to which we must return.