Coleridge’s Book of Moonlight

*Thomas Vogler*

My head-knockings, therefore, have to be real ones, solid and substantial, with nothing sophistical or imaginary about them.

—*COLERIDGE*

To this End, the Philosopher’s Way in all Ages has been by erecting certain *Edifices in the Air* . . .

—*SWIFT*

I would build that dome in air . . .

—*COLERIDGE*

What have we *MOONITES* done?

—*STERNE*

Like most of my essay, the title presumes to be nothing more than an image thrown out in an attempt to change our conventional way of reading the *Biographia Literaria*. I offer it as an image of the work itself, and introduce the phrase with three quotations. First, from page 46 of Blake’s *Notebook*:

> Delicate Hands & Heads will never appear  
> While Titian’s &c as in the Book of Moonlight p 5

This statement lies there enigmatically on the page, more teasing even than Nietzsche’s umbrella, until we find what I take to be a gloss on it in Wallace Stevens’ *Comedian as the Letter C*:

> The book of moonlight is not written yet  
> Nor half begun, but when it is, leave room  
> For Crispin . . . .  
> Leave room, therefore, in that unwritten book
For the legendary moonlight that once burned
In Crispin’s mind above a continent

Keeping with the letter C, and getting closer to Coleridge, we move from Crispin to Carlyle, and his description of Professor Teufelsdröckh as *homo scribens*:

But the whole particulars of his Route, his Weather-observations, the picturesque Sketches he took, though all regularly jotted down (in indelible sympathetic-ink by an invisible interior Penman), are these nowhere forthcoming? Perhaps quite lost: one other leaf of that mighty Volume (of human Memory) left to fly abroad, unprinted, unpublished, unbound up, as waste paper; and to rot, the sport of rainy winds? (*Sartor Resartus* 77)

Carlyle’s description here alludes to the story of Aeneas’s visit to the Cumaean Sibyl (*Aeneid*, Bk. 6) whose answers, written on leaves, were blown about on the winds. Coleridge took the title for his “collected” poems from the same source, thereby making an ironic comment on Wordsworth’s careful ordering of his work in the 1815 edition, as well as reflecting the scattered and disordered state of his own oeuvre. One of the many ways to understand the genesis of his *Biographia* is as a “preface” to these poems, begun in literal competition with Wordsworth’s preface, but ending up as a work in its own write.

I say its own “write” because it does not presume to exist—insofar as a Book of Moonlight may be said to exist—in its own right; it constantly points elsewhere for its provocations, its matter, and its fulfillment, even while presumably seeking to demonstrate and represent “the act of self-consciousness [which] is for us the source and principle of all our possible knowledge” (1:284). We could argue that the text of the *Biographia* is composed of writing which exists to fill a certain kind of space, a highly charged and problematic “space,” the emptiness of which was in part defined by the presence of another preface to another collection of poems, and Coleridge’s marginal status in that preface. In it Coleridge, who had once liked to think he was the first Englishman to distinguish between the “fancy” and “imagination” (1:85–86), was relegated by Wordsworth to having coined a phrase for the fancy (“the aggregative and associative Power”), which he introduces only to criticize and correct. Coleridge’s “beautiful Poems,” which had been “long associated in publication” with Wordsworth’s, are missing, because “the time is come when considerations
of general propriety dictate the separation.” (1815 Preface 3:39). But also missing is the “truth” about the imagination—the truth that Wordsworth missed in his attempts to philosophize about his own poetry and poetry in general.

Coleridge’s image for this missing space comes in chapter 4, as he turns from his initial encounter with Wordsworth to the “attempt” to “present an intelligible statement of [his] own poetic creed,” an attempt which will occupy him for the next nine chapters:

My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the common eye of our common consciousness. (1:88)

Kenneth Johnston has aptly observed that for Wordsworth there was “a tendency for The Recluse to turn at every critical point into The Prelude” (18). Coleridge’s description of The Prelude in the famous letter to Wordsworth of April 1815 repeats his image of his plans for the Biographia: “the Poem on the growth of your own mind was as the ground-plat and the Roots, out of which the Recluse was to have sprung up as the Tree—as far as the same Sap in both, I expected them doubtless to have formed one compleat Whole” (CL 4:573). In the same letter he makes an interesting slip, calling it “the Poem on the Growth of your own Support” (576) which he thought would “have laid a solid and immoveable foundation for the Edifice by removing the sandy Sophisms of Locke, and the Mechanic Dogmatists” (574). This is also an apt description of his own project in the following chapters, which set out to present Coleridge’s “own statement of the theory” and “the grounds on which I rest it” in the form of “deductions from established premises conveyed in such a form, as is calculated either to effect a fundamental conviction, or to receive a fundamental confutation” (1:88, italics added). It would seem clear, from preliminary gestures of this sort, that Coleridge was committing himself to producing in the Biographia the story of the growth of his own mind (or “support” as in the Wordsworth letter) as a case study or demonstration of the real existence and operation of the imagination.4

At the core of the “story” must be the performative or self-constituting utterance of an “I am.” He must write his sum before he can write his summa, as its existential “ground,” for “It is asserted only, that the act of self-consciousness is for us the source and principle of all our possible knowledge” (1:284). But the summa, the magnum opus or Logosophia in the
form of a philosophical demonstration is also required as "ground" for the sum. As definitive "epistemology" (ἐπι + ἡστάναι + λόγος, or words "on which to stand"), Coleridge's summa is necessary to provide the ground for his sum, as a philosophical demonstration of the essential truth that "we can never pass beyond the principle of self-consciousness. Should we attempt it, we must be driven back from ground to ground, each of which would cease to be a Ground the moment we pressed on it. We must be whirl'd down the gulph of an infinite series" (1:285). Without the summa the sum risks being only the dithyrambic ode of a Querkopf von Klubstick, shouting ipse Divus, "myself God":

Here on this market-cross aloud I cry:
I, I, I! itself I!
The form and the substance, the what and the why,
The when and the where, and the low and the high,
The inside and outside, the earth and the sky,
I, you, and he, and he, you and I,
All souls and all bodies are I itself I!

(1:159)

In this context we can hear a litotes in Coleridge's statement that "Great indeed are the obstacles which an English metaphysician has to encounter" (1:290). To avoid the bathetic dithyramb, he must forge a linked chain of compelling argument; but "a chain without a staple, from which all the links derived their stability" (1:266) is another infinite series, like a string of blind men in a straight line without a guide.

In this attempt to develop a systematic philosophical argument, Coleridge takes up his place in the great enlightenment project to produce an independent, rational justification for a moral human nature, to discover the rational foundations for an objective morality which will inspire the confidence of man as a moral agent, assuring him that his moral practice and utterance are correct. This is the idea of philosophy "as a science" (1:140) which Coleridge takes up in chapter 9, as a consequence of the "clearness and evidence" of Kant's work and the "adamantine chain of the logic" having taken possession of him "as with a giant's hand" (1:153). To complete the impulse, Spinoza "supplied the idea of a system truly metaphysical, and of a metaphysique truly systematic" (1:158). Without such systematic grounding we run the risk of becoming like Hartley who, though "excellent and pious," assumed "as his foundations, ideas which, if we embrace the doctrines of his first volume, can exist nowhere but in the
vibrations of the ethereal medium common to the nerves and to the atmosphere” (1:121–22). Or still worse, “We might as rationally chant the Brahmin creed of the tortoise that supported the bear, that supported the elephant, that supported the world, to the tune of ‘This is the house that Jack built’” (1:137–38).

Staples (providing support from above) and grounds (support from below) are figures of “attachment” to something outside in order to avoid the alternative of an infinite series which simultaneously fills all space and time and swallows itself into its own gulf. But this figure of attachment can be turned inside-out in an attempt to avoid the same fate: “We are to seek therefore for some absolute truth capable of communicating to other positions a certainty, which it has not itself borrowed; a truth self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own light. . . . Its existence too must be such, as to preclude the possibility of requiring a cause or antecedent without an absurdity” (1:268). Coleridge comes close here to Blake’s insanely “rational” Urizen, another bookish persona caught in the webs of the book he is and the book he is writing, the book “of” Urizen:

5. First I fought with the fire; consum’d
   Inwards, into a deep world within:
   A void immense, wild dark & deep,
   Where nothing was; Natures wide womb
   And self balanc’d stretch’d o’er the void
   I alone, even I! the winds merciless
   Bound; but condensing, in torrents
   They fall & fall; strong I repell’d
   The vast waves, & arose on the waters
   A wide world of solid obstruction

6. Here alone I in books form’d of me—
   (Book of Urizen, plate 4)

The very figures that seek to image an escape from the devouring trope of aporia may in fact themselves constitute that trap. Kant, in section 59 of the Critique of Judgment, gives as examples of metaphors that are not reliable from an epistemological point of view a set which begins with “ground [Grund]” and “to depend [abhangen]” and includes “to follow from [fließen]” and “substance” in Locke’s sense of “the support of accidents.”? Kant’s warning has been analyzed at length by Paul de Man (1978), in terms that are pertinent to our consideration of Coleridge at this point:
The considerations about the possible danger of uncontrolled metaphors, focused on the cognate figures of support, ground, and so forth, reawaken the hidden uncertainty about the rigor of a distinction that does not hold if the language in which it is stated reintroduces the elements of indetermination it sets out to eliminate. For it is not obvious that the iconic representation that can be used to illustrate a rational concept is indeed a figure. (27–28)

Coleridge could readily criticize the philosophical approach “which talking of mind but thinking of brick and mortar, or other images equally abstracted from body, contrives a theory of spirit” (1:235); but a viable alternative practice was not so easy for him to achieve.

II

An author is often merely an x, even when his name is signed, something quite impersonal, which addresses itself abstractly, by the aid of printing, to thousands and thousands, while remaining itself unseen and unknown, living a life as hidden, as anonymous, as it is possible for a life to be, in order, presumably, not to reveal the too obvious and striking contradiction between the prodigious means of communication employed and the fact that the author is only a single individual—perhaps also for fear of the control which in practical life must always be exercised over every one who wishes to teach others, to see whether his personal existence comports with his communication.

—Kierkegaard, Author 45

Most of what I have been discussing so far applies specifically to the famous “philosophical chapters” (5–13), which are usually taken to provide the main intellectual substance of the Biographia. I want now to shift my focus to the physical “packaging” of these chapters, while keeping the thread of spatial imagery implicit in the dominant image of “ground.” The ground is to provide the basis for erecting a structure, and the structure in this case is to be a text-edifice. For a variety of reasons it was imperative for Coleridge to produce a published book. His self-consciousness about this dimension of the project shows at every stage, from his early concern about duplicating the exact features of Wordsworth’s Preface, to the decision that his “book” should be divided into chapters, to the defensiveness at the end of chapter 10, where he claims that had “the compositions, which I have made public . . . been published in books, they would have filled a respectable number of volumes, though every passage of merely
temporary interest were omitted” (1:220). “But are books the only channel through which the stream of intellectual usefulness can flow?” he asks defensively, for the fact is, as he makes clear at the very beginning of the Biographia, his publications have not achieved the status and stature of books. Without the production of a book he risks the possibility of having “lived in vain . . . a painful thought to any man, and especially so to him who has made literature his profession” (1:219). The same note is struck in the Notebooks, as when he yearns for “time & ease to reduce my Pocket-books and Memorandums to an Index” in order to produce at least “one printed volume” (1:xviii–ix).

For Coleridge the existence of a printed, published book, with his own name on it, became both the sign for and the demonstration of a personal and intellectual existence. Publications like The Friend did not count, for that work was “printed rather than published, or so published that it had been well for the unfortunate author, if it had remained in manuscript” (1:175). The physical book could function as material object in that subject-object relationship in which Coleridge saw “each involving and supposing the other. In other words, it is a subject which becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself” (1:273). It is in this spirit that Coleridge takes the act of writing to illustrate the “absurdity” of the Hartleyan theory:

Yet according to this hypothesis the disquisition, to which I am at present soliciting the reader’s attention, may be as truly said to be written by Saint Paul’s church, as by me: for it is the mere motion of my muscles and nerves; and these again are set in motion from external causes equally passive, which external causes stand themselves in interdependent connection with every thing that exists or has existed. Thus the whole universe co-operates to produce the minutest stroke of every letter, save only that I myself and I alone, have nothing to do with it . . . . the poor worthless I! (1:118–19)

In writing his book Coleridge must thus perform a self-constituting and esemplastic act, comparable to that he claims to have performed in making the word: “‘Esemplastic, The word is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere.’ Neither have I! I constructed it myself from the Greek words . . . to shape into one” (1:169). In the act of producing his book, Coleridge was attempting to put himself together, to shape himself “into one.” The degree of success he felt he had accomplished may be accurately expressed in a letter he wrote to Tulk in August 1817: “In my literary Life you will
find a sketch of the *subjective* Pole of the Dynamic Philosophy; the rudiments of "Self-construction, barely enough to let a thinking mind see *what it is like*" (*CL* 4:767).

Before him most immediately was the example of Wordsworth, who had just edited himself in the form of the 1815 volumes, where "propriety" and the sign of his own name had dictated the exclusion of Coleridge's "beautiful Poems." But the extremity of Coleridge's self-consciousness in his enterprise comes closer to those works which in their *bookishness* as books exist as parodies of the edited and printed book. *A Tale of a Tub* comes to mind here as chief example, but *Don Quixote*, the *Dunciad*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Sartor Resartus*, and a whole range of Kierkegaard's productions provide additional examples.

I will discuss some of these works later, but for now would like to point out the ways in which they exemplify what Foucault has called the "author function" of a book. Anonymous or pseudonymous publication, or works which thematize the problems of "authorship," employ strategies which produce disturbing implications for the concept of the author and its link with the status of the proper name. The fact that Tristram Shandy or Lemuel Gulliver or Johannes Climacus exist only by virtue of the printed texts bearing their names—that they are thereby persons or authors whose identities are produced only by the printed book—may suggest the way in which any author can be seen as a "function" generated by publication and interpretation. In an exaggerated emphasis on the mechanics of the printed book (with its dedications, introductions, annotations, footnotes, etc.) the possibility is raised that the author (and even the editor in some cases) is himself simply another feature of the printed book, a function of its publication. Thus Kierkegaard, explaining his "pseudonymity or polynymity," asserts that "it has an *essential* ground in the character of the production." He is "a *souffleur* who has poetically produced the authors, whose preface in turn is their own production, as are even their own names." He can claim only to be the "foster father of a production . . . for all poetic production would *eo ipso* be rendered impossible and unendurable if the lines must be the very words of the producer, literally understood" (*Postscript* 551–52). Authors of such works typically publish their own words under the name of another, simultaneously invoking and subverting the rule of the proper name. Coleridge, by so frequently publishing the words of others as his own, is differently but equally subversive of the publication techniques—and their "proprieties"—that he is trying to use to establish his own authorial identity.
These and other considerations like them seem to me to put the efforts
of those engaged in the more conventional aspects of "editing" in a pecu­
liar situation. The Biographia has already been "edited" by its author, very
self-consciously, and with specific goals in mind. What are new editors to
do, and how are they to do it without participating in the strategies of the
author, or becoming complicitous with his efforts to produce the book as
book and himself as its author—without entering that magic circle where
the text evokes its own "author function" which they take as the literal
author of the text? In general, I suggest that we can see much of conven­
tional editing as the staging of the production of a text and its author; and
the more problematic the nature of the text to be staged, or the author to
be imputed, the more effort must go into its production.  

With these considerations in mind, let us now look at a recent staging
of the Biographia by Princeton University Press as an impressive new con­
tribution to that quintessentially Coleridgean goal: the Collected Cole­
ridge. In it Engell and Bate, as editors, are continuing a project begun by
Coleridge with the Biographia, the new edition of which now takes pride of
place in the Bollingen series. Both its physical form and the emphasis on
size and scale in its presentation demonstrate that this work is too big for
one volume, as well as too big for one editor. The hyperbolic dust jacket
presents itself as the outermost skin of this "supreme work of literary
criticism and one of the classics of English literature."

Into the Biographia Coleridge poured twenty years of speculation. . . .
Combining his belief in philosophical principles as the foundation of
criticism . . . the Biographia is unrivaled except by his Shakespeare lect­
ures as Coleridge's central work of criticism.

Coleridge himself used similar images, describing the magnum opus, for
example, as "a work, for which I have been collecting the materials for the
last 15 years almost incessantly" (CL 4:591), or as "the Reservoir of my
Reflections & Reading for 25 years past" (CL 5:160). The editors of the
new Biographia echo these tropes in the attempt to establish the effect of
an overflowing abundance that resists conventional modes of containment
and control. And of course no matter how much is here, its abundance
will be less than that of the magnum opus which McFarland imagines as
"continually being raided to produce slighter works that Coleridge did in
fact publish" (Ruin 354).

The physical form of this two-volume book makes it clear from the be­
ginning that we are approaching a center that is full, like a generous deli
sandwich bulging at the seams. At the front are cxxxvi pages of "Introduction," demonstrating the work's unity ("actually . . . a series of interlocking unities") and its "unshaken continuity" (cxxxii). At the end hang 161 pages of appended material. For those who like to nibble on footnotes with their textual sandwich, this is the place to eat, for the editors have "poured" in what seems like another twenty years of effort. Even the footnotes that Coleridge provided now have their own footnotes. Textual self-sufficiency is established by the dust jacket announcement of "the first completely annotated edition of this highly allusive work, giving in detail all the sources, ancient and modern, on which Coleridge drew, and illustrating the different ways in which he used them," as if the work can now give birth to itself out of its own sources that it includes within itself.

As we move towards the center of this editorial sandwich, we find that Coleridge's text itself already has the form of a philosophical sandwich, with the meat being the "philosophical chapters" that the editors claim Coleridge dictated to Morgan in August and September of 1815, placing them in the center of the work even though they were the last written. One material index of the density of this "central" material is the increasing frequency and length of Coleridge's notes. Here the form of his text is doubled by the form of the edited text:

Hence the disparity in bulk of annotation between the latter half of Volume I, containing the "philosophical chapters", and the rest of the edition. Considering how central these chapters are to our understanding of Coleridge's thought as a whole, how crammed they are with allusions of every kind, and weighed by the problem of sources . . . the increase in annotations has been inevitable. (xv—xvi, italics added)

More than a hundred pages later we will be told that "the Biographia is a book whose circumference is everywhere and whose center is nowhere" (cxxxvi). This raises several questions, among them whether or not the "truth as a divine ventriloquist" (1:164) has been at work again, since Jerome Christensen has emphasized how Coleridge's texts are "a circle whose center is nowhere and whose circumference is everywhere" (16) and pointed out "how the profusion of the peripheral bears on the absence of the central" (96).

If we tackle these chapters unaided by any editorial guidance except that already so abundantly provided by Coleridge, we see that (starting with the announcement at the end of chapter 4) they present themselves as an arduous and difficult journey for author and reader alike. The first
stages are historical, clearing away errors, specifying precise meanings for important words, acknowledging “obligations to Schelling” and others. This occupies us from 5 to 9, which ends with the image of Coleridge as “a writer of the present times” who can only “anticipate a scanty audience for abstrusest themes, and truths that can neither be communicated or received without effort of thought, as well as patience of attention” (1:167). As we turn to chapter 10, however, ready to cultivate our patience and exert our efforts, we may be surprised to find it titled “A chapter of digression and anecdotes, as an interlude preceeding that on the nature and genesis of the imagination or plastic power” (1:168). This “digression” goes on for forty-five pages, which makes it two pages longer than what has come before. It ends with an extended defense against “this rumour of having dreamt away my life to no purpose” (1:221), which may gain some urgency from Coleridge’s awareness of what he has been doing—and not doing—for the last forty-five pages. Chapter 11 continues the deferral for another eight pages with an “affectionate exhortation to the youthful literati” that they should not undertake the course he is pursuing: “NEVER PURSUE LITERATURE AS A TRADE” (1:223). This goes on in a light-hearted vein until it becomes an “unpleasant subject” (1:230) and Coleridge realizes that he is on the brink of returning to material already covered in chapter 2.

Chapter 12 seems to get us back on the track, announcing itself as “A Chapter of requests and premonitions concerning the perusal or omission of the chapter that follows.” The anticipatory motif is kept steadily in view as the chapter moves through thirty-four pages, much of which is either “direct translation” or “close paraphrase” or “loose paraphrase” or “material summarised (but reworded)” (Appendix A 2:254). At the end of this chapter, having spent forty-three pages giving background for his subject, fifty-three pages digressing from it, and thirty-four pages of premonitions, he announces that “I shall now proceed to the nature and genesis of the imagination” (1:293), and chapter 13 identifies itself as the long-awaited chapter “On the imagination, or esemplastic power.”

That chapter starts with one page of quotations, followed by three pages of introductory prose. At that point we reach the end of the journey and the “center” of the book, only to find a row of asterisks, followed by three pages of the “letter from a friend,” which prompts the decision by the author to defer publication, leaving only “the main result” of the chapter, in the form of a one-page conclusion that contains twelve lines on the imagination, two of which were apparently later “stroked out” by
Coleridge. The work up to this point has been so carefully and so self-consciously structured and staged that the absence of the crucial demonstration of the imagination produces a special kind of structural effect. The center is empty; the foundation, cornerstone, keystone, not there in the place where it was repeatedly announced and long expected—an absence made so emphatic as to be almost the presence of nothingness. It is this provocative vacuity that the editors and commentators rush to wrestle with and attempt to fill. In doing so, they contribute splendidly to the effect, which is perhaps best described by the Author of A Tale of a Tub:

It was judged of absolute necessity, that some present Expedient be thought on, till the main Design can be brought to Maturity. To this End . . . this important Discovery was made by a curious and refined Observer; That Sea-men have a Custom when they meet a Whale, to fling him out an empty Tub, by way of Amusement, to divert him from laying violent Hands upon the Ship. . . . And my Genius being conceived to lye not unhappily that way, I had the Honor done me to be engaged in the Performance.

This is the sole Design in publishing the following Treatise, which I hope will serve for an Interim of some Months . . . till the perfecting of that great Work. (325–26)

Dare I suggest that Coleridge's Tub of a text is breached in chapter 13 and revealed to be the text of a Tub? If we look inside Swift's empty Tub of a tale, we find an even more specific model for the effect that Coleridge has staged in chapter 13. In section 9 we encounter the highest reach of the aspiring intellect in the Tale:

The present Argument is the most abstracted that ever I engaged in, it strains my Faculties to their highest Stretch; and I desire the Reader to attend with utmost Perpensity; For, I now proceed to unravel this knotty Point.

There is in Mankind a certain * * * * *
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * (Hic multa desiderantur)
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
* * * * * * And this I take to be a clear Solution of the Matter. (413)

The Author adds a note to this graphic aposiopesis, suggesting that it "were well if all Metaphysical Cobweb Problems were not otherwise answered." An earlier note to a similar "Hiatus in MS." is also pertinent:
Here is pretended a Defect in the Manuscript, and this is very frequent with our Author, either when he thinks he cannot say any thing worth Reading, or when he has no mind to enter on the Subject, or when it is a Matter of little Moment, or perhaps to amuse his Reader (whereof he is frequently very fond) or lastly, with some Satyrical Intention. (340)

Sterne—himself in the line of descent from Swift—also provides examples of the hiatus maneuver, along with the generous provision of instructions for reading the book and the grandiose and always-thwarted plans for writing it that mark both authors. Sterne was so fond of Pliny’s defense of the digression (“Non enim excursus hic eius, sed opus ipsum est”) that he used it as a title-page motto for vols. 7 and 8 of Tristram Shandy. In one of Sterne’s most notable gaps (the missing “whole chapter” 24 in vol. 5) the “demonstration” that “the book is more perfect and complete by wanting the chapter, than having it” (1:372) is close to the arguments of Coleridge’s “Friend.” Joyce will continue this descent after Coleridge, producing in Finnegans Wake a book that contains a remarkable “letter”:

What was it?
A . . . . . . . . !
? . . . . . . . O!

Joyce’s “letter” evokes the “space” between alpha and omega which—being everything—must “contain” the book which contains them as the letters of the “letter,” transforming the hiatus into a textual ouroboros. A more direct hint at Coleridge’s textual effect comes earlier: “There was once upon a wall and a hooghoogwall a was and such a wall hole did exist” (69). Here the textual totality, the “whole of the wall” (69) exhibits the inevitable “hole” in the “whole” of the book.

A familiar touch from another of Coleridge’s favorite authors can be discerned in chapter 13 if we look closely at the precise point where the asterisks produce the scriptor interruptus effect. Coleridge has prepared the stage for an encounter between “two equal forces acting in opposite directions . . . both alike infinite, both alike indestructible” (1:299). It is precisely at the point where we are poised for the encounter, assured a second time that “something must be the result of these two forces, both alike infinite, and both alike indestructible” (1:300) that the interruption comes. The verbal formulation here suggests an echo of Sterne (“No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obsti-
nately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time" [1:399]). But the situation of a textual crisis that is being contrived here is more like that found at the end of chapter 8 of *Don Quixote*, when

Don Quixote was approaching the wary Biscayan, his sword raised on high and with the firm resolve of cleaving his enemy in two; and the Biscayan was awaiting the knight in the same posture, cushion in front of him and with uplifted sword. All the bystanders were trembling with suspense at what would happen as a result of the terrible blows that were threatened. . . .

But the unfortunate part of the matter is that at this very point the author of the history breaks off and leaves the battle pending, excusing himself upon the ground that he has been unable to find anything else in writing concerning the exploits of Don Quixote beyond those already set forth. (69)

In his role as "an English metaphysician" (1:290) Coleridge's reading of the German transcendental philosophers may well remind us of the equally vast and specialized reading of Quixote ("The poor fellow used to lie awake nights in an effort to disentangle the meaning. . . ." [26]). But instead of a Dulcinea del Toboso, Coleridge has a different lady, Dame Philosophy, the shimmering elusive beauty of the *Logosophia* which "some evil enchanter" keeps hiding or transforming into the chaotic text of the *Biographia*. The "friend" who writes him the letter is not Brisman's man from Porlock or Christensen's "man of the letter," but himself as Sancho Panza, the letter-carrier or intermediary between the Don and his Dame.15 In being both Quixote and Sancho Panza, Coleridge becomes Cervantes, the witty master of a text that can't fully be mastered by its readers.

If we turn now to the observation of Engell and Bate, that "no form of writing came more easily and habitually to Coleridge than the *Apologia*" (1:iii), we can see that numerous features of the *Biographia* make it inevitable that the *apologia* (or "away-pushing words") comes easily to his critics and editors as well:

This is not to excuse the plagiarisms. But a distinction can be kept in mind between "excuse" and a mere explanation of circumstances that could seduce or frighten Coleridge into acts against which the cushions of leisure, financial security, calmer (or firmer) temperaments, or even sheer moralism would preserve others. In connection with the "plagiarisms" the reader should bear in mind the chronology of the work, the
circumstances, the pressures to get it done rapidly, the self-doubts, the exhaustion. (lviii)

The reason for the continuation of this mode of the *apologia* is that the charges continue to exist in the minds and words of some readers, no less perhaps in his staunchest defenders than in his more hostile critics. These charges were already amply invented and documented by Coleridge himself, and the parties to the game seem bent on endlessly repeating the same moves already inscribed in the book. The task of the Coleridge editor thus appears like that of Richardson, struggling through successive editions of *Clarissa*, appending editorial comments, footnotes, summaries of letters and the like to the work, in a futile effort to control and predetermine its reception by the readers. Like his efforts, theirs too can sometimes have a subversive effect. Rather than assuring us of the authenticity of the text they so strenuously assert, they remind us of the uncontrollability of a text that requires such efforts.

What I am urging here is a different way of reading the *Biographia*, and a different basis of respect for Coleridge's skill as a writer. The choice by Engell and Bate of the elegant Latin form *apologia* rather than the more pedestrian English "apology" provides a nice Coleridgean touch, while safely avoiding the latter's meaning as a "failed effort," with which we might call the *Biographia* a "sorry excuse" or an "apology" for the LOGO­SOPHIA. But another conventional and time-honored use of the term *apologia* may be still more apt for the *Biographia* in its manifestation as a satura or satirist's overflowing grab bag. Satirists from classical writers to Pope and beyond have made the *apologia* one of their stock subjects, its goal to assure the reader that the censor is a *vir bonus*, a man of good will who has been forced into action against his will.

Thus Pope begins his entry into the satirical ring with the publication of the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* and a classical disclaimer: "This paper is a sort of bill of complaint. . . . I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleased some Persons of Rank and Fortune . . . to attack, in a very extraordinary manner, not only my Writings (of which, being public, the Public is judge) but my Person, morals, and Family, whereof, to those who know me not, a truer information may be requisite" (215). Compare Pope's opening here with the first lines of the *Biographia*:

It has been my lot to have had my name introduced both in conversation, and in print, more frequently than I find it easy to explain, whether I
consider the fewness, unimportance, and limited circulation of my writings, or the retirement and distance, in which I have lived, both from the literary and political world. Most often it has been connected with some charge, which I could not acknowledge, or some principle which I had never entertained. (1:5)

The same note continues throughout the work, maintaining the posture of one who had been “for at least 17 years [Pope’s “saving counsel” had enabled him to keep the peace for only nine years] consecutively dragged forth by them into the foremost ranks of the proscribed, and forced to abide the brunt of abuse, for faults directly opposite, and which I certainly had not” (1:50). Maynard Mack has suggested that no one ever misinterpreted a satire for failure to see that the adversaries were fictional, and it is clear that most of the hordes of Coleridge’s detractors that fill the Biographia are equally fictional—perhaps the most amusing being the “amateur performer in verse” whom Coleridge invents as the thief of his own epigram, originally addressed “To Mr. Pye” (1:28). Coleridge’s strategy here, with its self-contained economy in which he plays both parts, provides him the double pleasure of reclaiming the lines as his own wit, prompted by his own work, the “Ancient Mariner.”

Engell and Bate point out that of the ninety-six extant articles from 1798–1814 that mention Coleridge sixty-three are favorable, often even eulogistic, ten to twelve strike “a middle note,” and the remainder “less abusive than Coleridge implies” (1:50). These facts suggest that the much maligned “author” of the Biographia is merely an assumed identity or persona, the production of the text rather than its producer. Is the “real Coleridge” the one on Napoleon’s hit list, or the one who masqueraded as an American when he left his papers in Rome (1:216)? The one who “had translated the eight Hymns of Synesius from the Greek into English Anacreontics before [his] 15th year” (1:247)? Who frequently emphasizes the need for scrupulosity in acknowledging literary debts? Whose fugitive writings published in the Morning Post made him the rival of Burke, and prompted Fox to make the charge “that the late war . . . was a war produced by the MORNING POST” (1:215)? Who drafted more than 100 pages of chapter 13 and cut it down to ten lines, and then complained to Gutch about the need for “writing a hundred and fifty pages additional—on what, I am left to discover” (lxii)? The one who thought up all of German transcendental philosophy on his own? Or the one who enlisted in
the Light Dragoons as Silus Tomkyns Comberbacke? Or is he nehemiah
higgenbottom? Or Satyrane? Or Spy Nozy?

The thoroughly conventional satiric plot of the *Biographia* claims that
a fictitious and degraded "Coleridge" has been textually produced by the
press and is circulating in public conversation. This spurious impostor will
be refuted by the production of the "real" Coleridge in book form. But the
real Coleridge keeps going elsewhere. His letters, his printed words, his
lectures, even his conversations appear under the names of other authors.
Meanwhile his real work is always provisional, always somewhere else, like
the *Logosophia*, which is a commentary on the Gospel of John, which is a
commentary on the Logos of God. While he claims the thoughts as his
own, the words of others keep speaking themselves through him as he
dictates to Morgan. A substantial portion of the work appears under the
name of Satyrane, who was and was not a different Coleridge at an earlier
time. Another generous portion is a once "anonymous" group of letters
criticizing *Bertram* (a play Coleridge thought had taken the rightful place
of his *Zapolya*, rejected by Covent Garden and Drury Lane), claimed now
as his own but purged of the sarcasm that marked their original appear­
ance.

At least one part of the *Biographia* seems to have been actually written
at the appropriate time for inclusion in the work—written with apparent
pleasure by a Coleridge who had come to prefer the ease of speech to the
effort of writing ("written without taking my pen off the paper except to
dip it in the inkstand" [CL 4:728]) It appears under the alias of a "friend,"
a fictional persona who had actually entered and experienced one of the
antechambers of that vast textual edifice, the *magnum opus*. What was the
experience like? It was "too much, and yet not enough" (1:302). Not enough,
because "you have been obliged to omit so many links, from the necessity of com­
pression, that what remains, looks . . . like the fragments of the winding steps of
an old ruined tower" (1:302-03). Too much, because it will "amount to" over
one hundred printed pages when published, so that it is also like "one of
our largest Gothic cathedrals in a gusty moonlight" (1:301), both too large and
too serious for the present work: "If you do publish this Chapter . . . you will be
reminded of Bishop Berkeley's *Siris*, announced as an Essay on Tar-Water, which
beginning with *Tar* ends with the Trinity" (1:303). The chain-conscious friend
is suggesting that this missing link in the *Biographia*, which is itself missing
"so many links," would be a link too many for the work ("Siris" from the
Greek *seira*, "chain"). The result is that we are left with a book of Moon-
light, a book in which the disquisition on the imagination would be too much (and too little), but the letter from a friend is just right.

III

It would be highly interesting to point out the causes of the pleasure given by this extravagant and absurd language . . . it depends upon a great variety of causes, but upon none perhaps more than its influence in impressing a notion of the peculiarity and exaltation of the Poet's character, and in flattering the Reader's self-love by bringing him nearer to a sympathy with that character; an effect which is accomplished by unsettling ordinary habits of thinking, and thus assisting the Reader to approach that perturbed and dizzy state of mind in which if he does not find himself, he imagines that he is balked of a peculiar enjoyment which poetry can, and ought to bestow.

—WORDSWORTH

Weave a circle round him thrice . . .

—COLERIDGE

Thus far I may seem to be in agreement with the view that "Coleridge's attempt to produce a theory of subjectivity in the Biographia Literaria spectacularly fails. . . . the definition of subjectivity falls into nonmeaning in the moment of its utterance. Unspeakable and unspoken, the analysis is to be found in the unwritten 100 pages, in the Logosophia to be announced at the end of the Biographia (it was not announced) and in the essay prefixed to 'The Ancient Mariner' (which was never written)” (Belsey 77). My goal is different, however, for I believe that it is a failure only on one level which, if properly understood, can help us to see the true nature of its "success." One index of that success is the note of ironic humor with which Coleridge was able to extricate himself from his metaphysical cul-de-sac—a note he shares with Kierkegaard as one of "these authors who proposed to make the comical a determination in earnestness, and to find in the jest a release from the sorriest of all tyrannies: the tyranny of moroseness, stupidity, and inflexibility of spirit” (Postscript 251). But there is also a serious side to the Coleridgean accomplishment, if we take a lack of completion and unity as a special mark of the literary, a mode of discourse which both provokes and resists the techniques and satisfactions of a "philosophical" interpretation. I am convinced that Coleridge's philosophic argument can be seen as at all times dependent on and governed by literary and linguis-
tic devices, in which even the appearance of a philosophical argument may be seen as a literary effect.

As poets and theoreticians, both Coleridge and Wordsworth provide the arguments and examples for that conventional literary criticism which assumes that poetry is to be read as an expression of the full inwardness of an author's individual human experience. For Wordsworth poems should have a "source within my own mind, from which they have proceeded" (Essay 3:80). In this view poetry is a matter of subjectivity, and the Wordsworthian question ("What is a Poet?") is synonomous with the question: What is poetry? For Coleridge the authentic index of poetry can be seen as a subjectivity within a subjectivity: the imagination, which is the source and cause of those works which are true poetry. A radically different view suggests that the subjectivity which authenticates certain works as poems is the product of a discourse rather than its source, an effect produced by rhetorical strategies in the poem, and by equally important strategies of the interpretive discourse, both of which combine to produce the effect of the imagination. This explains in part the persistent emphasis on the importance of Coleridge's "applied" criticism of Wordsworth in the *Biographia*, since by performing a successful reading of Wordsworth, Coleridge was both identifying the traces of the imagination in the poetry and demonstrating a theory in practice which he had failed to articulate as philosophy. In Engell-Bate's words

An impartial and solid "philosophic reason, independent of all foreseen application to particular works and authors" [2:110-11], was making his actual applications of the greatest possible worth when finally they came, as they do come profusely in the second volume. (1:lxix)

The originary unity of the subject is the result of a circular process, in which the poem reveals its true self to a certain practice of reading. Since all productions of a poet will not have the authenticating marks, a special canon within a canon emerges, consisting of those writings which can be endowed with a special status, indicative of the author's presence. Thus Wordsworth can be criticized by Coleridge in the *Biographia* for exhibiting an undue predilection for the dramatic form in certain poems, from which one or other of two evils result. Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents
a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks. (2:135)

The subjectivity within a subjectivity, which is the imagination, can only be known by certain signs. One of the most important of these is the presentation of the written poem as the trace of a speaking voice, guarantee of the available presence of the poet, and of the spontaneous nature of his "utterance," which simply appears without effort. Lacking any a priori authority to command belief or attention, it is only by strategies of language that the poet can convince an audience of the authority of his voice. The merely material and mechanical aspects of writing do not reflect the essence of the poetry, and poems which exhibit the "mechanical adoption" of "figures of speech" are not true poetry but a "motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas" (Wordsworth 1802 Appendix, 1:160, 162) By contrast, "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (1800 Preface 1:126). "Produce" and "effect" are key words in Wordsworth as he discusses the strategies of those "desirous of producing the same effect" (1802 Appendix 1:160) that "genuine" poets produce—those who lack the originary source and rely instead on figurative language and meter to produce its illusion. But when he turns to "genuine poetry" and the question of "how this pleasure is produced" (1800 Preface 1:156), he has reached his "limits" and has no space to explain how the genuine poet can "throw over" his subjects "a certain colouring of imagination" (40). "Colour" is of course an ancient synonym for figurative language (cf. 1800 Preface 1:144), and it has a strange sound in the theory of a poetry that claims for its language the status of an unmediated transparency. Coleridge writes in the Biographia of the distinction between a "counterfeit and artificial persuasion" and "the person's own feelings [of] a real sense of inward power" (1:38), criticizing those whose self-presentations are governed "by their desire to appear men of genius" (1:42). The basic distinction is between those who "write orthographically, make smooth periods, and had the fashions of authorship almost literally at their fingers ends" and those who "in simplicity of soul, made their words immediate echoes of their feelings" (1:150).

But the absence of conspicuous mechanical signs of writing is itself an effect of a special kind of writing, equally material and equally "rhetorical" in its practice. Coleridge's own writing, from the "conversational poems" to the Notebooks, exhibits an impressive range of those techniques
and signs which, by a negative logic, we take as the authenticating traces of
the presence of a subject, and of the workings of his imagination. A
useful example, though seldom commented on, is his “The Blossoming of
the Solitary Date-Tree,” which can be read as an allegorical example of
the practice at its clearest. In his introductory note to the poem, Coleridge
first evokes the “guileful false serpent” responsible for the fall, who lacks
a soul but knows how to produce the effect of soul, pretending “to have the
heart of a Man, and to feel the yearning of a human soul for its counter­
part” (Poetical Works [EHC] 1:395). Coleridge’s poem aspires to the status
of a genuine “lament” in which the poet, like the date tree mentioned by
Linnaeus, “year after year had put forth a full show of blossoms, but never
produced fruit, till a branch from another date-tree had been conveyed
from a distance of some hundred leagues”. The poem itself is presented
allegorically as one of those “blossoms” which the reader must approach
from a similar distance, to join with the poet and complete his efforts to
produce the effects of an authentic lament in isolation:

The first word of the part of the poem that is not “wanting” (stanza 3)
gives us the term for the necessary afflatus from within: “imagination.”
But the part that is “missing” from the manuscript, the part that must be
completed by the reader, is also the inside part of the system. the imagi­
nation, and we must be both inside and outside this air-balloon-poem to
assure its ascent. The allegorical “fruit” of this date tree, its authentic
status as poem rather than infertile “blossom,” is our hearing it as the “lament” of a real subject. If we do hear it this way, becoming absorbed in its self-representation, we will be reading the poem as the trace of a subject, and a trace of the imagination of the poet. It will be a genuine poem only if we complete it; but if we complete it according to directions, we will experience our reading as the effect of the poet’s imagination, which is the source both of the poem and of our affect. The poem does indeed make a powerful plea for our complicity in this enterprise, but that plea is nothing but unfruitful flowers of rhetoric without our cooperation; and the most important and effective of its strategies is the bold and Coleridgean tactic of presenting the poem as a trace or fragment. The inadequacy of the trace, the loss of the “original,” prompts the adequation of our reading; its failure as conventional poetry is part of its certificate of authenticity, being too spontaneous, too authentic, too intimate, too “rude” to be captured by the written word. Genuine poetry is what gets lost in translation, and the exhibition of that loss, or fragmentary status, prompts us to fill the void with our own imagination of what is missing. Seen in this way, what might seem to be the special features of this fragment of writing, are an analogue of all written poetry that asks to be read as a trace (or “supplement” in Derrida’s terms) of the speaking voice of a genuine subject.

In the late twentieth century we have become accustomed to a variety of abdications of conscious authorial responsibility and intentional rhetoric in the production of a text which appeals to the reader’s sympathy and understanding. Freud has taught us to read the surface of discourse as a mode of secondary revision, with the powerfully conflicting (i.e., “authentic”) currents of the unconscious only partly or obliquely available through a special reading, or in special cases where the surface is ruptured. Read provides a typical example of the trope:

We can imagine in certain rare cases a phenomenon comparable to a “fault” in geology, as a result of which in one part of the mind the layers become discontinuous, and exposed to each other at unusual levels. . . . Some such hypothesis is necessary to explain that access, that lyrical intuition, which is known as inspiration and which in all ages has been the rare possession of those few individuals we recognize as artists of genius. (88)

Even those strategies of reading (and increasingly, of writing) which maintain that the writer does not write his language but is himself written by it as a passive agent, can be seen as strategies of authentication, providing
access to depth and meaning by reducing the functional presence of the
writer's conscious will.

What I have briefly suggested as a way of reading the "Date-Tree" poem
is equally applicable to "Kubla Khan" where the presented "fragment" of
a poem doubles—or is doubled by—its prose introduction. In that intro­
duction we have the description of an effect produced on the author by his
reading Purchas his Pilgrimage after taking an anodyne. That effect was the
composition of a poem, "if that indeed can be called composition in which
all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of
the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of
effort" (PW 1:296). On waking, before being called out on business, he
wrote down "the lines that are here preserved," of "what had been origin­
ally, as it were, given to him." And it is those lines which are "as it were,
given to" us, not for their poetic merits" but as a "psychological curiosity."

If we take the introduction at face value, we have a remarkable effect
produced on the author by a specified set of influences. The effect is the
double-production of dream images as things, and the correspondent ex­
pression of those things in words. In the written fragment we also have an
emphasis on a double production of the pleasure dome. First is that of the
Khan, whose (presumably verbal) decree effortlessly produces a pleasure
dome. An act of conscious will, using language, produces a spectacular
material result—but one whose material embodiment is also its vulnera­
bility, so that all that now remains is the remote trace of Purchas's writing.
The other production of the pleasure dome imaged in the poem does not
throw a "shadow," for it is both immaterial and conditional ("Could I re­
vive within me"). If the author could, he would enter the magic circle of the
imagination, so that those who "heard" the music would "see" the dome,
and would know him as a poet. But as Keats pointed out, if "Heard melo­
dies are sweet . . . those unheard / Are sweeter," and can better express a
"wild ecstasy" than our rhyme.

Words—what are they but a subtle matter? and the meaness of Matter
must they have, & the Soul must pine in them, even as the Lover who
can press kisses only [on] the garment of one indeed beloved . . . . O
what then are Words, but articulated Sighs of a Prisoner heard from his
Dungeon! powerful only as they express their utter impotence! Life may
be inferred, even as intelligence is from black marks on white paper—but
the black marks themselves are truly "the dead letter" (CN 2:§2998)
As "garment" the words of the poem remind us of our distance from the signified of the poetic subject, and within that subject of the imagination. But the material garment is necessary to create the effect of the existence of a privileged signification or idea (God, truth, imagination, or even the text) which is beyond logical demonstration or poetic representation, inaccessible to sensory perception. If the external garment is distorted, stretched or torn, the effect is all the more powerful, suggesting "that within which passes show" (Hamlet 1:2.83).

In Coleridge it is the result or goal of the poetic practice to hide the original and the source from view, thereby creating even more strongly the effect of their authentic originary existence elsewhere. While this effect is being produced, what is actually present to our perception is effectively being hidden—the production of that "miracle of rare device," which is as much dependent on its own tropes and strategies as the rejected mode of merely figurative language. There is no essential difference between "Kubla Khan" and a poem like the "Hymn Before Sun-Rise, In the Vale of Chamouni," which is often considered an embarrassment or scandal in the Coleridge oeuvre. Both use rhetorical means in order to produce the effect of our belief in an originary subjective affect ("the mood and Habit of mind out of which the Hymn rose" [CL 4:974]). But we have been trained by Coleridge and the Romantic tradition to suspend our disbelief willingly in one case, and to exercise it vigorously in the other. Coleridge had never been in the Vale of Chamouni (as he seemed to claim in the introductory note [PW 1:377]), so the poem cannot be the result of an experience of "objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment" (Wordsworth, Preface 51). The poem is not a trace of Cole-ridge’s encounter with the "sovrán blanc," but a trace of his reading. As Fruman observes,

The gentiana major, which Coleridge had found such "an affecting emblem of the boldness of human hope," was plucked from the notes of Brun, while the valley "which must needs impress every mind not utterly callous" with the shallowness of atheism, had never impinged upon the retina of the devout moralist. (Archangel 27)

In "Chamouni" Coleridge has apparently tried to hide the traces of his reading, and our discovery of the Brun poem with its notes unmasks the pose of the poem as a deliberate deceit. Yet in "Kubla Khan" the author
reveals a possible "source" of his psychological curiosity in his reading, and we are not so much disturbed by this as we are impressed by what the imagination can do with a few words of ancient prose.

Wordsworth, who emphasized the need for sensuous perception of objects, whose poetry is so often assumed to begin with the fact of witness, can nevertheless assert that the poet is characterized by "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events" (Preface 49). And even if Coleridge had been present in the Vale, to experience what Derrida calls "the natural wealth and original virtue of the sensory image" (Margins 210), it would have been only to experience the silent blankness of the mountain as yet another trace of the absent source, the God who resists all representations except those which signify His absence. The link between the signifiers and the transcendental signified that is missing in "Chamouni" is not that of participation or resemblance between the imagery of the poem and the physical location of its ostensible referents. It is the link between the trope of apostrophe (which governs the rhetoric of the poem) and the functional effect of that trope in producing an image of invested passion. As a distortion of ordinary speech, apostrophe can claim to be "a figure spontaneously adopted by passion, and it signifies metonymically, the passion that caused it." According to Wordsworth, this link is broken when a figure "which at first had been dictated by real passion" comes to be used by poets who, "perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect, without having the same animating passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of those figures of speech" (Wordsworth, Appendix 63–64). Thus Coleridge reports that "Mr. Wordsworth . . . condemned the Hymn in toto . . . as a specimen of the Mock Sublime" (CL 4:974). As a regression to the mainstream of eighteenth-century poetics, it exhibits its rhetorical techniques rather than hiding them.

The labor of composition must be hidden for the effect of the imagination to be produced, since the genuine poem must appear to have been spontaneously produced in the heat of original conception, contradicting the mundane belief that a very laborious process lies behind the production of most good poems.

Imagination!—lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my song
Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
Halted without a struggle to break through

(1805 Prelude 6, lines 593—98)

But if the imagination and the poetic traces that it is supposed to produce are themselves poetically produced, and if we read the traces as the poetic structures which they in fact are, we can see that they provoke us to experience the effect of the imagination by exerting our own efforts in cooperation with the poem, internalizing through our reading the same devices utilized by the poetic text. The poem simulates as its cause that which it cannot possess, and evokes in us that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The theory of the imagination demands this faith, as shown by Quixote's challenge to the merchants from Toledo who asked to see a picture of Dulcinea del Toboso before they would acknowledge her peerless beauty: "If I were to show her to you . . . what merit would there be in your confessing a truth so self-evident? The important thing is for you, without seeing her, to believe, confess, affirm, swear, and defend that truth" (45). If we cooperate with the demand, we find ourselves in the position so vividly described by Coleridge as his own:

I have too clearly before me the idea of a poet's genius to deem myself other than a very humble poet; but in the very possession of the idea, I know myself so far a poet as to feel assured; that I can understand and interpret a poem in the spirit of poetry . . . . Like the ostrich, I cannot fly, yet I have wings that give me the feeling of flight. . . . (CM [CC] 1:482, italics added)

Hazlitt's early review of the Biographia gives us a vision of Coleridge's efforts to fly that might have been written by the poet himself:

Mr. Coleridge has ever since [his early poetic efforts], from the combined forces of poetic levity and metaphysical bathos, been trying to fly . . . . going up in an air-balloon and coming down in a parachute made of the soiled and fashionable leaves of the Morning Post,—promising us an account of the Intellectual System of the Universe, and putting us off with a reference to a promised dissertation on the Logos, introductory to an intended commentary on the entire Gospel of St. John. (BL 1:lxvi)

But if Hazlitt was unable to experience the "feeling of flight" from the air-balloon of the Biographia, or the soiled leaves of the Post, he could still
recall the effect of the Sibylline leaves of Coleridge's early poetry, and their author as "the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius... . His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven," leaving behind the "recollec­tion" that rings in our ears "with never-dying sound" (Works 5:167). And that, too, is part of the special effect, not of individual works, but of the career and the canon of works seen as traces of the organic whole or trajectory of an individual subject, providing "the interest which arises from watching the progress, maturity, and even the decay of genius" (Table Talk January 1, 1834). Both Coleridge and Wordsworth have become poets whose image of greatness is intimately tied to the relative paucity of their "genuine" work in the vast sea of their "failures". The nonevents of Cole­ridge's Magnum Opus and Wordsworth's Recluse are nevertheless emphati­cally there as nonevents, certifying a different kind of genius for their authors. Our continued appreciation of that genius, in the spirit of its self-representation by Coleridge, bears out the maxim made "long since" by his "philosophical Friend" which Wordsworth repeats in the 1815 Essay:

—that every Author, as far as he is great and at the same time original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed; so has it been, so will it continue to be. (3:80)