

Theories of Addiction
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CHAPTER 4
BAD HABITS

*... only by forgetting that he is an
artistically creating subject, does man live
with any repose, security, and consistency.*

—Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense"



In April 1816, Samuel Taylor Coleridge placed himself voluntarily in the care of a doctor, the benevolent James Gillman. Coleridge had for years been desperate to break his opium habit, trying various cures, but to no avail. The time had come for strict measures, and he resolved "to submit himself to any regimen, however severe. With this in view," wrote Dr. Joseph Adams, who had been treating him, "he wishes to fix himself in the house of some medical gentleman, who will have the courage to refuse him any laudanum, and under whose assistance, should he be the worse for it, he may be relieved" (Gillman 271). After an initial interview that left Gillman, like Coleridge's Wedding Guest, "almost spell-bound, without the desire of release," the poet committed himself to the doctor's care for a period of one month. He remained eighteen years (273).

During that time it fell to Gillman not so much to cure Coleridge as to control his habit, watching over the sometime poet and philosopher to secure some semblance of health. Coleridge predicted it would be difficult. In a letter accepting the offer of asylum he promised to cooperate in every way that he could:

My ever wakeful reason, and the keenness of my moral feelings, will secure you from all unpleasant circumstances connected with me save only one, viz. the evasion of a specific madness. You will never *hear* any thing but truth from me:—prior habits render it out of my power to tell an untruth, but unless carefully observed, I dare not promise that I should not, with regard to this detested

poison, be capable of acting one. No sixty hours have yet passed without my having taken laudanum. (*Letters* 4: 630)

Although Coleridge cannot tell a lie, he can act one. His "specific madness" splits speech and agency, saying and doing, leaving him subject to an abject habit that compels behavior he cannot control. The therapeutic aim of his benign confinement is therefore to institute that control, to enforce the norm of the proper body, specifically through a regime of surveillance that can regulate not only his opium habit but also its characteristic madness. Coleridge finds comfort, if no full cure, in this personal asylum. With it comes renewed vitality as philosopher and moralist—as if asylum and philosophy are somehow allied. Indeed, Coleridge's turn in his later years toward philosophy and morals involves a turn away, not merely from opium and the monstrosity of habituation, but from poetry, too, and the truth of excess. What, one might ask, has been lost in the interminable task of rehabilitating Coleridge?



"JUNKIE"

Coleridge was an opium eater for well over half of his life.¹ By his own effusive testimony this bad habit was the bane of his existence. "Conceive a miserable wretch," he wrote to his friend Josiah Wade, "who for many years has been attempting to beat off pain, by a constant recurrence to the vice that produces it" (*Letters* 3: 511). This cycle of medication and withdrawal yielded a drug-dependent Coleridge, a self-medicating subject whose life and writing testified to the ill effects of his habit. To his contemporaries he presented an appearance of promise unfulfilled. Writing in 1824 William Hazlitt regretted that so prodigious a talent should produce so little: "All that he has done of moment, he had done twenty years ago: since then, he may be said to have lived on the sound of his own voice" (234). Thomas Carlyle advanced similar conclusions about Coleridge's career: "To the man himself Nature had given, in high measure, the seeds of a noble endowment; and to unfold it had been forbidden him" (quoted in Lefebure 30). Then there is Robert Southey, who set the standard for a whole tradition in criticism with his claim that "every person who had witnessed his habits, knows that for the greater—infinately the greater part—inclination and indulgence are the motives" (quoted in Cottle 373). Such judgments do not openly attribute Coleridge's apparent failure to his habit of eating opium. Other public figures—William Wilberforce, Clive of India, James Mackintosh, Thomas De Quincey—were after all known to be drug dependent without disastrous personal effect. But the habit of pathologizing Coleridge as somehow failed, broken, beaten—deviant—set in early and still shapes the way he is read, celebrated, or dismissed.²

The justification for this othering, particularly in our own time, has come

routinely to involve his use of opium. Thus Elizabeth Schneider, while admitting Coleridge was a habitual user, saves "Kubla Khan" from all unseemly pharmacological taint, concluding that the poem's "special character was not determined or materially influenced by opium" (17). Coleridge may have had a drug problem, but his poetry manifestly does not. Alethea Hayter is not so sure, suggesting that at least something in that poetry "emerged from a rare condition produced in him by opium," a special kind of reverie in which the external senses slept while the internal became hyperaware. She nonetheless views opium eating as deviant behavior, the affliction particularly of those "who long for relief from tension, from the failures and disappointments of their everyday life, who yearn for something which will annihilate the gap between their idea of themselves and their actual selves"—a psychological type she labels "The Inadequate Personality" (40). Coleridge, one is left to conclude, was in some deviant way inadequate. This opinion reaches its epitome in Molly Lefebure's biography, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, blithely subtitled *A Bondage of Opium*. It is here that Coleridge finally, after a century of moralizing criticism, achieves the stature of master addict. Lefebure dares to declare aloud what Coleridge's friends would only confide in whispers, that Coleridge's life and labors were a failure and that demon opium was the cause: "his predicament was not simply a matter of a sapped will. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's imaginative powers and concentration were literally destroyed by the drug: his intellectual capacity was fearfully eroded: his sense of truth hopelessly distorted (one of the major effects of morphine addiction)." This conclusion is of a piece with Lefebure's claim of intellectual honesty for her biography, which attempts for the first time "to present Samuel Taylor Coleridge as it seems that he really was—a junkie" (14).

Before we accept the moral, mental, and emotional deviance implied in that tag, however, we might notice a thing or two about Coleridge. For all the accusation of indolence, much of it admittedly his own, he seems able to have kept producing at a pace that would make any dean of humanities proud. The Bollingen edition of his works runs now to fourteen volumes and contains an astonishing variety of writing: essays, lectures, journalism, plays, poems, a philosophical treatise (or what was to become one), and marginalia. If Coleridge failed as a writer, he failed prolifically. Six thick volumes of letters and four annotated volumes of notebook entries only further prove the obvious point: the charge of indolence and its ill effects bears more on Coleridge's reputation as a "junkie" than his achievement as a writer. Perhaps criticism and not Coleridge has been inadequate. Perhaps the junkie needs rehabilitation, not so much to confirm as to comprehend his monstrosity. What, one might ask, is the truth of habituation, the wisdom of the junkie? The alternative to such questions is the soporific confidence of conventional, normalizing criticism.

FIX

For Coleridge the truth of an opium habit begins in pain. According to one pharmagraphical confession, opium came to him "like a charm, a miracle," relieving a painful swelling in his knees that had left him "almost bed-ridden for many months" (*Letters* 3: 476). On the basis of such testimony, and there is plenty of it in his letters and notebooks, Coleridge's life appears to have been a long if broken litany of pain. A weak constitution left him prone to sickness as a child. A desperate ague weakened him further as a schoolboy. Rheumatic fever laid him low for six months at seventeen, preparing the way for the joint pain that would hound him as an adult. Then come the various and extravagant symptoms that require self-medication: toothache, gum infection, migraine, inscrutable pains in limbs, chest, and bowels, the latter often accompanied by diarrhea or constipation of Herculean magnitude. "What I suffer in mere *pain* is almost incredible," Coleridge wrote to Tom Poole in 1801 (*Letters* 2: 721). Opium, at least initially, was a grand panacea, an all-purpose palliative that made the body, for a time anyway, bearable.

Although it is hard for us in retrospect to dispel the purple haze that hovers around it, for Coleridge and his contemporaries opium was an extremely effective and dependable pain reliever.³ In the words of its best historians, "At the opening of the nineteenth century . . . doctors and others still thought of opium not as dangerous or threatening, but as central to medicine, a medicament of surpassing usefulness which undoubtedly found its way into every home" (Berridge and Edwards xxv). Indeed, the hugely popular medical handbook, William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, recommends the use of opium in cases ranging from gout to rheumatism to migraine, pronouncing it "a valuable medicine when taken in proper quantity" (342). Coleridge himself maintained to his acquaintances that he had been "seduced into the use of narcotics" (Gillman 223) by such claims during his bout with swollen knees: "in a medical Journal I unhappily met with an account of a cure performed in a similar case (or what to me appeared so) by rubbing in of Laudanum, at the same time taking a given dose internally—It acted like a charm, a miracle!" (*Letters* 3: 476).

That "medical Journal" was most likely John Brown's *Elements of Medicine*, edited by Coleridge's friend Thomas Beddoes. In it Brown extols opium's power as a pain reliever. "The virtue of opium is great," he maintains, primarily because it excites torpid flesh: "The pains, that opium is calculated to remove, are all those, that depend upon general asthenic affection," among which Brown includes the pains of gout, chronic rheumatism, sore throat, headache, and gunshot wounds (1: 245n). Using laudanum to treat rheumatic pains was meant to stimulate the body, producing a sweat that would excite the whole system: "In order to render the sweat universal and of sufficient duration, it should be excited by Dover's powder, or laudanum, . . . and kept

up for twelve hours in full flow" (2: 168). Opium superinduces the bodily activity whose omission occasions pain—a precociously Freudian account of hypercathexis. Such are the exciting effects of opium.

But it also works as a dependable euphoriant. In Brown's considered opinion, opium "banishes melancholy, begets confidence, converts fear into boldness, makes the silent eloquent, and dastards brave. Nobody, in desperate circumstances, and sinking under a disrelish for life, ever laid violent hands on himself after taking a dose of opium, or ever will" (1: 285). Brown was only lending contemporary medical support to traditional pharmaceutical wisdom. In that wondrous farrago of fact and fantasy, *The Mysteries of Opium Revealed*, Dr. John Jones attests that "it is good and useful in all *Pain* and *grievous Sensations*" because "it takes off all Frets and turbulent Passions of the sensitive Soul, as . . . Melancholy Madness, or such as proceed from grievous thoughts or apprehensions, Losses, Crosses, Despair, Fears, Terrors, or the like" (328, 267). The reason: it induces "a pleasant *Ovation of the Spirits*" whose effect "has been compar'd (not without good cause) to a permanent gentle *Degree* of that *Pleasure*, which Modesty forbids the naming of" (20). Opium spiritualizes sexual pleasure permanently (for as long as its virtue lasts). Melancholia passes into a euphoria that is "like a most delicious and extraordinary *Refreshment* of the *Spirits* upon a very *good News*, or any other great cause of *Joy*" (20), though not without possible somatic side effects, since opium "is of great use to excite to *Venery*, cause *Erections*, to actuate a dull *Semen*" (357).

If Dr. Jones is a trustworthy authority in these matters (and his own extensive use of the drug at least merits respect), by the eighteenth century opium was the drug of choice whenever the melancholy fit should fall. When trained physicians add their medical imprimatur, as does George Young in *A Treatise on Opium*, a questionable narcotic acquires the cachet of a potent panacea. Coleridge may complain to Cottle of "a depression too dreadful to be described" (*Letters* 1: 319), but a time-honored remedy stood close at hand. Opium both reduced pain and produced euphoria—a lovely fix indeed. Hence John Murray's belief, recorded in his *System of Materia Medica and Pharmacy*, that "as a palliative and anodyne, it is indeed the most valuable article of the materia medica, and its place could scarcely be supplied by any other" (quoted in Berridge and Edwards 63).



HABIT

Such medicine could be habit forming, as indeed it was for Coleridge. He complains throughout his letters of the enervating effects of taking opium, as in the following confession, directed to his friend J. J. Morgan in 1814: "By the long Habit of the accursed Poison my Volition (by which I mean the faculty *instrumental* to the Will, and by which alone the Will can realize itself—it's

[sic] Hands, Legs, & Feet, as it were) was completely deranged, at times frenzied, dis severed itself from the Will, & became an independent faculty" (*Letters* 3: 489). Here again Coleridge describes his "specific madness," which on this account splits volition from will, producing compulsive behavior un-governed by conscious intention. Apparently an opium habit has nothing to do with will. It produces a body that prevailing norms cannot accommodate.

Before dismissing this explanation as the sophisticated trick of a junkie, one might ponder more closely Coleridge's understanding of habit. In a curious notebook meditation, Coleridge interrogates its strange agency: "Is not *Habit* the Desire of a Desire?—As Desire to Fruition, may not the faint, to the consciousness *erased*, Pencil-mark-*memorials* or relicts of Desire be to Desire itself in its full prominence?" (*Notebooks* 1: 1421). In the metaphor that Derrida has since made famous, Coleridge likens habit to writing, the non-conscious, material anteriority of speech. Habit is to desire as written script to its meaning. Where for Derrida, writing designates a constituent absence in the emergence of meaning, for Coleridge it bespeaks a constituent loss in the emergence of desire.

For habit, like writing, re-presents what is *not* present—in this instance desire, as in the similar case of Rousseau's quaint little compulsion.⁴ It does so by consolidating traces of desire, "Pencil-mark-*memorials* or relicts," as Coleridge calls them. These traces, "to the consciousness *erased*," memorialize the "full prominence" of a desire not fully present within them. They remember, so to speak, a constitutive loss in the emergence of desire. Habit, then, is best understood as a mode of somatic memory. It memorializes desire in behaviors that demonstrate desire's loss, so forcefully in fact that habit itself can come to substitute for "Fruition": "May not the Desirelet, a, so correspond to the Desire, A, that the latter being excited may revert wholly or in great part to its exciting cause, a, instead of sallying out of itself toward an external Object, B?" (*Notebooks* 1: 1421). In a reversal worthy of Derrida, Coleridge wonders whether desire might realize fruition in the habit that produces it. Cause and effect would merge in a logical loop wherein the loss of desire is a condition of its emergence. Habit represents a strange presence indeed, if it somatically remembers what is interminably lost. But that seems to be Coleridge's conclusion, which may explain his heartrending desire for a world without habit, without loss, without opium:

If I could secure you full Independence, if I could give too all my original Self healed & renovated from all infirm Habits; & if by all the forms in my power I could bind myself more effectively even in relation to Law, than the Form out of my power would effect—then, *then*, would you be the remover of my Loneliness, my perpetual Companion? (*Notebooks* 1: 1421)

Coleridge looks here to law to rehabilitate a will enervated by infirm habits, a prospect that will appear increasingly attractive over the years. But for the

moment one might examine the habit he finds so debilitating. For if habit is a mode of memory, and if opium is habit forming, then what, one might wonder, does an opium habit remember? Might Coleridge's abject habit memorialize more than just "inclination and indulgence"?



RUSH

Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness. (Nietzsche, *Tragedy* 36)

So writes Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the excessive pathos that the Greeks associated with the approach of their god Dionysus. With Dionysus comes great terror, and yet ecstasy too. That is why the closest familiar analogy to these Dionysian emotions is intoxication. Nietzsche's word is "Rausch," the disruptive force of which lingers in the colloquial use in English of "rush" to describe overwhelming occurrences, particularly of a pharmaceutical sort. What a rush.

But one must listen closely to catch the undertone of Nietzsche's words. For the Dionysian is not a supernatural power that seizes the human in times of intoxication. Nietzsche describes it, along with its incommensurable counterpart the Apollonian, as a play of "artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself" (38). Nothing apart from nature appears, then, in the rush of Dionysus. On the contrary, in the Dionysian, nature plays the artist, to the terror and the ecstasy of humankind:

Schopenhauer has depicted for us the tremendous *terror* which seizes man when . . . suddenly dumfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principle of sufficient reason, in some one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the *Dionysian*, which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication. (36)

The Dionysian is a double hit, at once bane and bliss. It comes to disrupt and to incite. It stirs feelings of terror *and* ecstasy. You would have to type these words one over the other to represent their simultaneity in the Dionysian. So much for the proper body. Allied to intoxication, this pathos disturbs its regulatory effects.

The coming of Dionysus challenges the propriety, exchangeability, and able-bodied agency of the proper body. Recall that Coleridge observed in his abject

habit a disreverence of will and volition. The latter acquired a haunting life of its own ungovernable by the individual called Coleridge. For himself and his many detractors this dissolution of autonomous agency bespeaks a total collapse of moral force: "inclination and indulgence." But as Nietzsche says,

there are some who, from obtuseness or lack of experience, turn away from such phenomena as from "folk diseases," with contempt or pity born of the consciousness of their own "Healthy-mindedness." But of course such poor wretches have no idea how corpse-like and ghostly their so-called "healthy-mindedness" looks when the glowing life of the Dionysian revelers roars past them. (37)

Could it be that Coleridge's habit, as somatic memory, recalls this "glowing life"? Perhaps the contempt and pity heaped on the opium eater registers the terrible ecstasy of the Dionysian, not to mention the relative ghostliness of normal healthy-mindedness.

Habit as memory; opium habit as Dionysian memory: these are the possibilities that Coleridge the junkie confronts. Nietzsche's interest in the Dionysian, as one of "nature's art-impulses" (38), centers in its occurrence, not merely as intoxication, but as nonimagistic art. Born of the collapse of the Apollonian *principium individuationis*, a Dionysian art exceeds the image, allowing something to sound for which we otherwise lack ears:

The wisdom of Silenus cried "Woe! Woe!" to the serene Olympians. The individual, with all his restraint and proportion, succumbed to the self-oblivion of the Dionysian states, forgetting the precepts of Apollo. *Excess* revealed itself as truth. Contradiction, the bliss born of pain, spoke out from the very heart of nature. And so, wherever the Dionysian prevailed, the Apollonian was checked and destroyed. (47)

The truth of excess that attends the Dionysian must of necessity exceed images and norms. It disrupts the regulatory force of the proper body and its proprietary agency. Hence the self-oblivion of the individual, whose *loss* of identity and proper embodiment best figures the truth of excess. Only a nonimagistic art can convey this loss, which is why music is for Nietzsche the purest example of Dionysian art. Music, like memory, occurs as strange presence. It can be heard only as it passes away; loss is the medium of its occurrence. And in its interminable loss of presence whispers a bliss born of pain.



LOSS

This is the real hallmark of the coming of Dionysus: the pathos of contradiction, the simultaneity of bliss and pain. As Nietzsche describes it,

only the curious blending and duality in the emotions of the Dionysian revelers remind us—as medicines remind us of deadly poisons—of the phenomenon that

pain begets joy, that ecstasy may wring sounds of agony from us. At the very climax of joy there sounds a cry of horror or a yearning lamentation for an irretrievable loss. (40)

When the Dionysian occurs, it awakens a memory, the lost memory of loss in the midst of deepest joy. When the Dionysian occurs as art, this memory becomes a force that sustains rather than simply destroys—sustains *as* it destroys. That is why Nietzsche can declare that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*" (52): life, which like music occurs only as it passes away, which deforms even as it produces all that is beautiful, valuable, or true, this life of loss can only be justified—eternally—through affirmation.⁵ Dionysian art affirms life by remembering its irretrievable loss while making that memory the means of its further occurrence. It is crucial to distinguish here between "loss" in this affirmative, productive sense and "lack" in a privative and originary sense. The latter descends from Hegel as the engine that drives dialectic. However dialectical Nietzsche's polemic may appear in *The Birth of Tragedy*, its turn toward the Dionysian does not arise as antithesis to the thesis of the Apollonian. Rather it describes an incommensurable art impulse whose productivity occurs as loss, even as dying organisms beget new life.⁶ It is in this sense that life becomes an "aesthetic phenomenon": old forms beget new as loss articulates excess. "All perform their tragic play, / . . . / Gaiety transfiguring all that dread" (Yeats 159). Art might thus become a means of rehabilitating a life of loss through affirmation.

Such medicines must at times remind one of poisons. The loss they remember will from some perspectives appear deadly. If it seems right to approach Coleridge's opium habit as Dionysian memory, then it should come as no surprise that through it excess reveals itself as, if not quite truth, then perhaps life. That abject habit may memorialize an irretrievable loss his poetry also remembers—and affirms. This possibility would, however, require a rehabilitation of the conventional image of Coleridge. He would turn from weak victim of "inclination and indulgence" into a creature of excess and strange delay, a belated votary of Dionysus, whose coming destroys the proper body along with its will:

In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet, and not the cheap wisdom of Jack the Dreamer. (Nietzsche, *Tragedy* 60)

Coleridge the Dionysian: that is the way he ought to be remembered. This great Hamlet of a writer languished out of knowledge, not "inclination and

... for a time all came to him, as Nietzsche suggests it must, "as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live" (60). If art heals Dionysian man, poetry was Coleridge's best medicine, better far than opium, turning a knowledge of excess—"the essence of things"—toward an affirmation of the life of loss. For a time.



HONEYDEW

Ultimately Coleridge submitted to a new control, but not before composing some astonishing lyrics. Among them the most notorious remains "Kubla Khan: or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment."⁷ Although in the apology that prefaces the poem he admits to publishing it "rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed poetic merits" (*Poetical Works* 1: 295), few would accept his judgment. "Kubla Khan" haunts modern writing like a monster, inspiring endless articles and even books with just fifty-four magical lines. This lost dream of loss has been amazingly productive, and contrary to the healthy-minded claims of so much of that criticism, the poem begins in opium. Coleridge confesses in the text that intervenes between the title and the poem that "Kubla Khan" came to him in a reverie—"a profound sleep, at least of the external senses." And he is frank if disingenuous about what produced it: "an anodyne" that had been "prescribed . . . in consequence of a slight indisposition." Coleridge forces one to approach his "vision in a dream" as an occurrence that opium made possible; whether it really happened that way or not is beside the point. Unless the poem is printed without its preface, one only enters Xanadu under the influence of opium.

And the reason should be obvious by now. "Kubla Khan," like Coleridge's opium habit, memorializes the Dionysian. Coleridge comes close to admitting as much in the poem's concluding description of the enraptured poet: "he on honeydew hath fed / And drunk the milk of Paradise" (*Poetical Works* 1: 295, hereafter cited by line). The lines recall Socrates' description in *Ion* of lyric poets in the act of composition: "they are seized with the Bacchic transport, and are possessed—as the bacchantes, when possessed, draw milk and honey from the rivers, but not when in their senses. So the spirit of the lyric poet works" (Plato 220). Socrates associates the lyric poet in the state of composing with Dionysian states. So does Coleridge. And so does Nietzsche. For the latter, lyric as opposed to epic poetry announces the Dionysian. The ancients knew why: "they took for granted *the union*, indeed the *identity*, of the *lyrist with the musician*" (49). This union of music and poetry gives the lyric its peculiar force. Language works differently in the lyric than in other kinds of discourse. It refers, not to things, but to music itself: "in the poetry of the folk song, language is strained to its utmost that it may *imitate music* . . . the

word, the image, the concept here seeks an expression . . . and now feels in itself the power of music" (53, 54). If music, as strange presence, passes away as it occurs, and if the language of the lyric strains to imitate such music, then the lyric memorializes the loss of its own occurrence. It occurs as a loss that announces excess. Hence the double structure of lyrical *mimesis*: the lyric imitates the occurrence (in language) of its occurrence (as music), a *mimesis* not merely of its own form, but of its formation and deformation. The lyric, in the music of its evanescence, remembers the Dionysian.



DULCIMER

It is a truism, though not quite an empty one, to say that "Kubla Khan" is the most musical of poems. But its music is no mere ornament of a beguiling little lyric. It indicates the operation of this lyrical *mimesis*. Coleridge himself describes the double structure of such *mimesis* when he relates the manner of the poem's composing, "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" (*Poetical Works* 1: 95). The composition of "Kubla Khan" occurs exactly as Nietzsche suggests it should, since "the lyric genius is conscious of a world of images and symbols—growing out of his state of mystical self-abnegation and oneness" (50). Images arise as things with a parallel production of correspondent expression, without consciousness of effort. This double structure of occurrence involves two components: images and expressions. Take the former for language and the latter for music and "Kubla Khan" turns Dionysian. The question to ask of its language then becomes, not what are the texts in which it originates, but how does it imitate its occurrence as music? What is the manner of its passing away?⁸

Loss—and its productivity—is the preoccupation of Coleridge's preface and poem alike. The legendary tale of the man from Porlock is a parable of loss. Disrupted from his reverie, the poet returns an hour later to find that

though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas, without the after restoration of the latter. (*Poetical Works* 1: 296)

Not the vision but the vision's loss is what Coleridge undertakes to imitate, and as he does so he doubles, triples, even quadruples his account: with first the story itself of the distracting businessman, then a self-quotation that misrepresents loss by promising an impossible restoration, then a resolution (in Greek) to sing a sweeter song, originally "Today" but changed mercifully

remembrance of Kubla's miraculous pleasure dome. These multiple accounts of Reverie Lost imitate the occurrence of music, making loss constitutive of the poem's emergence. That is why its language and imagery, when finally they come, imitate their passing. Kubla's dome, for all its rare device, appears first doomed (by "Ancestral voices prophesying war!"[30]), then dimmed to nothing (vanishing in the abyss between stanzas). And when a poet steps in at the end to revive it, his only access comes through a music that is always already gone:

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice! (42–47)

A poetry built of music passes instantly away. But in "Kubla Khan," with its apology and its preface, its self-quotation and its sublime imagery, loss turns productive. Its musical occurrence, like the somatic memory of opium eating, announces excess. In this manner, a Dionysian art affirms the life of loss: it multiplies the memorials of its occurrence. Sweet music indeed.



LOON

But such music is as difficult to endure as it is to create. Among the hazards of the Dionysian is a loss of interest in life. Hamlet is the great exemplar because the knowledge of excess that comes in the horrific image of his father's ghost renders all the world absurd: "now no comfort avails any more; longing transcends a world after death, even the gods; existence is negated along with its glittering reflection in the gods or in an immortal beyond" (*Tragedy* 60). A Dionysian art intervenes to exhaust these feelings of nausea and absurdity, producing plays within plays, poems within poems. But a danger persists that the loss constitutive of such art will receive, out of fear or grief or weariness, a transcendental interpretation, a normalizing critique.⁹ Excess succumbs to intelligibility, effecting a loss of loss. The ecstatic agonies of the Dionysian, those pains of opium's dubious pleasures, can just as easily receive transcendental as lyrical treatment.

Something of the sort occurs to Coleridge as Dionysian artist: he turns from the lyric, with its musical excess, toward the more certain world of philosophy and the proper body. Habits of opium and poetry become rehabilitated through transcendence and the norm of embodiment it enforces. And in this Coleridge resembles his own most powerful creation, the Ancient Mariner,

transcendental interpretation:

O Wedding Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.
(*Poetical Works* 1: 208, hereafter cited by line)

Like "Kubla Khan," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" makes the occurrence of loss constitutive of its narration, but unlike that more musical poem it interprets that occurrence transcendently. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" rehabilitates the Dionysian by rendering its ecstatic agonies intelligible. This baleful poem prophesies Coleridge's turn away from poetry.¹⁰

"Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!" (11). The Wedding Guest sees a glint of madness in the Mariner's basilisk eye. Beyond the pale of the quotidian, on the very threshold of a wedding feast, the Mariner tells an agonizing tale of loss and recovery that arises compulsively out of the simple question: "What manner of man art thou?" (577). If the tale's answer is Dionysian man, then its teller must indeed be crazed, lost in the occurrence of the memory of excess. Coleridge takes great care to document the madness of the Mariner. The extravagance not only of his tale's content but also of its sheer length indicts him. In a profusion of words and images it speaks of a loss of speech:

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot. (135–38)

In so excessively speaking the loss of speech the Mariner makes loss constitutive of the tale he tells. He is an artist in the Dionysian mode, narrating loss as a means to narration.

But he is mad too—medically speaking. In its excess, the Mariner's speech is painfully consistent with medical descriptions of melancholia, that traditional pathology of loss. Writing originally in Latin in *A Methodical System of Nosology* (1808), William Cullen places melancholia in the class of diseases called Neuroses ("sense and notion injured, without an original fever, and without any local disorder"), under the order of mental illness called Vesaniae ("a disorder of function of the judging faculty of the mind, without fever or sleepiness"), and defines it thus: "a partial insanity without dyspepsia," where "partial insanity" involves the perception "of false relations of things so as to excite unreasonable passions and actions," and where dyspepsia would indicate hypochondriasis (140). Melancholia begins in false perception and produces deviant behavior. William Pargeter, owner of a private lunatic asylum, published a treatise titled *Observations on Maniacal Disorders* (1792)

in which he claims that in melancholia "the error of the intellectual power is confined principally, often entirely, to one subject" (6). In *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity* (2d ed., 1806), Thomas Arnold, M.D., concurs, defining melancholia as "a permanent delirium, without fury or fever, in which the mind is dejected, and timorous, and usually employed about one object" (16). Because delirium without observable bodily ailment appears almost exclusively in language, aberrant speech becomes the main symptom of melancholia in the medical discourse of Coleridge's day. Speaking obsessively about a single subject, the melancholiac disrupts the linguistic norms that constitute and confirm health for the physician. The result is the loss of social relations. "God save thee, ancient Mariner! / From the fiends, that plague thee thus!" (79–80): no wonder the Wedding Guest fears the Mariner. He is mad; his speech proclaims it in the idiom of its own excess.



STRANGE POWER OF SPEECH

And yet talk is the Mariner's therapy too. The loss that is constitutive of his narration brings his identity to presence, makes him visible and audible to both the Wedding Guest and ourselves. Speech has the strange power of recovering what was lost. But bear in mind the double movement of re-recovery—at once to uncover, and cover again; to recover is as much to lose as to possess. Every time the Mariner tells his tale he loses anew the identity it presents. Hence his painfully compulsive narration, born in agony and chanted in passion:

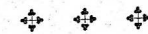
Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns. (582–85)

Speech meliorates an agony otherwise without image, but only temporarily. The Mariner's identity, re-recovered in the tale, is lost in its telling. The whole strange story of the Albatross and the water snakes occurs in compulsive response to that astonished interrogative (What manner of man . . . ?), and the manner of the Mariner disappears in its appearance. That is why he frequently repeats his performance. Loss is constitutive of its coming to presence, the characteristic manner of the Dionysian. Doomed compulsively to repeat a tale that unmakes him, the Mariner announces excess.

But he does not do so in a mode of affirmation. One of the effects of his disturbing tale, in spite of its manner, is to assert a transcendental and therefore normative interpretation of its constitutive loss. Its strange power of speech produces, in its excess, an authoritative speech of power. It becomes possible

therefore to interpret the "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in metaphysical rather than Dionysian terms, an interpretation advanced by its famous marginal gloss, which reaches the conclusion that Mariner must "teach, by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth" (*Poetical Works* 1: 209). Perhaps this explains Coleridge's remark to Anna Laetitia Barbauld regarding the moral of his poem: "in my own judgment the poem had too much" (*Table Talk* 87). Too much morality will assure the loss of loss. The Mariner can easily be interpreted—he does so himself—as beholden to a higher power. His identity comes to be defined once and for all by a discourse of moral reference and evaluation. And the loss constitutive of his narration receives a transcendental interpretation. This time it is for good.

Then there's the fate of the Albatross. Its death is nothing in itself, a mere event in an eventful world. But interpretation of that event is everything, at least to the Mariner. When the Albatross ceases to be a just bird and becomes as well a signifier in a moral discourse, it serves to regulate the strange speech that produces the Mariner's identity: "Instead of the cross, the Albatross / About my neck was hung" (141–42). A new morality naturalizes the old in this appropriation, substituting for the sign of the cross that of the Albatross, which signifies by another substitution the Mariner himself. The identity that this moral discourse produces is apparently more natural but no less responsible than its earlier Christian avatar. When the Mariner blesses the water snakes he legitimates this discourse. Even though the act itself might as easily affirm the beauty of a life of loss, its interpretation privileges a higher power: "Surely my kind saint took pity on me, / And I blessed them unaware. / The selfsame moment I could pray" (286–88). The Mariner's strange speech produces in him an identity that, however menacing, ultimately depends on a higher power. Melancholia receives transcendental treatment as prayer rehabilitates delirium. Thereafter the Mariner can be interpreted as a morally responsible, self-disciplining man.¹¹



ABSTRUSE RESEARCH

Coleridge struggled against opium to become that kind of man. It is a common place of criticism that Coleridge turns from poetry to philosophy and moral about the time he tries finally to kick his "accursed Habit" (*Letters* 3: 476). Transcendental philosophy rehabilitates a melancholy Coleridge, treating the life of loss with abstruse truth. One might say with Nietzsche that "her philosophic thought overgrows art and compels it to cling close to the trunk of dialectic" (*Tragedy* 91). Nietzsche is speaking of the Platonic dialogues but the point applies to Coleridge: his writing turns away from lyric and toward philosophy, away from the truth of excess and toward the power of law as proper embodiment. Dionysian man yields to the type Nietzsche associates

with Socrates, the theoretical man, who "with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of a panacea" (97). Not opium, not poetry, but philosophy finally becomes for Coleridge the elixir of life. As early as 1802 Coleridge attests to its therapeutic powers:

And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.
(*Poetical Works* 1: 367)

Philosophy, too, can be habit forming. A Truth habit is much more acceptable than a drug habit. Coleridge's turn to philosophy is a turn away from—and forgetting of—the Dionysian, which so invigorated his earlier poetry. His philosophical alternative institutes assimilation to moral discourse as the condition of health and happiness—as indeed it was for Coleridge himself in his desperate efforts to abandon opium: "In the one crime of OPIUM, what crime have I not made myself guilty of!" (*Letters* 3: 511). By finally fulfilling his long-standing resolution to place himself "in the House, and under the constant eye of some medical man" (*Letters* 3: 398), Coleridge erects a material structure of moral law and discipline, a private asylum that, internalized, would ameliorate his "specific madness" and produce lasting recovery.¹² That this asylum so obviously resembles the structure of the late-eighteenth-century asylums for the insane shows how such practices coordinate private and public agencies.¹³ There is something of the asylum about Coleridge's later philosophical writings, a tendency to reproduce its relations of power as the condition not only of personal and political health but even of artistic freedom.



ASYLUM

For the great French physician and psychiatrist Philippe Pinel, humane reformer of the asylum, the treatment of mental illness was primarily a moral matter. Quoting the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he describes his approach as follows: "In the moral treatment of insanity, lunatics are not to be considered as absolutely devoid of reason, i.e. as inaccessible by motives of fear and hope, and sentiments of honour. . . . In the first instance it is proper to gain an ascendancy over them, and afterwards to encourage them" (103). It would be easy but ill-advised to overlook the institutional framework in which Pinel's treatment occurs. Although it aims at producing a morally responsible, self-disciplining individual, it does so in the confines of an asylum whose

structure it works to internalize. According to Pinel, cure depends less on the inmates themselves than on the character and behavior of its primary moral agent and exemplar, the governor. Successful treatment becomes possible only "at a well regulated asylum . . . subject to the management of a governor, in every respect qualified to exercise over [the inmates] an irresistible controul" (59–60). The power granted to this governor is a direct corollary to the fundamental "laws" of the asylum:

to allow . . . all the latitude of personal liberty consistent with safety; to proportion the degree of coercion to the demands upon it from his extravagance of behaviour; to use mildness of manners or firmness as occasion may require,—the bland arts of conciliation, or the tone of irresistible authority pronouncing an irreversible mandate. (83)

The "enlightened maxims of humanity" that guide Pinel's moral treatment produce an individual whose autonomy is an afterimage of institutional power and its proper embodiment (68). When an inmate internalizes the governor and regulates speech accordingly he or she is pronounced cured.

For all its humanity, then, Pinel's moral treatment of insanity privately incarnates institutional power. It produces the truth of recovery by erecting an asylum within, an internalized site of self-discipline. Foucault describes the effects of such therapeutics as the instantiation of "a sort of invisible tribunal in permanent session" (*Discipline and Punish* 265). The great achievement of Pinel's asylum as a social institution is to have made possible this private tribunal: "The asylum in the age of positivism, which it is Pinel's glory to have founded, is not a free realm of observation, diagnosis, and therapeutics; it is a juridical space where one is accused, judged, and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trial in psychological depth—that is, by remorse" (269). If the asylum becomes that institutional space that produces the truth of recovery, then Coleridge is one of its finest achievements. That his was a domestic and not institutional arrangement only exaggerates the force of its example. By submitting to the care of a physician in order to control his opium habit, Coleridge not only becomes the first celebrity to enter rehab, he also becomes a living testimonial to the power of this juridical space and the effects of its internalization in the psychodrama of remorse, recovery, and relapse. Through his example is born a legion of recovering habitués. But something dies, too, or at least falls silent: the life of excess as somatic memory. Coleridge's recovery is as much a matter of forgetting as self-discipline. Lost to memory is the life of loss and the monstrous force of Dionysian art. Knowledge comes increasingly to take its place, a knowledge that reproduces institutional relations of power as a condition of proper embodiment and human health. Transcendental philosophy thus fits neatly in the juridical space of the asylum. Both institute bodily control over bad habit by appealing to higher power. Poetry is all but forgotten.

IMAGINATION

Dionysian poet turns transcendental philosopher. Even Coleridge's aesthetic theory betrays a trace of the asylum. Witness the influential theoretical statement Coleridge made in *Biographia Literaria* (1815–17) concerning the "esemplastic power" of Imagination. It's a peculiar statement, since to define this creative faculty Coleridge immediately divides it in two:

The Imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. (*Works* 7:1: 304)

Although typically taken to establish the divine agency of imagination, this statement also betrays its institutional origins. For the double structure of imagination reproduces at the origin of the work of art the power relations of the asylum. However "eternal" the "act of creation in the infinite I Am," the individual creative act is but the echo of an imperious moral authority. It is regulated by a power that, although identified with God, resembles in its agency that of Law as Coleridge describes it in *The Friend*, no. 7, "Essay IV: On the Principles of Political Philosophy." Both regulate the visual: imagination as "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception," law as an "awful power . . . acting on natures pre-configured to its influences." And both legislate the verbal, assimilating the acceptable in art and politics to an authoritative moral discourse: "This is the Spirit of Law! the Lute of Amphion, the Harp of Orpheus! This is the true necessity, which compels man into the social State, now and always, by a still-beginning, never-ceasing force of moral Cohesion" (*Works* 4:2: 100–01). Coleridge finds in such necessity a cure for his "specific madness," a reunion of will and volition in the operation of "an invisible power . . . a Power, which was therefore irresistible, because it took away the very Will of resisting . . . acting on natures preconfigured to its influence" (100). Law is such a power and Imagination is another. For all its transcendental pretensions, Coleridge's Imagination has social origins. Like Pinel's governor, like "the awful power of Law," it preconfigures the artist to respond to its influence. Hence the moral authority of its products. The modern Imagination, at least as Coleridge defines it, works in the juridical space of an invisible asylum, which may be why the art of the insane inspires such fascination: the dangers of the Dionysian ever menace the moralized Imagination.

But it is not Imagination alone that regulates this space and the bodies it masters. That task requires another institution, the character and function of

which becomes the subject of Coleridge's late tract, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each* (1830). The turn away from bad habits and toward the proper body fulfills itself in Coleridge's advocacy of religion as the institutional means of producing it. A healthy body politic requires pervasive assimilation among its members to a regulatory moral discourse. Institutionally, that task falls to the church, "inasmuch as the morality which the state requires in its citizens for its own well-being and ideal immortality, and without reference to their spiritual interest as individuals, can only exist for the people in the form of religion" (*Works* 10: 69). Religion thus conceived is a more political than spiritual institution, reproducing a moral unanimity that regulates national identity. The kind of identity that arises in Coleridge's poetry as a means of meliorating the life of loss becomes the foundational unit of a self-disciplining body politic, at least in that social order whose history and tradition coincide with England's: "in regard of the grounds and principles of action and conduct, the State has a right to demand of the National Church, that its instructions should be fitted to diffuse throughout the people *legality*, that is, the obligations of a well-calculated self-interest, under conditions of a common interest under common laws" (*Works* 10: 54). To the established church Coleridge assigns the task of spreading this identity throughout the nation. State religion reproduces and regulates the health of the proper body in liberal society. The politics of the conservative sage of Highgate are in part the prejudices of a reformed opium habitué, dependent no longer on drugs but on ideas and institutions that promote bodily health and happiness. Religion truly is the opiate of the masses.



CODA: OF TRUTH AND EXCESS

Pondering his life from a posthumous perspective, Coleridge anticipates its value as exemplary narrative: "After my death, I earnestly entreat, that a full and unqualified narration of my wretchedness, and of its guilty cause, may be made public, that at least some little good may be effected by the direful example!" (*Letters* 3: 511). As case study and moral fable Coleridge's narco narrative might represent something true. This link between truth and excess warrants further treatment. Coleridge begins his life as artist in the manner of the Dionysian. He ends up a philosopher, preferring morality to music. Lost in the interim is the abundant life of loss, the disrupting rush of excess ever deforming living forms. Coleridge may have gained discipline, security, and even health as a result, but at the cost of forgetting the creative life that his poetry remembers.

Oh, that this Socrates might longer have practiced his strange music! But for a few harrowing recoveries, the lyric was lost to Coleridge. His melancholy story is not simply that of a hapless junkie. It tells of loss that announce

excess. It bespeaks an interminable disappearance. Little wonder then that the melancholy Coleridge should seek pharmaceutical or philosophical treatments "here, when the danger to his will is greatest" (*Tragedy* 60). Health requires a return to social relations, however desperate the means: "And did I not groan at my unworthiness, & be miserable at my state of Health, its effects, and effect-trebling Causes? O yes!—Me miserable! O yes!—Have mercy on me, O bring something *out* of me! For there is no *power*, (and if that *can* be, less *strength*) in aught within me! Mercy! Mercy!" (*Notebooks* 2: 2453). Is criticism capable of rehabilitating Coleridge? Of recovering the truth of excess, the wisdom of the junkie? Mercy, mercy!

CHAPTER 5

CRAZY BODY

Owing to dyspepsia afflicting my system, and the possibility of any additional derangement of the stomach taking place, consequences incalculably distressing would arise, so much so indeed as to increase nervous irritation, and prevent me from attending to matters of overwhelming importance, if you do not remember to cut the mutton in a diagonal rather than a longitudinal form.

—De Quincey to a cook



If you are what you eat, what is the diet of a transcendentalist? All prejudices, says Nietzsche, come from the intestines—a witty remark, considering that his word for prejudices, "Vorurtheile," gestures toward something that precedes judgment.¹ Bowels before cognition? De Quincey thinks so too. In an entry to a diary he kept in 1803, he makes a portentous claim:

The intimate connection, which exists between the body and the mind, has never (to my knowledge) been sufficiently enlarged on in theory or insisted on in practice. To shew the ultimate cause of this would be very difficult though not (I think) impossible. But on the present occasion it would be almost superfluous; because, throughout the whole of the following system, I suppose previously that the reader admits the fundamental points on which it is grounded; and, even though he should not, I don't care a damn. (Lindop 98)

Perhaps De Quincey should have cared a damn. If critical tradition is any indication, few of his readers have shared those fundamental points. He continues to be treated as the guilty subject of private suffering, the sad penitent of substance abuse, or, more recently, the pale-mouthed prophet of imperialist dreams.² But if we take seriously De Quincey's hint that the intimate