# Otherworldly spaces in selected poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats

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**Abstract**

**Otherworldly spaces in selected poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats**

A literary survey points out that spatiality – despite recent trends – does not receive much attention in the study of Romanticism. This dissertation aims to fill this gap and investigates the otherworldly realms that Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats create in their poetry. The term *otherworld* is used to denote any space that is not actuality and includes spaces like the pleasure-dome at Xanadu in "Kubla Khan" and "the cold hill's side" in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".

The specific focus is on the way the poets create these worlds. Despite several similarities, the two poets' worlds differ in that Coleridge alludes to the transcendent and emphasises mystery and the vastness of the universe. He does so by using images that reveal only part of the otherworld created and by focusing attention on that which cannot be perceived by the senses. In contrast, Keats's focus is on the particular, highlighting the otherworldly within that which is known. He achieves a familiar unfamiliarity by alluding strongly to the senses and revealing what he called the "truth" of the objects contemplated in his poems.

The findings are based on a hermeneutic, biographical and historical approach rooted in the two writers' prose.

**Opsomming**

**Vreemde ruimtes in geselekteerde gedigte deur Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats**

'n Literatuuroorsig dui aan dat ruimtelikheid – ten spyte van onlangse tensdense – nie veel aandag geniet in die studie van Romantiek nie. Die verhandeling het ten doel om dié leemte te vul. Dit handel oor die anderwereldse ruimtes wat Samuel Taylor Coleridge en John Keats in hulle poesie skep. Die term *otherworld* word gebruik om na enige ruimte te verwys wat nie die bekende wereld is nie. *Otherworlds* sluit ruimtes in soos "Kubla Khan" se Xanadu en die "cold hill's side" in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".

Die spesifieke fokus val op die wyse waarop die digters dié ruimtes skep. Ten spyte van die feit dat daar baie ooreenkomste tussen die twee digters se wêrelde voorkom, verskil hulle daarin dat Coleridge se wêrelde op die transendentale dui en daardeur misterie en die grootsheid van die heelal beklemtoon. Coleridge bereik dié effek deur beelde te gebruik wat die ruimte net ten dele onthul en wat fokus op dié aspekte van die wêrelde wat nie sintuiglik waarneembaar is nie. In teenstelling hiermee, fokus Keats op die partikulêre, die vreemde en anderwereldse in dit wat bekend is. Hy skep 'n bekende onbekendheid in sy *otherworlds*, deur klem te lê op die sintuiglike.

Die bevindings berus op 'n hermeneutiese, biografiese en historiese studie wat sterk steun op die skrywers se eie prosa.

**Notes on the text**

1 "Romantic", when spelt with a capital letter, refers to the cultural movement stretching from roughly 1780 to 1830. The same term used as an adjective and spelt with a lower case "r" carries the more general meaning explained in *The Reader's Digest Oxford Wordfinder* (1993:1335) as "of, characterized by, or suggestive of an idealized, sentimental, or fantastic view of reality".

2 All poetry quotations are verbatim, respecting the original form. The punctuation at the ends of lines of verse has been kept as it was in the original texts.

3 Unless stated differently, all page references to Coleridge's poetry and prose refer to Coleridge, S.T. 2000. The Major Works, including *Biographia Literaria* [1817]. Edited by H. J. Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

All page references to Keats's poetry are to Keats, J. 1986. The Complete Poems. Edited by M. Allott. New York: Longman.

4 Throughout this dissertation Coleridge's and Keats's spelling of the word *faery* was used.

5 Reference to one gender includes reference to the other gender.

## Chapter 1

## Introduction and contextualisation: The worlds of Coleridge and Keats

### 1.1 Introduction, contextualisation and problem statement

From Thomas Chatterton's (1752-1770) medieval realms in the Rowley poems, to Robert Burns' Scotland as represented in "Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon" and "Robert the Bruce's March to Bannockburn", Romantic poems, like all literary texts, create worlds. These worlds are often an expression of, or shaped by, the ideologies and ideas of the time. Chatterton expressed in the Rowley poems a Romantic conception of the medieval past, whereas Burns articulated a Scottish nationalist yearning. Similarly, in "Jerusalem", William Blake (1757-1827) overlaid mythic conceptions of Britain with images of the London of his time, thereby commenting on social and economic problems. The allegorical spaces in "Milton", "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", "The Little Vagabond" and "The Sick Rose" are simultaneously symbolic and concrete expressions of London.

In "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" William Wordsworth (1770-1850) creates a very different romantic image of London, but most of his poems, such as "The Solitary Reaper" and "I wandered lonely as a cloud" conjure natural spaces in an accessible idiom. Nature is also an important motif in the so-called "Lucy poems". Wordsworth's spaces – like those of John Clare (1793-1864) – recall the Rousseauean image of untainted nature.

Both Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) created exotic spaces with mysterious atmospheres. For example, Byron's spaces in

"Beppo" and "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", pose a more "realistic" picture of the exotic places that the poet visited, whereas Shelley's "Ozymandias" and "Hellas" create mythic and fantastic exotic spaces. Both express in their poetry the Romantic urge for exploration. Fleming and Marien (2005:490-512) identify the gothic revival, nationalism, exoticism and a rediscovery of nature as quintessential characteristics of the broad movement *Romanticism*. The poems mentioned above express these Romantic characteristics specifically in the realms, the spaces created in the poems.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and John Keats (1795-1821) too created worlds in their poetry that represent Romantic topoi. Both created poems that simulate actuality[1] and poems comprising spaces that are not concurrent with actuality. The latter group will be the focus of this dissertation. The unreal worlds in the poems that the two poets created show several similarities. Both poets, for instance, created medieval realms (as found for instance in "Christabel" and "The Eve of St. Agnes"), atypical representations of natural spaces (in for example "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Meg Merrilies"), as well as eerie fantasy spaces such as the "deep romantic chasm" in "Kubla Khan" and the "elfin grot" in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". Within these spaces Coleridge and Keats explore similar subject matter and themes. Although there are similarities in the types of worlds that Coleridge and Keats created, these worlds differ in the way they are constructed. This difference has not yet been addressed in criticism.

Two poems that foreground both imagination and space serve as examples of this important difference. "Kubla Khan" and "Ode to a Nightingale" deal with visions brought about by an agent that stimulates the imagination. In the introductory note to "Kubla Khan", Coleridge explains that the poem about Kubla's creation of the pleasure dome in

[1] The term *actuality* is used to denote the known world in the broadest sense.

Xanadu was "given" to him during a drug-induced sleep. Similarly, unsure of whether he wakes or sleeps, the nightingale's song catalyses Keats's imaginary visits to several otherworldly realms.

In spite of these similarities the realms created in the two poems also differ significantly. The pleasure-dome is a space with sacred rivers, huge caverns and ancient hills. Despite the overwhelming scenery Coleridge describes the pleasure-dome in such a way that it remains mostly outside one's frame of reference. There is a dichotomy between the lush, almost over-description of the dome and the scarcity of information provided by these descriptions. Coleridge uses vague and nondescript images throughout the poem: for example, the speaker describes the dome as "a miracle of rare device" (line 36; p. 104) and its caverns as "measureless to man" (line 4 & 27; p. 103). Even though these descriptions seem elaborate, they do not contribute to a visualisation of the pleasure-dome. Instead, they add to the emotive quality of what is described. I have repeatedly, while analysing the poem, tried to draw a map of Xanadu – it proved to be impossible as the information given is just too hazy. To draw a map, I need to know whether the "sunless sea" (line 5; p. 103) and the "lifeless ocean" (line 28; p. 103) are the same thing. If they are indeed the same, the River Alph seems to flow in a circle. Furthermore, what exactly is the relation between the "twice five miles [thus ten miles] of fertile ground" and the sacred river that meanders for five miles "with mazy motion" (line 25; p. 103)? A relation is implied, but the geographical relation between five miles of meandering river and the ten miles of fertile soil is in no way clear.

The effect of this overload of non-descriptive information is that the dome is not picturable. One can indeed in one's mind's eye "see" aspects of the world, but the world as a whole, its outlines and its workings can only be "seen" with the aid of the

imagination. Put differently, because the visual information provided in the poem does not readily correspond to things found in actuality, one has to trust one's imagination to provide a mental picture of what is "described".

In contrast to the unpicturable pleasure-dome, the realms to which the nightingale transports the speaker in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" are described in highly sensual and sensory terms. In the faery realm where the Queen-Moon sits "haply" on her throne (line 36; p. 527), the speaker cannot see "what soft incense hangs upon the boughs" (line 42; p. 528). In this image Keats synaesthetically employs three senses, and ironically, in the realm where he cannot *see*, he engages not only sight, but also the senses of smell and touch. The image falls readily within one's frames of reference and appeals to one's own experience. The same is true of "embalmèd darkness" (line 43; p. 528) and the "coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine" (line 49; p. 528). The "a"-assonance in "embalmèd darkness" also appeals to the hearing sense and – with the long "a"-sound – endows the darkness with calmness. These images are therefore not only very sensual, but also carry an abundance of sensory information – unlike Coleridge's images.

The effect of Keats's descriptions is that the realms he creates in this poem – despite being completely different from actuality, are highly picturable. He invites one not only to picture, but also "smell", "hear", "taste" and especially "touch" aspects of the realms he creates.

The two poets' prose writings illuminate the difference found in the rendering of these worlds. Coleridge's prose writings during the time when he wrote some of his best-known poetry dealing with the otherworldly, point towards a preoccupation with the

imagination and with the idea of a grand and transcending world beyond what we can perceive. One could thus expect to find in his poetry of the time realms that appeal to the imagination and worlds surpassing actuality. Keats, on the other hand, was throughout his short writing career, preoccupied with portraying the "truth" of the objects that he wrote about. For Keats, attaining this "truth" means that as poet he had to have sympathy with objects contemplated in his poetry. The word *sympathy* comes from Greek roots and it literally means to "*feel with*" something. It is in this sense that Keats identifies with the objects that he writes about; he *feels with* them. As a result, he appeals strongly to *how* things are perceived through the senses and known through experience. His preoccupation with sensory perception and experience is evident in a letter written to J.H. Reynolds dated 3 May 1818 in which he writes that "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved *upon our pulses*" (Houghton, 1951:98; my emphasis). Coleridge's emphasis on imagination and Keats's on the senses and experience are evident in their creation of worlds other than actuality.

This difference in approach found expression in Coleridge's and Keats's individual poetic techniques and is illustrative of most of the otherworldly spaces they created. The worlds Coleridge creates in, for instance "Kubla Khan" and "Rime of the Ancient Mariner", differ significantly from Keats's worlds in, for example, "Meg Merrilies" and "Song of Four Faeries". The difference is particularly pronounced with regard to the atmospheres of the worlds. Atmosphere, according to A.F. Scott (1985:24), refers to the general mood of a literary work and is, among other things, brought about by the setting. The worlds of both "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" fall far outside one's frame of reference and therefore seem strange. The eerie atmosphere of the mariner's seascape is in stark contrast to the earthy atmosphere that informs Meg Merrilies' world and the world created in "Song of Four Faeries".

The description of air in two different poems also illustrates this difference: In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", after the mariner "fell down in a swound" (line 392; p. 61) a voice belonging to one of the Polar Spirit's fellow demons relates that

> The air is cut away before
> And closes from behind.
>
> (lines 424-425; p. 62).

In "Song of Four Faeries" the elemental faeries introduce themselves by briefly describing their realms. Zephyr, the faery of air, describes her realm as

> [f]ragrant air! Delicious light!
>
> (line 2; p. 506).

Not only the contrast in the tone of the two quotations (the one being threatening and the other joyful), but also the ways in which the poets *describe* air, create very different atmospheres and elicit different possible readings. In the first quotation air is given qualities that it does not possess in actuality; it is presented in such a way that it conjures an image of a thick, suffocating substance. Coleridge creates an image that falls *without* one's frame of reference and consequently, one has to rely on one's imagination to make sense of this phenomenon. The atmosphere created is otherworldly, threatening and claustrophobic. In the construction of his otherworldly realms, Coleridge provokes the imagination.

In "Song of Four Faeries" Keats describes the realm of Zephyr with reference to things *within* the reader's frame of reference. Keats's appeal is to the reader's senses and sensory experience. The realm of Zephyr seems familiar because Keats describes it

using two senses. He draws attention to the senses by using synaesthesia in the phrase "[d]elicious light". The realm created is familiar because Keats provokes the senses and sensory experience. Both Xanadu and the realm of the faeries are otherworldly, but Coleridge's realm is mysterious and seems far removed from actuality, whereas Keats's realm seems familiar.

Similarly, the presence of the sacred river Alph which plunges into the "deep romantic chasm" (line 12; p. 103) gives the pleasure dome a mysterious and larger-than-life atmosphere. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the "slimy things [that] crawl with legs" (line 125; p. 53), the "troop of spirits blest" (line 347; p. 59) and the green ice floating by in the land of "mist and snow" (line 134; p. 53) also create a grotesque and mystic atmosphere. Not only the presence of these weird phenomena, but also the poetic devices that Coleridge employs to describe them, contribute to the fact that these realms seem huge, mysterious, mythic and far removed from the realm known to us. The way in which Coleridge for example describes how the "slimy things [crawl] with legs [u]pon the slimy sea" (lines125-126; p. 53), places the movement of these things outside our grasp and frames of reference. Their movement remains largely inscrutable. The image could also point to the fact that the sea is somehow solid, confronting one with a surprising image that is unexpected and otherworldly, and placing the sea, which is something familiar, outside our experience.

In contrast to Coleridge's mysterious worlds, the realm of Keats's four faeries in "Song of Four Faeries" presents an otherworldly perspective of actuality that seems familiar. The features of the worlds and consequently, their different atmospheres, are within our frames of reference. The "feverous glooms" (line 94; p. 510) and "earth-quaked-mountains" (line 83; p. 510) of the world described by the faeries in "Song of Four

Faeries" are features *of the earth* and of actuality. They emerge from actuality and as a result, we can picture them. The realms described in the poem gain an otherworldly quality not so much because they are alien, but rather because they are either viewed from a faery-perspective, or presented as imaginary spaces. The same is true of the realm of Meg Merrilies, the gypsy. This poem presents a dimension of Kirkcudbright County in Scotland that normally remains unseen. This dimension with its otherworldly atmosphere is a result purely of the way the persona, Meg, sees the world. Keats's otherworldly realms – despite the fact that they are not our world – are recognisable. He lets us see the realm vividly and lucidly though Meg's eyes. These realms also seem smaller and less remote than Coleridge's vast and mysterious worlds. The illusion is created that they are closer to actuality. Not only their setting, but also Keats's description of these realms contributes to this. The "cold hill's side" (line 44; p. 506) in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", despite the fact that the realm is in no way co-existent with the realm we know, is described using very vivid, earthy images. The cold hill's side is a place where "[t]he sedge has withered from the lake, / [a]nd no birds sing" (lines 3-4). It is thus described using phenomena that are part of our frames of reference.

There is therefore a pronounced difference between Coleridge's and Keats's non-actual worlds. This dissertation investigates the extent of this difference through close analysis and contextualisation of the poetry. For analytical purposes, the term *otherworld* will be used to denote any imaginary space that is not concurrent with actuality. The term will be used in its broadest possible sense, including dreamscapes, imaginary medieval realms and faery worlds. It will also be used to denote spaces of this world that are foreclosed from normal sight.

## 1.2 Literature overview

Despite recent trends, the study of spatiality in Romantic poetry has not received much attention in contemporary criticism, neither have Romantic poems dealing with mysterious and extraordinary worlds been treated in criticism as a generic group. As this dissertation uses a basic hermeneutic, historical and biographical approach, it draws on both critical analyses and close readings as well as critical and historical material highlighting the contexts of the poems under discussion. Such material enriched my own reading of the poems. The thesis developed in this dissertation is in the first instance focused on the poetry, and builds on phenomena found in the primary texts. The criticism mentioned below was useful, mainly because they deepened my insight into the poetry.

Interpretations of poems that are useful in terms of analysis, include those by Franson (1994) and Parry (2000) (with reference to "Christabel") and Lau (1983) (with reference to among others "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner") who have contemplated the symbolic value of elements within the otherworlds created. One of the most valuable close interpretations of mimetic space is A.J. Bennett's (1990) reading of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".

Criticism highlighting influences that shaped otherworld poems, and contexts within which such poems were written, can be divided into criticism dealing mostly with historical and biographical matters on the one hand, and psychoanalytical criticism on the other hand.

Studies dealing with contextual matters have been specifically focused on the influence of German philosophers of the time such as Immanuel Kant, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling on the creation of otherworld poems. These studies follow in the tradition of Thomas McFarland's famous article "A complex dialogue: Coleridge's doctrine of polarity and its European context" (1981) which first indicated the significant influence of the German idealist philosophers on British poetry of the time.

H.R. Rookmaaker (1987) for example analyses "Kubla Khan" with reference to German idealist thought, whereas Norman Fruman (1986) assesses the influence that the discovery of the impact of the German philosophers on Romantic poetry has had on literary criticism in general. These critics elucidate the impact of the continental philosophers on the poetry of especially Coleridge who eagerly read these philosophers' writings.

Other contextual studies that elucidate the milieu in which poems were produced, include those by Felber (2004), who suggests that Keats's reading of one of his female contemporaries, Ann Taylor's "The Maniac's Song", may have influenced his writing of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". Alan Richardson, in "Coleridge and the Dream of an Embodied Mind" (1999), takes Coleridge's introductory note to "Kubla Khan" as a point of departure to discuss how Coleridge's drug addiction impacted on his "mind-body dualism" as expressed in certain passages in *Biographia Literaria* and other writings. Forest Pyle (1995) explores the social and literary roles of the imagination within the Romantic context in a book entitled *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism.* Another New Historicist reading is T.A. Hoagwood's "Keats and Social Context: 'Lamia'" (1989). Of much value for contextual information is

*Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream* by Barth, Mahoney and Mahoney (*eds.*; 1990). Several chapters in this book compare aspects of Coleridge's and Keats's poetry. Chapters on Coleridge and Keats in J.B. Twitchell's *Romantic horizons: aspects of the sublime in English poetry* (1983) are also useful for the same reason.

Using Harold Bloom's theory concerning influence, D.S. Neff (1999) in "Between *Clinamen* and *Tessera*: Female Homophilia in *Gerusalemme Liberata* and *Christabel*", contemplates possible psychological and contextual influences contributing to Coleridge's inability to finish "Christabel". Deutney (1994) and Ashton (1996:126) consider how Coleridge projects himself subjectively in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and David Bunyan (1990) uses a Freudian interpretation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to predict what Coleridge would have written in the essay on the supernatural that he had planned, but never wrote.

Even though these critics reflect on *aspects* of the worlds in which poems dealing with the otherworldly are set, and provide useful insights into the biographical and historical contexts in which they were produced, the concepts of space and spatiality are never their main focus. A significant exception is Lilach Lachman's article "Time, Space and Illusion: Between Keats and Poussin" (2003). Even though she writes about space as a "semiotic field" (following the semiotic theory of G.E. Lessing; Lachman, 2003:311), she focuses on interart transfer of signs and on the limits of aesthetic media. Again, as was the case with the criticism mentioned above, the article provides useful contextual information, but does not directly address the issues on which this dissertation is focused.

Ecocriticism (or "ecopoetics" as Jonathan Bate [2000:75] prefers to call it) is an important recent critical approach dealing with space. As the name suggests, it foregrounds issues relating to the earth as dwelling place, as resource and as construct. Contrary to what one would expect, there are few ecocritical Romantic studies. Furthermore ecocriticism tends to focus on the (exploitative) relationship between humans and nature and does not in the first instance consider the otherness of the world created in a literary text. Ecocritical studies of Romantic poetry, such as Lucy Moore's "Beauty is Truth", (2000) reflect this tendency.

Critical works mentioned above are representative of recent reflections on Romantic poetry. Although the last couple of years have seen a huge interest in space and spatiality in other genres, periods and theoretical modelling, there is, in general, a shortage of criticism exploring these concepts in Romantic poems. Furthermore, otherworlds in poems are rarely discussed in the first instance with reference to the way in which they are constructed.

### 1.3 Research questions

Against this background the following questions will be answered:

1 In which ways do Coleridge's and Keats's otherworlds differ?

2 Which different techniques do the two poets use to create such divergent otherworlds?

3 How do the poets' worldviews as expressed in their prose writings manifest in their otherworld poetry?

## 1.4 Theses and aims

In most of his otherworld poetry Coleridge creates realms that cannot be grasped fully with the aid of the senses. His otherworlds frequently do not strongly appeal to the senses, but rather urge one to engage with the world via one's imagination.

Coleridge employs, among others, techniques that simultaneously reveal and conceal the otherworlds in his poems. The most significant of these is the use of imagery which I shall call "preclusive adjectives and similes". The former entails the employment of adjectives that add to the emotive value of an image, but bring no *specific* picture to mind and the latter the technique whereby things are compared to unpicturable phenomena.

Coleridge's worlds seem weird and unfamiliar and the atmospheres that prevail in them are often myth-like and mysterious. The poet draws one into the otherworld, but frequently deters one from fully comprehending it. Such worlds lead the reader to an appreciation of that which lies beyond what is perceptible through the senses.

In contrast, Keats's sensory rendering of his otherworlds engages the reader's own experience, particularly sensory experience. I shall argue that Keats's otherworlds conjure a sense of familiarity as a result of the way they are described. Keats's yearning to see the world through the eyes of the objects contemplated in his poems, crystallises in descriptions that are sensuous and foreground experience. As such, he draws the otherworlds into one's frame of reference. Since one can relate the sensory information to actuality and to one's own experience, the realm does not only seem familiar, but can also be visualised in detail. Keats therefore paradoxically creates a familiar unfamiliarity.

Contrary to Coleridge's otherworlds, the sensuous descriptions and atmospheres in Keats's otherworlds are inviting. The reader can "see", "feel", "hear", "touch" and "taste" what the personas in the poem do. Keats invites one to indulge in the lush environments that he creates, and thereby leads one to an appreciation of the immanent truth of nature.

The poets' letters and other prose writings interestingly point to a difference in worldviews which could account for the different types of otherworlds created in these poems.

### 1.5 Method

As mentioned before, this study uses a basic hermeneutic, historical and biographical method, deriving theses in the first instance from the two poets' otherworld poetry. The difference in their poetry could also have been located and explained with reference to philosophical trends of the time. Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's development of this philosophy provide a context for the interpretation of the difference between the two poets' otherworld poetry.

Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), built a bridge between two philosophical traditions, namely rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism, simply put, holds that all knowledge derives from rational thought (Delius, 2000:115), that all conceptions that one has are a priori, id est things can be known without reference to experience. In contrast, the empiricists were of the opinion that experience was the only source of knowledge. They believed that one has a rational faculty *as a result of* the fact that one experiences

things. Kant connected these two traditions by postulating that a priori knowledge sometimes presupposes experience and that our rational faculty shapes our experience into what we perceive to be objective reality (see for example Flew, 1999:189-193). Shelling elaborated on Kant's theory by stating that not the mind (rational faculty), but rather the *creative imagination* shapes experience into what we perceive to be reality (see for example Larmore, 1996:22).

Against this background, Coleridge's and Keats's otherworld poetry can be seen as flipsides of this worldview. Their poetry embodies two essential aspects of human perception. Coleridge's poetry captures the creative imagination that makes sense of "chaotic" perceptions. Moreover, by confronting one with chaotic images, he activates the imagination to make sense of such images. The fact that Coleridge's otherworlds are not picturable, could suggest that these poems capture reality just before the creative imagination makes sense of it. His non-picturable worlds thus foreground the role of the imagination.

Keats's otherworlds on the other hand foreground sensory perception and experience, but even so, his worlds do not, according to Schelling, exist without the creative imagination. They cannot, as the creative imagination shapes the experiences that he explores in his poetry.

This dissertation could also have approached the poetry as embodiments of the Romantic worldview. Coleridge's otherworlds could then be said to express a Romantic yearning for mystery, transcendence and imagination, whereas Keats's otherworlds are characteristic of the Romantic search for a truth immanent in nature, that is perceivable through the senses.

Since this study is focused in the first place on the poetry, and not on Romantic philosophy, I decided against an approach.

* * *

In line with the definition of *otherworlds* presented earlier, I chose poems set in or dealing with spaces radically different from actuality. For this reason I excluded poems dealing with or based on classical myths. Myths, even though they can be seen as "not real", are *known* and one has certain set ideas of classical spaces. Instead, I chose poems dealing with radically new, unmapped and imaginary spaces. Keats wrote more otherworld poems than Coleridge did; in order to maintain balance, I chose poems by Keats in which the setting is foregrounded.

The poems that will be analysed are Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), "Christabel" (1816) and "Kubla Khan" (1816), as well as Keats's "Meg Merrilies" (1838), "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819), "The Eve of St. Agnes" (1820) and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1820). Where relevant, I refer to other poems as well to supplement the main argument.

## Chapter 2

## Coleridge and the world beyond

### 2.1 Introduction

Even though Coleridge's otherworlds share features with actuality, he employs several techniques to foreground, in these worlds, that which the senses cannot ordinarily apprehend, especially that which cannot be seen. The juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar, of visible and invisible features within the otherworlds intimates that there is more to the world than meets the eye. Coleridge draws one's attention to the unseen and the unfamiliar, and the foregrounding of the invisible creates the impression that the world is vaster and more mysterious than we are led to believe by our senses – it creates the impression that the world is, in essence, inscrutable. This view projected by his representation of otherworlds in his poetry echoes Coleridge's own mindset at the time when he wrote some of his best-known otherworld poems. This is clear from his prose writings, where he frequently expresses the notion that the universe surpasses that which we see and hear and touch and, as importantly, that one's senses cannot lead one to truth. Even a superficial reading of the poetry and prose indicates that there is a link between Coleridge's view of the world and the view he expresses through his otherworlds.

This chapter examines the techniques that Coleridge employs to focus attention on that which is not visible within the otherworlds that he creates. It argues that because some of the phenomena constituting the otherworld fall outside one's frame of reference, one has to rely on one's imagination to make sense of the world. As has been indicated, this

argument should be viewed against Coleridge's worldview at the time when he wrote the otherworld poems.

## 2.2 *Contextualisation and ars poetica*

Around 1797 when Coleridge was writing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and a number of other otherworld poems for inclusion in *Lyrical Ballads*, he wrote several autobiographical letters to his friend Thomas Poole. One specific letter, dated 16 October 1797, illustrates two important aspects of Coleridge's worldview at the time: the first is his preoccupation with the immensity of the universe, and the second is a profound distrust in the ability of the senses to bring one to a truthful view of the universe.

In this letter Coleridge remembers his childhood fascination with his father's narrations of things beyond the perceptible. He relates how he listened with awe and wonder to his father who told him about the stars and the planets (p. 503). This memory of his attraction to, and fascination with what lies beyond that which can be perceived, leads Coleridge into his next thought, namely that his "early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c" (p. 503) habituated his mind "*to the Vast*" (p. 503; emphasis in the original). Contrary to popular opinion of the time (Prickett, 1979:4), Coleridge firmly believed that children should be permitted to read "Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii" (p. 503); stories – in other words – that deal with otherworlds. He writes:

> I know no other way of giving the mind a love of 'the Great', & 'the Whole'. – Those who had been led to the same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess – They contemplate nothing but *parts* – and *parts* are necessarily little – and the Universe to them is but a mass of *little things*.

> [...] I have known some who have been *rationally* educated [...] They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things; all became a blank & they saw nothing (p. 503; emphasis in the original).

Stories set in otherworlds give the mind a love for 'the Great' and 'the Whole'. These "Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii" necessarily deal with things not to be found in actuality; as such they teach the mind that the universe is vast and inscrutable, that there is more to the world than our senses lead us to believe.

Embroidering on the same idea, Coleridge remembers that he never believed what he saw, touched or heard, but in a grandeur that is beyond the senses, explaining: "I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief [...] I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight* – even at that age"[2] (p. 503; emphasis in the original). He looks toward his "conceptions" for an explanation of the world and his conceptions dictate that the world is vast.

This notion of the immensity of the universe is reserved for those who let themselves be led by their conceptions and not for those who "have been rationally educated". Rationally educated people look at parts and see "nothing"; they cannot appreciate the world in its mysterious fullness and splendour. Faery tales allow one to look beyond parts at the great and the whole – it allows one to *see*.

The idea that one should not look at the particular, but at the vast, the great and the whole is stated even more explicitly in the introductory quotation at the beginning of "The

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[2] Coleridge here engages with the mind-senses duality with which the German philosophers of the time also grappled. See for example Crisman (1991) & Rookmaaker (1987).

Rime of the Ancient Mariner", which Coleridge began writing in the same year he wrote the letter to Poole discussed above. Here the focus on the whole also encapsulates the invisible. Coleridge quotes a passage from T. Burnet's *Archaeologiae Philosophicae sive Doctrina Antiqua De Rerum Originibus* (MDCXCII / 1692). The passage may be translated as follows:

> I can easily believe, that there are more invisible than visible Beings in the universe. But who shall tell us what family each belongs to, what their ranks and relationships are and what their respective distinguishing characters may be? What do they do? Where do they live? The human mind has always circled around a knowledge of these things without ever attaining it. I do not doubt that it is beneficial sometimes to contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of a greater [grander] and better world; for if the mind [spirit/thoughts] grows used to the trivia of daily life, it may dwindle too much [may contract itself too much], and decline all together into worthless thoughts. Meanwhile, however, we must be on the watch for the truth, keeping a sense of proportion so that we can tell what is certain from what is uncertain and day from night (p. 48).[3]

As the *whole* of the universe also includes the invisible, it cannot be perceived merely by the senses. Thinking about the universe in this way highlights its mystery, as the rhetorical questions in the first half of the passage suggest. Contemplating the image of a greater world attunes the mind to the greatness and vastness of the universe. As in the letter to Poole, Coleridge emphasises the fact that one can only appreciate the immensity and inscrutability of the universe by keeping in mind that the senses do not purvey a complete picture of the world. Here, however, it is stated more urgently: one's spirit may deteriorate if one does not keep in mind that there is more to the universe than meets the eye. The Latin *mens* (translated above with "mind") is best translated with the word *spirit*. Quoting Burnet, Coleridge warns that a focus on everyday things without wonder at the unseen and inexplicable is damaging for one's soul. The Latin text states

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[3] This is the translation (from the original Latin) found in Coleridge (2000:49). Terms in square brackets are my suggested translations.

that the *mens* may (literally) contract itself into *pusillas cogitationes* (translated above with "worthless thoughts"), which is the diminutive form. A mind, not fixed on the great and the whole will be habituated to think only small/little, worthless, inane thoughts. In a nutshell, Coleridge is arguing that in order to have a balanced view of the world, it is necessary to look beyond that which the senses perceive, as such an approach leads one to a view of the great and the whole.

Coleridge wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as well as several other otherworld poems specifically for publication in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. These include "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", "The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem", "The Foster-Mother's Tale" and "The Dungeon". He was also preparing "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" and "Christabel" for this publication, but they were only published later. Coleridge also claims in its introduction to have started writing "Kubla Khan" in 1797 (p. 102). All these poems deal with otherworlds and project things not perceivable via the senses. One can therefore fairly safely assume, given the letter that Coleridge wrote to Poole in the same year, that these poems will have imbedded in them a sense of the immensity (the greatness and wholeness) of the universe which preoccupied Coleridge's mind at the time.

Reflecting on the composition of the volume (*Lyrical Ballads*) in *Biographia Literaria* some 20 years ex post facto, Coleridge recalls how he and William Wordsworth contemplated two types of poetry. The first type – which Wordsworth was supposed to write for the volume – is poetry that adhered to the "truth of nature", whereas the second type – which was to be Coleridge's endeavour – is poetry of the imagination. Coleridge would write specifically about "incidents and agents [...] supernatural". His efforts were to be directed to

> persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith (p. 314).

Coleridge's poetry would therefore be focused on things beyond the perceptible, things indicating the great and the vast. As poet, he would create "shadows of the imagination" and one would suspend one's disbelief to arrive at "poetic faith". Coleridge's contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* were to bring about a willing suspension of disbelief not by drawing on "the truth of nature", i.e. actuality, but rather by creating scenes and scenarios that would conjure "from our inward nature a human interest" compelled to engage with things "supernatural, or at least romantic". The engagement with things beyond the perceptible would constitute "poetic faith". The willing suspension of disbelief is thus an exercise whereby the imagination is sustained and prolonged – a state where anything interfering with the imagination is suspended in order to arrive at (poetic) faith. "Poetic faith" will thus henceforth be used to refer to a state of engaged and prolonged imagination, a state where one cannot rely on one's senses. Poetic faith is indeed necessary to contemplate the immensity and inscrutability of the universe. In Coleridge's poem "Love" the character, Genevieve, embodies a listener/reader completely lost in poetic faith.

In the light of Coleridge's view of the world, its infinity and its incomprehensibility, it is little wonder that he views the act of creation as a pseudo-epic and divine action. The creator – of the world and of poetry – who creates "shadows of the imagination" and procures poetic faith is in Coleridge's eyes a mythic and mystic being. As a result of his

reading of German philosophers, especially of Schelling,[4] Coleridge considers the imagination as the highest faculty of the human mind. While pondering on the imagination, he distinguishes between primary imagination, secondary imagination and fancy – and thereby reflects on the role of the poet.

Primary imagination is "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" (p. 313). The poet is thus miming God. Secondary imagination is an "echo" of primary imagination,

> coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify (p. 313).[5]

In creating poems and otherworlds in poetry, the poet takes part in a mysterious and godly process. The act of writing is in accordance with divine creation; the poet repeats

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4 Throughout *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge refers to the imagination as a *unifying* or *modifying* faculty. His views of the imagination are greatly influenced by German idealist thought. One aspect of this tradition holds that humans lost the connection with nature that they once had as a result of the fact that humans became aware of their individuality (see for example Rookmaker, 1987:229). Consequently nature appeared chaotic, "an outer world of unrelated things" (Rookmaker, 1987:229). The German philosophers of the time believed that all human endeavours are directed towards restoring the lost unity between humans and nature. Coleridge – influenced by Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* – believes that the imagination (re)creates this unity – hence his habit to speak of the "unifying" and "modifying" imagination.

5 Critics have interpreted this passage differently. They differ about the hierarchical order of *primary* and *secondary imagination* and consequently about which of the two the poet partakes. Barth (1986:23 and 2005:17-18) for instance argues that secondary imagination is the higher form of imagination, grounding his argument in Coleridge's dictum that all human beings use primary imagination. Crisman (1991:412) writes in a footnote that he believes that primary imagination is the "higher force" among other things because it is in line with "various other English senses of *primary* and *secondary*".

I support Crisman's view that primary imagination is the higher force and I shall use this term when referring to the imagination that the poet possesses.

the eternal act of creation. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" depict such mythic and mysterious creators.

Fancy, as distinct from primary and secondary imagination, is a lower form of creation than the imagination. Coleridge's distinction between imagination and fancy is cryptically summarised by Stephen Prickett when he argues that the imagination is a "'living power' that transformed the elements with which it dealt, shaping them into a new unity. Fancy [... is] a mere 'dead arrangement' of 'fixities and definites': a scissors-and-paste job of the mind" (Prickett, 1979:6). Because fancy deals with "fixities and definites", it is an action or faculty guided by the senses. "The poet", writes Coleridge (p. 392) "should paint to the imagination, not to the fancy". Coleridge's romanticised view of the poet dictates that the poet should strive to attain the highest faculty of the mind; he should be inventive and creative.

Against this background the chapter proceeds to investigate the techniques that Coleridge uses to intrigue the imagination and convey a sense of the great and the whole. These techniques include making the invisible visible and focusing the attention on aspects of the world which are invisible. By doing this, Coleridge leads one to look at that which *cannot* be seen, to engage in poetic faith and look at that which lies beyond the perceptible.

## 2.3 "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Coleridge creates a mysterious seascape of which the configurations are different from those of seascapes found in actuality. One cannot grasp the seascape in this realm by means of the senses only. One has to engage,

through poetic faith, with the realm created and consider that there are – as Coleridge states in the quotation preceding the poem – more invisible than visible phenomena in the world.

Coleridge distorts the spatial configurations of the seascape using several techniques, the most significant of which are linked to the way Coleridge describes the realm. Adjectives normally modify and qualify nouns, and adverbs shape the meaning of verbs. In both cases they aid comprehension and as a result help the reader to visualise what is being said. Several of the adjectives and adverbs in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" seem vague and strange. The ghost ship is, for example, described as a "*spectre*-bark" (line 202; p. 55), the water-snakes are said to be illuminated by an "*elfish* light". Even though these adjectives contribute to the atmosphere of the realm and add otherworldly shades to the respective nouns they qualify, they do not really contribute to the reader's visualisation of these phenomena within the otherworld. These nouns still carry familiar associations, but the defining/modifying adjectives that are supposed to narrow their (the nouns') meaning down, are imprecise and foreground an uncertainty regarding their visible features. The adjectives do not appeal to the senses, and instead of "solidifying" the phenomena described, they create a vagueness that surrounds them. As a result one has to suspend one's disbelief willingly to form a mental picture of both the ghost ship and the light in the otherworld. Similarly, the storm-blast at the beginning of the poem is described as having "o'ertaking wings". The emotive value of this image is strong and it creates an ominous and threatening atmosphere, but does not bring a very specific picture to mind. At best, it creates different pictures in the minds of different readers; but there is an element of uncertainty with regard to what the storm-blast looks, feels, sounds and smells like. All of these images comprise an element beyond the senses; their vagueness engages poetic faith.

Likewise, similes normally bring unfamiliar things within the frame of reference of the reader by comparing something unfamiliar or abstract with something known, giving one a point of reference to interpret the unfamiliar object. In his otherworld poetry Coleridge does the exact opposite. He compares phenomena in the otherworld to abstract things, and thereby creates a world that is indistinct and difficult to picture. Ashton (1996:127) points out that this type of simile on the one hand draws the experience nearer (as that is what we expect a simile to do) and on the other hand emphasises the unusualness of the experience. The sun in the otherworld is described using such a simile. The mariner relates that

> [n]or dim nor red, like God's own head,
> The glorious Sun uprist:
>
> (lines 97-98; p. 52).

Here Coleridge compares something familiar (the sun) to something unfamiliar (God's head), leaving one with a very slight idea of what the sun in the otherworld looks like. Even though one may know what the sun (in actuality) and a head look like, the fact that the sun is compared to *God's* head, casts the appearance of the sun in the otherworld into uncertainty. The example confronts one with something that cannot be seen merely by relying on the information given. Again, only in a state of poetic faith, can one *see* what is described. Put differently, what one sees is a product of one's imagination, a product that is, in the first instance, shaped by the atmosphere created in the poem and not by information that appeals to one's senses.

I shall refer to these images as *precluding adjectives and similes*. I chose the word *preclusive* partly for its Latin roots and partly for its English meaning. *Preclude* comes

from *praecludere*, which is derived from *prae* (before) and *cludere* (to shut / to close). The word's etymology brings to mind something that is foreclosed, perhaps closed before one's eyes. Coleridge reveals an otherworld, but also keeps it hidden: it is as though he creates worlds by hiding them. He gives one some clues as to what the world looks like, but in essence it remains inscrutable. The result of the preclusion can be connected to the word's English meaning: it excludes the reader from the otherworld. It makes the realm strange, evasive and seemingly far away. The inscrutability of a realm created in this way leaves one searching for the whole, and makes one aware of the immensity of the world. By always only showing a part, and hinting at that which remains hidden, Coleridge makes one curious about the whole, especially those parts of the whole that are precluded. "Songs of the Pixies", another of his otherworld poems, illustrates the same technique. In the note preceding the poem Coleridge mentions that the pixies are "invisibly small", yet a large part of the poem is devoted to bringing these beings before the mind's eye. He thus makes the invisible visible. The preclusion cultivates a belief in the invisible, hence it cultivates poetic faith.

Coleridge constructs the seascape using images that foreground the invisible aspects of the world. Three of the four basic natural elements that are generally believed to constitute the world, namely fire (including the sun), water and air are described using preclusive images. This means that the elements that should make up the macrocosm of the otherworld are vague and hamper one's visualisation of the otherworld in which the mysterious events and characters are set. The first element, the sun (stanza 24, lines 97-98), a fire-symbol, is described using the alienating simile quoted above ("Nor dim nor red, like God's own head, / The glorious Sun uprist").

"God's head" is a precluding image that attunes the reader to look for that which is invisible and inscrutable. The image defamiliarises an aspect of the otherworld. Another fire image is to be found the following description:

> About, about, in reel and rout
> The death-fires danced at night.
>
> (lines 127-128; p. 53).

Not only is it not clear where these fires come from, but more importantly they are given an otherworldly quality via the use of the precluding adjective "*death*" (line 128; p. 53; my emphasis). Both images dealing with fire contribute to the sense that the world is immense and inscrutable. The same is true of the element of water. The mariner compares the water to a witch's oils:

> The water, like a witch's oils,
> Burnt green, and blue and white.
>
> (lines 129-130; p. 53).

Even though water that seems to burn as the sun shines upon it is a common image and one that Coleridge may have picked up from paintings produced in this time, the fact that the burning water is compared in a precluding simile to a "witch's oils", leads one to contemplate the possibility that there are more invisible than visible things in the universe. As was the case with fire, water in the otherworld is described very vaguely. In order to picture the water in the realm, one must engage in poetic faith; one must use one's imagination to *create* the missing information. For all its lack of visual information, the image does align the realm with the otherworldly and thereby contributes to the eerie and scary atmosphere of the scene. As water in this simile possesses qualities that it cannot have in the realm known to us, it leads us to a sense that the world is great and vast.

One of the best examples in the poem where Coleridge leads one *to see* the invisible is the description of the third element, namely air. The mariner relates:

> The air is cut away before
> And closes from behind.
>
> (lines 424-425; p. 62).

In contrast to the previous examples, Coleridge does not 'hide' visual information in this image. Instead he makes the invisible visible. Air is an invisible substance; Coleridge makes us see air by describing it as a thick substance that claustrophobically surrounds the ship. Air not only becomes visible, but gains an otherworldly quality. The image attunes one to a vast and inexplicable realm and foregrounds invisibility that causes uncertainty.

In the case of all three elements discussed above one has to suspend one's disbelief to make sense of the world. Coleridge implores one's poetic faith to carry one beyond a normal understanding of the world. The macrocosmic configurations of the realm are evasive. The last element, namely earth, is markedly absent from and invisible in the realm. Neither when the ship sets sail for the unknown, nor when it returns are there any references to earth. Only at the very end of the poem is a reference to "bay", but it is not described in any way. This makes the abnormal seascape all the more overwhelming. In the typical repetitive style of a ballad, the earthlessness of the realm is emphasised in part II of the poem:

Water, water, every where
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where
Nor any drop to drink.

(lines 119-122; p. 52).

The fact that the poem is set in a world where the framing elements (water, fire and air) preclude comprehension and where one element (earth) is completely missing, directs one to engage in poetic faith, id est to consider the immensity of the realm created. One can only see the world in one's mind's eye by trusting one's imagination. Within this vague setting Coleridge proceeds to place more evasive and invisible phenomena.

On board the ghost ship, which features are described using several preclusive images such as *spectre*-bark and *dungeon*-grate, are two crew members, Death and Life-in-Death. There is no description whatsoever of Death, rendering him (?) invisible. Life-in-Death is described using images pertaining to the senses and images appealing to poetic faith:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

(lines 190-194; p. 55).

In this stanza highly sensual (and picturable) images and preclusive ones alternate and emphasise the juxtaposition between that which falls within and without one's frame of reference. In this "description" Life-in-Death is almost brought before the mind's eye, but the impression and feeling that she purveys are much stronger than her visual image. As her name suggests, she partakes of both the known and the transcendent. It is thus fitting that she is described using images pertaining to this realm, images engaging the

senses, and images pertaining to a realm beyond, and that Death is not described at all. In the case of Life-in-Death the familiar and unfamiliar are juxtaposed in such a way that they draw one's attention towards the unfamiliar (her nightmare qualities are more interesting than her red lips, for example). Both Death and Life-in-Death serve to remind one of the immensity of the realm, of its aspects that preclude vision. Furthermore, much of the information regarding Death and Life-in-Death and their ghost ship is introduced in the form of questions. These questions too foreground the uncertainty surrounding the two characters:

> Are those her sails that glance in the Sun
> Like restless gossamers?
>
> Are those her ribs through which the Sun
> Did peer as through a grate?
> And is that women all her crew?
> Is that a Death and are there two?
> Is Death the woman's mate?
>
> (lines 183-189; p. 54).

Similarly, the sails of the ghost ship are compared to "restless gossamers". This personification probably brings different pictures to the minds of different readers. Tapping into my own poetic faith, I see raggy sails that move nervously like spider legs. The reason why everyone "sees" it differently, is because the image intrigues our imaginations and elicits poetic faith, and through the imagination we are lead to see what Coleridge "hides".

All these preclusive images contribute to make the realm inaccessible and to create a realm that seems great and vast and beyond our comprehension, a realm that falls almost outside our frames of reference. The images are not descriptive in the traditional sense of the word, but rather contribute to the atmosphere and defamiliarisation of the

realm. The effect is that one is constantly reminded that there is more to the realm than is conveyed by the descriptions; the "descriptive" techniques serve to reinforce the quotation at the beginning of the poem, namely that there are more invisible than visible phenomena in the world. The reader can only visualise the realm of the mariner through poetic faith. Still the images make the realm seem overwhelming. By alluding to that which *is not* visible, Coleridge focuses the attention *on* the immensity of the universe. He thus points to a reality transcending that which can be perceived through the senses.

This central notion is furthered by another technique, viz. defamiliarisation. Coleridge defamiliarises the seascape by using images of things that can be visualised, but that do not really exist. Such images fall outside our frames of reference and only through poetic faith can we visualise the realm. In other words, one has to willingly suspend one's disbelief to form a mental picture of the image used. This is another technique that Coleridge uses to make the invisible visible. In stanza 13, for instance, the mariner relates

> And ice mast-high came floating by,
> As green as emerald.
>
> (lines 53-54; p. 50).

I can indeed form a mental picture of green ice floating by, but the picture in my head is not derived from reality. Experience of actuality does not provide a picture of floating green ice. In order to "see" this picture, one has to rely not on sensory experience, but on poetic faith, or prolonged imagination. Only through poetic faith can one "see" what the mariner describes. More importantly, by forcing one to look outside one's frames of reference, Coleridge grants a momentary glimpse of a world that transcends actuality --

a realm that can only be "entered" with the aid of the imagination. So too can one, with the aid of the imagination, picture the scene described in stanza 30:

> The very deep did rot: O Christ!
> That ever this should be!
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon a slimy sea.
>
> (lines 123-126; p. 52-53).

Again, as was the case with the sails that looked like "restless gossamers", each reader's "picture" of the slimy things will be different, as the imagination fills out the gaps that the description creates. As was the case with the green ice, the "slimy things" lead one to "view" things that do not fit within one's frame of reference; things that are absent from and invisible in actuality. The poetic devices used in this stanza further obscure the movement of the slimy things. "Crawl" is a clumsy, ungraceful movement. The "s"-alliteration and the iambic foot in this stanza however suggest a flowing, regular and smooth movement. Even though the associations one has with the word "crawl" are probably predominant when visualising the movement of the slimy things, the sound of the images subliminally negates these associations. This discrepancy thus created, may hamper visualisation of the creature's manoeuvres. Because their movements are elusive, they stimulate the imagination and hint at a transcendent reality.

In the desolate and abnormal seascape the mariner finds solace in the sound of birds:

> Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
> I heard the sky-lark sing;
> Sometimes all little birds that are,
> How they seem to fill the sea and air
> With their sweet jargoning!
>
> (lines 358-362; p. 60).

This seems easy enough to picture, but it is highly unlikely to find a selection of little birds in the middle of the ocean, especially in the middle of a seascape with virtually no reference to earth. The appeal to the imagination is intensified if one takes into consideration that skylarks (line 359; p.60), contrary to their name, are sedentary, inland birds (see for example Anon, 2001). Again the reader is left to see and hear the birds in the middle of the ocean through the willing suspension of disbelief. The choice of the word "seem" in line 361 again foregrounds the uncertainty that informs much of the seascape.

Another image that foregrounds invisibility within the realm, is an image of the moon. The description of the moon falls outside our frames of reference and can only be comprehended via poetic faith. Shadows are cast when the sun moves behind an object. In the otherworld, however, the moon's shadow lies on the bay. This would not be possible in actuality, as the sun, in its normal orbit, does not move behind the moon. The image indicates that in the otherworld the sun and/or moon move in different paths than they do in this realm. It most probably suggests that there are two moons in the otherworld; one causing the other to cast a shadow and both moons' moonlight lying on the bay. The configurations of the otherworld's cosmology remain mysterious, even though a reader would be able to picture the shadow of the moon when reading the following lines:

> The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
> So smoothly it was strewn!
> And on the bay the moonlight lay,
> And the shadow of the moon.
>
> (lines 472-475; p. 63).

Because one has been accustomed by now to look for the invisible, it is quite likely that the interpretation above would be the most natural and that one would not merely interpret "the shadow of the moon" as a moon shadow; not *cast by*, but *of* the moon.

There are several such examples in the poem. In addition to these images that force one to see with the aid of the imagination, Coleridge uses several other techniques to foreground the uncertainty surrounding visualisation in the otherworld. They include the mysterious storyteller, the way in which information is conveyed as well as the implementation of an obscure myth as an intertext to the poem.

The mariner is the focaliser in the poem. While reading the poem, one sees through his eyes. The mariner is also rendered in otherworldly manner. Not only is he hardly described in the poem and thus, in a sense, "invisible", but he also speaks an archaic language that distances him from the realm of the reader. More importantly, this speaker knows what God's head, Death and Life-in-Death look like. He also narrates things that he does not physically see. By focalising through the mariner, Coleridge urges readers to look at the world in a different manner. Adding to the mariner's mystery is the fact that his actions remain mystifying. People have interpreted the mariner's actions in several different ways. This is as true of the crew that sailed with the mariner and as of critics who analysed the poem throughout the years. The crew's uncertainty with regard to the symbolism of the albatross killing is evident from stanzas 23 and 24:

> Then all averred I had killed the bird
> That made the breeze to blow.
> Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
> That made the breeze to blow!
>
> [...]
> Then all averred, I had killed the bird

That brought the fog and mist
'Twas right, said they, such bird to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

(lines 93-96 & 99-102; p. 52).

Critics too have interpreted the mariner's actions in a myriad ways. To name but two interpretations: Jonathan Bate (2000:49 & 52) interprets the shooting of the albatross as the archetypal crime against nature and as a breach of the "contract of mutual dependency which binds species in a network of reciprocal relations" J.B. Twitchell (1983:91) sees the albatross killing as a way in which Coleridge introduces the mysteries of the sublime. The mariner and his actions puzzle crew – within the otherworld – and critics – in the real world – alike. The mystery of cause (the albatross shooting) and effect (the consequences of the shooting) is maintained within and without the realm. The uncertainty is foregrounded and the mariner leads one to consider that there are mysterious aspects of actuality, precluded from our sight.

Another feature of the poem that foregrounds uncertainty and obscures the realm is its intertext. Several Romantic poets used folklore and classical myths as intertexts for their poems. These intertexts are generally known and it is possible that they fall more readily in the average reader's frame of reference. Consequently, a reader familiar with folklore or classical myths may be able to infer the dynamics of the world created in such poems by applying classical or folklore qualities to the otherworld. The fairly well-known classical myth of the titans, for example, provides not only a context for the interpretation of Keats's "Hyperion", but also suggests a specific place, namely Olympus, even before it is mentioned in the poem.

The myth of the "Polar Spirit" and its "fellow demons" that Coleridge provides as context in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" only contributes to making the realm more

inaccessible. Furthermore the polar spirit is referred to more often in the margin notes (only added in the *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) edition of the poem) than in the poem itself. The scant references to the myth thus also defamiliarise the "context" given.

The techniques discussed lead one to look for meaning not in what is described, but in that which lies beyond. One is reliant on one's imagination to make sense of the great and vast realm that Coleridge creates. Through "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" Coleridge urges us to "contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of a grander and better world" (p. 49), as is stated in the quotation preceding the poem. This creative attitude to the world around us leads us to the realisation that there are dimensions of the universe that transcend our understanding. This, according to Coleridge is the right and truthful understanding of the universe and it is possible only as a result of the imagination. J.R. Barth (1986:25) succinctly summarises Coleridge's view of the imagination:

> Deeper and more comprehensive than the understanding, the imagination is in fact a faculty of the transcendent, capable of perceiving and in some degree articulating transcendent reality – the reality of higher realms of being, including the divine.

The imagination – Coleridge believed – can lead one to a glimpse of what lies beyond. Coleridge brings about a brief look at a transcending realm in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" using a number of techniques, but mostly through his use of language.

Coleridge had, by the time that he had written "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", never been on any sea or ocean. He therefore had no sensory memory upon which he could draw. As Coleridge swears by his "conceptions" and not by his "sight", his lack of experience was of little significance – he looked towards the imagination for inspiration.

Keats's approach would have been radically different. He believed that one must have intimate knowledge of everything one writes about, and this knowledge, Keats believed, was based in the senses.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reminds one of the mysteries of the ocean and gives one a more profound understanding of nature. After being confronted with the seascape in the poem, one would not necessarily have answers to the mysteries of the sea and of nature, but one would entertain the possibility of a greater and vaster reality beyond one's grasp. This understanding is, according to Coleridge, the right way of contemplating the universe.

### 2.4 "Christabel" and the invisible world beyond

Even though "Christabel", which explores the supernatural as well as a gothic and romantic past, was only published in 1816, Coleridge started to write it in the same year "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was published in *Lyrical Ballads*, namely 1798 (Ashton, 1996:123). For this reason, one can fairly safely assume that his ideas regarding a grander and vaster world, that informs the mariner's seascape, also informs the otherworld in "Christabel". In this poem Coleridge reinforces the view that he unpacks in the introduction to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", namely that there are more invisible than visible beings in the world.

"Christabel", like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", creates an otherworld which intrigues poetic faith. The poem presents one with an otherworld where supernatural phenomena linger just outside of the realm the personas perceive. The otherworld within the poem comprises two dimensions: the natural, and the supernatural. The poem is

written in such a way that it draws the reader's attention to the transcendent, supernatural dimension. Put differently, the reader is led to focus on those things in the realm that are invisible and inexplicable.

Instead of preclusive images, Coleridge uses, in "Christabel", the constant suggestion that there is more to the universe than meets the eye. He does so by juxtaposing visible and invisible phenomena and by diverting the attention to the invisible. This analysis will point out the techniques whereby Coleridge foregrounds that which evades the senses.

As in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", the spatial configurations of the realm draw the attention to the immensity and inscrutability of the realm. Karl Franson (1994) interprets the symbolism of the spatial configurations of the realm in an interesting way. The poem tells us that in the cold and dark wood Christabel finds herself "[a] furlong from the castle gate" (line 26; p. 69). Franson (1994:153) writes that a *furlong* is an eighth of an English statute mile, or 660 feet. He goes on to explain that "the old oak tree" where Christabel is said to kneel and pray is probably a *Quercur robur* (the common English oak). Given the average diameter of the stem of this type of oak, Geraldine who lies on the other side of the oak, must be about five to seven feet away from Christabel. This places Geraldine approximately 666 feet away from the castle. This interpretation suggests that the evil that Geraldine embodies transcends anything that Christabel could imagine. This spatial configuration of Christabel's realm makes it clear that this is a space where natural, visible and supernatural, invisible forces exist side by side. Within this diabolic environment Coleridge creates an uncanny and highly mysterious atmosphere.

The atmosphere in the poem is the compound of its sounds, rhythm and descriptions. One's poetic faith relies in this poem heavily on the ominous atmosphere of the otherworld. The metre of the first stanza sets the scene for the eerie events that follow:

> 'Tis the middle of the night by the castle clock,
> and the owls have awakened the crowing cock;
> Tu–whit!–Tu–whoo!
> And hark, again! the crowing cock,
> How drowsily it crew.
>
> (lines 1-5; p. 69).

The overtly iambic foot, the consequential stress on the last syllable of each line and the "k" alliteration echo the sound of the old castle clock, creating an eeriness which forms a sharp contrast to the make-believe, isolated and secluded world of Christabel where the "gate [...] was ironed within and without" (line 127; p. 72). Foregrounding a deceptive sense of safety, the contrast between what is said and the way in which it is said, makes one suspicious regarding that which senses (can) perceive. Put differently, juxtaposed against this eerie atmosphere created by the sounds and metre, one is confronted with the protagonist of the poem, Christabel, completely unaware of the danger around her. This dramatic irony and especially Christabel's lack of awareness are of the most successful techniques used to convey a sense that everything is not what it should be, that one should be on the lookout for things transcendent. It is as though Christabel's unawareness sharpens one's knowledge of and responsiveness to the invisible aspects of the realm. Atmosphere and setting together draw one's attention to the supernatural.

Adding to the atmosphere of the otherworld, Coleridge also employs codes belonging to vampire fiction to accentuate the contrast between the visible and the invisible, in order to focus on the latter. Vampire fiction emphasises the dichotomy of visible and invisible phenomena. By their nature, vampires simultaneously live in two realities: that of the

living and that of the dead. Having read among others 'Monk' Lewis' play *The Castle Spectre* (1797), Charles Robert Maturin's *Bertram* (1816) and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Coleridge was familiar with the vampire tradition. According to Rosemary Jackson (1981:49) in fantasy literature (including vampire stories) that which is not seen and not said, is not known, and therefore remains a threat. Put differently, we equate that which we see with that which is possible and certain. Coleridge uses the vampire codes to emphasise specifically that which cannot be perceived by the senses. The first bit of vampire fiction code that Coleridge uses is Christabel's nightly wandering outside the safe realm of her father's castle. Within the context of vampire stories, this action already spells trouble. As such, it serves to make one aware that there are more invisible than visible phenomena in this world.

Another piece of vampire code is put to use when Geraldine cannot cross the threshold on her own. Vampires have to be invited into a realm of which the threshold has been blessed. When Christabel and Geraldine reach the gate to Sir Leoline's castle, Geraldine pretends to be too weak to walk and Christabel carries her into the castle grounds.

Evil has now been invited into the safe realm of Christabel. Another sign of the workings of the supernatural (and another vampire fiction characteristic) in the "safe" realm is evident when the two women pass through the hall. As Geraldine passes, the torches in the hall that have burnt out and are only smouldering suddenly light up.

The characteristics of vampire stories found in the poem attune one not so much to the things that happen within the natural, visible dimension of the realm, but rather to that which transcends the perceivable, specifically to the evil "lurking beyond". The fact that

these signs are not revealed to Christabel, intensifies the mystery. As explained in the quotation introducing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Coleridge focuses our attention, by means of vampire story characteristics, on the invisible things in the realm.

Another means to achieve the same end is Coleridge's portrayal of the antagonist, Geraldine. The speaker focuses on aspects of Geraldine's personality that she keeps hidden from Christabel, which heightens the suspense and reinforces the juxtaposition between the safe visible realm and evil invisible realm. One is constantly aware of something invisible on the borders of the visible. This leads one's thoughts away from trivial matters, so that one would not be inclined to think "worthless thoughts".

When Christabel meets Geraldine for the first time, the speaker describes Geraldine by means of a preclusive adjective. She is said to be a "lady strange" (line 71; p. 71). Geraldine, whom Neff (1999:198) describes as "a puzzling amalgam of threat and beneficence", remains a mystery. The reader senses that she is evil and later on deduces that she is a vampire, but what exactly her plans are, remain veiled. As was the case with the ancient mariner, there is a lack of information on Geraldine, endowing her with mystery. The mystery surrounding Geraldine makes one curious about those aspects of her that remain hidden. Like Life-in-Death in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Geraldine lives in both supernatural and natural dimensions of the otherworld, but her concealed, evil side is much more interesting than the damsel in distress persona she pretends to be in the natural dimension of the otherworld. Consequently, the evil and mysterious side of Geraldine attracts one's attention; the invisible, precluded aspects of her character are the focus.

Christabel remains unaware of the impending evil. From the first stanza it is quite evident that all is not as secure as Christabel seems to think. Her obliviousness of the danger that awaits her intensifies one's impression that something evil is brooding. As a result, one is actively on the lookout for the supernatural in the otherworld. Or, in Coleridge's terms, one's attention is diverted from the small and inane thoughts and focused on the possibility that there "are more invisible than visible phenomena in the universe" (p. 49). Because the invisible is almost tangible in this realm, one's poetic faith easily engages with things supernatural. In the supernatural dimension of the realm, one is confronted with several powerful forces that reinforce the focus on the invisible.

When Geraldine accidentally summons Christabel's mother (stanza 24), the suspense reaches a climax. With the ghost of Christabel's mother in the room the supernatural is no longer only subtly present, yet Christabel still notices nothing. The focus is – at this point – completely directed towards the invisible and the transcendent, and not towards the visible and the trivial, id est the natural realm in which Christabel finds herself. Coleridge thus leads the reader to have poetic faith in what lies beyond the perceivable world. He does so by creating a realm where the supernatural seems ever-present. Through the tone, atmosphere and the description of the supernatural, one is lead to an experience of a transcendent reality.

It is, however, not only evil forces that linger at the edges of Christabel's world. Several 'good' forces are also present in the realm. In the poem the Virgin Mary is frequently invoked. The first time is when the speaker says – when Christabel is on the brink of meeting Geraldine – "*Jesu, Maria, shield her well*" (line 54; p. 70). Christabel also prays "Mary mother save me now!" (line 69; p. 71) just before she speaks to Geraldine for the

first time. The suggestion is that in Christabel's world – where the natural and transcendent are closely intertwined, where the supernatural is tangibly present – such invocations have power, they do invoke transcendent forces/entities. In the light of the role that Coleridge ascribes to the supernatural, one can assume that such invocations are not merely utterances. The supernatural in the realm is concrete and is part of the truth of the realm. Hence, it is quite possible in this otherworld that the invocation of good forces initially led Christabel to a false sense of security. The invocations contribute to portray a sense of the great and the vast; they complete the whole which cannot be apprehended merely by the senses.

Another instance where a good paranormal force is invoked, is when Geraldine summons Christabel's dead mother. She refers to the mother as Christabel's "guardian spirit" (line 212; p. 74). In the light of the one's experience of the supernatural throughout the poem, the presence of the dead mother seems probable. Put differently, the ever-present supernatural in the poem has stretched the reader's disbelief to accommodate the possibility that Christabel's mother can indeed, in this realm, appear when summoned by a vampire.

The descriptions of the otherworld, the natural-supernatural duality implied in the vampire codes in the poem, the character of Geraldine and the invisible forces of the otherworld all accentuate the juxtaposition between visible and invisible and foregrounds the mystery and uncertainty prevailing in the realm. The mystery and suspense are also upheld throughout the poem by means of questions that anticipate important descriptions and information. The questions slow down the pace at which information is given, thereby intensifying the uncertainty and suspense. A third person speaker asks:

Is the night chilly and dark?

(line 14; p. 69)

to which the answer is given:

The night is chilly, but not dark.

(line 15; p. 69).

Again, after Christabel strolls into the forest, a third person speaker introduces information only after a question is asked:

Hush, beating heart of Christabel !
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
And stole to the other side of the oak.
What sees she there?

She sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,

(lines 53-57; p. 70).

These questions, together with the portentous atmosphere and the vague description of the medieval setting, produce a suspenseful feeling, and yet throughout the poem Christabel remains unaware of danger just outside of her "safe" world.

The constant suggestion of the presence of the transcendent as well as the way in which one is made aware of it, helps to induce poetic faith. One is more aware of what one cannot see, than that which is portrayed as visible within the realm. It is quite possible, given Coleridge's view of the universe as "great" and "whole", that he wanted people to apply this view of the world not only in the reading of poetry, but also in their day to day activities. In "Christabel" the idea of the transcendent resides not so much in words and

images (as is the case in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"), but is highly dependent on the atmosphere created. Atmosphere is foregrounded in most of Coleridge's otherworld poems, but Christabel is certainly the most atmospheric of these poems. The atmospheres in Coleridge's otherworlds are very different from the ones found in Keats's otherworlds. Even Keats's most extremely otherworldly spaces have earthy atmospheres.

### 2.5 "Kubla Khan"

"Kubla Khan" is probably Coleridge's best-concealed otherworld, partly because it explores preclusion thematically. It uses both the preclusive language trickery found in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and the constant suggestion of a "great" and "whole" universe just outside of perception, that made the otherworldly almost tangible in "Christabel".

One of the themes Coleridge explores in "Kubla Khan" is the mystery of creation. He assumes the position of a visionary (with "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" [line 50; p. 104]) to whom this mystery is revealed and then proceeds to create a myth of how things came into being. "Kubla Khan" combines several of the techniques discussed thus far to once again focus on invisible aspects of the world that make up the great and the whole and the vast. Coleridge's use of poetic language both creates a mythic world and renders it inaccessible.

The first two lines of "Kubla Khan",

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:

(lines 1-2; p. 103)

are reminiscent of creation as explained in the Bible. Kubla Khan *decrees* a pleasure-dome, much like, as is described in the book of Genesis, God spoke words to bring the world into being ("Let there be light" et cetera).

The idea of a creator creating through words is also reminiscent of 1 John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

As is the case in 1 John 1, "word" and "creator" are intimately connected in "Kubla Khan" and the creation process happens as a result of this unity: through them everything came into being. The word "decree" is emphasised by its position in the line as well as by the rhyme scheme.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

(lines 1-5; p. 103).

"[D]ecree" rhyming with "sea" links creation and place. The colon after "decree" introduces the context of the act of decreeing and thus of the act of creation. The placement of the word in the stanza thus underscores the relation between creator, the act of creation and the (space) created. The emphasis on the word brings Kubla's action in line with divine creation, but also with Coleridge's creation of the poem. All three

entities (God, Kubla Khan and Coleridge) create (worlds) with words. This idea is reminiscent of Coleridge's thoughts concerning primary imagination which he described as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (p. 313). This alignment of mysterious creation leading one into the poem fills one with anticipation for a grand and vast realm. The language used to describe the world, however, frequently deters one from grasping it completely. As is the case in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", the language in the poem creates, but also forecloses the pleasure-dome in Xanadu.

In this poem Coleridge again uses preclusive images. "Sunny spots of greenery" (line 11)[6] are easy to picture, but what is a "deep *romantic* chasm" (line 12)? We are told that Alph is a "*sacred* river" (line 3), that the "deep *romantic* chasm" is a "*savage* place" (line 14). The speaker (the visionary Coleridge) tells us not to even bother picturing the caverns of Xanadu, as they are "*measureless* to man" (lines 4 & 27). Other examples include "*demon*-lover" (line 16), "*mighty* fountain" (line 19); even the term "*pleasure*-dome" (line 2) brings no specific picture to mind. These preclusive images contribute to the atmosphere and mood of the realm, but not to one's visualisation of it. The adjectives "demon", "savage" and "romantic" create an overwhelming tone within the otherworld and are suggestive of a transcending reality, but serve to alienate the reader form it. These images are overwhelming, but do not fit readily into the average reader's frame of reference. As a result one has "to contemplate in the mind as in a picture the image of a greater and better world" (see p. 49).

Coleridge also employs a preclusive simile. "The deep romantic chasm" (which is itself inscrutable) is described as

[6] All examples in this paragraph are to be found on p. 103 and the emphases are added.

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

(lines 14-16; p. 103).

Here something preclusive and invisible (the romantic chasm) is compared to something even more unpicturable (a place haunted by a mysterious woman wailing for her demon-lover). The result is once again that, even though the atmosphere created by this image is overwhelming, it deters one from grasping what the chasm looks like. The image suggests much more than is conveyed by the visual information given.

Contrary to the nature of metaphoric language and certainly contrary to Keats's sensuous language, Coleridge's descriptions do not illuminate the space created in the text. They do, however, contribute to the defamiliarisation of the pleasure-dome. The result of this defamiliarisation is that one cannot draw upon one's frame of reference to make sense of the world. Because Coleridge constantly alludes to a world beyond the known, a reader is forced to consider "the image of a grander and better world" (p. 49), as Coleridge calls it in the quotation preceding "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The poem thus catalyses an experience of a transcendent reality. Put differently, the unfamiliar realm commands one's utmost willing suspension of disbelief; one has to believe (in) or have poetic faith in something that is not easily summoned before the mind's eye. One must, as Coleridge advocates in the preface to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", entertain the possibility that there is more to the universe than meets the eye.

One cannot picture the things "described" and as a result, one's mind makes associations, filling in the gaps that the poem creates using one's imagination. Every individual reader's perception of the place is thus different. As the chasm, caverns and other features of the otherworld are defamiliarised, interpretations and visualisations thereof will vary. The uncertainty created this way emphasises the immensity of the realm.

This mysterious, invisible world is the perfect space for unreal (and contrasting) phenomena such as the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" (line 36; p. 104) and the "ancestral voices prophesying war" (line 30; p. 103). Such phenomena are not possible within the laws of physics of our world and therefore they too demand that one engages with poetic faith and considers a transcendent reality.

The general outlines of the landscape in "Kubla Khan" are therefore not, as Rookmaaker (1987:228) asserts, "relatively clear"; instead, the landscape is deliberately created in such a way that its outlines are *not* clear. As the spatial configurations of the realm within which the poem is set, do not coincide with one's experience of actuality, they bring about an appreciation of the realm's invisible and transcendent qualities. Because one is led to look beyond the visible, one can consider the image of a grander and better world.

It is interesting to note that none of these alienating devices are found in the second part of the poem and as a result, the world of the Abyssinian maid seems much closer to the reader (and to Coleridge!) than Xanadu is; it is rendered more visible than Xanadu is. Despite the fact that this realm is not as far removed as the pleasure-dome, it is

inaccessible to Coleridge and the reader. Two techniques are employed to make this realm inaccessible: the sparse description and the setting.

In the five lines describing the damsel, one finds no preclusive images. Still the damsel remains a riddle. All the reader knows about her is that she is from Abyssinia and that she plays a dulcimer. We have no idea what she looks like or what her song sounds like. We are reminded three times that she makes music, but not one image describes the sound. There is an absence of images that appeal to the senses and that would have made the realm familiar. This lack of information intriguing the senses is all the more evident when it is compared to the description of the music made by Wordsworth's solitary reaper or by Keats's nightingale. As was the case with the ancient mariner, the lack of information about the Abyssinian maid gives her mythic and otherworldly qualities.

The maid is also placed in a world that is *almost* real. Abyssinia is the former Ethiopia. It is thus a real place, but removed in time and space. The realm is almost real and almost knowable. Furthermore, the Abyssinian maid is placed in a vision. She is therefore part of an otherworld. Coleridge goes on to explain the effect that her song would have on him, were he able to recall it:

> 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!
>
> (lines 42-47; p. 104).

The realm of the damsel with the dulcimer thus forms an interface between Coleridge and the pleasure-dome that he can no longer cross. He is trapped in the real world with its visible phenomena. The damsel's music would transport him yet again to the foreclosed, transcendent world of the pleasure-dome. In one of his many discussions of the imagination Coleridge writes that "the poet must [...] likewise understand and command [...] the excitement of vision by sound and the exponents of sound" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 8; p. 393). In both this passage and in the poem Coleridge yearns for primary imagination. In his description of the poet who possesses primary imagination in *Biographia Literaria*, the sounds will bring about visions; in "Kubla Khan" the sound of the damsel's music will bring about imagination that will take him back to the precluded realm of the pleasure-dome. Yet, Abyssinia and the pleasure-dome remain just outside his reach. Coleridge can no longer transcend his own reality and consequently he cannot finish the poem. If he could, he would truly be a poet "painting towards the imagination" (p. 392), or as he puts it in this poem, he will embody the poet of whom people will say:

> ... Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.
>
> (lines 49-54; p. 104).

Virtually all images in the last part of the poem emphasise the transcendent qualities of a poet able to conjure a world that lies beyond our perception, id est a poet able to paint towards the imagination. The mention of "thrice", here, as in "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" (another of Coleridge's otherworld poems), conjures associations of the transcendent, as both the Celtic and Christian traditions link this number to the divine.

Preclusive images are, however, not the only devices employed to defamiliarise the pleasure-dome. In an insightful article David Perkins (1990:97) writes that "Coleridge's introductory note to 'Kubla Khan' [which most critics believe to be an unreliable construct] weaves together two myths with potent imaginative appeal". The first myth is that of the "lost poem"; it tells of how "an inspired work was mysteriously given to the poet and then dispelled irrecoverably". The second myth that Perkins links with the image of the poet that was later propagated by the *symbolistes* and *L'art pour l'art*, is that of the "drugged poet", the reader of "curious lore, such as *Purchas His Pilgrimage*". Perkins sees the introductory note as an essential part of the poem and emphasises the fact that it gives the poem a plot that it would not otherwise have, that it indicates genres to which the poems belongs, and presents images and themes that interrelate with those in the poem. As such, the introductory note gives the poem mythic status, it emphasises those qualities in the poem that transcends the ordinary. Put differently: the introductory note foregrounds the invisible.

In the realm in which the poem is received (id est actuality), it can never be complete(d). But according to Coleridge, in a different realm – that of the visionary dream – it was completed, or consisted at least of "not [...] less than two or three hundred lines" (p.102). For a short while after the vision, Coleridge could still access the transcendent realm, but reality intruded in "the person on business from Porlock" (p. 102), and afterwards Coleridge was forever denied access to the realm of his vision. The realm itself is evasive and preclusive. In the preface Coleridge also invokes the medieval setting of another of his poems, "The Picture", to illustrate the irrecoverability of the vision. "The Picture" tells the story of a youth who watches the mirror image of his beloved in the water. The image is however distorted and when the surface of the water becomes

smooth once more, the girl has disappeared. The allusion to this poem reiterates the idea that Perkins (1990:97) calls the myth of the lost poem. The fact that the complete poem is irrecoverable contributes to its mysticism; the poem belongs to a transcendent, inaccessible world. The poem too has become invisible and its invisibility is the subject of the introductory note as well as of the second part of the poem.

Preclusive images, the visionary speaker with knowledge of the unseen and the myths created in the introductory note count among the contributing factors that create the mystery and myth-like nature of the otherworld in "Kubla Khan". Adding to the sense of remoteness of the realm is the constant suggestion of something eluding perception, of a grand and divine creation, that ordinary people cannot know about. The images used in the poem constantly remind one of a transcendent reality. The fact that Coleridge can no longer access the realm intensifies the mystery surrounding the pleasure-dome and this suggestion also intensifies the one's curiosity regarding the transcendent world. These devices serve to bring the reader to a short, but overwhelming experience of a transcendent reality, or as Rookmaaker (1987:231) puts it, the reader is allowed a "momentary, finite vision of the infinite".

## 2.6 Conclusion

In his otherworld poetry, Coleridge employs certain techniques that render the otherworlds inscrutable. The poems hint at the immensity of the universe in a manner that forces one to activate and rely on one's poetic faith. Coleridge's focus is on the great and the vast, on realms beyond what we can know. He consciously leads one's thoughts away from the worthless and inane to grand issues and questions such as "what lies beyond?"

In all the poems discussed Coleridge diverts the attention from *pusillas coginationes* to that which cannot be apprehended by the senses, especially that which cannot be seen and, as such, he confronts one with a sense of the immensity of the universe. All the techniques discussed above can be sorted into two groups: the first group comprises techniques whereby invisible things are made visible, and the second comprises techniques that Coleridge uses to hide information necessary for the visualisation of the otherworlds. Several less significant techniques support these two main techniques.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" Coleridge employs preclusive images to foreclose the realms that he creates and he also makes the invisible visible by creating images that one can only *see* with the aid of poetic faith. He thus leads one to see the realm using the imagination and not the senses. Adding to the effect of these techniques are mysterious storytellers and – in the case of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" – a very obscure myth. All these techniques serve to focus the attention on the great, the vast and the whole.

Coleridge uses less language trickery in "Christabel" than he does in "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Still, he creates a realm that attunes the reader to the immensity and inscrutability of the universe, by setting up a realm where the otherworldly is almost tangibly present. The characters' oblivion regarding the otherworldly in their realm sharpens one's awareness thereof. The constant suggestion of the transcendent brings about a willing suspension of disbelief. In "Kubla Khan", the evocative introductory note also endows the poem with mystery and suggests a transcendent reality.

In a nutshell: Coleridge makes the invisible visible. His approach is quite different from Keats's. Keats focuses on small things, on tangible objects, but he does not consider them to be *pusillas coginationes,* to him they are not worthless, as will be discussed shortly.

* * *

It is informative that Coleridge who created these grand, evasive otherworlds aimed to constitute a true otherworld, representing everything that England of the late 1700s and early 1800s was not. Under the influence of Robert Southey, encouraged by the revolutionary ideas of the time and in reaction to the harsh iron-hand government in England, Coleridge joined (and soon after became the chief advocate) of the *Pantisocracy.* The Pantisocracy was a scheme whereby the participants would emigrate to America and settle on the banks of River Susquehannah. As its name suggests there would be no individual property ownership and all inhabitants would be equal. The participants would live close to nature, there would be no rich and no poor and nobody would ever go hungry. It was the hope of the participants that the principles of the society would expand and that eventually all of humanity would share in a world of love.

Roe (1990:113) writes that "For Coleridge ... [the Pantisocracy's] equalitarian principles were not wholly political or economic, but religious and emotional as well". So taken was Coleridge with this new plan that he promoted its principles widely and blindly married Robert Southey's sister-in-law, Sara – a decision he regretted for the rest of his life. Coleridge's enthusiasm for this project says something about his view of otherworlds: it relates that he considered such perfect, idyllic worlds *possible.* They exist – he believed – just outside our reach.

Unfortunately, utopias do not exist and, as a result of conflicting philosophical ideas *underpinning* the Pantisocracy (Roe, 1990:115) and the materialistic interests of its instigator, Southey (Ashton, 1996:73), the Pantisocracy was never realised. Like the pleasure-dome in Xanadu, the society at the banks of the Susquehannah forever evaded Coleridge. It remained a world that would transcend, a place that entices the imagination and conjures images encompassing the great, the vast, the whole.

## Chapter 3

## Keats's sentient worlds

### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter pointed out that Coleridge created worlds in his otherworld poetry that remain just outside our grasp and frames of reference. His distrust of the senses, as explained in his prose writings, manifests in the otherworlds he creates. Many of the significant features of Coleridge's otherworldly realms remain invisible and therefore partially inscrutable. What is especially striking is that these worlds exhibit a lack of images that appeal to one's senses.

Keats too wrote poems dealing with, or set in, spaces other than the familiar, spaces that could be termed *otherworlds*, as they represent spaces other than actuality and spaces foreclosed from sight. His otherworlds, however, differ significantly from those created in Coleridge's poetry. Whereas Coleridge strove to give readers a momentary glimpse of a transcendent reality, Keats points to the otherworldly qualities immanent in everyday things. William Jackson Bate (1976:41), taking issue with Middleton Murray, writes that "we must guard against reading into Keats an idealism which is not there". He goes on to explain that "if Keats is idealistic, his idealism is concrete" (Bate, 1976:47). This is also true of Keats's otherworld poems. If he leads us to a glimpse of a transcendent reality, it is always via the concrete or immanent. Put differently, the experience of the transcendent, for Keats, always has its roots in an appreciation of actual, concrete phenomena, even when he writes otherworld poetry. The ideal for Keats is always crystallised in the particular. The sip of wine for which the speaker in "Ode to a

Nightingale" yearns is described as "[t]asting of Flora" (line 13; p. 526), but it gains this transcendent status only after it has been described as "[c]ooled ... *in the deep-delved earth*" (line 12; p. 525; my emphasis). Furthermore, it tastes not only like Flora, but also like "the country green" (line 13; p. 526). Only in its relation to the earth, does the particular, the wine, become transcendent.

The otherworlds that Keats creates frequently highlight some aspect of the realm we know, some aspect of actuality that had been foreclosed from sight. In this lies the difference between Coleridge's and Keats's otherworlds: Whereas Coleridge creates worlds partly precluded from sight, Keats reveals worlds in spaces where we do not expect them. In "Meg Merrilies", for example, Keats reveals aspects of the known world in a new and engaging manner. This realm, like all Keats's otherworlds, focuses attention on the known and the familiar. There is thus a dichotomy present in Keats's otherworld poetry: he creates unfamiliar territories by alluding to the familiar. One can almost say that he creates a familiar unfamiliarity in his otherworld poetry. This paradox will be explored thoroughly in relation to his ars poetica.

This chapter explores the techniques that Keats employs to create such a familiar spatiality in his otherworld poems. It argues that Keats appeals through the senses to one's experience, focusing attention on concrete objects, making them tangible and recognisable; he pulls otherworldly phenomena into our frames of reference and thereby makes them familiar. The scenes that he creates in otherworld poems have the feeling of familiarity, because he employs the senses in a variety of ways. Most of his descriptions involve more than one sense and he often uses synaesthesia to foreground sensory experience in descriptions of places other than actuality. The appeal to imagination is much less than was the case with Coleridge's otherworld poetry, as the

worlds that Keats creates are highly picturable. This argument correlates with Keats's view of the role of the poet as indicated in his prose writings.

### 3.2 Contextualisation and ars poetica

In his poetry as well as in his letters Keats reveals himself as a poet of the senses. Consider for example his letter to Benjamin Bailey on 22 November 1817:

> I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not [...] I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning, – and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for a life of sensation rather than of thoughts! (Houghton, 1951:46-47).

In this dictum Keats seems to hold the same opinion as Coleridge, namely that it is not reasoning but imagination that brings one to truth.[7] Like Coleridge, he distinguishes between reasoning and imagining. Yet what Keats says in this letter about the imagination must be understood in the context of how he sees the role of the poet.

Unlike Coleridge, who saw the poet as a participant in the mysterious and divine action of creation, Keats is of the opinion that the poet must merely be a "thoroughfare for all thoughts" (Bate, 1979:18). The poet in Keats's eyes is not a mystic, but someone who identifies with the object that he writes about to such an extent that he has no identity of his own. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats (17-27 November 1819), he complains about the direct opposite in a friend by the name of Dilke. He writes

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7 Cf. Coleridge's letter to Thomas Poole (16 October 1797) discussed in Chapter 2.

> [t]hat Dilke was a man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made his mind up about everything. The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing – to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts (Bate, 1979:18).

In similar vein Keats describes himself in the same letter to Benjamin Bailey (22 November 1817) as follows: "... nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights, or if a sparrow were before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel" (Houghton, 1951:48).

Keats *loses* his own identity and assumes the identity of, in this case, a sparrow. He experiences exactly what the sparrow experiences, he is the "thoroughfare" or conduit for the sparrow's thoughts. This approach resonates in Keats's poem "Meg Merrilies" where the world literally changes as Keats sees it through Meg's eyes. The idea of an "identity-less" poet is developed in a letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated 27 October 1818. In this letter Keats explores the "poetical Character" – the sort of which he believes himself to be a member:

> it [the poet] is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – it has no character – it enjoys light and shade – it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated, – It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the cameleon [sic] poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation (Houghton, 1951:160).

The "cameleon poet" changes its colour to become the object which it contemplates. Keats is of the opinion that a poet should be impersonal and identity-less in order to assume a new persona. If able to do so, a poet can rejoice in a variety of contrasting phenomena and still make up his "mind about nothing", because all experiences

merely "end in speculation". Being identity-less and taking part in an object's existence, leads the poet to the truth of the object. Bate (1976:33) points out that knowledge and experience are necessary for the poet. He writes that

> the more knowledge the poet has about the sparrow, its bodily construction and its way of life, the more complete will be his capacity to 'find his way' into the sparrow, providing that this knowledge does not become detached from the living creature before him (Bate, 1976:45).

Knowledge and experience enhance the identification to which the poet strives and in turn, the identification leads to an understanding and knowledge of the *truth* of the object. It is the revelation of this truth that leads one to a sense of familiarity, even in Keats's otherworld poetry. The truth of the object is frequently expressed in terms of very vivid sensory images in Keats's poetry, as will be explained shortly. Because the poet has no defining characteristics, it is as though he continually fills some other entity:

> A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity; he is continually in for, and filling, some other body [...] the poet has none [an unchangeable attribute], no identity. He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. [...] It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature. How can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with people, if I am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then, not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me that I am in a very little time annihilated – not only among men; it would be the same in a nursery of children (Houghton, 1951:160).

The idea that a poet should be a thoroughfare for all thoughts is closely linked to the ideal that a poet should have real-life experiences – more specifically that a poet should be able to experience what the object that he writes about experiences. Only if a poet does this, can he have true sympathy with the object about which he is writing. As

mentioned in Chapter 1, the word sympathy comes from the Greek *sumpatheo* (συμπαθεω), which literally means *to feel with*. Keats wanted to experience with and feel with the objects contemplated in his poetry.

Experience in Keats's mind is strongly linked to sensory perception, as he explains to Hamilton Reynolds in a letter of 3 May 1818:

> axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses. We read fine things, but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author [...]. Until we are sick, we understand not; in fine, as Byron says, ' knowledge is Sorrow '; and I go on to say that ' Sorrow is Wisdom ' (Houghton, 1951:98).

Keats wanted to experience all facets of life "upon [his] pulses" and he believed that this would lead him to understanding and to truth. One frequently finds in Keats's poetry that intense experiences of happiness lead to sadness or sorrow. In both "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode to Melancholy" intense engagement with sensory experience leads the speaker to immense sadness. Keats is of the opinion that only through such intense sadness resulting from, and by extension through, sensory experience can one achieve real wisdom and arrive at truth.

Keats thus sees the poet as a characterless creature who assumes the persona of the person or object that he writes about. The implication of this approach is that he is immanently part of what he produces in poetry. He, as it were, *becomes* the sparrow that picks among the gravel. He experiences the world through the identity of other objects, feeling *with* them, and by doing so, is able to attain a truth about such objects that would otherwise have remained hidden. Bate (1976:19) calls this approach to truth "instinctive", as it implies an approach to an object that is almost unconscious (as

opposed to rational and conscious) and without deliberation or choice. And it is this sense of instinctive truth that Keats captured in his own poetic creed, namely 'Negative Capability', which he explained in a letter to his brothers dated 21 December 1817:

> The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. [...] Several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties Mysteries doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration (Bate, 1976:7).[8]

"The excellence of every art", writes Keats, "is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth." Bate (1976:49) explains that the intensity that Keats speaks about is "the *concentrated* life, force, and meaning of a *particular*" (my emphasis). He stresses that for Keats the intensity should never be divorced from the particular (Bate, 1976:50), because, in Keats's conception, "the concrete and the ideal are one and the same" (Bate, 1976:49). Keats's focus is not on "the great" and "the whole"; instead it is on the particular. The concentration of the life and force in the concrete and the particular is often translated in Keats's poetry into tangibility. In his poetry, his execution of Negative Capability, these views manifest in very sensuous descriptions. Keats concentrates by means of allusion to the senses, and through this concentration, he arrives at an immanent truth that seems familiar.

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[8] While this letter may be read as criticism of Coleridge, it is important to keep in mind that Keats is here referring to Coleridge's "true philosophical Critique" of Wordsworth's poetry which was published earlier that year (1817) in *Biographia Literaria* (see for example Gittings, 1970:174-5).

An example of how Keats concentrates the life and force of a particular object to achieve intensity is the "soft incense" that "hangs upon the boughs" ("Ode to a Nightingale", line 42, p. 528). This image not only concentrates three senses and thus appeals to sensory experience, but also concentrates the particular, the flowers, metonymically into "incense". The word "incense" is both metaphor and metonymy, concentrating the flowers to their sensual essence. The image reveals truth and energy, the "concentrated life" and "force" as Bate (1976:48) would have called it, contained within the particular. The choice of the word "incense" captures the smell of the flowers, and is described as "soft", which makes the concentrated essence tactile. Furthermore this tactile essence is described as "hanging", giving it weight. One has a sense of what the flowers on the boughs look, smell and feel like. There is intensity in the description and unlike Coleridge's images, Keats's boughs are not only picturable, but also involves two other senses. It is in this way that Keats creates a familiar unfamiliarity. It is necessary to pause briefly at this paradox.

Keats, like Coleridge defamiliarises the otherworlds he creates, but, unlike Coleridge, he uses techniques that concentrate experience and capture the life, force and energy of the object described. Keats's defamiliarisation ironically leaves one with a feeling of familiarity, because it focuses on the known. He remains in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, in order to identify with the object described. When thus identified, he is able to reveal the object's truth, and this truth seems familiar, because it captures the essence of the object described. The two main techniques that Keats uses to capture and concentrate the truth and the essence of an object are metonymy and descriptions that encompass more than one sense, especially synaesthesia. Metonymy, by its nature describes something with reference to its concentrated essence, whereas synaesthesia

concentrates sensory experience. Keats draws strongly on the senses, especially on the sense of touch, thereby making his images more concrete and intense. Bate (1976:51) writes that "[i]ntensity , for Keats, was almost physical in its nature; and for that reason [...] intensity, to his mind, should be kept within the bounds of the concrete." Concentrating sensory experience causes the intensity that gives the objects that Keats contemplates "an identity and indeed its nature and its 'truth'" (Bate, 1976:57) and it is this truth that Keats equates with beauty (see Houghton, 1951:46-47 and Bate, 1976:7, quoted above). These techniques defamiliarise what is described, but also pull the otherworldly into our frames of reference. By concentrating truth and experience, the images that Keats uses not only add intensity to objects described, but also familiarise them. This is in essence what Negative Capability entails.

Through Negative Capability Keats focuses on the particular and on the concrete, and because he is strongly identified with the objects he writes about, he reveals their truth. He confronts one with otherworlds that seem to form part of one's own frame of reference and experience as they concentrate the truth and essence of what is described. Such otherworlds are in stark contrast to the otherworlds that Coleridge created.

Ashton (1996:317-8) attributes Keats' formulation of Negative Capability to his reading of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria.* She argues that Keats's notion of remaining in "uncertainties Mysteries, doubts" came from Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" and "negative faith" (Coleridge, 2000:314).[9] It is interesting to note that Coleridge's disbelief led him to look for the great and the vast and to that which remains unseen,

[9] For a thorough introduction to the influence that Coleridge and Keats had on one another, see Jack Stillinger's "Keats and Coleridge" (1990).

whereas Keats's uncertainties, mysteries doubts led him to focus on the particular and to see it in a new and different manner.

Negative Capability is something that Keats tried to live by. He consciously kept himself in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts in order to be a better poet. Being in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" means that he "made up his mind about nothing"; as the chameleon poet he knew that all things will "end in speculation". As has been explained, a poet must, according to Keats, become an empty vessel and "must make up his mind about nothing" in order to experience what the object that he writes about experiences, to see, for example what the nightingale sees. When a poet is thus identified with the object "all disagreeables evaporate" and beauty can be equated to truth. The truth that Keats speaks about is the truth of the object and of its nature. It is this quality that causes his otherworlds to appear familiar. Whereas Coleridge asserted that his creeds were informed by his "conceptions" and not by his "sight" (Coleridge, 2000:503), Keats defers all conceptions in order to see the world through different eyes.

In a letter to Jane and Marianne Reynolds (14 September 1817) Keats identifies – in the sense described above – with Marianne: he writes that "[he is] pleasing [him]self in the idea of [her] Sensations" (Keats, 2003). When this happens, he can see the immanent sublime in the cosmos – as she would have seen it:

> in truth the great Elements we know of are no mean Comforters – the open Sky sits upon our senses like a Sapphire Crown – the Air is our Robe of State – the Earth is our throne and the Sea a mighty Minstrell playing before it – able like David's Harp to charm the evil Spirit from such Creatures as I am – able like Ariel's to make such a one as you forget almost the tempest-cares of Life. I have found in the Ocean's Musick – varying (though selfsame) more than the passion of Timotheus, an enjoyment not to be put into words and 'though inland far I be' I now hear

> the voice most audibly while *pleasing myself in the idea of your Sensations* (Keats, 2003; my emphasis).

Keats not only sees what Marianna sees, but also makes the associations that she would have made. He does so by becoming a conduit for her thoughts; he experiences her feelings with intensity. By focusing through her eyes on particular objects, he is led to a transcendent truth that is embedded in and results only from the concrete and the particular.

One poem that illustrates the role of the chameleon poet very well is "Meg Merrilies". In this ballad that Keats wrote in a letter to Fanny Keats while travelling in Scotland in July 1818, the landscape literally changes as Keats sees the world through the eyes of the persona, Meg. The world in which she lives is an otherworld set within the realm we know, in Kirkcudbright County. By revealing the world through the eyes and experiences of this persona, Keats creates a fairytale-like realm with a fairytale-like atmosphere. It is a realm which draws on his own personal knowledge of Scotland and of the story of Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* which Charles Brown told him during their tour of Scotland (Gittings, 1970:223). In a letter dated 3 – 9 July 1818, Keats wrote to John Taylor: "We are now in Meg Merrilies country, and have, this morning, passed through some parts exactly suited to her. Kirkcudbright County is very beautiful, very wild, with craggy hills somewhat in the Westmoreland fashion" (Houghton, 1951:115). Gittings (1970:223) writes that "Scotland struck Keats as a savage primitive harsh country". The poet was also touched by the simplicity, naivety and poverty of the local people. The persona, Meg, in Keats's "Meg Merrilies" is based partly on Walter Scott's character and partly on the women he saw in Scotland. The persona can be said to concentrate Keats's knowledge and the women's experience. As the poem is partly founded in Keats's own *real* experience and partly on his knowledge of Sir Walter Scott's story, his knowledge

added intensity to the poem and enabled him to have sympathy with not only the persona of Meg, that is representative of the rural Scottish women, but also with the environment in which the persona finds herself.

Keats applies Negative Capability to experience the world as the persona, Meg, would have experienced it. Firstly, by remaining in "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts", Keats is able to identify with the persona to such an extent that he can have sympathy with her. He is then able to see the realm, Kirkcudbright Country, as the persona, Meg, and the Scottish women on whom this persona is based, would have seen it. Kirkcudbright Country, like the faery otherworld in "Ode to a Nightingale", literally – for him – changes into an otherworld that had previously been foreclosed from sight. The realm looks different; through the eyes of this persona, it is beautiful, and – in Keats's terms – equates truth. Put differently: by having sympathy with the persona and looking at the realm through her eyes, he grasps an immanent truth about the otherworld. Keats, the "cameleon poet", *becomes* the persona and describes her realm as follows:

> Her apples were swart blackberries,
> Her currants pods o'broom;
> Her wine was dew of the wild white rose,
> Her book a churchyard tomb.
>
> Her Brothers were the craggy hills,
> Her Sisters larchen trees -
> Alone with her great family
> She live'd as she did please.
>
> (lines 5-12; p. 358-359).

In the first part of the stanzas quoted above, Keats gives both his and Meg's frames of reference: her "apples" are what he calls "swart black berries", her "currants" are what he calls "pods o'broom", et cetera. In the last two lines of the second stanza, his

identification becomes more intense. The two frames of reference are *concentrated* into one, obliterating his own perspective and seeing the world completely through the eyes of the persona, Meg. A significant truth about this persona, and about the rural Scottish women, is evident in the following stanza:

> No breakfast had she many a morn,
> No dinner many a noon,
> And 'stead of supper she would stare
> Full hard against the moon.
>
> (lines 13-16; p. 359).

At no point is the persona, Meg, described as either poor or hungry. Keats reverts to facts about the rural Scottish women in order to avoid calling the persona "hungry" or "poor". The absence of hunger and poverty is part of the truth of the environment. Keats, remaining in mysteries, uncertainties, doubts, concentrates the realm to encompass only its riches; he is able to express with intensity the immanent and hidden truth of this realm that he knew intimately. His imagination seized this realm as beauty, and therefore – as he explains in his letter to Bailey (discussed above) – it must be truth. The truth of the realm is that nature substitutes everything that the inhabitants may lack. In Meg's realm nature is all-encompassing. The immanent value of everyday things within the realm becomes apparent when he is identified with the persona, Meg, who experiences these things as riches. As he foregrounds the truth of the realm, it becomes familiar and leads one to appreciate everyday phenomena, such as apples, currants and books in the same way the Scottish women do.

### 3.3 "Ode to a Nightingale"

In "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats explores the value of the fullness of human experience – experience that encompasses both the joyful and the sad, hurtful aspects of living in this world. The poem articulates Keats's approach to life and to poetry as discussed above, and provides a good example of the difference between Coleridge's and Keats's view on the role of the poet. The speaker in the poem oscillates between encountering real human experience and daydreaming, the "fancy" that he concludes "cannot cheat so well" (line 73; p. 531). The nightingale acts as a catalyst for the imagination that transports the speaker to several other realms. The speaker's journey in the poem is as follows: he moves from his own realm, to the south of France and to the nightingale's realm in the trees, from there he journeys back to his own realm, and then travels to a faery realm, to the realm of death, to the past realm of Ruth and back again to his own realm. Only the faery realm and the realm of death are otherworlds in terms of the definition set out earlier, and these as well as their relation to actuality, will be the focus of this analysis. Reference will also be made to aspects of the other realms to explore and illustrate Keats's use of Negative Capability.

The poem reveals a circular structure: the poet can only see his realm in perspective when he is – with the aid of the imagination – elsewhere in an otherworld, and when he finds himself in the otherworlds he cannot sense the things around him, and longs for his own realm. Unlike Coleridge, who cannot access the otherworld, Xanadu, again (in "Kubla Khan"), Keats is unable to leave this world for an otherworld.

Stanza 4 and 5 present an otherworld and form the crux of what Keats is saying about the senses. The chameleon poet sees the same realm that he described in the previous

stanza as a place "[w]here youth grows pale, and spectre thin, and dies" (line 26, p. 527), through the eyes of the nightingale and an otherworld, that had been foreclosed from sight, opens before his eyes. He describes it as such:

IV

Already with thee! Tender is the night,
And haply the Queen Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

V

*I cannot see* what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
*But*, in embalmèd darkness, *guess* each sweet
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

(lines 35-50; p. 527-528;
my emphasis).

This stanza calls into recollection what Coleridge wrote about his "early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c", namely that he "never regarded [...] senses in any way as the criteria of [his] belief." Instead he "regulated all [his] creeds by [...] conceptions not by [...] *sight*" (Coleridge, 2000:503). Keats, in these two stanzas, advocates the direct opposite. The two verbs "see" (line 41; p. 528) and "guess" (line 43; p. 528) are of particular significance. Coleridge's conception is guided by his imagination, by the faculty usually associated with *guessing*. Keats wants to "see", not "guess". The senses stimulate Keats's imagination, even when he "cannot see", he senses allow him to guess. For Keats anything that transcends the seen, starts within the concrete.

Seeing through the eyes of the nightingale, having sympathy with it, the speaker describes this realm in vivid sensory and familiar terms.

In the quotation above, the familiarity lies in the fact that Keats makes the night tactile by calling it "[t]ender", the flowers upon the boughs are described as "soft incense" hanging and the darkness is brought into the realm of the senses by being synaesthetically termed "enbalmèd", even the "glooms" are "verdurous". In all of these images Keats concentrates the life and force of the objects by alluding to more than one sensual experience, and focuses on the particular (the flowers, the night, the boughs) in order to make it familiar. The "fays" (line 37), that do not fall readily within one's frame of reference, are familiarised by the use of the adjective "starry". They are brought into our frames of reference and concretised. Put differently, unlike Coleridge's images that preclude vision, Keats's images provide a cornucopia of sensuous information that one can relate to one's own experience. This creates the sense that the otherworld is accessible and not far removed from the world we know, that it is familiar. The familiarity directs attention to the value immanent in the concrete objects. The chameleon poet, seeing through the eyes of the nightingale, thus describes the realm, not as one who cannot see and merely guesses; instead the description testifies of intimate knowledge of the immanent truth and beauty of particular aspects of nature. The speaker cannot dissociate himself from this truth embedded in nature. Given this context, it is necessary to examine Negative Capability in the rest of the poem in more detail.

* * *

In the first four lines of stanza 1 the speaker ponders actuality and feels removed from his senses.

My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past and Lethe-wards had sunk.

(lines 1-4; p. 525).

The punctuation and metre give these lines a slow tempo, emphasising the dejection of the speaker and a particular identifiable familiar experience. The three agents – hemlock, Lethe and opiate – introduced in the first stanza that cause the mournful remove from sensory perception that the speaker experiences are significant, because they anticipate most of the otherworlds on which the speaker ponders. Hemlock is a poisonous plant and is used in stanza 1 to introduce the realm of death that is described in stanza 6. Opiate, personified (and thus concentrated) as dull, is associated with hallucinations. This drug is perhaps introduced here to account for the "fairy lands forlorn" that are explored in stanza 7. The reference to the river Lethe introduces the first of a number of classical references that all pertain to aspects of wine.

The speaker relates that he is "too happy in [the nightingale's] happiness". He discards his own identity and assumes the role of the identity-less poet: he becomes the nightingale. The sympathy that he gains as a result of Negative Capability causes him to see the world through the eyes of the nightingale; he thus feels detached from his own senses "as though of hemlock [he] had drunk".

During this identity-changing phase, when the speaker yearns to identify with the nightingale, he describes the bird as a "light-winged Dryad of the trees" (line 7; p. 525). A dryad is a wood nymph; the word comes from the Greek *dryas*, *-ados*, which in turn come from the word *drys*, which means *oak tree*. The etymology of the word connects

the nightingale with nature. More importantly, as the speaker, who wants to "fade" with the nightingale "into the forest dim" (line 20; p. 526), is taking part in the nightingale's (*dryados*) existence, he himself becomes identified with – and has sympathy with – nature. The phrase "light-winged Dryad" thus concentrates two senses and an aspect of nature, while the three-word phrase conjures an elaborate picture of the nightingale and even of its surroundings. Even though the word "dryad" carries transcendent qualities, the nightingale is familiarised and bound to the earth. Due to his use of Negative Capability, Keats creates familiar spatiality in this image.

Thus identified with the nightingale, the speaker describes the singing bird (in the second half of the first stanza) with reference to three senses:

> 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
> But being to happy in thine happiness, -
> That thou, *light-winged* Dryad of the *trees*,
> In some *melodious plot*
> Of *beechen green* and *shadows numberless*,
> *Singest* of *summer* in *full-throated ease*.
> (lines 5-10; p. 525; my emphasis).

The intense involvement and concentration of the senses is a result of Keats's employment of Negative Capability; the speaker is *becoming* the nightingale, experiencing what it experiences; he is "happy *in* the [nightingale's] happiness" (line 6; p. 525; my emphasis). This identification is translated into very sensual language and, consequently, one is introduced into a realm of the nightingale (nature) that seems familiar. The phrase "beechen green" also proves this point. A beech grows out of the earth. Keats uses an earthy adjective that not only concretises and qualifies "green", but also places the scenery within one's frame of reference. The synaesthetic description of the nightingale's song (the "melodious plot / Of beechen green and shadows

numberless"; line 8-9; p. 522) appeals to senses and involves one's experience. Keats leads one to see through the nightingale's eyes, and, in doing so, reveals the truth and the beauty of the nightingale's song and its surroundings. The picture thus revealed is a familiar one, and draws upon familiar experience.

Keats's own experience intensifies the experience of the nightingale's joy. In her notes to the poem Miriam Allott (1986:524) points to the fact that Keats had suffered from a sore throat during the previous six months. The nightingale singing with "full-throated ease" is therefore in startling contrast not only to the speaker's feeling of numbness, but also to Keats's personal experience and physical pain. The contrast emphasises and involves Keats's own human nature and experience, concentrating both sound and feeling in the image and adding intensity to it, as it grounds the sound of the nightingale in real human experience.

The alliteration (and near-alliteration) heightens the appeal to the senses; the "s"-alliteration in

> That thou, light-winged dryad of the trees,
> In some melodious plot
> Of beechen green and shadows numberless,
> Singest of summer and full-throughted ease.
> (lines 7-10; p. 525, my emphasis)

coupled with the near-"s" sounds found in "trees", "beechen", "shadows" and "ease" appeal to one's sense of hearing as it echoes the nightingale's harmonious song. This and the metre that gradually changes, from a more broken metre, to dactyls soften the rhythm, subliminally underscoring a sense of ease, that indicates – in contrast to the metre of the first half of the stanza – that a more energetic and joyful view is to follow.

In the second stanza, the speaker enters the warm South during the merry-making at the annual grape gathering (Allott, 1986:526), and shifts perspective to *become* a grape-gatherer, as he is endowed with the knowledge of a grape-gatherer. In this realm, he tastes, sees, feels, hears and smells what local grape-gatherers would. Even though this is strictly speaking not an otherworld, but rather a realm removed in time and space, it does illustrate the changing character of the chameleon poet and the workings of Negative Capability. The poet yearns to be totally saturated in this experience:

> Oh, for a *draught of vintage*! That hath been
> *Cool'd* a long age in the *deep delved earth*,
> *Tasting* of Flora and the *country green*,
> *Dance*, and *Provençal song*, and *sunburnt mirth*!
> Oh, for a beaker *full* of the *warm South*,
> Full of the true, the blissful Hippocrene,
> With *beaded bubbles winking* at the brim,
> And *purple-stained* mouth;
> That I may drink and leave this world unseen,
> And with thee fade into the forest dim–
> (lines 11-20; p. 525-526; my emphasis).

Keats chose the word "vintage" instead of *wine*, partly for the rhythm and partly because vintage refers not only to wine (the product), but also to the entire process and time of wine making. The word calls into mind the whole experience of wine making and the experience that a draught of wine may bring about. This stanza that describes the wine involves all five senses (emphasised in the quotation above). Keats conjures a reality through the use of Negative Capability that is not his reality and because he appeals so strongly to the sensory experience, one can form a clear picture of the reality which he sees through the eyes of a grape-gatherer. The wine's taste does transcend human experience (because it tastes like "Flora"), but only after Keats has directed one's attention to the immanent qualities of the wine itself. "Flora" is symbolic of both the

immanent qualities of wine, such as its fruitiness and of its transcendent qualities, such as godliness and abundance. The wine that tastes of Flora is firstly and intimately connected to the ("deep-delvèd") earth where it has been "[c]ooled a long age". The associations with wine are therefore both immanent and transcendent as Keats leads one to a transcendent experience that is firmly rooted in the concrete and the actual.

The words "cool'd" and "deep-delved" have the same function as the term "vintage". They refer to processes and also to experience. The metonymic construction found in "the warm South" also points to the fact that in the experience of wine drinking the speaker senses more than just wine, the metonymy concentrates the experience. The speaker is reminded in the taste of wine of the "[d]ance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth" (line 14; 526). The speaker's imagination takes him from the concrete (the earth and the wine) to a realm that is not his own. By doing so he points to the immanent value and truth of both wine and human nature.

The use of synaesthesia furthers the idea that one sense conjures the next: the speaker can *taste* the "country green", "Provençal song" and "sunburnt mirth" (line 14; 526), and the concentration of the grapes' life and force gives one a clear picture of the realm created. One can indulge in a sensuous description of wine that can be related to one's own experience. Thus even when the speaker feels detached from his own senses, he describes a reality where he is joyful in very vivid sensory and familiar terms.

In stanza 2 one finds two classical references, namely "Flora" and "Hippocrene". Flora is the goddess of fruitfulness and Hippocrene is a fountain on mount Helicon that is sacred to the muses. These references form part of a cluster of classical references in "Ode to a Nightingale". The first classical reference in the poem is that of "Lethe"

(stanza 1) – the river of forgetfulness. In stanza two the fruitfulness ("Flora") of the South that the speaker senses (literally *tastes*) in the wine is linked via the imagery with the forgetfulness brought about by wine (and a sip from Lethe). The muses, according to Roman mythology, are responsible for inspiring artists. Again the cluster of classical references concentrates the full experience of wine – the inspiration ("Hippocrene"), forgetfulness ("Lethe") and fruitfulness (Flora) that wine implies. The cluster of classical references intensifies all aspects of wine.

In the third stanza the speaker describes his own reality in completely different terms than in the fourth and fifth stanza (discussed above). The first part of this analysis stated that the speaker saw actuality through the eyes of the nightingale. Here, however, he sees it through the eyes of suffering mortals. Keats yet again, making up his mind about nothing, assumes the role of the chameleon poet. He describes the raw experience of living in this world, capturing, concentrating the hardness of the experience:

> The weariness, the fever and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
> Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs,
> Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
>
> (lines 23-30; p. 526-527).

The speaker, sympathising with suffering mortals, states that these are the things that the nightingale would not know about ("What thou among the leaves hast never known"), because the nightingale sees a different truth. The description is, however, evidently that of one who has intimate knowledge of and sympathy with human nature and experience. The stanza has a very personal tone and as such probably draws on Keats's

knowledge of human suffering that he gained as a physician's apprentice. The stanza is focused on the moment ("Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, / Or new love pine at them *beyond to-morrow*"; lines 29-30 p. 527). Keats wrote to Reynolds that "Sorrow is Wisdom" (Houghton, 1951:98). The wisdom that he refers to is the immanent knowledge and truth, in this case of human nature. He cannot – like the nightingale – *not* know. The tension between actuality and fancy/imagination is foregrounded: even though the speaker *sees* with the eyes of the nightingale, he cannot ignore his own immanent nature. The metre supports the concentration of human sadness in the tone. As in the first stanza, the tempo here is slow, emphasising the despondency of the speaker. The caesurae in the stanza, most markedly brought about by the punctuation (especially in line 3), are used specifically for this purpose. It slows down the tempo and each monosyllabic word is accentuated: "Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs" (line 25; p. 526). The tempo changes when the speaker is carried away yet again from actuality to the otherworlds of the nightingale. Keats now uses spondaic and iambic feet when the speaker says

> Away! away! for I *will* fly with thee,
> not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
> But on the viewless wings of Poesy.
>
> (lines 31-33; p. 527).

The image of Bacchus connects with previous classical images; the speaker will not be transported through the forgetfulness (Lethe), the inspiration (Helicon) or the luscious pleasure (Flora and Bacchus) of wine, but through the imagination. The speaker will thus not subdue his senses by means of wine, but would enhance them through poetry.

The fact that Poesy's wings are "viewless" is significant. Firstly, Keats does not use the word "invisible", partly for the metre, but also because the "-less" in "viewless" emphasises a lack (of sight) more than "in-" in "invisible" does. The use of the word "viewless" recalls again Keats's poetic creed of Negative Capability that holds that the poet should be identity-less. A poet should "take part in [the sparrow's] existence and pick about the gravel" (Houghton, 1951:48). Only if the Poesy's wings are *viewless* can the speaker fly with the nightingale and see the world as the nightingale would, even if "the dull brain perplexes and retards". As mentioned earlier Keats considered "consecutive reasoning" as the antithesis of intuitive imagination. The reason why "the dull brain perplexes and retards" (line 34; 527) is because it cannot comprehend the truth of the "viewless" imagination, which is a symbol for the identity-less poet remaining in mysteries, uncertainties, doubts.

From the faery otherworld in stanza 4 and 5 (discussed above), the speaker travels to the realm of death. The reference to "hemlock" in the first stanza anticipated this realm. Again immersed in the imagination and seeing through different eyes, the speaker says that he cannot perceive the world around him with his own senses. In the realm of death, he cannot feel pain, as he is a "sod" to the "high requiem" or poetry of the nightingale. Still, the death is personified and thereby, to an extent, familiarised. The speaker relates that he has been

> ... half in love with easeful Death,
> Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
>
> (lines 52-53; p. 529).

As Keats cannot have intimate knowledge of the realm of death, it is less picturable than other spaces in the poem. Even so, by viewing the realm with the aid of the imagination

through the eyes of an inhabitant of the realm of death, the speaker is led to truth, namely that even though death may be easeful and desirable, one is cut off from sensory perception. This leads the speaker to exclaim:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!
>
> (line 61; p. 529).

Having focused on the immanent qualities of the nightingale, the speaker attributes transcendent qualities to it. One is led through the concrete and the particular into the transcendent. The nightingale becomes immortal and is not restricted by time and space.

Another aspect that familiarises the settings in the poem is the allusion to the familiar nightingale tradition: many pre-Romantic and Romantic poets wrote about nightingales (Allott, 1986:524). Allott (1986:524) also writes that Keats most probably read Coleridge's "To the Nightingale" and "The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem". These two poems are likely to have been influences on Keats's writing about a nightingale, because Keats and Coleridge met on Hampstead Heath a month before Keats wrote "Ode to a Nightingale" in April 1819. Keats wrote to George and Georgiana Keats that Coleridge during the slow two-mile walk "broached a thousand things" (Keats 2003) that included nightingales. This meeting and experience may have impacted on the writing of the poem as will be explained.

In the tradition of writing about nightingales, the pre-Romantic and Romantic poets saw the bird as a symbol for melancholy and sadness. Coleridge changes this tradition by stating:

And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,
'Most musical, most melancholy'[10] bird!
A melancholy bird! Oh idle thought!
In nature there is nothing melancholy.
But some night-wandering man, whose heart was pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain.
And many a poet echoed the conceit;

(lines 12-23; Coleridge, 2000:99).

Coleridge's nightingale is a happy bird ("Tis a merry Nightingale", line 43) and so too is Keats's nightingale. Keats alludes to Coleridge's poems[11] and taps into the familiar tradition of writing about nightingales. Keats's nightingale is, however, not merely a joyful bird and a symbol of happiness, but also a catalyst for his travels to otherworlds. It is possible that people of his time would have been familiar with the nightingale tradition and with the progression that Coleridge brought about in it. Coleridge's "To the Nightingale" thus provides a context for the faery realm with its "Queen-Moon and starry fays" that Keats visits. The "Queen-Moon", although otherworldly, would seem familiar.

Keats, with the aid of the imagination and with the nightingale as catalyst, visits a number of otherworlds; he visits a faery realm, the realm of death and past worlds. In the end however he concludes that "the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is famed to

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10 The second quoted line "most musical, most melancholy" bird is from Milton's "Il Penseroso". Coleridge is thus consciously writing into (and commenting on) the nightingale tradition.

11 There are also certain other resemblances in language that suggest that Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" was influenced by Coleridge's poem: Coleridge for instance uses the phrase "A balmy night" (line 8; Coleridge, 2000:99) which Keats echoed in stanza V line 3 with "in embalmèd darkness" Allott also suggests that Keats's "Queen-Moon" could have been inspired by a Coleridge line from "To the Nightingale", "Bards address thy name, / And hers, the full-orb'd Queen that shines above".

do" (lines 73-74, p. 531-532). Only when living in and experiencing this life to the full, experiencing it "on his pulses", can Keats truly exist. Keats wrote in "Sleep and Poetry" that as a poet he will pass through "realm [...] of Flora and Old Pan" (line 102; p. 73), but he will

> ... pass them for a nobler life
> Where [he] may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts...
>
> (lines 123-125; p. 74).

Keats will not linger in the realm of Flora and Old Pan, because he is of opinion that, even though fancy may bring him to certain truths, he is bound to the earth. His interest in and creation of otherworlds only remind him of this fact.

Keats creates several realms in "Ode to a Nightingale". In both the realms that resemble actuality and in the otherworlds one finds a sense of earthiness. The juxtaposition between these two types of otherworlds makes it clear that Keats's rendition of otherworlds does not differ much from his rendition of actuality. This is very different from poems in which Coleridge portrays both actuality and otherworlds (compare for example his otherworldly rendition of nature and his realistic rendition of the city in "Frost at Midnight"). The next poem under discussion, "The Eve of St. Agnes", presents an otherworld which seems familiar due to Keats's sympathetic poetic character, his appeal to the senses and his focus on the primacy of the moment.

## 3.4 "The Eve of St. Agnes"

In "The Eve of St. Agnes" Keats creates a medieval otherworld in which he explores, among other things, human experience. The poem illustrates ways in which Keats concentrates human experience through metonymy and a strong appeal to the senses. The world contains "sleeping dragons" (line 353; p. 477) and an "elfin-storm" (line 343; p. 477), but on the whole the world created does not differ much from the realm known to us. This is the case because Keats endows the otherworld with an abundance of sensual descriptions, capturing the truth of the objects found there. Throughout the poem Keats hints at a truth immanent in particular objects. The images concentrate the essence and energy of the things he describes. The personas and by extension the reader indulge in a sensuous and lush world that seems familiar.

"The Eve of St. Agnes" overflows with sensual descriptions. The myth is explained to Madeline in stanza VI in which she is told that on this evening young virgins – if they went to bed without supper – may receive visions of their loved ones "[u]pon the *honeyed* middle of the night". Here the sweetness of the event is transposed unto midnight. The image hints at a truth of midnight that is directly and immanently connected to the protagonist's (Porphyro's) experience of midnight. When Porphyro devises a plan to see Madeline that night, the speaker explains that the "thought came like a full-blown rose" and caused a "purple riot" in his heart (line 138; p. 462). The image of the full-blown rose connects Porphyro's plan to the earth, while endowing it with the beauty associated with flowers. "[P]urple riot" on the other hand brings to mind the idea of blood rushing through his body. The image's distinct and concrete physicality captures Porphyro's excitement, concentrating his experience. Madeline is said to fall into "the poppied warmth of sleep" (line 237; p. 468). Again the image points to a

profound sleep that is both deep and comfortable, concentrating allusions of both opium and of flowers. Her warm sleep is juxtaposed against the coldness described at the beginning and end of the poem. The adjective "poppied" not only describes her sleep, but also engages two senses and represents a familiar experience, unlike the experiences of Coleridge's mariner, for example. As soon as Madeline is asleep, Porphyro sets a table next to her bed; the event is described as follows:

> Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
> Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
> A table and, half anguished, threw thereon
> A cloth of woven crimson, gold and jet.
>
> (lines 263-256; p. 470).

The richness and the abundance of descriptive visual images immediately involve one in the world and scene created. The richly coloured *woven* cloth is not only visually familiar, but also has texture. Keats focuses on the particular and thereby, in the image of the cloth, appeals to one's sensory experience. One is able to engage with the scene created.

Tactility is also used in connection with Porphyro who is said to be "entoiled in wooféd phantasies" (line 288; p. 472) when he tries to wake Madeline. Again the image relates an abundance of information regarding Porphyro and concentrates the density of his feelings, while giving them a tactile quality. Examples like these can be found in almost every stanza. The effect is that one can – in this medieval otherworld – *see* and appreciate the setting and the characters in it. Because these images are rich in visual and sensuous allusion, capturing the truth of the objects described, the realm seems familiar.

Frequently such sensuous descriptions are presented as personifications: the old Beadsman's "frosted breath" takes flight to heaven like "pious incense" (line 6; p. 453) and he hears "music's golden tongue" (line 20; p. 454). The statues are praying in "dumb orat'ries" (line 16, p.454). Here the senses are employed in bringing inanimate objects to life and endowing them with familiar qualities. The use of personification here is significant as this figure of speech, by its nature, involves and alludes to human experience. In decoding personification one necessarily draws on one's own personal experience of human existence.

As in "Ode to a Nightingale", Keats evokes several senses at once in order to familiarise the realm. This not only foregrounds the senses, but also creates familiarity. After Porphyro set the table, the scene in the room is described as such:

> And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
> In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
> While he from forth the closet brought a heap
> Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
> With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
> And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
> Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
> From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
> From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.
>
> These delicates he heap'd with glowing hand
> On golden dishes and in baskets bright
> Of wreathed silver: sumptuous they stand
> In the retired quiet of the night,
> Filling the chilly room with perfume light.
>
> (lines 262-275; p. 470-471).

In this scene all senses are involved and it creates a luxuriant and fleshly atmosphere that is also an expression of the erotic love that Porphyro has for Madeline. According to Allott (1986:470) the passage also suggests warmth and colours of summer. As such,

one can visualise, feel, smell, hear and taste what is described. This description creates a complete involvement with the events described. The involvement is further intensified by the fact that the warmth suggested here is in stark contrast to the descriptions of cold at the beginning and end of the poem. Put differently, the stanza concentrates sensory experience involving all five senses, thereby creating intensity of feeling and a sense of familiarity.

The same is true of stanza XXXVI:

> Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
> At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
> Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
> Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
> Into her dream he melted, as the rose
> Blendeth its odour with the violet,
> Solution sweet – meantime the frost-wind blows
> Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
> Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.
>
> (lines 316-324; p. 475).

Porphyro melts into Madeline's dream "as the rose [b]lendth its odour with the violet". This highly sexual image encompasses both sight and smell and, more importantly, Keats uses earthy images here: roses and violets grow *out of* the soil and the blended odours are intricately connected to the flowers and thus to nature. The image concentrates two senses, but also links Porphyro and Madeline to nature and therefore to actuality. Similarly, while spying on Madeline, Porphyro sees how she

> Unclasps her warméd jewels one by one;
> Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
> Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees.
>
> (lines 228-230; p. 468).

Here the description of Madeline concentrates three senses, but the description goes beyond the sensual to an erotic and sexual appreciation of her beauty. The overtly iambic pentameter also gives this stanza a rich melodic sound, which contributes to the lusciousness of the scene and the underlying eroticism. Keats reveals – in the "warmed jewels" – an immanent truth about the particular object and about its wearer. It is almost as though the jewels become an extension of Madeline who is painted here as a passionate person. The image invites our senses of sight and of touch, but leads us to a knowledge of the objects/personas that transcends the description, id est to an intensified knowledge.

Other examples where Keats concentrates the force and life of the particular by referring to several senses include "[t]he silver, snarling trumpets" (line 31; p. 455) and "the icéd gusts still rave and beat" (line 326; p. 476). The effect of these is to involve one fully in the realm created, to focus on the object, the particular and to point to the object's immanent truth and energy.

These are excellent examples of Negative Capability. Keats's focus on the particular and the concentration found in the images he uses, enable one to perceive the otherworld created often with more than one sense. More importantly, one grasps truths *about* particular objects that go beyond the mere description. The descriptions testify to intimate knowledge of and sympathy with the object and the effect is that the medieval otherworld seems familiar.

Another technique Keats frequently uses in his poetry, that is also evident in "The Eve of St. Agnes", is synaesthesia. The "lucent syrops" Porphyro prepares for Madeline are "tinct with cinnamon" (line 267; p. 471). The past participle "tinct" engages sight,

whereas "cinnamon" appeals in the first instance to taste and smell, but also to sight. The combination of the three senses concentrates the energy and essence of the particular objects. Adding to this, the delicacies that he puts on the table (almost like an offering on an altar) fill the air with "perfume light". The synaesthetic description contributing most significantly to Negative Capability is the "warméd jewels" Madeline wears. This description concentrates touch and sight, but refers to more than merely a necklace. As mentioned before, the image emphasises the fleshliness and voluptuousness Porphyro sees in Madeline.

Throughout the poem Keats uses an abundance of sensual images and there is a strong focus on the primacy of the moment, which add intensity to the otherworld in the poem. At the end of the poem Porphyro and Madeline "glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall" (line 361; p. 478) and escape through the "elfin-storm" (line 343; p. 477), anxious not to wake the "sleeping dragons" (line 353; p. 477). These images, which are reminiscent of Coleridge's language usage, form a stark contrast to the highly picturable and sensuous imagery in the body of the poem.

### 3.5 "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"

The preceding analyses focused on the ways in which Keats reveals truth and establishes familiarity in his otherworlds. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is an important example of Keats's otherworld poetry, as it poses the most extreme otherworldly space in Keats's oeuvre. The world seems much further removed from actuality than Porphyro's realm, for example. Aspects of the otherworld on "the cold hill's side" are quite similar to Coleridge's strange and inexplicable worlds. Yet, as this analysis will

point out, Keats's decision about which particular aspects of the world should be familiarised, and what not, is dictated by the symbolism embedded in the world.

In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" Keats creates an otherworld completely different from the realm we know. In this realm he explores Romantic topoi such as nightmares, death and desire. More than any other otherworld poem in Keats's oeuvre "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" contains aspects that transcend our experience of the world. Like Coleridge, Keats contrasts the immanent and the transcendent, but unlike Coleridge, Keats emphasises the value of the immanent. As will be evident from the analysis, the descriptions of the knight and of the faery are very different. Even though this realm is quite unlike actuality, Keats employs techniques that bring the realm within familiar experience.

Gittings (1970:303) discusses the influences that shaped "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". According to him, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* provided the pale, melancholy man wandering all alone, Wordsworth provided the cadence of the poem, Coleridge its nightmare quality and Spencer the medieval setting. The title of the poem is taken from Alain Chartier's poem with the same title. The fact that the poem is rich in allusion contributes, to a lesser extent, to the fact that the world created is familiar. As in the poems discussed thus far, Keats uses language to render the otherworld "on the cold hill's side" familiar.

One such example is the use of present continuous verbs when he talks about the knight. These point to a process and thereby lead one "into" the knight's experience. The knight is said to be "loitering" (line 2; p. 501) and is described as having a "*fading* rose" (line 11; p. 503) on his cheek. The knight-at-arms puts the faery on his "*pacing*

steed" (line 21; p. 503). The present continuous tense here gives the action immediacy; it is happening *now*, as the poem is being read. The present continuous tense involves the reader in the primacy of the moment and in the knight's immediate action.

In contrast to the present continuous tense used in connection with the knight, Keats describes the otherworld on the cold hill's side using the simple present tense or present perfect tense. "The squirrels granary *is* full" (line 7; p. 502) and "the harvest *is done*" (line 8; p. 502); "no birds *sing*" (line 4; p. 502) and "the sedge *has withered*" (line 3; p. 502). Not only does Keats's use of tenses emphasise the idea of death and stagnancy that prevail "on the cold hill side", but he also chose images *of the earth*; the stagnancy is concentrated within the particular and in familiar terms.

Another technique that Keats uses to appeal to the familiar experience is to foreground the sadness of winter by using images of summer. The winter is described as a time when "no birds sing", when the "squirrel's granary is full" and "when the harvest is done". These images are earthy and grounded in human experience of the seasons. There are several such earthy images in the poem. The knight too is described in terms of nature: there is a "*lily*" on his brow and a "fading *rose*" on his cheek. On his brow are "anguish moist and fever-dew". The image of "fever-dew" brings about two possible interpretations: it could be a repetition of "anguish moist", i.e. the sweat caused by fever, but the word also reminds of "feverfew", a plant that is traditionally used to cure fever. If Keats is alluding to this plant, the image points to and concentrates the tension between sickness and healing within the knight. This contradiction underscores an intensity of the experience of illness and could bring about the "haggard" and "woe-begone" look of the knight. The otherworld "on the cold hill's side" becomes a metaphor for – and concentrates – the knight's experience.

Andrew Bennett (1990:paragraph 21)[12] traces the etymology of the word "woe-begone" and writes that according to the OED the word literally means "affected by an *environment* of woe" (my emphasis). As he points out, our appreciation of the modern connotations of the word ('unhappy,' 'woeful,' and so forth) are invigorated and enlightened" by our knowledge of its etymological meaning (Bennett, 1990:paragraph 21). The etymology of the word thus foregrounds the way in which the landscape mirrors the knight's experience. The knight is bound to the earth in such a way that the earth resembles his state of being. Put differently, the knight's disposition shapes the otherworld in which he finds himself.

No such images are used to describe the faery. She is not connected to the earth. Instead Keats uses Coleridgean preclusive images to describe her. She is a "faery's child" (line 14; p. 503), she speaks a "language strange" (line 27; p. 504), and she takes the knight to an "elfin grot" (line 29; p. 504). Unlike Coleridge, Keats uses such images not to portray a sense of awe and wonder, but rather to portray the faery as dangerous. She is removed from human experience, falls outside common experience and is therefore not to be trusted. She transcends the known (and the earth), but the transcendence is not rooted in the concrete as is usually the case with Keats's otherworldly beings. The reason for this alternative rendering of the faery is to be found in Keats's own knowledge and experience.

Keats tapped into his own experience of love and death when he wrote the poem. His much-loved brother, Tom, died shortly before the poem was composed, after he (Tom)

[12] References to this article will indicate the paragraph number, as no page numbers were available.

had been deceived in love. Gittings (1970:303) points out that this was also an important event that echoes in the poem and comments that Keats "instinctively knew" that love and death would, for him personally, always be inseparably connected (Gittings, 1970:304). He sees the faery as a symbol of the "eternal fusion of Love and Death" (Gittings, 1970:303). In this sense the poem explores that which is immanent in nature – in this case human nature. Even though Keats instinctively knew that Love and Death would be connected in his life, the connection posed something about which he could not have intimate, immanent knowledge. Death, because it is more distressing and more immediate than the realm of death in for instance in "Ode to a Nightingale" is dealt with in a more abstract way. The abstractness – as opposed to concreteness – in this case translates to a lack of knowledge about the relation between love and death. Their immanent truth remains hidden, Keats did not, in this poem, connect it to the known and the familiar. The fact that the faery, the symbol of the fusion of love and death, represents the unknown, is emphasised by the fact that she cuts the knight off from his sensory perception. Shortly after he encounters the faery, the knight relates that he "set her on [his] pacing steed, / *And nothing else saw all day long*;" (lines 21-22; p. 503; my emphasis).

The description of the faery is thus in stark contrast to the way in which the knight is described. An abundance of images describes the knight, connecting him to the earth and to nature. The faery – symbolising Death and Love – on the other hand remains a mystery due the fact that very little information is given about her, and that which is given only adds to the mystery. This contrast is heightened by the fact that the knight is portrayed as active, whereas the lady remains passive throughout the poem. Bennett (1990:paragraph 1) writes that there is both an overabundance of information and a lack of information in the poem. On a lexical level, he argues, " the poem is highly wrought,

introducing an overload of information" (Bennett, 1990:paragraph 5), but on the narrative level very little information is given. Despite a lack of information many things seems to happen in the poem, such as "seduction, enthrallment, bewitchment, echoes of the Fall, gothic vision, dream, dream within a dream" (Bennett, 1990:paragraph 4) and more. The same is true of the faery. She is portrayed as an interesting and complex persona, and yet she remains a riddle. Like most of Coleridge's otherworldly entities this faery is beyond sensory perception.

In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" Keats thus employs his own experience, but also engages familiar experience to which one can relate. He does so by creating a world that is accessible, because it contains many familiar things. The otherworld, even though it does not resemble the realm we know, is described with reference to natural phenomena. The only exception to this is the description of the faery. Because she represents the unknowable connection between love and death, she is described in such a way that she falls outside one's frame of reference. Keats also uses words, specifically verbs that emphasise the knight's experience.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Keats's application of Negative Capability in the creation of his otherworlds makes them seem familiar. He becomes the identity-less poet that feels and experiences what the objects that he contemplates feel and experience; he becomes the sparrow that picks about the gravel, the grape-gatherer yearning for a sip of wine or the gypsy, Meg Merrilies, seeing Kirkcudbright Country as a place of abundance. To achieve these perspectives on aspects of the worlds created in the poems, Keats was resolved to make up his mind about nothing, to remain in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts.

In an attempt to concretise the sensory experience, Keats's focus is – unlike Coleridge's – on the particular, the minute. His creed of the identity-less poet manifested in his poetry in an attempt to concentrate and concretise for the purpose of discovering immanent truth. Through his imagery Keats tries to concentrate the essence and the energy of what he describes. This led him to use images such as "warmèd jewels", "perfumed light" and "frosted breath". The senses play a prominent role in Keats's images and in many of his images he accentuated tactile qualities. By alluding to the senses and by concentrating experience, Keats endows the realms with familiarity. This means that he creates in his otherworld poetry that which can be termed a familiar unfamiliarity. Even when they are removed in time and space, the realms created in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "The Eve of St. Agnes" involve one's senses to such an extent that one can fully "know" the realms. Keats sought in his poetry to reveal the truth of the objects that he wrote about. One is brought to see and experience this intuitive and instinctive truth and knowledge that Keats sought to reveal through his use of Negative Capability. This truth, frequently expressed in the sensuous rendering of the realms created in the poems, is what brings about familiarity.

Keats brings before one's eyes an otherworld that is highly picturable and sensuous. In these worlds he actualises his creed of Negative Capability. The imagination that Keats employs in his otherworlds is thoroughly grounded in *this* world. He writes and creates worlds with an intensity and primacy of feeling that goes beyond realism, imbuing the whole world with meaning. Transcendence for Keats is firmly rooted in the known and the concrete; the sublime is immanent in things we see and hear everyday. His otherworldly view of this realm starts at a sensuous appreciation of things in this world. He is ultimately a poet of the senses and his spatiality is familiar. As has been shown,

Keats uses earthy images and places a lot of emphasis on how one perceives the world through the senses. This holds true even when Keats creates worlds that are not the realm that we know. As the next chapter provisionally concludes, it is this emphasis on the senses that differentiates Keats's otherworlds most strongly from Coleridge's.

## Chapter 4

## The world beyond and the world within: the difference between Coleridge's and Keats's otherworld poetry

### 4.1 Introduction

Despite having similar views regarding the inability of reason to arrive at a whole truth, Coleridge and Keats had distinct and different artistic visions. This difference manifests in the otherworlds that they create and explore in their poetry. As Romantic otherworlds, and the way in which they are created, have not been studied in depth in criticism, this dissertation set out to answer questions regarding the differences found in Coleridge's and Keats's otherworlds. It investigated the nature of the differences between Coleridge's and Keats's otherworlds; the different techniques that the two poets employ to create such divergent otherworlds, and the way in which the poets' worldviews, as expressed in their prose writings, manifest in their otherworld poetry. The dissertation proved that both poets hint at a more comprehensive view of the universe; Coleridge by alluding to the transcendent and emphasising the mysterious and Keats by focusing on the otherworldly within the familiar.

### 4.2 Coleridge's transcendent otherworlds

I have argued that the mysterious and otherworldly atmospheres prevailing in Coleridge's realms are a result of, among other techniques, his use of preclusive images that reveal, but also conceal information. Such images give some information, but also contain some element of vagueness. The "caverns measureless to man" (line 4 & 27; p.

103) in Xanadu (in "Kubla Khan") may conjure visual images of huge caves, but the fact that these caverns are "measureless to man" keeps aspects of them inscrutable. Images like these give one only enough information to know that one cannot know the whole, that something remains hidden. They do so by foregrounding invisibility in the otherworld, either by focusing on and making visible, with the aid of the imagination, that which cannot be seen in actuality, such as the thick and suffocating air in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" ("the air was cut away before / and closes from behind"; lines 424-425; p. 62) and the swarm of little birds singing in the middle of the ocean, or by making things invisible by means of preclusive images. I have illustrated how preclusive images present and hide information with reference to the following example:

> Nor dim, nor red, like God's own head,
> The glorious sun uprist:
>
> (lines 97-98; p. 52).

As has been explained in the analysis, Coleridge does not in this simile describe what the otherworldly sun looks like. Instead, he starts by saying what it does *not* look like; the sun is "[n]or dim, nor red", leaving a myriad of possibilities of what it could look like. Furthermore, he includes in this simile an aspect that precludes us from grasping what the sun looks like in the mariner's seascape. "*God's* head" (my emphasis) is something that we cannot know. Not only can we not know what God's head looks like, but we are confronted with a speaker that can. We are lead into this weird world by an otherworldly being with knowledge of what lies beyond that which we perceive. Even though Coleridge reveals some aspects of the sun to us, he conceals its essence, making it invisible and unpicturable and therefore inscrutable.

Coleridge uses the same technique in "Kubla Khan" where preclusive adjectives, such as the "deep romantic chasm" (line 12; p. 103) and the "woman wailing for her demon-lover" (line 16;p. 103) give one an idea of the phenomena found in the realm, but where a seeming over-abundance of information tells one more of the atmosphere of Xanadu, than about what it actually *looks* like.

Adding to the effect of the preclusive images, Coleridge employs constant suggestions of things transcending our grasp. In all his poems, but especially in "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan" one is confronted with an overwhelming sense that the otherworld encompasses more than the sum of its descriptions. That is a result of the fact that Coleridge directs attention away from the descriptions to that which lies beyond. In "Christabel" he does this by juxtaposing the known and the unknown. Dramatic irony and vampire fiction code enhance this juxtaposition in this poem.

In "Kubla Khan" the mysterious figure of Kubla Khan as well as the suggestive environment conjure the constant suggestion of something beyond the perceivable. The mystery surrounding the composition of the poem also adds to this suggestion.

Several techniques support Coleridge's two main techniques, for instance, the fact that Coleridge sometimes provides very little information regarding a central character, as is the case with the personas of the mariner and Life-in-Death in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Kubla Khan and the damsel with the dulcimer in "Kubla Khan". Coleridge also uses an obscure myth as intertext to the otherworld in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", which adds to the eerie atmosphere of the otherworldly seascape. These techniques contribute to the mystery of Coleridge's realms largely because they render

aspects of the otherworlds invisible and inscrutable and direct the focus to aspects of the otherworlds that transcend the known.

Coleridge lures one into a willing suspension of disbelief by appealing to one's imagination. He thereby leads one, through the imagination, to poetic faith and to an appreciation of what lies beyond the world we perceive, specifically to that which cannot be seen. The idea that the world is mysterious and not fully knowable by means of the senses, is crystallised in the otherworlds that he creates in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner", "Kubla Khan" and others.

Coleridge's fascination with the inscrutability of the world we live in as expressed in the otherworlds he created is also evident in the prose that he wrote during the time when he composed some of his most memorable otherworld poems. Several such writings point towards a universe that is beyond human perception, a world that is vast and grand. In these writings he also advocates that the imagination is more important and central to perception, than the senses are.

### 4.3 Keats's sentient otherworlds

Whereas Coleridge leads one's thoughts away from what he called *pusillas coginationes* to the great and the vast, Keats's focus is on the particular. Within the particular, Keats tries to capture the truth of the concrete objects that he writes about. The result of this approach is that the otherworlds he creates, seem familiar.

Keats's poetic creed of Negative Capability leads him to remain in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts and to make up his mind about nothing. As a result, he is able to

*feel with*, to have sympathy with, the objects that he writes about and to reveal a truth about these objects that would otherwise have remained hidden. Because he captures truth in this way, his realms seem familiar. "Ode to a Nightingale" expresses his techniques very well. In the poem Keats sees actuality through the eyes of suffering mortals as well as through the eyes of a nightingale. He is able to see the realm through both perspectives, because he makes up his mind about nothing. The two perspectives open before his eyes two worlds that, despite the fact that both derive from actuality, have very little in common. That the two worlds do not intersect is emphasised by the fact that the speaker tells the nightingale that the world of mortals is a world that "thou among the leaves hast never known" (line 22; p. 526). When he sees actuality through the eyes of those who suffer, he draws strongly on his own knowledge and experience of suffering and thereby adds intensity to the description of the realm. When viewed through the eyes of the nightingale, an otherworld, previously foreclosed from sight, is revealed. In the same way, Keats, having made up his mind about nothing and insisting upon remaining in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, sees an otherworld, when he looks at Kirkcudbright Country through the eyes of the persona, Meg Merrilies.

Through the application of Negative Capability, Keats becomes one with the objects contemplated in his poetry and as such, he can see otherworlds not only through the eyes of a nightingale and the Scottish rural women, as represented by the persona, Meg Merrilies, but also through the eyes of Porphyro (in "The Eve of St. Agnes") and a knight at arms in a faery otherworld. By playing with perspectives in his otherworld poetry, Keats gives us a fresh, yet familiar, otherworldly perspective on actuality.

Keats's focus on the particular, however, takes this process a step further. He is not only able to see dimensions of actuality usually precluded from sight, but he also sees

within these dimensions the truth of the objects described. The truth is often concentrated in and expressed through the use of metonymy and highly sensual images, especially synaesthesia. I argued that it is this truth that gives the otherworlds that Keats explores a sense of familiarity.

The analyses pointed out images such as Madeline's necklace that is described as "warmèd jewels" (line 228; p. 468). This image mixes both sight and touch, thereby foregrounding the way in which we perceive what is described and concentrating several familiar experiences. The "warmèd jewels" relate truth not only about the object described (the jewels), but also about its wearer – the jewels carry with them also an aspect of Madeline.

The fact that the image alludes to more than is described, forms an interesting parallel with Coleridge's poetry that highlights the difference between the two poets' otherworlds. In Coleridge's otherworld poems one is left with a feeling that there is more to the realm than the sum of the descriptions. That which lies beyond, though, is mysterious and unknown. Keats too creates images that allude to more than is described, but in his otherworlds, that which lies beyond description is linked to the known, it is concretised and familiar.

The cold hill's side in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" testifies to a sensuous rendering that makes the otherworld familiar; it is described as a space where

> [t]he sedge has withered from the lake
> And no birds sing!
>
> (lines 3 & 4, p. 502).

The description alludes to sight and hearing, and as it uses images of winter, also implies the sense of touch. The strong appeal to the senses concretises the realm and draws it into familiar experience. Similarly in "Ode to a Nightingale" the speaker can *taste* the "country green", "Provençal song" and "sunburnt mirth" (line 14; 526). The synaesthesia concentrates the experience and the senses involved in it. The result is that it leads one to look at wine in a new way, while highlighting its essence and familiar qualities.

In "The Eve of St Agnes" Porphyro puts on the table a "cloth of woven crimson, gold and jet" (line 256; p. 470). Not only does Keats pinpoint the particular, but he also describes it in terms of phenomena within our frames of reference. He concretises the scene by alluding to two senses, and with that creates a rich and picturable environment.

The familiarity is also a result of Keats's use of metonymy. In "Ode to a Nightingale", the otherworld that opens before the speaker's eyes as he sees it through the eyes of the nightingale, is metonymically described in terms of all the vegetation found there. The speaker relates

> I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
> Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
> But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
> The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
> Wherewith the seasonable month endows
> White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
> Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
> And mid-May's eldest child,
> The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
> The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
>
> (lines 35-50; p. 527-528).

The metonymy concentrates the realm to reveal its essence and its truth. The truth of the realm that is thus revealed, makes it familiar.

Their familiarity makes Keats's otherworlds seem smaller than Coleridge's and less remote, because he focuses not on the great and the vast, but on the particular as perceived by the senses. Keats's creed of Negative Capability led him to create otherworlds clad in rich and voluptuous descriptions, rooting his most idealist and escapist otherworlds firmly in actuality. The otherworld in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is the most otherworldly realm that Keats created, and even in this realm, most of the phenomena found, are described using earthy images. In his other otherworlds too, objects gain an otherworldly quality only after they have been concretised and tied to the earth. This is true of the nightingale and the wine in "Ode to a Nightingale".

In a nutshell: The poetic language Keats uses to create otherworlds alludes to the familiar. A reader cannot only picture Keats's otherworlds, but also indulge in familiar experience that involves all the senses. As such one is led to grasp the immanent truth of nature.

Keats's emphasis on the senses is evident in the letters that he wrote. In contrast to Coleridge's worldview, Keats believed that sensory experience is paramount to an understanding of the truth of the world.

### 4.4 The world beyond and the world within

The main difference between Coleridge's and Keats's otherworld poetry can be summarised as follows: It is as though Coleridge wants to say through his otherworld

poetry, "there is a fascinating world beyond that which you can see"; whereas Keats's otherworld poetry tells one "there are fascinating aspects within this world that you do not see". This difference crystallised in Keats's sensuous images that frequently foreground tactility and in Coleridge's images that problematise visibility.

The different atmospheres and spatial configurations of the otherworlds in their poetry reflect this main difference. The difference also accounts for the fact that the two poets' otherworlds have different relations to actuality; Coleridge's worlds namely seem far removed from actuality, whereas Keats's seem much closer and familiar. The different natures of the otherworlds created in the two poets' poems are the result of different techniques used. Two poems that can both be described as gothic, namely "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "Christabel" illustrate some of these differences.

In "The Eve of St. Agnes" Keats creates a medieval realm that forms the setting for the story of Madeline and Porphyro to unfold. As stated in the analysis of the poem the world is meticulously described using images that invoke the reader's senses. Luscious descriptions of food ("jellies soother than the creamy curd, / And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon" [lines 266-269; p. 471]) and violent storms that are described as "icéd gusts" that "rave and beat" (line 326; p. 476) give the world a rich, but familiar atmosphere. Madeline's otherworld is familiar because it comprises of things to be found in actuality too, and is described with references to the senses. Very few elements in the poem set this realm apart from the one we know. It is almost as though Keats creates a "domestic" gothic in this realm. The medievalism of the realm is underplayed and the otherworld can easily be mistaken for actuality.

The medieval otherworld of Coleridge's "Christabel" on the other hand is radically different from the realm we know. It is endowed with much mystery, partly as a result of the fact that the scenery is not thoroughly described – that is, there is a scarcity of information regarding the surroundings – and partly because of a continuous suggestion of things transcendent. The gothic in the realm of Christabel exists almost purely in the supernatural and this distances her realm – in time and in space – from the one we know. The gothic in "Christabel" is the unknowable and eerie vampiric gothic – there is nothing that can be said to be familiar about it – the gothic in "Christabel" does not equate actuality.

The same difference informs both corpora of otherworld poems. Coleridge's otherworlds, such as Kubla's pleasure-dome and the Mariner's seascape seem further removed and more mysterious than Keats's otherworlds which seem tactile and familiar, as is illustrated by Meg Merrilies' Scotland where the emphasis on the world's 'realness' creates the illusion that Meg's story is a recovered piece of history that had been lost. In a nutshell, Coleridge's otherworlds obscure all except the great and the whole in order to create a transcendent spatiality. He achieves this mainly by foregrounding invisibility in the realms that he creates. Keats's otherworlds focus on the life and energy concentrated in the particular and thereby highlight the immanent value of small things. The familiarity in Keats's realms is largely a result of his aim to make things tangible in his otherworlds.

### 4.5 Conclusion

Coleridge creates otherworlds that one can – even through a willing suspension of disbelief – always only partially comprehend. In his otherworld poems, he points to a

reality beyond that which can be perceived and as a result, Coleridge's otherworlds – even though they are overwhelming and mythic – seem far removed from the world known to us.

Keats leads one into the otherworlds he creates by appealing to one's concrete experience that is always embedded in the senses, he looks for the otherworldly within what can be perceived and attempts to reveal their immanent truth. His otherworlds seem closer to the familiar world (and are often set in it) and are reminiscent of fairy-tales rather than of myths.

This is not to say that Keats' otherworlds are less imaginative, or that Coleridge's refute perceivable reality, only that in Coleridge's work there is a tendency towards transcendence and in Keats's towards the immanent truth of nature.

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