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The Sanity of Furor Poeticus: Romanticism's Demystification of Madness and Creativity

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The Sanity of *Furor Poeticus*: Romanticism's Demystification of Madness and Creativity

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of English,
University at Albany, State University of New York
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and
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Abstract

Art and medicine have historically exchanged axioms for understanding mental illness, negotiating a lexicon with which afflicted artists can articulate their experience. This exchange, however, has been problematic. The mentally ill have had to conform to explanatory paradigms that are often inadequate, and cultural mores stemming from the scientific misunderstanding of “madness” have often stigmatized mental illness. These include misconceptions about the source of creative genius as residing in either the divine or the unconscious, the cultural fashioning of the “mad poet” identity, and the idealization of certain types of mental illness as “artistically valuable.” This study will show, however, that the European Romantic movement in the early 19th century contained psychologically afflicted poets who were able to use tropes of “madness” in inventive ways to articulate a more insightful account of the interplay between mental illness and the creative process than could be found in existing paradigms of mental illness. Furthermore, I contend that these poets were able to respond to their period’s flawed paradigms by sardonically using these tropes to subvert convention and, in doing so, help shift the paradigm. The poetry of John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge is examined alongside that of Charles Baudelaire to elucidate the important role that these poets had in advancing discourse on mental illness and creativity into our contemporary period.

Acknowledgements

There is a certain irony that a study of the relationship between mental illness and creativity sorely tested my own sanity. I would like to thank Professors Ineke Murakami, Kir Kuiken, and Paul Stasi for keeping me grounded with their endless patience, expert guidance, and unwavering support. This project would not have been at all possible without you three. This project is for my family, my colleagues, and the afflicted.

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Introduction: Madness in The Romantic Era

Art and medicine have historically exchanged axioms for understanding mental illness, negotiating a lexicon with which afflicted artists can articulate their experience. Scholars such as Allen Thither and Branimir M. Rieger have theorized the coexistence of “literary madness” and “clinical madness,” two distinct yet interconnected paradigms that are in constant interaction. For all of the advances that this discourse has provided in understanding mental illness, however, the exchange between these two traditions has been problematic. Thither argues that they “have an antagonistic relation as often as they have a relation in which they share axioms of understanding” (162). This antagonism is especially perilous for artists suffering from mental illness, who must “live and experience their insanity in conformity with the explanatory paradigms that their era uses to understand madness” (162). Consequently, artists feel compelled to articulate “madness” using the language of these paradigms. However, psychology’s imperfect understanding of mental illness often makes the language of science inadequate for artists seeking to illuminate the experience of madness.

Both medicine’s inadequacy as an expository language for the experience of mental illness and the tension between literature and medical psychology have allowed for a myriad of stigmatizing notions to become attached to mentally ill artists. These include misconceptions about the source of creative genius as residing in either the divine or the unconscious, the cultural fashioning of the “mad poet” identity, and the romanticizing of certain types of mental illness as “artistically valuable.” Interestingly, afflicted artists have worked within these marginalizing confines by using both literary and clinical tropes of “madness” in their historical moment to construct the experience of mental illness in a way that, Thither concedes, “often offered a more insightful knowledge of madness... than medicine” (162).

Because these stigmatizing notions, which still pervade our present moment, don't arise ex nihilo, this study focuses on the European Romantic movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Scholars consider this period to be the beginning of scientific inquiry into “madness” as a psychological and physiological illness. It was during this transitional period in the early 19th century that psychiatry and psychoanalysis, two concurrent traditions that comprise much of our present discourse about clinical psychology, emerged in Germany. Furthermore, a study of madness in the Romantic era is significant in illuminating our contemporary understanding of mental illness for many reasons. The first is that “Modernity begins with Romanticism, which, in Germany, formed the last great cultural synthesis in our history, when doctors and writers...all shared much the same conceptual framework” (Thither 163). The second, interrelated reason is that doctors and writers both challenged empirical medicine by drawing upon past concepts of the numinous depths of the psyche. This created “the conditions of possibility... for the development of psychoanalysis” (163). The final reason, as articulated by Foucault, is that many of the modern institutions—such as the asylum and mental hospital—were birthed during this period.

The extent to which we can derive insight into mental illness from literature is a critical site of scholarly debate in understanding how fiction can inform and shape cultural and medical inquiry. There is a long tradition of psychoanalytic scholarship that attempts to identify elements of the author's own experience with mental illness within his or her writing. Scholars of this tradition often see an artist's ailment as inescapably manifest in that artist's work, especially when that work concerns themes of madness. Other scholars, like Louis A. Sass and Albert Rothenberg, believe that an authentic representation of mental illness can be written by both sane

and insane authors, and to reduce a work of art to the ailment of a diseased artist degrades creative invention and reduces art to a one dimensional “case study.”

My thesis belongs to the latter approach, and looks to illuminate the contribution that afflicted authors had in informing discourse on “madness” during those periods where literature and medicine harbored conflicting understandings of mental illness. This study will show that certain afflicted Romantic poets responded to their period’s marginalizing paradigms by sardonically appropriating tropes of “madness” to subvert convention and inform the cultural zeitgeist. I specifically focus on how these poets reimagine melancholia as an experience that is both creatively debilitating and physically agonizing—in short, something much closer to what we know as clinical depression. Melancholy is given precedence in this study for three reasons. First, depression is the most common form of mental imbalance worldwide. Second, “melancholia” as an abstract philosophical and psychological concept has been mythologized since the time of Aristotle as a state of superior insight. As such, it is most often associated with artistic genius, and was specifically considered by Romantics to be a higher state of consciousness. Third, Baudelaire’s deconstruction of melancholia into more distinguished forms of dejection, such as his so-called “spleen,” as discussed in Chapter 2 can be read as the beginnings of a taxonomy in which specific varieties of depression were distinguished.

I do not argue that all, or even most, mentally ill artists engaged in this kind of criticism. Indeed, there were and are many who believe in these misconceptions and, in turn, mythologize harmful stereotypes such as the “mad genius.” I focus on those artists who, perhaps due to familiarity with their own affliction, thought critically about the psychological discourse of their moment. Furthermore, I contend that this use of convention to challenge convention has

contributed to paradigmatic shifts in the cultural attitude towards mental illness, demonstrating literature's ability to inform scientific inquiry and shape an era's knowledge of "madness."

Chapter 1 examines the ways in which the poetry of John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge subverts misconceptions about creativity, madness, and poetic identity held by both the medicine of the latter 18th century and their own Romantic movement. The paradigm of madness at the dawn of the Romantic era was a composite of intersecting medical and philosophical ideas largely inherited from the Enlightenment. Two models of medicine that prevailed during the beginning of this period were the neoclassical and the Iatro-Mechanical models. The neoclassical model, borrowing from Hippocratic and Galenian ideas of medicine, saw madness as an imbalance of bodily "humors" (Zimmerman 1) and conceived of mental illness as a similar imbalance of mental states, as in Descartes's "imbalance of passions." Conversely, the Iatro-mechanical model likened man's anatomy to a machine and conceived of the brain as a nexus of fibers that controlled behavior based on the tension of those fibers (Foucault 128). Mania and melancholy, two binary affects that, to Foucault, are key themes of the Classical concept of madness, were respectively the product of overly tight or loose fibers in the brain (128). The Iatro-Mechanical model surpassed neoclassicism as the preferred psychological paradigm of the eighteenth century, in large part, because of the dissemination of Immanuel Kant's "rational empiricism," which reduced all knowledge to a relation of a subject to an objective world, precluding any knowledge of "the noumenal world"—for example knowledge of the soul (Thither 168). This mechanistic, empirical outlook dominated medical discourse at the start of the eighteenth century.

Empiricism's dominance over eighteenth century medical discourse can be seen as endemic of a phenomenon of the Classical Era¹ described by Michel Foucault, in which the language of "reason" came to silence the language of "madness" (38). He claims, "by a strange act of force, the classical age was to reduce to silence the madness whose voice the Renaissance had just liberated, but whose violence it had already tamed" (38). This "silencing" occurred through the confinement and reclassifying of madmen. The *Hospital General*, created in 1656, separated madmen from the larger population and ascribed to them the label of social deviants. This was not a medical institution, but rather a legal one intended to consolidate those on the social fringe. This event became emblematic of a larger trend of confinement and marginalization that persisted into the nineteenth century (Foucault xii).

During this practice of confinement, the public exhibition of madmen at "hospitals" emerged throughout Europe. The institutionalized were put on display for a paying audience, and were sometimes incorporated as actors in theatre (69). Abbe de Coulmier, the director of Charenton institution which staged such a play, noted, "The insane who attended these theatricals were the object of the attention and curiosity of a frivolous, irresponsible, and often vicious public" (Qtd. in Foucault 69). While the display of madmen dates back to the middle ages (68), Foucault argues that the manifestation of this practice in the Romantic era made "madness a pure spectacle" (69) and "a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed" (70). This reduction of the madman to an animal, coupled with the limiting empiricism of prevailing medical paradigms, denied the mentally ill a social presence and, more severely, denied the institutionalized insane their humanity. The Western attitude towards

¹ Foucault defines the "Classical Era" as occurring from 1656 and the nineteenth century. See *Madness and Civilization*.

madness at the start of the Romantic era appears to be one of morbid spectacle, at once fascinated and repulsed by it.

The literal spectacle of the hospitalized insane coincided with an allegorical spectacle of madness in the arts. The Romantics ironically, initiated this artistic spectacle as a rejection of the empirical boundaries placed on creativity, imagination, and insanity. During this period, Cesare Lombrosio compiled an encyclopedic volume associating genius with “a broad range of mental diseases . . . from alcoholism to epilepsy” (Burwick 3). Drama, which has a venerable tradition of depicting madness, became a venue where the afflicted Romantic could explore his or her own “mad” inspiration. Burwick notes, “The theater itself becomes a madhouse, or troping the trope, as Charels Beys did in *Les Illustres Foues* (1634), the madhouse becomes theater” (10). Using tropes of madness from both literature and medicine, Romantic artists and thinkers during this period attempted to reestablish the imagination, instead of reason, as the supreme human faculty, and the melancholy as the shareholders of a special kind of insight rather than bestial abnormalities.

This reimagining of creativity and melancholy largely occurred with the Romantic appropriation of *furor poeticus*, or mad poet. While many in the Romantic movement used this trope to exalt the powers of the poet and the imagination, John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge appropriated this trope in their poetics to achieve a more subversive effect. As seen in the readings of Keats’s “Odes” and Coleridge’s selected poetry, both poets use the trope of *furor poeticus* to problematize the myth of sudden artistic inspiration, imaginative excess as a cause of madness, and melancholy as either a form of madness or a state of higher insight and creativity. In doing so, they each articulate an experience of melancholy, the creative process, and the

interplay between the two in a way that helps move the paradigm of madness away from its conception as a moral evil.

In Chapter 2, we see the effects that the Romantic reimagining of the psyche had on medicine at the turn of the century. Medical discourse in the nineteenth century retreated from both Iatro-mechanical models of medicine and Romantic medicine's inquiry into the imagination as a source of madness. Instead, a science known as "positivist psychiatry" arose that "demonstrated that it could account for a mental disease using the findings of pathological anatomy" (Thither 195). In other words, mental imbalances were now being attributed to physical diseases². Unlike Iatro-mechanical medicine, however, this correlation between pathology and psychology was demonstrated by regular correlation of a pathological organic state with a pathological mental state³.

This advancement in medicine had a momentous impact on western culture's conception of madness. First, madness was no longer viewed as a moral evil, but rather a social and medical problem. Foucault notes that this shift in conception saw "the reduction of the classical experience of unreason to a strictly moral perception of madness, which would secretly serve as a nucleus for all the concepts that the nineteenth century would subsequently vindicate as scientific, positive, and experimental" (Foucault 197). Consequently, madness was no longer a state mutually exclusive from reason⁴, but was instead included along the spectrum of possible

² An important principle of this science, according to positivist Claude Bernard, is that "... in nature there is nothing troubled or abnormal since everything takes place according to natural laws, laws that are by definition "normal" (Thither 197). As a result, mental states were no longer viewed as abnormal or normal, as good or evil. Instead, positivist psychiatry marked the beginnings of science's consideration of behavior and mental states as existing along a spectrum. For more detailed description of positivist psychiatry, see introduction.

³ The earliest example was Antoine Bayle (1789-1859) and his correlation of general paralysis with chronic meningitis. See Thither, 195.

⁴ In regards to the previous generation's error in conceptualizing clinical madness, Psychiatrist John Conolly wrote in 1830 that medicine of that era "sought for, and imagined, a strong and definable boundary between sanity and insanity, which has not only been imaginary, and arbitrarily placed, but hurtful to those so segregated. Quote and analysis in Reed 145.

human behavior. Because of this, madness permeated culture and was considered a fluid potentiality for all. One could conceivably oscillate between the two states in a lifetime—entering into insanity and, in theory, recovering from it. This added medical and moral dimension to madness saw that the treatment of madman in western society changed from confinement to rehabilitation⁵. Hospitals, at least ostensibly, attempted to cure madness. As a result, the madman, according to Foucault, once again reclaimed a social presence (201). Second, fear of madness was replaced by a cultural fascination with it—especially in literature. Writers either aimed to depict madness with verisimilitude, or sensationalized it to bring about a desired effect (Reed 142). Romantics had long given literary treatment cognitive states that, as John Reed says, “...smack[ed] of mental imbalance and melancholia” (144). Combining elements of Romanticism and horror, Gothic literature rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and gave considerable attention to insanity. Gothic fiction often endowed insanity with supernatural elements and, unlike Romantic literature, depicted madness as a terrible curse. The various emergent treatments of insanity in literature, as Reed rightly notes, “reflects nineteenth-century society’s fascination—bordering on obsession—with madness” (142).

Alongside this transformation of thought, a transformation in industry occurred in 19th century France, which saw the country modernize between 1853 and 1870 under Louis Napoleon. This modernization entailed the destruction of antique and medieval districts in Paris in favor of urbanization. In the midst of this transformation was Charles Baudelaire, a Parisian poet and suspected manic-depressive (Jamison 267) who sits on the axis of both literature’s transition from Romantic idealism to Modernist cynicism, and medicine’s transition from Romantic positivism to our modern disciplines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. I argue that *Les Fleurs du Mal* helped to motivate this transition by accomplishing three distinct ends. First, his

⁵ See *Madness and Civilization* – “Doctors and Patients”

appropriation and corruption of Romantic tropes—such as their version of *furor poeticus*, the idealization of nature, and the exaltation of the individual—is done to subvert the Romantic notion of the psyche as a numinous entity apart from the physical body and the idea of “noble,” or artistically valuable, melancholy. Second, Baudelaire’s doctrine of correspondences—in which all manner of physical and psychological experience inform and induce one another—allows for the “physicalizing” of madness. In other words, mental imbalances could now be viewed as a sickness that induces a physical reaction, and conversely physiological ailments could induce psychological afflictions. This is seen in Baudelaire’s series of “Spleen” poems, in which he conceives “ennui” as an existentially—and physically—distressing listlessness. Finally, Baudelaire’s “ennui” advances beyond the literary melancholia of the Romantics and can be read as a prefiguration of different classifications of depression.

Chapter 1: Keats, Coleridge, and the Melancholy of *Furor Poeticus*

Perhaps the most significant Romantic appropriation of a trope of madness occurred with the reimagining of the *furor poeticus*, or mad poet. A figure with a time-honored mythos dating back to classical antiquity, the “mad poet” received his inspiration from frenzied visions provided by the gods. He held a special position in the Greek social order, at once mythologized by society and disenfranchised from it (Thither 28). As medical and theological thought advanced in the Western world, the proverbial “gods” of creativity were supplanted by paradigms that saw genius, and its doppelganger insanity, as products of sensory or psychological aberrations that resulted in a collapse of reason (Burwick 3). The afflicted artist’s creativity was flattened to a function of a diseased mind; his art became the subject of cultural fascination, and his standing in society remained that of a fringe other. This was the position that afflicted Romantics inherited from the Enlightenment and Kantian empiricism. Enlightenment philosophy positioned madness as the absence of reason, and more severely as an evil to be feared (Reed 142). In response, Romantics unearthed the antiquated *furor poeticus* trope and reimagined it as “a revolutionary and liberating madness that could free the imagination from the ‘restraint of conformity’” (2). This chapter will explore the ways in which John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge—two of the most eminent poets, thinkers, and melancholics⁶ of the Romantic era—used this trope ironically to liberate artistic creation from its conception as an act involving insanity and, more significantly, to unhinge melancholy as an affective state separate from madness.

The Romantic version of *furor poeticus* was markedly different from the Greek and Renaissance versions. Frederick Burwick notes that, “rather than mediating God’s creative will

⁶ Posthumously diagnosed as possibly unipolar or bipolar. See *Touched with Fire* pp. 268

as oracle or prophet, through mystical union or beatific vision, the poet was deemed to possess special affinity with nature, a capacity to read nature's hieroglyphs and translate natural phenomena into language and emotion" (27). Creative inspiration retained its theological dimension, but internalized it as sensitivity to natural phenomena as opposed to an external transmission from the heavens. This reimagining reflected the Romantic focus on nature and subjective experience, and afforded afflicted artists a degree of autonomy over their own identity. Through their collective reimagining of *furor poeticus*, Romantics were able to use their art to respond to social forces that, as Foucault contends, sought to equate imaginative excess with madness and censor the voices of the "insane" (xi).

John Keats depicted his own vision of the psyche and the workings of melancholy within it in his 1819 series of spring odes. The ode, a lyric form created to offer praise to Greek deities and immortalize them in verse, was one of many conventions of classical antiquity appropriated by Romantics and reinvented to express their sentiment (Academy of American Poets). A key feature of Romantic literature is the use of "Romantic irony," which is defined as "an attitude of detached skepticism adopted by an author towards his or her work; typically manifesting in self-consciousness or self-reflection" (OED). Keats, drawing upon this Romantic brand of irony, uses the Pindaric ode form of Classical Greece to satirize the form itself and critique his present moment. This satire and use of irony offers a self-reflexive critique of the nature of art and *furor poeticus* itself, parodying the notion that it belongs to a select few who are privileged with heavenly bouts of creatively productive madness. Therefore, his "Ode to Psyche" and "Ode on Melancholy" can each be read as a criticism of Kantian depictions of the psyche and a vision of the Romantic *furor poeticus*.

“Ode to Psyche” evokes Apuleius the Platonist’s classical myth of the god Cupid falling in love with the nymph Psyche. After witnessing a rendezvous between these two mythic figures, the poet eulogizes Psyche in the second stanza:

O latest born and loveliest vision far
 Of all Olympus’s faded hierarchy!
 Fairer than Phoebe’s sapphire region’d star,
 Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;
 Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
 Nor altar heap’d with flowers;
 Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
 Upon the midnight hours; (2.24-31)

This ironic homage to the mortal Psyche with a lyric form reserved for immortalizing Gods suggests an apotheosis of both the literary “Psyche” and the temporal human one. The nymph Psyche’s deification occurs through the praise she receives as the “loveliest” and “latest born” member of the Greek deities, while the temporal Psyche is deified in the poet’s declaration to maintain “A rosy sanctuary... / With the wreathed trellis of a working brain” (3.59-60). This deification is made even more ironic by Psyche’s standing in “Olympus’s faded hierarchy,” a pantheon that has long been stripped of its religious sovereignty. James Chandler, in his reading of “Psyche,” argues, “This narrative is not itself being offered as a version of Apuleius’s fable but instead as a developmental history of Western culture that can actually be laid out in a subtextual time line plotting the poem’s critical points of reference in the past” (628). Chandler’s reading of “Psyche” as an allegorical timeline of “western religious history” allows us to chart the development of a skepticism that emerged in late antiquity, and into Christianity, that “we

may hold responsible for the faintness of the older Olympian gods” (628). This disempowering of the antique gods, he rightly notes, suggests the emergence of empiricism “that insists on the proof of the senses,” (628) a development that defined the problematic outlook empirical medicine held towards madness.

This reading is supported by various references to Milton *Ode to Christ’s Nativity*, noted by Helen Vendler⁷ (50-51). Milton’s Ode, which describes the “banishing of the pagan gods” upon the birth of Christ, is alluded to in Keats’s “Psyche” with the reference to “Olympus’s faded hierarchy” and various word patterns shared by both poems. This reading of “Psyche” as an allegory for the progression of Western thought, specifically the transition from polytheism to the less mystic monotheism, also gives the poem an added historical significance that allows us to situate it within the psychological discourse of Keats’s day. Psyche’s deification against a fading mythology, then, becomes an allegory for the Romantic re-envisioning of the human imagination against the reductive Empirical paradigm. Psyche, in spite of her loveliness, has no temple, “no altered heap,” no “virgin choir,” no spiritual reverence whatsoever. This lamentation suggests the poet’s dismay toward “the enlightenment attempts to dissolve the soul into the mechanics of the body” (Chandler 632). By apotheosizing the psyche, Keats appears to be looking to antiquity as a means to infuse it with a kind of divinity that was denied by his historical moment. However, this is not a mere return to mysticism of the Greek pantheon. Rather, Keats’s deification of “psyche,” which empiricism had secularized by identifying it solely with faculties of reason, can be read as an ironic move to exalt the imagination, a faculty used in the kind faith required to empower the Greek pantheon in one’s mind. In other words,

⁷ For a complete account of the various references to Milton’s Ode, see Helen Vendler’s *The Odes of John Keats*, pp. 50-51.

Keats's "deification" can be read as an exercise of imagination— specifically religious faith—to elevate the imagination to the lofty status that reason held in the 18th century.

While the poem appears to espouse the myth of the *furor poeticus* and divine inspiration, there is also evidence of a critique of the Classical form of this mythos by way of the poem's irony. The poet seeks to deify Psyche, yet asks of her in the first stanza to, "...pardon that thy secrets should be sung / Even into thine own self-conched ear:" (1.3-4). The poet appears to have two contradictory intentions here. As mentioned before, the use of an ode indicates his intention to exalt the sanctity of "Psyche." Yet, his desire to sing her "secrets" to the reader suggests a doing away of the mysticism surrounding Psyche by laying bare her workings—a desire that is subversively at odds with the latter intent to apotheosize the human psyche.

This paradox appears to be resolved by the poet's relegation of Psyche's divinity to the world of the imagination. He declares "Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane / in some untrodden region of my mind" (4.50-51). Chandler argues that "psyche represents the apotheosis not of fideism but of skepticism, or at least of an empiricism that insists on the proof of the senses" (628). I depart from Chandler in this instance by arguing that it is not, in fact, skepticism that is being apotheosized in "Psyche" but rather the exercise of the imagination. Keats is indeed purporting a doctrine of skepticism by singing Psyche's "secrets," ironically demystifying the deity to whom he is singing praise. However, Psyche's deification occurs not in the temporal world, but rather in the "untrodden region" of the poet's mind. This leads one to believe that it is not an empiricism of the senses being apotheosized, for the "priest," the "church," and indeed the sacrament by which Psyche becomes deified is rooted in the imagination. It is through the poet's exercise of imagination, and transcription of it into verse, that psyche can attain the reverence and tangible value in civilization. Consequently, because imagination is a faculty of the psyche,

it, too, attains a similar godhood. This notion of psyche as an internal deity echoes the Romantic belief, as purported by Coleridge, that “divine creativity” is not the external transmission of inspiration from the gods, but rather an internalized sensitivity to the natural world (Burwick 38). By reimagining psyche’s divinity as an internal characteristic, Keats effectively subverts the myth of creativity as a sudden, divine transmission and the afflicted poet as a mouthpiece for the gods. In doing so, he endows creative process with imaginative agency in producing and interpreting artistic inspiration, which would have been denied to the passive “divine poet.”

If “Ode to Psyche” represents Keats’s subversion of the “divinity” of *furor poeticus*, then “Ode on Melancholy” represents his subversion of the mythology surrounding its madness. As mentioned earlier, Foucault identifies melancholy as one of the defining faces of madness in Classical era (117). Keats’s demythologizing of melancholy begins with his satirizing of the ode form itself. This is most clearly seen in the original opening stanza that Keats chose to omit. The stanza reads:

Tho’ you should build a bark of dead men’s bones,
 And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,
 Stitch creeds together for a sail, with groans

 Of bald Medusa; certes you would fail
 To find the Melancholy, whether she
 Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull. (1-3,7-9)

Helen Vendler argues that this passage describes a heroic romantic quest, a descent into Hades to find the female goddess Melancholy (157). The barge used to travel across the Lethe, the mythical river of forgetfulness, is both literally and metaphorically made from parts of the dead.

The “bark of dead men’s bones” and the pursuit of an unattainable mistress satirizes Petrarchan and Burtonian forms of love poetry (Vendler 157) as being cadaver-esque vehicles for an endeavor that “certes you will fail.” Rather than portray this futile pursuit as noble, as in the Petrarchan tradition, Keats’s omitted parody of the antiquated love-verse anticipates his later warning against seeking harmony with melancholy through forgetfulness or anesthetization.

“Ode to Melancholy” begins, in earnest, with a series of warnings against potential reactions to melancholy. The poet warns the reader “No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist / Wolf’s-bane, tight rooted, for its poisonous wine;” (1.1-2) and “Make not your rosary of yew-berries, / nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be / Your mournful Psyche” (1.5-7). Once again, Keats draws upon a number of Classical and Romantic tropes to subvert convention—in this instance, conventional reactions to melancholy. He warns against seeking the forgetfulness of Lethe, and against committing suicide through the classic poisons of wolfs-bane and yew-berries. He also draws upon the Romantic tradition, specifically his own poetry, in his warning against letting “the death-moth” be one’s Psyche, since the Psyche in Romantic literature is often represented as a butterfly to reflect the “lightness of the soul” (Keats 464). The butterfly motif, represented in Keats’s own “Ode to Psyche” (1.16), becomes perverted into the death-moth, whose wings look like human skulls. If the butterfly of the Psyche represents the transcendence of the human soul, then the death-moth becomes a symbol of human mortality and physical frailty. Here Keats evokes Burton’s *Anatomy on Melancholy*, which claimed that melancholy was “the character of mortality” (Qtd. in Haverkamp 693). This perversion of the psyche into the death-moth serves as a caution against identifying with melancholy and obsessing over the mourning it entails. The poet argues against both the extremes of forgetting and succumbing to melancholy—as often happens in both life and literature—and instead advocates a reveling in

“the wakeful anguish of the soul” (1.10). Ironically, the poet cautions against all extremes—be it forgetting, suicide, or obsessing over mourning—and instead advocates a thoughtful processing of the experience of Melancholy. This suggestion subverts the notion of melancholy as insanity, according to Enlightenment thought, by depicting it as a mood that can be operated upon by reason, rather than an alternate state of consciousness or absence of reason.

In the second stanza, or antistrophe, the tone of the poem changes from cautionary to prescriptive. The poet, offering a course of action for melancholy, states:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
 Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,

 Than glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
 Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave
 Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
 Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
 Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes (2.11-20)

The first stanza warns against suicide or a retreat from reality as a cure for melancholy, while the second stanza encourages the reader to embrace melancholy’s rapturous pain and use it to create art. The melancholic should channel his pain into the creative endeavor, which is alluded to in this stanza via the Romantic trope of natural beauty. The poet offers the reader several options, including to “glut thy sorrow on a morning rose” or on “globed peonies.” In a move that once again evokes Petrarch in an ironic way, the poet suggests that the melancholic channel the rage of his mistress, which may be a literal mistress or refer to the experience of melancholy, and

“Emprision her soft hand,” or immortalize her in verse. In this way, Keats romanticizes both the “artistic value” and “divine quality” of melancholy, while making it accessible to everyone as a universal source of creative genius.⁸

In the epode, or concluding stanza, the poet speaks of a surprising resolution to the melancholic’s creative endeavor. Addressing melancholy, he writes:

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
and Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu... His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung” (3.21-25, 30)

As in “Ode to Psyche,” Keats sardonically uses a verse form reserved for immortalizing gods to draw attention to the transience and mortality of the natural world. Vendler notes that, in this passage, “Beauty” and “Joy” are personified with capital letters, as if to depict them as living beings. That Beauty “must die” and Joy, “bidding adieu,” must leave makes these two entities into a particular kind of being, namely, mortal. By using this metaphor, she contends, Keats seems to be saying that there is no such thing as undying Beauty or Joy, not even in literature (166). Furthermore, the poet seems to be suggesting that the only form of beauty is that which must inevitably perish. Although the creative endeavor is depicted as the preferred method of coping with melancholy, it is not one that offers a resolution to the pain of depression. The end result of “Beauty” and “Joy,” and the end result of the human experience, is death. Art, rather than serving a means to immortalize these transient states, acts as a constant reminder of their

⁸ Vendler argues that, “*Melancholy* alone among the odes uses, as its constitutive trope, admonition or exhortation; the poet addresses admonitions to himself” (158). My reading departs from hers in that, rather than the poet admonishing himself—which he may be doing as well—I argue that he is primarily admonishing the reader, who is in this case both the melancholic and the would-be poet. By assigning the reader both of these roles, Keats is destabilizing the special status of the *furor poeticus*, or mad poet, by presenting it as a vocation, a choice that anyone in the throes of melancholy can pursue.

mortality. This reminder traps the poet in a melancholic cycle that, as Burton reminds us, is the quintessence of the mortal experience. By equating mortality with melancholy, Keats seems to challenge depression as a form of insanity by depicting it as an inevitable, and perhaps necessary, part of the human experience. In doing so, he anticipates Coleridge's deeper inquiry into melancholy as state of psychological lassitude that is not devoid of reason, which Coleridge examines in the context of melancholy's relationship to art. Melancholy, as we shall see, manifests in "Kubla Khan" as a product of creative impairment and, in "Dejection: an ode," as a cause of creative impairment.

Notorious for his cosmic imagination and erratic temperament (Jamison 219), Samuel Taylor Coleridge was at the forefront of Romantic philosophical debate on the intersection of genius, madness, and creative inspiration. His philosophy on the psyche and the role of religion in poetic inspiration is among the most complex and significant in Romantic thought. In his autobiographical treatise *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge articulates an architecture of the imagination that provides a framework for his philosophy on the origins of genius and madness. The imagination, he asserts, is divided into two distinct entities: the primary and secondary imagination. The primary imagination is "...the living Power and the prime Agent of all human Perception, and as repetition the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" ("Chapter XIII" 488). The secondary imagination, on the other hand, "...is an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create" (488). This duality of consciousness, not halves but different permutations, works in sync to process and replicate the external object recognized by sensory experience. The primary imagination is the productive imagination, the one that synthesizes

original visions, as, for example, in dreams. The secondary imagination is the reproductive imagination, dependent on the primary imagination for recollection and information. An example of the secondary imagination at work would be the creation of poetry from a vision. Coleridge's philosophy of the imagination can be seen as one of the major Romantic protests against the over-rationalizing of the psyche for the ways in which it distinguishes imaginative play from insanity.

It is important to note that the imagination for Coleridge does not replicate sensory experience *alone*. Coleridge departs from his contemporaries, such as Frederick Schelling, who view the imagination as constitutive of reality (MacFarlane 742). Instead, Coleridge defines the imagination as an entity that “mediates between a nature of *real* objects and a *real* “I AM,” creates poetry, not the world, and maintains the priority of the “I AM” over the “it is” (743). The “I AM” represents the creative autonomy of the poet, while the “it is” is the external object or vision that the poet draws upon in his work. This agency of the imagination in sensing and creating a vision that is, at once, a representation of the external object and an original creation independent of it, is at the core of Coleridge's more elaborate model of the function of religion in detecting temporal miracles—in other words, “divine inspiration.”

As Frederick Burwick notes, an obvious problem of the *furor poeticus* trope is that it presents religious experience as a form of madness (42). A devoutly religious man, Coleridge sought to defend the role of faith in miracles by redefining the miracle itself. He did this by entering into an ongoing debate occurred during the eighteenth century in which philosophers inspired by the Enlightenment—such as David Hartley, George Campbell, James Beattie, and David Hume—presented a materialist view of miracles as documentable observations that are “violations of the laws of nature” (Burwick 44). In reaction to this, Coleridge sought to “defend

the faith in miracles and to discriminate the divine from the demonic, true faith from mad frenzy” (42) by purporting a doctrine of miracles as “subjective rather than objective” (44). Coleridge’s vision of the miracle, as Burwick notes, overturns the mechanist version of eighteenth century apologetics of the religious experience (46). He defines a miracle as “that which appears...beyond the power of unassisted man” and gives it three primary axioms:

- 1) The contravention of a law of nature is not the essence of a miracle
- 2) The essential significance of a miracle is its sign value;
- 3) Faith *precedes* the perception of a miracle, that is to say, recognition of a miracle as such is a result of faith rather than its cause. (Qtd. in Burwick 46)

Of these three axioms, the third is the key to understanding Coleridge’s conception of artistic inspiration. Miracles, for him, are subjective experiences rather than external and temporal phenomenon, and as such they are internal rather than external. A prerequisite for the experience of a miracle—more specifically for the ability to perceive it—is faith. Coleridge notes that, “The great Truths of Christianity are directly declared to be the inward result of a certain moral state, incipient at least, and to be a revelation from God to the minds in the state” (Qtd. in Burwick 49). Divine inspiration is not a materialist, monolithic vision granted to a chosen few, but rather a subjective and interpretable experience privileged to those of devout faith and good character. By returning a subjective and moral dimension to inspiration, Coleridge subverts both the divinity and the “madness” of *furor poeticus*. The poet is no longer a chosen vessel for a heavenly creativity that can alienate him from his fellow man; he is the one who gets to choose. He has the agency to open himself to the inspiration of God through nature. The creative madman thus cannot be considered an evil presence, for creative revelation requires a moral and pious

character in Coleridge's view⁹. By endowing *furor poeticus* with an inherent morality that makes his visions possible, Coleridge is subverting this notion of the psychologically ill as evil.

Coleridge's framework for understanding (or thinking about) the imagination and creativity allowed him to conceive of madness in a way that both appropriates the Kantian view of madness and subverts it. Kant "recognized that because the mind gives structure and meaning to external phenomena, the disturbed mind distorts external phenomena" (Burwick 81). From this position, he conceived of two sources of madness: a disruption of affect, which creates the Enthusiast, and a disruption of passion that creates the Phantast (81). A disruption of affect results in hypochondria, while a disruption of passion results in mania. Kant distinguishes between five types of madness that can emerge from these disruptions. The first three refer to a man who "having lost his reason, but not his senses or understanding," a man who has lost his wits, or judicial power, but not his reason, and a man who has been out of his senses "as in the case of the hypochondrist, to whom his limbs would be made of glass" (Qtd. in Burwick 82). The final two can be either combination of all three, or an excess of sensation, as in a frenzy (82). In regards to the artist, Kant's paradigm theorizes that, "in the midst of imaginative play with aesthetic illusion, the artist may succumb to the spell he is trying to create" (82). This surrendering of the artist to the illusion of his imagination anticipates much of Coleridge's thought on the nature of madness.

Coleridge appropriates the five-part Kantian formulation of madness as the schematic of his own ideas on insanity, which is categorized into four types: Hypochondriasis (loss of sense), Derangement of the Understanding, Loss of Reason, and Insanity (Burwick 89). However, he draws upon the same religious sensibilities he used in defining miracles to advocate poetic faith

⁹ Under the Enlightenment model of the psyche, moral goodness was synonymous with reason, and any condition deviant from reason, such as mental illness, was considered evil. See Reed pp. 142 & Foucault.

as a “willing suspension of disbelief” (Qtd. in Burwick 82), thereby making the suspension of critical reason an act of sanity. This gives Coleridge’s doctrine of madness a “...religious coloration which it does not have in the Kantian scheme” (McFarland 752). In other words, Coleridge attempts to mesh his own religious sensibilities with the pragmatism of the Kantian view in a way that retains a definition of madness as a confusion of visions of the imagination with reality, yet excludes the suspension of disbelief in both poetic inspiration and religious faith—which we identified in Keats as a kind of imaginative exercise—from this paradigm of madness. Furthermore, this religious dimension subverts the reliance on empiricism and reason derived from the senses that defined sanity in the Kantian model.

Coleridge’s meditation on the likeness between madness and dreaming crucially expands upon his doctrine of the imagination by offering a framework for the ways in which the sane can descend into insanity. In his prose, Coleridge writes, “So akin to Reason is reality, that what I could *do* with exulting innocence, I can not always *imagine* with perfect innocence/for Reason and Reality can stop and stand still, ...But Fancy and Sleep *stream on*” (“Dreams” 590). Coleridge bounds reason to reality in this quote, placing experiences not rooted in reality—illusion, imagination, and dreaming—in opposition to reason. It is during sleep that one can escape the limits of reality and allow the images produced during fancy and sleep to “stream on,” or associate together without guidance from reason or the will. Detachment from reason thus paints dreaming as a kind of mad experience. This connection between insanity and dreaming is further grounded in Coleridge’s excerpt on madness, which to him is “not simply a bodily disease. It is the sleep of the spirit with certain conditions of wakefulness; that is to say, lucid intervals” (Coleridge 598). The difference between dreams and madness, Coleridge notes, is in these lucid intervals where “an act of will is involved” (598). Reason is constantly fighting off

the bestial madness that emerges during these dream states, however it is when the reason relaxes for a moment that “the man is mad for ever” (598).

Madness as a conscious surrender to the illusion of dreams seems to make the suspension of disbelief in faith-based inspiration a sign of insanity in the poet. Burwick notes that, for Coleridge, “The illusion of art is a waking dream that lulls the reason and will while the reader blindly follows the free play of imagination. The mind remains preoccupied by illusion, neglecting its immediate surroundings” (82). However, Coleridge makes an important distinction in his definition of the symbol that precludes the poetic endeavor from being, by definition, a marker of insanity. In *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816-17), he defines symbols as “harmonious in themselves and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are *conductors*” (Coleridge 359). A symbol, in other words, is both a representation of an object and a material manifestation of object itself. It is of the same constitution, the same essence, as its referent and is therefore consubstantial with it. In contrast, an analogy for Coleridge is a mere copy of its referent, artificial and lacking in substance (“Symbol” 608).

In terms of art, a symbol is able to revive the artist’s experience and allow the audience to live that experience. A symbol is *not*, however, the object or reality it represents. Rather, it has “a property of *Outness*... [that] can alone gratify/ even that indeed not fully—for the utmost is only an approximation to the soul sensible of its imperfection of itself, of its *Halfness*, yearns after, whenever it exists free from the meaner passions” (“Symbols” 608). As Burwick notes, there is a liminality to symbols that position them between the mind and nature (85). The “halfness” that Coleridge speaks of refers to the symbol’s ability to occupy this liminal space and move between both realms. It exists both in nature as a representation of reality and in the mind of the beholder

as an illusion independent of its referent. Regarding the symbol's role in Coleridge's philosophy of madness, Burwick notes:

In desynonymizing illusion and delusion, Coleridge declared that the latter depends on the failure of the understanding to discriminate the representation from reality, whereas the former allows the mind to appreciate the thing represented with full awareness of its mode of representation. (85)

The sane man surrenders his disbelief while at the same time "recognizing the mode of representation." For example, the reader suspends reality and becomes invested in the plot of a book, eventually returning to the realization that it is fiction. The deluded madman, on the other hand, never returns to this realization. The example Coleridge uses is Don Quixote. Quixote's madness results from his inability to recognize his knighthood as fiction. He believes it to be real, and as a result he engages in battles with windmills that, to him, are equally real enemies (85). This model of madness is significant for artists such as *furor poeticus*, who are the conjurers of symbols in their art. The artist operates perilously close to insanity in the transposing of his illusion into art, and, indeed, risks descending into delusion by believing in the corporeality of his own imagination.

The relationship between dreaming, madness, and the symbol in Coleridge's paradigm is best understood through their roles in the artistic process. The poet acquires a vision, produced by the primary imagination, through "dreaming." Dreaming can occur in the traditional sense or as a daydream, but it is best understood as analogous to the imagination interacting with its environment. This helps us make sense of Coleridge's contention that faith is a prerequisite for poetic inspiration derived from the miracles of nature. While Coleridge no doubt meant religious faith, this can more pragmatically be understood as the willful suspension of disbelief, an

obvious requirement for one to believe in the verisimilitude of imagined worlds—for example a theatergoer losing himself in a play.

The poet, having acquired a vision beautiful enough to be worthy of transcription, attempts to bring this idealized vision into reality through the creation of a symbol, that is to say, art. The symbol is both a representation of the poet's beatific vision and, ideally, a way for the viewer to enter into that vision and obtain the same experience. This transcription occurs through the exercise of the secondary imagination which, for our purposes, can be understood as the cognition of creative production. Unlike imaginative dreaming, the act of creation is effortful, stressful, and in some cases anxiety inducing. The poet must negotiate the particulars of his original dream with the limitations of his artistic medium to approximate the original vision as closely as he can—an endeavor that inevitably ends in failure. This inability to bring the ideal into reality is what Romantics define as melancholy ("Romanticism"). However, melancholy is not madness for Coleridge. Rather, madness occurs when people lose themselves in an imaginative experience so completely they are unable to be retrieved. The example preferred by Coleridge was Don Quixote combating the imaginary monster of the windmill. The artist, by suspending disbelief in order to enter into the veracity of his own vision to produce the symbol, is thus precariously close to madness in his sustained effort to revive his vision. This proximity of the creating poet with madness makes it easy to see how outsiders would interpret his behavior as madness, allowing for the existence of the "mad genius" stereotype. It is precisely creativity's perceived proximity to madness that Coleridge considers, and then deconstructs, in "Kubla Khan."

Because of the close proximity of artistic creation, dreaming, and madness in Coleridge's philosophy, his infamously incomplete poem "Kubla Khan" can be read as an allegory for the

poet's failed desire to create a symbol by using the secondary imagination to revive the illusion of the primary imagination. The illusion of the primary imagination, shared by Coleridge and the poetic voice of the poem, is the phantasmagoric dream of Kubla Khan's palace. The failure of the Poet to accomplish his desire is evidenced both by Coleridge's alternate titling of Kubla Khan as "A vision in a Dream of the Fragment of Kubla Khan" and the poet's own admission that he was unable to finish the poem after being interrupted by a visitor from Porlock (181). I hope to show that the poet's failure to synthesize the vision of his imagination in verse subverts the myth of the creative madman in two ways. First, it depicts the creative process as a cognitively effortful procedure of reconciling polarities, anticipating a modern understanding of the creative process as theorized by Dr. Albert Rothenberg. This reimagining serves to challenge the myth of *furor poeticus*' vision and craft as a kind of sublime possession and, in doing so, destabilizes the idea of creative invention as a type of madness. Second, the poem communicates a frustration of the creative process that stems from being unable to reconcile the two modes of imagination, a frustration that can—and for Coleridge did—produce feelings of anxiety and melancholy that are equally removed from insanity.

The poem begins with an ethereal description of Kubla Khan's palace at the intersection of Alph, the divine river of the Greek god Alpheus. The scene has a dream like quality to it. It is immaculate in its splendor, with "walls and towers were girdled round, / And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills" (Coleridge 182). In this line, the poet juxtaposes the movement of nature with the immobility of "walls and towers"—contrasting the man made with the earthly. The cadence and rhyming of the first stanza has a musical quality to it that further contributes to the reverie. Words like "ran" and "man," "ground" and "round," "decree" and "see" are coupled together in tetrameter verse with a cadence that makes the stanza sound musical. The poet's

description of “forests ancient as the hills, / and folding sunny spots of greenery” (1.10-11) echoes the description of Eden in *Paradise Lost*¹⁰, with its “crowns with her enclosure green / And the rural mound the champain head / of a steep wilderness” (Qtd. in Coleridge 182). The dream of Kubla’s palace depicts a beauty that is man made, flawless, and intransient. This phantasmagoric scene represents Coleridge’s poetic ideal, the perfect synthesis of the dream of the primary imagination and the reproductive faculties of the secondary imagination into a unified “symbol” of the poet’s original vision, his encounter with Kubla Khan’s palace in his dream. However, this vision is merely a desired potentiality and has not come to fruition yet via the poem’s completion. It is in the Coleridgean sense, still a dream, one that can bring the poet to the edge of madness in his preoccupation with giving it life through verse that the poet reveals in his later admission “To such a deep delight ‘twould win me,” (4.44).

In the second stanza, we begin to see clearly the allegorical mechanisms of the creative process and evidence of its frustration. The river, as Irene Chayes argues, comes to represent the fluidity of thought and “the mind as activity” (Qtd. in Milne 19). The river can also be read as an evocation of the dream experience, during which Coleridge claims “fancy and sleep *stream on*” (“Dreams” 590). It meanders in “a mazy motion” (2.25) past Xanadu, the symbol of the primary imagination, “through wood and dale” (2.26) and into the romantic “chasm.” The designation of the chasm as “romantic” and its subterranean location as the repository of the river of thought allow the cave to be read as a metaphor for the unconscious. The cavern is described as “A savage place! As holy and enchanted / As e’er beneath a waning mood was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon lover!” (2.13). As evidenced by the poem’s reference to Cybele, the god of wild nature, the romantic cavern represents the tumult (a word used frequently throughout the

¹⁰ For a more comprehensive documentation of “Kubla Khan’s” evocation of *Paradise Lost*, see Coleridge’s *Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*, pp.182, footnote 3.

poem) and activity of both nature and the mind during creation. From the depths of this cavern “A mighty fountain momentary was forced: / Amid whose swift half-intermitted Burst” (2.19-20). The fountain in poetry, as Geoffry Yarlott notes, is often a metaphor for the inception of life (142); It can also come to represent the life of the mind and the birth of artistic vision (142). Coleridge’s imaginative fountain, however, is not one that adheres to the periodic and effortless wellsprings that a poet, deriving inspiration from an alternate source of consciousness (be it the gods or psychotic delirium), would likely experience. Rather, it is “momentarily forced” and comes in “swift half-intermitted bursts.” Creativity is not, as the *furor poeticus* tradition would have it, the mere transcription of inspiration. It is a laborious craft that occurs in “swift half-intermitted bursts” and must, at times, be “forced” by the artist. When read as an allegory for the creative process, the winding river of Alph in “Kubla Khan”—and in particular the romantic chasm—subverts the myth of sudden and effortless artistic inspiration that is integral to the *furor poeticus* trope. By depicting creativity as a thoughtful, calculated act, it becomes necessarily a *rational* act, one wholly at odds with the 18th century conception of madness as behavior devoid of, or opposed to, reason. Furthermore, Coleridge’s depiction of the landscape of Xanadu, as we shall see, anticipates a modern psychiatric conception of the faculties of creativity.

The presence of polarities—both in the reconciliation between primary and secondary imagination and of the tumultuous beauty of nature with the timeless, artificial man-made beauty of Xanadu— marks an uncanny anticipation of a modern understanding of psychology when read as a metaphor of the creative process. Dr. Albert Rothenberg, in his study of the cognitive processes of creativity, argues that all creative production uses, to some extent, what he calls the “Janusian process,” a cognitive exercise that entails the synthesis or juxtaposition of seemingly irreconcilable opposites to “meaningfully crystalize and express personal as well as universal

values, experiences, and feelings” (24). This crystallization of the universal and the personal is evident in both the narrative of the poem and the history of its creation. The poet’s attempt to bring together a unified vision of the placidity of Kubla Khan’s palace with the activity of the river running down into the ocean is quite literally a synthesis of opposites to create a complete scene. When read as an allegory for the cognition of creation, the palace comes to represent the man-made ideal, the finished poem, and, in Coleridgean terms, the “primary” imagination. The river, as mentioned earlier, embodies the meandering journey and flow of cognition. It is a tumultuous, effortful, and ever-changing landscape that stands in direct contrasts to the immaculate and timeless stability of the palace. It is both a part of the palace, in that it runs directly through it, and its diametric opposite. Autobiographically, the poem is often read as Coleridge’s attempt to recreate his personal experience, the dream of Kubla Khan’s palace created by his primary imagination, using his reproductive “secondary imagination” as made manifest through his poetry. When removed from its autobiographical moorings, the poem comes to embody the struggle that all artists face in attempting to externalize the experience of the imagination into something concrete, coherent, and emotionally accessible to others “who can then respond to it as the artist responded” (Milne 18).

The river, channeling through the “caverns measureless to man,” eventually reaches its site of repose, where it sinks “in tumult to a lifeless ocean” (28). The end of the river’s circular journey to its site of origin in the “lifeless ocean” signifies the end of the artistic brainstorm, which too returns to its point of origin in the primordial unconscious. Warren Stevenson notes that the river’s circular structure resembles the *ouroboros*, a serpent eating its own tail that acts as “the ancient symbol of eternity” (Qtd. in Milne 20). This analogy, however, is not a wholly applicable one. Alph does return to its source of origin, and continues the cycle of creative flow.

It comes to represent, as Fred L. Milne notes, the unification of seemingly opposed elements, as evidenced by the “sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!” (37). However, the journey of Alph through the palace of Kubla Khan cannot represent eternity due to the scene where we are left at the site of the river’s deposit into the ocean:

And ‘mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
 Ancestral voices prophesying war!
 The shadow of the dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves;
 Where was heard the mingled measure
 From the fountain and the caves. (2.29-34)

It is not a scene that maintains the eternal continuity of the palace in the poem’s beginnings, but rather one that foreshadows destruction of the palace itself. The “Ancestral voices” that Kubla hears introduces a sense of time and transience to this previously timeless scene by endowing the Kubla Khan of the poem with an ancestry. The “war” that is prophesied, and the eventual crumbling of the palace, is never seen in the poem itself, but rather is alluded to by the dome’s shadow that “floats midway on the waves” (32). The voices, as Milne notes, are “the harbingers of the destruction and dissolution awaiting the shadow of his creation as the river carries its image toward the descent into the unconscious” (25). Interestingly, the poet abandons the motif of timelessness to make a point about the evanescence of poetic vision. The artistic vision of the primary imagination is “a miracle of rare device” (3.37), yet doomed to fade into a “shadow” and disappear from memory if it is not made concrete through poetry. This allusion to the past to draw attention to the impermanence of the future, ironically, foreshadows the poem’s own failed resolution. More significantly, this juxtaposition of eternity with temporality reflects the ultimate

impossibility of completely capturing the beatific ideal of a dream into reality through art. Eternity is analogous to the original dream, a portal into a world not bound to time or space. Transience, on the other hand, can represent the memory of that dream, which fades over time and is unable to be translated into verse. This tension, which we know to embody the Romantic conception of melancholy, foreshadows the poet's own lamentation that is experienced in the next stanza.

The turn of the poem occurs in the fourth stanza, in which the poet's perspective dramatically shifts from an outward envisioning of Xanadu to an inward self-reflection. The poet remarks in terse tetrameter:

A damsel in a dulcimer
 In a vision once I saw:
 And on her dulcimer she play'd
 Singing of Mount Abora.
 Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song,
 To such a deep delight 'twould win me, (4.36-43)

This passage marks the point where the poet fails to recreate the entirety of his vision. With this failure, the poet makes a jarring shift away from indicative language to the subjunctive, the language of what-ifs. He remarks upon a completely separate image in the Abyssinian maid playing a dulcimer, or harp, and singing of Mount Abora¹¹, wishing that he could “revive” within himself “her symphony and song” (3.43) and claiming “To such a deep delight ‘twould win me” (44). Here we see the poet's lamentation over his inability to create a Coleridgean symbol— in

¹¹ A possible reference to Mount Amara of *Paradise Lost* fame, through which a tributary of the Nile coursed. See *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition* pp. 183.

which the referent is consubstantial with the medium of representation— through the synchronization of the primary and secondary imaginations. Like the palace of Xanadu, the poet wishes to revive “the symphony and song” of the Abyssinian maid by immortalizing it in poetry. Were he to be successful, the poem would serve as a symbol of the maid’s song: a manifestation that is of the same essence and able to provide the reader with the same aesthetic experience of the poet who beheld it. The poet believes though, due to the poem’s fragmentation, that he failed in his endeavor to create a symbol of his original vision, and therefore has not “won” the delight that a finished product provides. Because of this, the poem ends on a melancholy tone due to the use of subjunctive language. The poet is left wanting for inspiration and closure to his work. Instead, he must settle for the vision he would have created had he not, as the preface suggests, been interrupted.

While *Kubla Khan* is often read as an allegory for the processes of poetic inspiration, it is also a meditation on the positioning and power of the poet in civilization. This is most clearly seen in the poem’s final stanza, in which the poet continues to imagine not just his would-be poem, but the reaction of others to his artistic prowess. He imagines, “And all who heard should see them there, / And all should cry, Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!” (48-50). Evoking Apollo, the Greek god of poetry, this foreboding, even frightening, image of a poet with “flashing eyes” and “floating hair” conjures up the Platonic image of *furor poeticus* as one possessed by the gods. For the poet of ‘*Kubla Khan*’, though not necessarily Coleridge, this image was the ideal. It is a poet at the height of his powers, able to bewitch an audience with his poetry and terrify them with his behavior. It is the “mad poet.” It is also a type of poet that Coleridge himself criticized. As noted by Regina Hewitt, Coleridge, in his praise of Louis de

Boissy¹², defined his artistic genius by his intelligence, industriousness and incessant labor (Qtd. in Hewitt 51). His criticism of the Platonic *furor poeticus* came in a later defense of Boissy's works, in which he described the Platonic "mad poet" as an "inspired idiot" (52). This disjunction between the definition of genius found in Coleridge's prose with the idealized "mad poet" in 'Kubla Khan' establishes a satirical distance between the poetic voice of 'Khan' and Coleridge himself. The poet is not actually Coleridge, but rather a subversive parody of those poets who mythologize this trope of, in the words of Coleridge, the "inspired idiot."

This parody is evidenced in the final stanza, where the poet reveals his motivations for wishing to revive the beauty of his vision. Ostensibly, the poet's claim that the revival of his beautiful vision "To such a deep delight 'twould win me," (4.44) suggest that the mere act of revival is what the poet seeks. However, the ordering of the words, that the revival of the Abyssinian maid's song "'twould win me" delight more accurately indicates that it is not the poet's own sense of delight that he is pursuing, rather, he hopes to win the delight of others. This is further supported by the poet's imagining of the public reaction to his artistic prowess, to which, "all who heard should see them there, / and all should cry, Beware! Beware!" (4.48-49). The poet's fantasizes about the public regarding him with fear and awe, in much the same way one would regard the "divine poet." Thus, the parody is seen in the failed poet's mythologizing of the very archetype that he is deconstructing. The poem, in one sense, is not just about failed creativity, but about a failed poet's vain pursuit of fame and mythologizing of *furor poeticus*, a trope that is both subverted over the course of 'Kubla Khan' and that is damaging to the poet by contributing to his own marginality in society.

¹² "Boissy, the author of several dramatic pieces, that were acted with applause, met with the usual fate of those men, whom the very genius, that fits them to be authors, incapacitates for successful authorship.—Their productions are too refined for the lower classes, and too sincere for the weather ranks of Society. Boissy in addition to great intellectual ability, possessed the virtues of Industry and Temperance; yet his works produced him fame only. He labored incessantly for uncertain bread." — *The Watchman*, Thursday, May 5, 1796, Qtd. in Hewitt pp. 51.

Kubla Khan's latent parody of the inspired genius and allegorical depiction of the creative process as a cognitively effortful, rational one establishes the poem as an important protest against 18th century definitions of madness, the mythology of "possessed inspiration," and even our contemporary myths about spontaneous artistic creation. The poet's exercise of logical cognitive faculties in trying to transpose his vision into poetry positions creativity as something markedly different from madness. Furthermore, the melancholic tone that the poem adopts in the wake of artistic failure begins to distinguish melancholy, as well, as a condition that resides outside of madness, and can befall the sane.

At the end of *Kubla Khan*, we see hints of the poet's melancholy emerge from his inability to complete his creation. Written five years after *Kubla Khan*¹³, Coleridge's "Dejection: an Ode" can be considered a thematic successor to 'Khan' for the ways in which it explores the nature of inspiration, depression, and emotional consequences of creative impotence. Biographically, the ten-year period between 'Kubla Khan' and 'Dejection' (1797-1802) saw Coleridge's poetic output decline alongside bouts of depression and ailing psychological health (Keanie 1). As a critique of 18th century notions of madness, Coleridge's "Dejection" is significant for the ways in which it challenges the view of melancholy as an alternate state of consciousness that is conducive either to creativity or intellectual insight. Instead, it demonstrates depression's true role in artistic creation—as both an impediment to creative thought and a painful episode from which one can retrospectively draw creative material—by articulating the cognitive experience of depression with striking verisimilitude. Furthermore, "Dejection" subverts melancholy's status as a form of madness by articulating a state that does not rob one of

¹³ Although *Kubla Khan* was published in 1812, ten years later than "Dejection", it is believed to have been written in 1797.

reason, but of pleasure and the capacity to feel passion—a capacity that, Foucault argues, created the very conditions of possibility for madness (85)¹⁴.

Melancholy occupied a paradoxical standing in Western culture during the latter 18th century. It was both a defining form of madness and somehow separate from it. Melancholia was broadly considered to be “a madness without fever or frenzy, accompanied by fear and sadness. To the extent that it is delirium—that is, an essential break with the truth—its origin resides in a disordered movement of the spirits and in a defective state of the brain” (121). However, being melancholic or depressed did not necessarily make someone insane. Rather, as Burton notes in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, pathological melancholy equating to madness was identified by its severity and duration. In Romantic philosophy, melancholy was not only separate from madness, but even a marker of intelligence and insight. Thomas Sydenham, a Romantic physician, claimed that melancholics “are people who, apart from their complaint, are prudent and sensible, and who have an extraordinary penetration and sagacity. Thus Aristotle rightly observed that melancholics have more intelligence than other men” (Qtd. in Foucault 118). Because of this, Romantics thought melancholy to be a valuable affective state for creative potential. These diametrically opposed viewpoints of melancholy, one as a form of insanity and another as a source of higher intelligence and artistic genius, comprised discourse on melancholia in the 18th century and mythologized depression in two inaccurate and stigmatizing ways. As we shall see, Coleridge deconstructs both conceptions of melancholy in his self-reflective “Dejection: an Ode.”

In an appropriation similar to Keats in “Ode on Melancholy,” “Dejection: an Ode” uses the poet’s elegy to his love—which for Coleridge was Wordsworth’s wife, Sara Hutchinson—as a pretense to explore the devastation of his own dejection on his imagination. In the opening

¹⁴ “THE savage danger of madness is related to the danger of the passions and to their fatal concatenation.” (Foucault 85)

strophe, the poet predicts the onset of a storm on the night of the poem's writing. He does this through a comparison of the moon's appearance to its appearance in the ballad of Sir Patrick Spence¹⁵, noting that they are similar. After a vivid description of a tempestuous storm, the poet reveals his hope in the concluding couplet that "Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give, / Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!" (1.19-20). These lines offer the first indication of the poet's emotional desolation. His misery and impaired capacity for deep emotion are such that he hopes for the onset of a storm to "startle this dull pain" simply so that he can experience some profound feeling and "make it live!"

Beginning with the final couplet of the first stanza, we begin to see a description of melancholy emerge throughout the ode that destabilizes melancholia as a form of insanity as it was defined in Coleridge's time. The poet's idiosyncratic brand of pain is expanded upon in the opening lines of the second stanza, which read:

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
 A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief,
 Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
 In words, or sigh, or tear— (2. 21-24)

The experience described by the poet in this stanza takes what we know to be defining symptoms of depression, hopelessness and loss of pleasure (Jamison 3), and makes it emotionally resonant and vicariously accessible. The succession of "pang, void, dark, and drear" conjures a sensation of hollowness and absence of any stimulating emotion. The pairing of "grief" and "no relief," and "drear" and "tear," impresses upon the reader the feeling of melancholy as an oppressive force. It robs one of not just feeling, but the capacity to feel, and offers no relief. It is not,

¹⁵ "Late, late yestreen I saw the new moon, With the old Moon in her arms; / And I fear, I fear, my Master dear! / We shall have a deadly storm!" - From The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence. Coleridge pp. 155

however, a kind of delirium or, “break with the truth” which was an inextricable feature of classical madness. There is no alteration of reality or deviance from reason that characterized Enlightenment conceptions of insanity. Certainly, there is no overload of sensation that defines Romantic madness, nor the confusion of illusion with reality found in Coleridge’s view. The melancholy of ‘Dejection’ appears to defy all definitions of madness in the eighteenth century, as the poet retains a lucid awareness over his own emotional state, becoming more detached than delusional. The poet’s lucidity and self-awareness is evidenced by his precise description of dejection as “A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear” (2.21), while his retention of reason is indicated by the suspension of “the shaping spirit of Imagination,” (6.86) which, for both Romantics and Empiricists, was the cognitive site where madness could emerge. If the poet is robbed of his imagination, then the remaining psychic faculty is cold, unfeeling reason. Andrew Keanie furthers this point in his reading of ‘Dejection’, noting “Madness has since come to be associated with... cerebral disturbedness. Dejection is pure dullness, and the sufferer, trapped in a 'colorless' consciousness, 'removed from the real throb of the senses', cannot 'startle th[e] dull pain, and make it move and live!’” (284).

Similarly, ‘Dejection’ also works to subvert the notion of melancholy as a generator of creativity. In an attempt to relieve his dejection, the poet turns to nature, the Romantic wellspring for creative inspiration, as a means to provoke artistic feeling. He stares at out at the western sky with what he describes as a “blank” eye (2.30), articulating it with precision yet claiming “I see them all so excellently fair, I see, not feel how beautiful they are!” (156). The poet, again disturbed by his inability to feel pleasure, comes to the realization that “I may not hope from outward forms to win / the passion and the life, whose fountains are within!” (3.45-46). In other words, the poet cannot rely on the beauty of nature to either soothe his dejection or stimulate his

imagination. The source of poetic inspiration and feeling derived from aesthetic beauty must come from inward “fountains”—a metaphor returning from ‘Kubla Khan’— that represents, in this instance, emotional states. Strophe IV alludes to a state that can breathe life into nature (4.48) and is the “sweet and potent voice of the soul,” the fountain that could possibly restore the poet’s imagination. However, instead of melancholy, we learn in Strophe V that it is joy that is the “beauty-making power” (5.63), the optimum cognitive state for poetic creation. The poet reaffirms this sentiment throughout, calling joy “Life and Life’s Effluence”(5.66), “the sweet voice” capable of creating “A new Earth and a new Heaven / Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud” (5.69-70). In other words, it is joy, and not melancholy, that offers the poet the ability to enact the creative process to make a “new Earth and new Heaven” and share it with “the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd (6.53). It is joy through which “All colours” of creativity and aesthetic appreciation become “a suffusion from that light”(75).

This sentiment aligns with what modern scientific studies tell us about the cognition of creativity. Both Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison and Dr. Rothenberg note in their respective studies of creativity in those with mental illness that positive mental states, such as joy, are the cognitive states most conducive to creative fecundity and production.¹⁶ Furthermore, studies have shown that affective states, in their most severe forms, are actually an impediment to creative production (Jamison 95). Coleridge, perhaps unknowingly, subverts the notion held by his Romantic contemporaries that melancholy is a state that yields creative genius by intuiting what modern studies have scientifically demonstrated about the cognition of creative production.

After identifying Joy as the necessary state for one to be able to appreciate natural beauty and appropriate it into artistic originality, the poet proceeds to identify dejection as the source of his imaginative impairment. This occurs in strophe VI, the turn of the poem, which begins:

¹⁶ Jamison pp. 95 & Rothenberg pp.11

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
 The joy within me dallied with distress
 And all misfortunes were but as the stuff

Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness: (6.76-79)

Unlike the preceding strophes, in which the poet either reflects upon his current condition or address his lady, strophe VI sees the poet reflect upon a time where he wasn't beset by melancholy. He claims that, although his path was rough his "misfortunes were bust as the stuff / Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness" (6.78-79). During these joyful times, the misfortune, and sometimes pain, experienced by the poet became material for creative inspiration, or rather "the stuff / Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness." It is not "productive depression," as Christine Nguyen argues (69), that the poet is reflecting upon here, but rather the ability of joy to turn misfortune and pain into the materials for poetry.

Following this recollection, the poet returns his attention to his present dejected state. He laments:

But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
 Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth,
 But oh! Each visitation
 Suspends what nature gave me at my birth
 My shaping spirit of Imagination. (6.81-85)

The poet is not concerned that his afflictions have robbed him of his mirth, or energies. Rather, he despairs over the effect that melancholy has in suspending his imagination. For a Romantic poet such as Coleridge, this suspension of imagination would rob the poet, as Andrew Keanie notes, of "his more potent imagination: his power to shape the world" (81). This power to shape

the world with one's imagination, and subsequently create new worlds through art, is at the heart of Romantic philosophy and, as we saw in *Kubla Khan*, the ideal for Coleridge's poetic persona. The great irony of "Dejection: An Ode" is that it is a beautifully created poem about the inability to create. Despite the poet's claims to the contrary, he artfully exercises his imagination to articulate what he believes to be its slow death due to dejection. This would only be possible, it seems, through a reflection on the pain of dejection once the poet has reclaimed a measure of peace. The poet acknowledges in Strophe VI that "misfortunes were but as the stuff / whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness" (6.78-79). In other words, misfortune was the raw material for fancy, or thinking, to fashion dreams of happiness. If we are to associate dreams once again with the primary imagination of the poet, then it seems that joy and contemplation are what allows the poet to fashion artistic vision out of his misfortune. This would implicitly hold true for dejection, the ultimate misfortune in that it robs the poet of his coveted imagination. In creating a beautiful poem about the inability to create, Coleridge reconsiders many notions in both Empirical and Romantic philosophy regarding the effect of melancholy on creation and its status as a form of insanity.

Dejection's primary contribution to understanding the depression's effect on creativity is rooted in the ode's defining irony: that it is art about the inability to create art. Regarding our present understanding about the relationship between creativity and mental disease, the significance of this irony is that it illuminates two important facts about melancholy's effect on the artist's brain. The first is what the poet tells us himself, that depression and ahedonia—the inability to feel pleasure—is an impediment to creativity. The second fact, evidenced by the poem's nuanced description of dejection, is that these extreme states of "madness"—depression, mania, hysteria, hypochondria, etc.—provide a wellspring of creative material for the poet who

has endured this state of consciousness. While studies have shown that severe depression and other mental diseases are actually an impediment to creativity¹⁷, the mere *experience* of mental disease, the pain, and alternate modes of thinking it induces can be reflected upon and molded into art once the artist has reclaimed a sound state of mind. Dejection tells us, well before science had, that it is the *experience* of psychopathological affect, and not the affect itself, that provides a wellspring of artistic genius.

¹⁷ Jamison pp. 94 and Rothenberg pp.12

Chapter 2: *The Flowers of Evil* and the Pathology of Ennui

First published in 1857, and censored that same year for being an affront to public decency, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* is credited by Gustav Flaubert as finding, "a way to inject new life into Romanticism" ("Charles Baudelaire – Biography"). This is somewhat of an ironic charge, given that many of the Romantic tropes featured in *Les Fleurs du Mal*—such as nature as the beatific ideal, the sovereignty of the individual, and the autonomy of the psyche from the physical self— are appropriated, and subsequently subverted, with language that depicts them as bizarre or grotesque. However, this is not to say that Baudelaire's intent is to subvert Romantic ideology itself. Rather, Baudelaire was both an admirer of Romanticism¹⁸ and, having served as the chief translator of Edgar Allan Poe in France, a student of the Gothic. Baudelaire's attention to psychological disturbance and his fusion of Romantic tropes with elements of horror are two characteristic features of Gothic literature found in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

While this use of macabre language and images to distort Romantic tropes serves a number of ends in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, two effects emerge that are useful for our purposes. First, the corruption of Romantic tropes concerning ideals of beauty—such as nature or women— foregrounds sensual experience and its ability to induce mental states. This is useful for an understanding of Baudelaire's philosophy of correspondences, which proposes a link between mind and body that parallels, and at the same time problematizes, the paradigm of positivism. This is significant for our current understanding of mental illness in that positivism began to view madness as a pathology, in which physical states signaled correspondent mental states. Baudelaire's theory of correspondence importantly views this mind-body relationship as two-directional, meaning that mental states, such as experience, can induce physical illness. This could not occur under positivism, for it required physical symptomology to identify mental

¹⁸ Baudelaire wrote an art critique praising Romanticism in an 1846 *Salon* Article

illness, but importantly is considered in our current model of psychiatry, which Baudelaire importantly anticipates.

Second, this denigration of Romantic idealization aids in Baudelaire's complex characterization of "ennui" and distinguish it from Romantic melancholy. While melancholy for the Romantics was, in the words of Barbara Wright, "Their attitude of lofty despair...born of frustration at the gap between the ideal and the real" (39), ennui is in many ways a more severe offshoot from melancholy in that it is an existential horror defined, in part, by the ways in which one becomes alienated both from the surrounding world and from the self. By identifying ennui as a state separate from, but not disconnected to, melancholy, Baudelaire's text can be read as partially instigating the eventual breakdown of the larger abstraction of melancholy into the varying classifications of depression that we have today. In doing so, he affirms the medicine of his day that saw madness as a pathological condition while at the same time illustrating the psychological and idiosyncratic ways that madness could manifest itself, ways that the paradigm of positivism didn't consider. These two takeaways, I contend, are what make the *Les Fleurs du Mal* a significant transitional work in cultural understanding of mental illness.

Chief among the Romantic subjects that Baudelaire considers is the relationship of the imagination to the physical world. Romantics traditionally conceptualized the imagination as the highest faculty of the mind, which departed from 18th century empiricists who considered reason to be the highest faculty. Imagination was exalted as the "creative force" of the mind that was capable of shaping reality and, for the Romantics, was analogous to the creative powers of both nature and God (Rowan 353). Implicitly, this also meant that the exercise of imagination constituted a spiritual experience that was separate from sensuous experience. While Baudelaire shares with Romantics the belief that the psyche is capable of "exerting a powerful and creative

influence on the world” (358), he importantly departs from them in both his attitude towards imaginative play and the Cartesian dualism between body and mind. In regards to the latter departure, Baudelaire’s philosophy of the imagination is largely contained within his theory of correspondences¹⁹, which, in his own words, contends that “everything, from movement, number, color, perfume, in the *spiritual* as well as in the *natural* world is significant, reciprocal, converse, *correspondent*” (Qtd. in Burt 122). All manner of phenomenon, natural and spiritual, sensual and psychological, becomes correspondent to one thing: subjective experience.

This idea that every manner of experience—both sensual and spiritual—is somehow synchronous, overlapping, and analogous with one another has several important implications. First Baudelaire’s conception of the psyche ostensibly aligns him with positivists in the view that physical states or experiences correspond with psychological ones. In other words, an experience that engages the senses, such as drug use, produces a coterminous and analogous mental state—i.e. a perception of being “high.” Baudelaire viewed the imagination as the faculty that, in the words of Norma Rowan, is “able to ‘read’ the correspondences that link the phenomena of the material world and hence to perceive the relations of all things to each other and their part in ultimate unity” (360). Just as in Romanticism, then, Baudelaire’s imagination both allows us to comprehend, and to a certain extent, construct reality. However, it also subverts the Coleridgean notion of artistic inspiration as being rooted in a religious faith that allows for the perception of miracles. Instead, this mind-body correspondence implies that one could experiment with manipulating sensory experiences—as both Baudelaire and Coleridge had done with opium—to induce a sublime, and perhaps creatively fecund, state of conscious. This, in principle, removes the imagination from any special theological standing.

¹⁹ Baudelaire draws upon Emanuel Swedenborg’s theological doctrine of correspondence, which posited a relationship between the two modes of existence when one experiences revelation: The spiritual plane of the mind and the natural plane of the mind.

A second implication of Baudelaire's doctrine of correspondences is that it changes the relationship of the reader to art. Rather than art communicating an experience to the viewer, Baudelaire's philosophy of correspondence reconfigures poetry as *being* experience. The viewer cognitively experiences a certain affect through identification with art's subject matter. As a result, the viewer is not passively receiving testimony about an experience; he or she is engaging in it. In regards to literature about mental illness, Allan Thither importantly argues that poetry after Baudelaire ceased being a mere rhetorical structure for communicating affect or experience; instead "It wants to be the space into which one enters in order to experience elation and hallucination, depression and madness" (210). The significance of this reconfiguration, in short, is that poetry no longer is reliant on rhetorical strategies to transmit experience or meaning. In terms of articulating madness, rhetorical forms of art are limited by their reliance on conventions of language to convey meaning. Poetry, on the other hand, now has the potential to accurately provide a window into states of madness—states that often defy language—to the reader.

Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences" illustrates both of these features of the doctrine of correspondence, and in doing so, articulates a vision of the psyche that is neither completely Romantic nor Positivist, yet shares features of both. Correspondence appears to be steeped in Romantic ideology—particularly that concerning the ability of nature to offer a symbolic language for the poet to obtain spiritual transcendence. Baudelaire adopts Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of the spiritual as "the thing which allows itself to be apprehended by the senses and which most resembles consciousness" (Qtd. in de Man 104). The spiritual plane, in Baudelaire's poetics, takes on a decided sensory quality, and is grounded in terrestrial experience rather than the "miraculous" and religiously colored spiritual reality of Coleridge. The poem begins as such, reading:

Nature is a temple, where the living
 Columns sometimes breathe confusing speech;
 Man walks within these groves of symbols, each
 Of which regards him as a kindred thing. (1-4)

The poem of analogy quite literally begins in analogy. Nature here is anthropomorphized as a living temple, perhaps gesturing to the Romantic belief most completely articulated in Keats's "Ode to Psyche" that the imagination is analogous to the creative force of deities. Alternatively, nature as simultaneously "a living temple" and a "grove of symbols" could also reference the Coleridgean belief that faith allows the comprehension of natural miracles. This is suggested by the religious coloration of the nature-temple analogy and the notion that nature is, at the same time, a garden of "symbols," which, for Coleridge, were inspired by the poet's willful suspension of disbelief to the "miracles" of nature. What is clear is that nature and the emblematic language used to represent it, or the forest and "grove of symbols," correspond to one another and allows for comprehension of abstract experience. More interesting, though, is the correspondence between man and symbol, which "regards him as a kindred thing" (4). This correspondence seems to suggest that through the use of emblematic language²⁰—for example poetry that is inspired through interaction with nature—the poet is in fact reconfiguring himself.

From this, a triangular correspondence emerges between man, nature, and symbol. This is indicated by the poet's claim that "each / Of which regards him as a kindred thing" (3-4).

Symbols become a means for man to enter into and reflect upon both the natural world and the

²⁰ John Porter Houston definition of emblematic poetry as "pictorial representation which is presumed to contain elliptically a wealth of meaning; it is obtrusive, pregnant with significance and, as such, demands to be interpreted" is what is referred to when discussing Baudelaire's poetic language. His distinction between allegorical versus emblematic poetry, while outside the scope of my argument, is useful for understanding the simultaneous unity and multivalence of meaning found in the correspondent symbols of the poem. For more, see *Demonic Interpretations* pp. 95.

self—with each becoming representative of the other. This is epitomized in the image of nature as an organism with “living / columns,” (1-2) one that can “breathe” (2) and communicate, albeit in “confused speech” (2). This synthesis of nature, man-made “columns,” and human features of “breath” and “speech” into a single organic unity becomes a representation of how the natural and the symbolic converge within the individual organism, who negotiates and interprets these two modes of experience. This reflection is an entry into the spiritual as well, suggested by both the analogy of nature as “a living temple” and Baudelaire’s definition of the spiritual. This use of nature and symbol to allow the imagination to enter into a “spiritual” consciousness ostensibly purports a Romantic view of the psyche as a faculty comprehending of, yet detached from, the physical self.

This reconfiguring of the self in the symbolic language of nature indicates a profoundly Romantic endeavor, or “error” in the words of Paul de Man, of “a self that tries to forget its own temporal fate by patterning itself on the eternal aspects of nature” (102). In other words, poetry inspired by the eternal, or “spiritual” features of nature, becomes a means for the poet to escape his or her own mortality. However, as we see in the second quatrain, de Man’s interpretation of Baudelaire’s ostensibly Romantic pursuit begins to unravel:

As the long echoes, shadowy, profound,
 Heard from afar, blend in a unity,
 Vast as the night, as sunlight’s clarity,
 So perfumes, colours, sounds may correspond (5-8)

Here, the spiritual or imaginative correspondences are abandoned for sensory ones. The quatrain itself is one extended analogy where the correspondence of “perfumes, colours, sounds” are likened to the blending of far off “echoes.” Baudelaire appropriates the Romantic trope of

synaesthesia, or the intermixing of sense organs, to illustrate how the poet comprehends his or her cognitive experience of reality. Echoes (sounds) are described as shadowy (visual), and the polarities of “vast” obscure night and “sunlight’s clarity” converge into one. The spiritual reality entered into through an interaction with nature and symbol is not the incorporeal one of the Romantics, but rather one bound to sensory experience. Scholars have often read the first stanza as affirming a correspondence between the terrestrial and celestial, or earthly and spiritual (McGowan 21). However, the sensual ironies present in “Correspondences”—for example the blending of the natural with the artificial (perfumes)— suggests a more subversive reading best described by Leo Bersani, who argues that “Poetic idealization begins to look like the very opposite of spiritualization; it is an abstract process of the mind which returns the poet to sensual intensities” (31). The “vertical correspondence” (32) linking nature to spiritual correspondence is replaced with a singularly terrestrial correspondence of the corporeal features of nature—the fleeting sounds, smells, and touches. The apprehending faculty, the imagination, thus becomes inextricably linked to physiology, subverting the Romantic conception of both imagination and spiritual reality as realms separate from physicality.

Furthermore, Baudelaire’s “Correspondences” is not an attempt to transcend temporality, for the very experiences he describes as correspondent are temporal in nature. In fact, he even goes so far as to eulogize the transient nature of existence in “Carrion,” in which he immortalizes the decay of a female corpse in verse, and regard an escape from temporality through dreaming as unsustainable in “Parisian Dream.”²¹ The title of the first series of poems, “Spleen and the Ideal,” indicates this tension between the ennui of reality and the search for an escape through an “ideal” found in the imagination. Baudelaire thus encounters the same poetic struggle with

²¹ The poet’s lament at the impermanent ideal found in dreaming is suggested in his awakening “Open, my ardent eyes could see / The horror of my wretched hole; I felt my cursed cares to be / A needle entering my soul;” (‘Parisian Dream’ 2.1-4)

temporality as the Romantics do, but instead oscillates between short-lived analogous escapism in the poems concerning the “ideal” and morbid confrontation in the poems concerning “spleen.” The poet becomes stuck in this tension between impossible attempts to escape spleen and languishing over the impossibility of escape. This tension becomes, as we shall later see, a defining feature of Baudelaire’s “ennui.”

The final verses of “Correspondences” mark the turn of the sonnet and perhaps the most significant instance of irony in the poem. In it, natural and artificial modalities of sublime experience become obscured to such a degree that nature ceases to be a subject of the poem, and instead recedes into a mere allegorical object. The passage reads:

Odours there are, fresh as a baby’s skin,
 Mellow as oboes, green as meadow grass,
 —Others corrupted, rich, triumphant, full
 Having dimensions infinitely vast,
 Frankincense, musk, ambergris, benjamin,
 Singing the senses’ rapture, and the soul’s. (9-14)

The trope of synaesthesia is continued in the first two verses, with Baudelaire’s preferred sense of odour²² evoking the freshness of “a baby’s skin” (9), the mellowness of “oboes,” and the green color of “meadow grass” (10). However, the jarring use of the horizontal bar in line 11 signals odors of a different variety, ones that are both “corrupted” and “triumphant.” These odors, “Frankincense, musk, ambergris, [and] benjamin” (12) are all ingredients used in medicine, leading a number of scholars to read this as Baudelaire’s advocacy of drug-induced alternate states of consciousness (Schlossman). Interestingly, the odors of nature correspond to

²² As an aside, the olfactory senses engage the amygdala, the brain’s center for emotional response, and the hippocampus, the brain’s center for memory. It’s possible that scent is used so heavily in Baudelaire due to the ways it evokes both memory and emotion.

definitive sensory experiences—sight, touch, taste—but do not transcend into the numinous or sublime experience that, in Romantic poetry, occurs when one encounters nature. Bersani importantly notes that, in contrast, the odors of the stimulants don't evoke any concrete sensory experience, but rather “they ‘expand’ and they ‘transport,’ they become ‘infinite things’ (beyond the senses) in their effects *on* the senses” (33). Stimulants, in “singing the senses’ rapture and the soul’s” appear to be the means to acquire sublime, and perhaps spiritual, experience. In contrast, the “living temple” of nature is ironically correspondent to earthly experiences, earthly sensations.

However, in order to see how nature becomes subordinated to mere allegory, we must turn once again to Paul de Man’s reading of “Correspondences.” He describes the use of irony in the poem as “the device by means of which the excessive naturalism of the correspondences is exorcised and renounced in the hope of achieving a truly allegorical style, no longer dependent on references to entities that lie outside the self” (116). The irony of nature’s function in “Correspondences” is that it is a “temple” that offers no opportunity for spiritual transcendence. It is simply an object used to evoke memory, specifically sensory memory. Nature loses its standing as a subject and recedes into allegory, an empty referent for the individual to endlessly reflect upon the self and mental states experienced within the self. The irony is that Baudelaire is engaging in what de Man considers to be a classically Romantic scenario where “a conception of the self as the pole of a subject/object relationship becomes an illusion that has to be renounced” (102) in order to, I argue, denigrate one of Romanticism’s most cherished sites of autonomous beauty and spirituality: nature.

Nature’s recession into mere allegory, through which the poet reflects upon himself, is an example of the larger function of allegory throughout *Les Fleurs du Mal* as a device to articulate

the arbitrating function of experience, an internal state, in shaping both physical and psychological realities. Symbols in Romantic philosophy contained an objective and autonomous meaning outside of the subject engaging it. It is, in Coleridgean terms, consubstantial with its referent—at once a representation of it and of the same essence. Allegory does not contain an objective meaning, lacking in, according to G.W. Hegel, “the concrete individuality of a Greek god... or some other actual person” (Qtd. in Kellie 220). In other words, allegory is given meaning and shape by the subject evoking it. In “Correspondences,” nature becomes mere allegory that becomes interchangeable with artificial “Odours” (9). The stimulating agent, whether it is natural or artificial, is irrelevant, for it is simply a means to conjure or reflect upon internal experience, for example a state of consciousness. In short, allegory has no meaning outside of the experience that the subject uses it to evoke, whereas a symbol arguably does have objective meaning.

Baudelaire’s use of allegory as a device to elucidate how external representations can become self-reflexive mirrors to examine inner states has significant implications for discourse on madness. Namely, it shows how the correspondence between sensual and psychological experience creates the conditions for an understanding of mental illness as a total pathology, one that engulfs both the physiological and psychological self. This, as we shall see, is most fully realized in Baudelaire’s description of ennui in his series of “Spleen” poems, where external objects lose any independent meaning and become empty signifiers, upon which the poet imposes and reflects upon his own tormenting experience of ennui—a state that elicits a parallel physical deterioration. Thus, analogy as it is presented in “Correspondences” becomes a device to understand how sensual and psychological stimuli are arbitrated and given meaning by the self, reflecting upon experience.

In sum, Baudelaire ironically undercuts the Romantic view of nature as a path to transcendent spiritual experience in order to illustrate a view of the psyche that synthesizes both Positivist and Romantic features. It is Positivist in that Baudelaire describes a correspondence between mind and body where physical and psychological states interact and are coterminous. Psychological experience is one rooted in physical sensation, and physiological experiences induce psychological ones. It is Romantic in that the senses are still a means of comprehending the spiritual universe, which Baudelaire, drawing upon Coleridge, defines as, “a storehouse of images and signs to which the imagination gives a place and relative value” (Qtd. in de Man 106). As Alan Thither notes, this synthesis significantly draws attention to a major failing in positivist psychiatry’s understanding of madness. He writes:

Baudelaire’s ironic poetics resulted in a dualism analogous to the dualism that positivist psychiatry could not overcome. The body is the locus of all natural processes, thus all pathologies. But experience is a mental state. It seems to be all the more dramatic in that experience denies or transcends the body, as in manic elation. Baudelaire and the modern poet’s understanding of experience points to a problem in understanding madness, for the very notion of inner experience seems to escape a nosography that wants physiological signs to define madness. (212)

By drawing attention to inner states as something that can exist independent of physiological markers, Baudelaire demonstrates that the relationship between mind and body is not unilateral as it is conceived in the Positivist paradigm. While pathologies can signal mental illness, it is also true that mental states can elicit physical reactions.

Indeed, the ability of mental distress to induce physical distress is a defining feature of Baudelaire’s particular brand of madness in “ennui.” In “To The Reader,” Baudelaire personifies

ennui as, “He [who] willingly would devastate the earth / And in one yawning swallow all the world” (35-36). Ennui, as depicted in this poem, is the scourge of the Earth, the embodiment of evil, and, as suggested by the poet’s assertion that “Reader, you know this dainty monster too;” (39) an unavoidable part of the human condition. Yet, it is never given a concise definition within *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Ennui is often translated in English as “boredom,” however its nature and effects are far more severe than that. A clue into ennui’s character is given by Baudelaire identifying it as synonymous with “Spleen,” which in the French refers not to the organ, but rather means “a disgust with life” (Waldrop xx). While Baudelaire indeed does not offer a simple takeaway of what comprises ennui—perhaps to capture the idiosyncratic ways in which it can be experienced—he does compose a vivid profile of its effects on the individual through various poems throughout *Les Fleurs du Mal*, most specifically in “Sick Muse,” “Venal Muse,” and the series of poems entitled “Spleen.”

In order to understand how ennui is both connected to and detached from melancholy, we must briefly recall the two types of melancholy at work during Baudelaire’s time. First, there is the clinical understanding of melancholy, defined as “a madness without fever or frenzy, accompanied by fear and sadness,” where one retains the faculty of reason (Foucault 121). Ennui, as we shall see, shares in the fear and sadness of clinical melancholy, yet departs from this conception in that it can indeed produce a state resembling psychotic delirium. The second is the philosophical melancholy of the Romantics, which stems from an awareness of the “unbridgeable gulf” between the worlds of reality and imagination, or ideal and real. As we saw in Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” Romantic melancholy often emerges in artists as a lament over the impossibility of materializing artistic vision. Significantly, both conceptions view melancholy as a state of heightened insight. This is not true of ennui. Instead, Baudelaire depicts a state that is

lacks any residual value and, as evidenced by the multiple routes of escape from ennui through wine, perfume, women, poetry, etc. in *Les Fleur du Mal*, one that he would like to avoid at all costs. Ennui departs from—and in many ways challenges—this second conception of melancholy. In doing so, “ennui” progresses beyond melancholy by representing a condition that is a physical and psychological sickness, rather than a productive emotional state or disposition.

This revision of melancholy is seen in “Sick Muse” and “Venal Muse” through the poet’s appropriation of the divine “muse” trope, which he uses to subvert the Romantic notion of melancholy as a creatively fecund state. Baudelaire, as Barbara Wrights rightly notes, appropriates the all-powerful Romantic muse, to which the poet is subservient, and instead depicts a muse that is “sick, insincere, and hypocritical” (Wright 39). More importantly, he depicts a muse that is “cold and taciturn” (‘Sick Muse’ 4), silently withholding the language necessary to produce art. The poet questions his unresponsive muse in the first two quatrains of each sonnet, pleading in “Sick Muse” for an explanation for his muse’s silence and questioning in “Venal Muse” what will be done once “purse and palate both are dry” (‘Venal Muse’ 7). The poet’s investment in the muse’s physical health, and the muse’s stake in what would happen once poverty and starvation occur (‘Venal Muse’ 7) suggests that the poet and the muse are one in the same, and thus allows us to read “the muse” as a psychomachiac representation of the poet’s own creative cognition.

Like the poet of Coleridge’s “Dejection,” the muse of “Sick Muse” and “Venal Muse” is neither inspired nor transformed by depression. Instead, he is paralyzed by it and rendered ill. The poet tells his muse that “Dream visions haunt your eyes, and I discern, / Reflected in the shadings of your skin, / madness and horror, cold and taciturn” (‘Sick Muse’ 3-5). The muse is described in visceral, corporeal language. Its skin is shaded in a way that reflects “Madness and

horror.” The poet wishes for its “breast to breathe the scent of health,” (9). Demons pour “fear and love” (6) onto the muse, and its shoulders are “mottled” in the winter months where melancholy usually occurs (‘Venal Muse’ 6). The madness described in “Sick Muse” is decidedly physicalized, with each emotional ailment corresponding to a show of physical sickness. The skin is cold and mottled, breath produces scents that do not indicate health, and the eyes are haunted when the mind is beset with madness, horror, and fear. The madness experienced by the muse can be read as a kind of melancholy, due to the “fear” that is produced and the “black tedium” that is experienced in the winter months (‘Venal Muse’ 3), both of which are characteristics of both literary and clinical melancholia. It is significant that the muse—the emblem of creativity—is not elevated to creative production by melancholy, nor is it moved to a philosophical longing of a an impossible or lost reality. Instead, it is merely sick and unresponsive. Baudelaire’s sardonic treatment of the muse, which he condescendingly refers to as a “starving clown,” (‘Venal Muse’ 12) is an overt subversion of the mythology of the divine muse and, more pragmatically, the madness-inspired artist. Furthermore, the melancholy described in the muse poems is a physicalized malady, at odds with the ideological understanding of melancholy purported by the Romantics.

While Baudelaire’s “muse” poems illustrate the effect of ennui on the creative mind, insight into the sensual and psychological experience of ennui can be found in the final four poems of “Spleen and the Ideal” entitled, appropriately, “Spleen.” Given that Baudelaire uses the terms “spleen” and “ennui” interchangeably, the title of this four-poem series signals a deeper inquiry into the character of ennui. The “Spleen” series charts the poet’s descent into ennui, with each poem describing an escalating state of horror, melancholy, and alienation. As such, these poems will be read as a kind of psychological narrative through which the poet makes use of

most of the Baudelairian conventions—self-referential allegory, the gothic corruption of beauty and nature, anthropomorphizing of death, etc.—to illustrate the existential decay of ennui.

The first poem of the series introduces one of the defining characteristics of Baudelaire’s “Spleen”: the alienation of the subject from his environment. The poem begins:

Pluvius, this whole city on his nerves,
Spills from his urn great waves of chilling rain
On graveyards’ pallid inmates, and he pours
Mortality in gloomy district streets. (1.1-4)

Death imagery is ubiquitous throughout this first spleen poem. Pluvius, the name given by the French Republic Calendar for the winter months of January and February, is anthropomorphized as an oppressive warden who pours both “chilling rain” and “mortality” over the citizens of the city—which are allegorized as “inmates” bound to the “graveyard.” Several Romantic tropes are corrupted with this death imagery in order to depict the decay of the poet’s external reality.

Nature, specifically the winter seasons, is anthropomorphized as an oppressive prison warden pouring freezing rain and reminders of mortality over the citizens. Baudelaire’s use of women as an emblem of beauty, an appropriation of a Romantic trope seen throughout *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is inverted here as a “drowsied crone” (1.12), or old woman, is depicted as a symbol of “wasted,” bygone love (1.14). These abundant reminders of mortality establish spleen as a kind of Burtonian melancholy, which, as we recall, is defined in part by a recognition of life’s transience. However, ennui is distinguished from melancholy here in that it leads the poet into a bizarre, otherworldly perception of his environment, whereas Romantic melancholy was thought to yield a heightened, but still reasoned, sensitivity to the world. Ennui seems to constitute a break with, or perhaps a disintegration of, reality. The poet’s city, his home, becomes

unrecognizable as it transmutes into a graveyard that is hostile in every way to life. This alienation of the melancholic from his environment speaks to the marginality experienced by both the artist and the madman who, historically, were exiles within their own societies.

This scene can also be read as an objective correlative, or symbolic manifestation, of the poet's own emotional and psychological state. Despite the lack of presence of the narrator as a subject within the poem, there are clues throughout that support this reading. "Some poet's phantom" roams about the streets "moaning and whimpering like a freezing soul" (1.8). The poet's alienation from his own environment foreshadows, as we shall see, an alienation from the self in later *Spleen* poems. Because of this, the phantom of "some poet" could be read as the poet's own, unrecognized self. Ennui, then, comes to embody death on two levels: the physical and the spiritual. The poet, having lost his corporeal self (metaphorically, of course, if we are to read the narrator and the phantom poet as one in the same), moans and whimpers like a "freezing" soul (1.8). The soul, or inner reality, of the poet is not yet dead, but is dying and being tortured due to ennui's onset. The contrast of the wailing bell with the falsetto pipes of the clock in stanza 3 also evokes this motif of death in progress. The wail of the bell (1.9), a loud booming sound, is reminiscent of a funeral toll. Juxtaposed with this are the "Pipes in falsetto of a wheezing clock" (1.10). The clock, a symbol of time and transience, is personified as "wheezing" in a sickly, falsetto sound, evocative of a dying breath. This motif of death, both past and in progress and spiritual and physical, throughout *Spleen I* medicalizes ennui by giving it the character of terminal illness.

Spleen II shifts perspective from the expansive yet confining setting of the city to the poet's personal quarters, where he experiences another feature of ennui that began in *Spleen I*:

alienation from oneself. This progressive alienation is signaled in the first stanza by the poet's antipathetic relationship to his own memories, which reads:

More memories than if I'd lived a thousand years!
 A giant chest of drawers, stuffed to the full
 With balanced sheets, love letters, lawsuits, verse
 Romances, locks of hair rolled in receipts,
 Hides fewer secrets than my sullen skull.
 It is a pyramid, a giant vault
 Holding more corpses than a common grave. (2.1-5)

Memories are featured prominently throughout *Les Fleurs du Mal* both as oppressive reminders of lost presences and as allegorical objects to escape the ennui of the present. In his reading of *Le Cygne*, Hans-Jost Frey remarks on the strategy of enumerating memories as an escape from loss, claiming, "Instead of clinging to the present, losing it, and becoming nostalgic, one can avoid loss by accepting the present as always passing and then leaving it. Enumeration is such a leave taking" (94). This same strategy appears in *Spleen II*, albeit to an opposite effect. Memories of all the rudiments of life, as represented by the "balance sheets, love letters, lawsuit" etc., are both oppressive reminders of lost presences and sources of oppression themselves. It is not the content of the memories that disturbs the poet; it is the quantity. Memories become dead matter in the mind of the poet, which is compared to "a giant vault / Holding more corpses than a common grave" (2.4-5). The memories themselves are never true subject matter, but again function as a mere allegory upon which the poet imposes reminders of his own transient existence. Because they are allegory, they exist outside of the poet as a means to evoke this reminder of mortality, thus signaling the poet's gradual estrangement from himself.

The ennui brought about by an overabundance of memory also instigates a physical deterioration. This is indicated by two episodes found in the first stanza. The first evidence of ennui's physicalization is in the poet's opening remark, "More memories than if I'd lived a thousand years!" (2.1). Holland astutely notes that the hyperbolic language of this line, "more" memories than if he had lived a thousand years, makes it so that the Poet's memories are "virtually innumerable" (87). The weight of this accumulation of memories ages the poet as if he had endured a thousand years worth of experience. At the same time, its abstract and innumerable nature makes it so that the poet is unable to escape the oppression of his memories, which stretch into the infinite. Ennui, then, becomes a kind of perpetual confinement brought about by the poet's own accumulation of experience.

The second piece of evidence of ennui's physicalization comes in the comparison of the poet's mind to the "chest of drawers" stuffed with the poet's personal letters. Again, hyperbole is used to create an effect of the virtual innumerability of the secrets housed in the poet's skull. However, the letters as emblems of memory and lost presence serve a greater function than a mere object of comparison. As representations of lived experience, the memories also once existed in organic unity with the poet himself. Once cast aside into the chest as artifacts of those lived experiences, they lose their ability to evoke meaning and experience, and thus they fade into dead matter upon separating from the poet. In Baudelairean terms, these artifacts cease to act as correspondent emblems through which the poet could enter into nostalgic experience, but instead recede into mere allegorical objects for the poet to reflect upon his own inner state. The use of "skull" instead of "mind" indicates the degree to which the poet experiences ennui as a physical state, a kind of psychosomatic sickness. This is significant in that Baudelaire once again

attests to the ability of experience, a mental state, to induce physical pathology in a way that Thither argues “escapes a nosography that wants physiological signs to define madness” (16).

In line 8, the allegory of the self as a graveyard spreads from the skull to the entire person. The poet declares “—I am a graveyard hated by the moon / Where like remorse the long worms crawl, and turn / Attention to the dearest of my dead” (2.8-10). Simile collapses into correspondence in this passage; no longer is the poet “like” a graveyard, he is a graveyard. Analogy, which usually features a concrete example to explain an abstract state, is inverted in this passage. The “long worms” that crawl to the dead matter within the poet are like remorse. This inversion of the sequence of analogy indicates that emotions like remorse have become foreign to the poet, he must rely on the image of the “long worms” to remind himself of remorse’s character. Finally, this passage marks a long sequence where the poet refers to himself strictly through allegory, being “a graveyard”(2.8) and “a dusty boudour” (2.13). It would appear that spleen has left the poet no longer able to reflect upon himself independently; rather he must identify with objects like a graveyard or boudour that are emblematic of his emotional state.

This alienation from the self reaches its apex in the final verses of Spleen II. The line break signals the initiation of a dialogue between the poet and his own disenfranchised, physical self. He remarks:

—Henceforth, o living flesh, you are no more!
 You are of granite, wrapped in a vague dread,
 Slumbering in some Sahara’s hazy sands,
 An ancient sphinx lost to a careless world,
 Forgotten on the map, whose haughty mood
 Sings only in the glow of the setting sun. (2.19-24)

The poet renounces his own corporeal body in this final stanza, claiming, “you are no more! / You are of granite, wrapped in a vague dread” (2.19-20). The body as both as an organic entity and a manifestation of the poet’s self is “no more,” and is instead rendered into “granite,” or dead matter seemingly like his memories. The poet’s alienation from himself is juxtaposed with the image of an “ancient sphinx lost to a careless world / [that] Sings only in the glow of the setting sun.” (2.22)—an allusion to the Statue of Memnom that Baudelaire modifies to into a symbol of the isolating marginality of the poet²³. Pairing this allusion of alienation from society alongside an alienation from the physical self demonstrates the crushing completeness of the poet’s isolation. He is disconnected from everyone and everything, even his own body.

However, the language of his initial disavowal of his own flesh problematizes this understanding of self-alienation, as it seems to indicate a more serious condition than mere estrangement: a disintegration of the subjective self. The body isn’t simply an artifact that once comprised the poet’s self; it is “no more.” This self-vaporization manifests most explicitly in *Spleen III*²⁴, where the poet only refers to himself in third person-analogy, specifically the dual analogy of a king (3.1) and a child-like invalid (3.8). Nothing internal or external provides the poet with an object of self-identification to examine his current condition of ennui, and thus he must resort to enumerated allegory in a doomed attempt to reconstruct the lost self. Ennui, therefore, constitutes a break from both physical and psychological reality that distinguishes it from melancholy. It is experienced not as a deadening of the self, but as a vanishing of the self. It is a recession into complete oblivion.

²³ “The statue of Memnon, in Egypt, was supposed to sing by the rays of the rising sun. Here Baudelaire modifies the legend by having the statue of a forgotten sphinx sign to the setting sun, in an image of the poet isolated and ignored by the world.” (McGowan 380).

²⁴ *Spleen III* also reveals a characteristic of ennui that definitively links it to depression: the absence of desire and pleasure. The poet, examining his allegorical role of the king, remarks “Nothing can cheer him” (3.4) and proceeds to enumerate a list of pleasures that do not move him, including “The comic jingle of the court buffoon,” (3.7) “courtesans.../ No longer have the antics or the clothes / To get a smile from this young rack of bones.” (3.10-12). For more, see “*Spleen 3*.”

If the material self as a subject disintegrates, then what fills the void left behind? The answer is given on line 15 of Spleen II:

Nothing is longer than the limping days
 When under heavy snowflakes of the years,
 Ennui, the fruit of dulling lassitude,
 Takes on the size of immortality” (2.15-18)

Ennui replaces the self and “takes on the size of immortality” (2.18). Psychologically, ennui consumes the poet with a “dulling lassitude,” resulting in a weariness and disgust with life. As suggested by the numerous prior examples of ennui’s physicalization, the renunciation of the dead “granite” flesh, and the dual meaning of the titular word *mal*, Spleen becomes both an evil and a total sickness.

Beyond both the physical and psychological affect, ennui becomes experience itself, as evidence by the poet’s hyperbolic contention that “Nothing is longer than the limping days” when “ennui...takes on the size of immortality” (2.1,17-18). Eugene Holland’s reading of time in this passage as supplanting the function of memory is useful here for understanding how temporality becomes oppressive under ennui, which itself then becomes a total pathology. He notes that, “Whereas initially, memory appeared virtually infinite, though devoid of content, now time does: nothing is as long as the days when listless boredom assumes the dimensions of immortality” (89). As mentioned in my analysis of the passages concerning memory, ennui departs from Romantic melancholy in that it is a confinement within the material world, rather than transcendence from it. The extent of this confinement and the impossibility of escape are indicated both in this passage and more fully in Spleen IV, where the repetition of temporal clauses (“When/ “Quand”) indicates how the earth and time itself imprison the poet. Ennui

becomes a total pathology in *Spleen IV* in that it becomes correspondent to all experience. Whereas various psychological and sensual experiences overlapped with lucidity in “Correspondences,” these same experiences overlap in *Spleen IV* in “a mad cacophony,” (4.14) or utter confusion. Spiders spin “disgusting threads deep in our brains,” (4.12) “Bells at all once jump out with all their force,” (4.13) and the sky “pours a black day sadder than our nights” (4.4-5). All manner of experience, sensual and psychological, internal and external, collapse into one singular, paranoid experience: ennui. Hope’s death at the end of *Spleen IV* and triumph of Anguish “in my bowed skull,” (4. 20) indicates that there is no escape from ennui, and that its despair is perpetual, bottomless and, importantly, physical.

Baudelaire’s physicalization of madness through ennui importantly anticipates a contemporary understanding of mental illness in two ways. First, it affirms the features of positivist psychiatry that rightly saw physical illness as being able to induce psychological illness. Second, it suggests that experience, or mental states, can bring about both physical and psychological pathology. This second feature would later become standard diagnostic practice in 1883 when Emil Kraepelin, considered to be the father of contemporary psychiatric nosology, “moved the paradigm away from classifying insanity based on external symptoms, and towards a classification based on inner experience” (Thither 213). Baudelaire’s contribution to psychology should not be understated, for it was he who captured the pain and pathology of mental illness in verse well before it was comprehended in the text of medicine.

CONCLUSION

The evolving discourse on madness at the turn of the 18th century is a watershed moment in legitimizing mental illness as illness—that is to say, as a psychopathological condition that is

degenerative, not the product of choice, and not under one's control. The Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, guided by both doctors and artists, helped to bring the afflicted population out of their seclusion as "immoral madmen" and into a reclaimed social presence. "Madness" went from being viewed as a moral evil inextricable from one's character to a pathology that, to some extent, could affect anyone. This epistemological shift between centuries saw a number of models of the workings, and corruption of, the psyche emerge from doctors, philosophers, and poets alike until we arrived at the beginnings of modern psychiatric understanding with Emil Kraepelin.

Popular discourse on the relationship between mental illness and creativity, however, has not progressed far beyond the time of the Romantics. Despite psychiatric studies demonstrating a complex, and arguably antagonistic, relationship between mental illness and the creative process (Rothenberg), the notion that mental illness and creativity are somehow symbiotic with one another is so prevalent that it remains a popular cultural stereotype (Kaufman). Myths of the born genius, of the inspired poet who writes everything in his head in one sitting, and of the creative madman still pervade our current moment (Rothenberg 10). These myths may seem harmless, but they in fact come at a great expense to artists—both sane and insane—and to the mentally ill. By allowing these myths to persist, we continue as a culture to create an environment where creative achievement is problematically linked to mental imbalance, the afflicted artist becomes disenfranchised from society as a spectacle, and the pain of mental illness loses significance in a search for artistic "value."

Keats, Coleridge, and Baudelaire each understood the consequences of our cultural misunderstanding of mental illness and creativity, due to their great insight into their own creative processes and familiarity with depression. These artists used their craft to explore the

relationship between “madness” and creativity, and articulate new understandings of the psyche and the experience of depression. Keats and Coleridge both worked to subvert the myth of melancholy as a creatively advantageous state and as a form of insanity through their inventive appropriation of *furor poeticus*. Baudelaire, building upon the work of these Romantics, used his poetics to establish mental illness as a total pathology in a way that affirmed the positivist psychiatry of his period, while also articulating understandings about the mind-body relationship in a way that this paradigm of medicine couldn’t consider. It may be that we ought to look to the past— to the works of afflicted artists like Keats, Coleridge, and Baudelaire— in order to ensure a more tolerant, understanding, and humane future for the mentally ill.

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