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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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COLERIDGE'S CONCEPT OF SYMBOL

by  
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Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts,  
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## ABSTRACT

The object of this thesis is to clarify Samuel Taylor Coleridge's understanding of the concept of symbol. To this end I have studied various of his prose writings and works of poetry and have attempted to articulate a meaning for symbol that is consonant with Coleridge's epistemological and ontological premises. Chapter One is an analysis of the theory of Imagination. Of all his intellectual concepts the theory of Imagination has been most carefully and fully discussed; and it is a theory which is important here because Imagination is a concept necessary to Coleridge's understanding of symbol. Coleridge tells us that Imagination is the symbol-making power; and the process of making symbols consists first of an act of perception, of primary Imagination. Once we understand what Imagination is, we can know what symbol is.

Chapter Two is on symbol itself. In this chapter I have examined several instances where Coleridge explicitly explores the meaning of symbol. From these instances I have attempted, first, to reveal the nature of the symbol and its relationship to us and, second, to interpret the concept in terms of Coleridge's thought. In the latter case, I refer to two models--the wheel and the Trinity--which I believe describe the underlying form of Coleridge's concept of symbol and, indeed, of his entire sense of the unity of life.

Chapter Three, a study of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, is written in the conviction that this poem, the longest major poem in his corpus, contains symbols that illustrate both the philosophical and artistic dimensions of symbol for Coleridge.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor John S. Hill for his inspirational teaching in a graduate course which first led me to appreciate Coleridge, and for his counsel with this paper. Special thanks to my parents and to James for their faith and understanding.

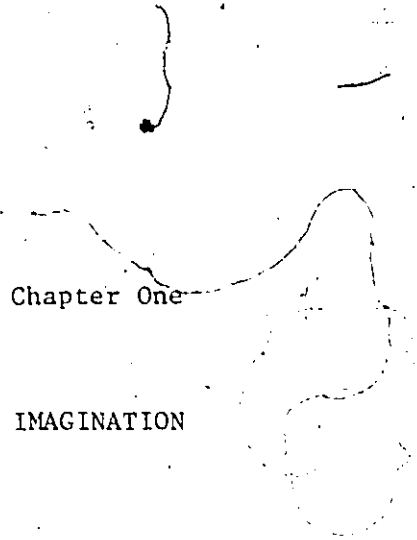
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AM - The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
- AR - Aids to Reflection
- BL - Biographia Literaria
- CC - The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge  
(The Collected Coleridge)
- CL - Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- CN - The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- CSC - Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century
- F - The Friend
- IS - Inquiring Spirit
- SM - The Statesman's Manual
- TT - Table Talk

For full bibliographical information, see the Bibliography.  
References to the Biographia Literaria are from the Watson edition  
(London: Dent, 1956).



Chapter One

IMAGINATION

Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed how the little animal wins its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary fulcrum for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive.

The formulation of Coleridge's theory of Imagination spanned twenty of the most intense years of his life, and it occupied a central place in his thinking as a critic. The theory, by his own testimony, was conceived in an inspirational encounter with William Wordsworth's poetry in 1795, and it grew through his own convincing experience as a poet and his "hard thinking and hard reading" as a philosopher (BL 167). First articulated in a letter to a friend in 1802, the original terms of the theory involved a distinction between the concepts of "Fancy" and "Imagination" by which Coleridge separated two kinds of poetry according to the epistemology--and ultimately the ontology--informing each. Imagination, for Coleridge, is the power which enables us to perceive truly, and it operates by synthesizing opposing forces, such as subject and object, man and nature, the active and the passive. Coleridge further characterized Imagination as being of two different degrees: the primary and the secondary. The primary Imagination exists in all of us--even if only as potential--to make us to understand truth, to allow us to perceive truly; the secondary Imagination belongs to those who, seeing the world with the clear eyes of true understanding, are further able to embody this perception in material form and to fashion, mirroring (though at a finite level) God's creative activity, new and living things.

The genesis of Coleridge's theory of Imagination is nowhere better explained than in Coleridge's own words about himself, penned in 1796: "I feel strongly, and I think strongly; but I seldom feel without thinking, or think without feeling. . . . My philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from my feel-

ings" (CL I p. 279). The understanding that, for himself, thought and feeling were somehow always bound together was the original source of Coleridge's theory, and later its conceptual matter. Unity, the central function of the Imagination in the Biographia Literaria, was a lifelong concern with Coleridge, a concern made vital by the very substantiation of its truth within his life. Thought and feeling, idea and experience were intimately woven together in the text of Coleridge's life, and the years prior to his first intellectual formulation of the concept of Imagination in 1802 were rich in experiences from which his later ideas took their shape and their conviction.

Coleridge first met William Wordsworth in 1795. Less than a year later, he was writing to John Thelwall that Wordsworth, then a little-known poet, was "in my opinion the best poet of the age" (CL I p. 215). What had stimulated such intensity of admiration in Coleridge was later described in the Biographia:

I was in my twenty-fourth year when I had the happiness of knowing Mr. Wordsworth personally; and, while memory lasts, I shall hardly forget the sudden effect produced on my mind by his recitation of a manuscript poem ["Guilt and Sorrow" 1791-97] . . . . It . . . . made so unusual an impression on my feelings immediately, and subsequently on my judgment.

BL 47-48.

Wordsworth's poem was unlike any other modern poem he had read. The Neoclassical school of "Mr Pope and his followers," whose influence was predominant among his contemporaries, gave him "little pleasure", sacrificing, as it did, "both heart and head to point and drapery," to create but "false beauties" composed of a "conjunction

disjunctive of epigrams" (BL 9, 12). In an early letter, Coleridge, reflecting on the kinds of epithets used to describe the spirit of "this age" wrote, "Pope in his Dunciad makes it this leaden age". (CL I p. 50). In the Biographia Literaria, he tells us of his comparison of Erasmus Darwin's great Neoclassic poem, The Botanical Garden (1789-1791), to a "Russian palace of ice, glittering, cold and transitory" (BL 10). The excellence of these poets, he tells us, "consisted in just and acute observations on men and manners in an artificial state of society as its matter and substance--and in the logic of wit conveyed in smooth and strong epigrammatic couplets as its form" (BL 9). And this, Coleridge knew in his heart, could not truly be the end of genuine poetry. There had to be something greater to which it aspired, of which, in its finest moments, it spoke.

When he first heard the recitation of "Guilt and Sorrow", Coleridge felt a shock of self-recognition. The poem, he tells us in retrospect, contained what he knew at the time to be an essential truth for himself--"the union of deep feeling with profound thought" (BL 48). And what was more, Coleridge perceived therein,

above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere and with it the depth and height of the ideal world, around forms, incidents and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew-drops.

BL 48-49.

Here, in Wordsworth's composition, was poetry that breathed with a living "atmosphere", that shone with enlightening "lustre" and invigorating "sparkle". Herein lay the key to the concept of

Imagination: this poem united the real world--familiar "forms, incidents and situations"--with its essence, the ideal world, and so effected a symbiotic exchange: the real attained glory, and the ideal, existence. In 1795, this conceptualization was far from Coleridge's intellectual understanding, but the experience, in his own words, led him directly to a distinction by which he was able to account for the creation of two such different kinds of poetry as Wordsworth's, with its revitalizing spirit of dawn-like freshness, and the Neoclassical, with its artificiality and "pointed" lines:

Repeated meditations led me first to suspect (and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions and effects, matured my conjecture into full conviction), that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.


BL 49-50.

Philosophical Empiricism

The "general belief" at the time--that the poetic process was singular and definable equally by either Imagination or Fancy--had come about virtually, it seemed, by default. Coleridge noted that: "It is not . . . easy to conceive of a more apposite translation of the Greek phantasia than the Latin imaginatio" (BL 50). But if the semantic definition was the product of an act of translation, what the words represented was made much more clear by their definition

within the prevailing philosophy of the day.

The definition of Imagination in the principal works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was deeply embedded in the major premise of philosophical empiricism, that is, the belief that all knowledge comes to us through sensory experience. In An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), John Locke presented the most systematic statement of this philosophy. He proposed that the mind, in its original state, was like a sheet of "white paper void of all characters, without any ideas," a tabula rasa that gleans all of its information from two sources--sensory experience from the external world, and the reflection of the mind upon itself (II i 2). This information constitutes the "simple ideas" of the mind, and it is by an act of joining together these simple ideas that all other ideas, broadly termed "complex" ideas, are formed. In the acquisition of simple ideas, the mind is completely passive (II xii 1), utilizing only an "external" and an "internal sense" (II i 4). To explain how the mind in its active function creates its complex ideas, Locke developed the notion of the "association of ideas", which later, in the works of David Hartley and others, became a popular philosophical doctrine. According to this theory, the mind links simple ideas together by one of two methods: "Some of our ideas have a natural correspondance and connexion one with another [which] it is the office and excellency of our reason to trace . . . and hold . . . together, [while others join in a] connexion . . . wholly owing to chance or custom" (II xxxiii 5).<sup>1</sup> The association of ideas, it would appear, occurs either by an actual causal connection, which it is the function of reason to determine, or by a contiguity



of time and/or space, either repeated, so as to become customary, or accidental, so as to be the product of chance. While Locke did not explicitly discuss its activity, Imagination would seem to be somewhat suspect for him as a faculty by which ideas are randomly and often wrongly connected, so as to be potentially dangerous. In this system, then, mind is virtually a machine, obtaining its raw materials at the behest of stimuli, and knowledge consists in gathering these raw materials together.

Imagination was defined within this epistemological framework by empirical thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and David Hume. For both it was closely linked with the activity of the memory, where the ideas of sense are stored. Hobbes said in Leviathan (1650) that Imagination "is nothing but decaying sense," differing from the memory only in being the decayed sense itself, as distinct from merely expressing that decay; here too he explicitly asserted the "general belief" of the time:

This decaying sense, when we would express the thing itself, I mean fancy itself, we call imagination . . . but when we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old, and past, it is called memory. So that imagination and memory are but one thing, which for diverse considerations hath divers names.<sup>2</sup>

Hume, in his Treatise on Human Nature (1739), stated that memory and Imagination are the two faculties that retain the impressions of sensation and thus which contain our ideas. The ideas of the Imagination are "faint and languid" as opposed to the "lively and strong" ideas of the memory and are not required to maintain the specific "order and form" of the memory (I i 3).<sup>3</sup> The Imagination, then, for both Hobbes and Hume, created by connecting together, in

a novel manner, images (or "ideas") ready-made through sensory experience.

By 1802, Coleridge was to reject this view of Imagination, and with it, the whole empirical epistemology that supported it. In 1795, however, he yet lacked the experience and philosophical preparation to do so; and his intellectual ideas were naturally the product of the tradition into which he had been born. By far the single most abiding philosophical influence on Coleridge's thought in this period was the work of David Hartley, an Associationist in the tradition of Locke. While still a student at Cambridge in 1794, Coleridge first read Hartley's Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (1749), and two years later expressed the immense esteem he grew to hold for him by christening his first-born child David Hartley Coleridge, in honour, he wrote, of "that great Master of Christian Philosophy" (CL I p. 236).

Hartley's original contribution to the doctrine of Association had been to ascribe a physiological activity to the mental processes involved in idea-association. To do so, he had conceived the doctrine of vibrations in which he claimed that the impressions received from the external world strike the aether in the pores of the sensory nerves to set off vibrations which then travel along the nerve pathways to the brain.<sup>4</sup> This particular aspect of Hartley's philosophy was never seriously accepted by Coleridge, as a rather facetious rendition of it in a letter to Southey in 1794 reveals:

Boyer thrashed Favell most cruelly the day before yesterday--I sent him the following Note of consolation. 'I condole with you on the unpleasant motions, to which a certain

Uncouth Automaton has been mechanized; and am anxious to know the motives, that impinged on it's optic or auditory nerves, so as to be communicated in such rude vibrations through the medullary substance of It's Brain, thence rolling their stormy Surges into the capillaments of it's Tongue, and the muscles of it's arm. . . .'

CL I p. 137.

The lines immediately preceding this excerpt, however, indicate what did attract his interest and what held Coleridge so long to Hartley's basic philosophy:

I am a compleat Necessitarian--and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself --but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought--namely, that it is motion--.

Hartley, deriving his fundamental concepts from Locke, elaborated the idea that there was a direct connection between the association of ideas and our moral behaviour.<sup>5</sup> Because of the presence of a benevolent Deity, the sensations we receive (which are the substance of our ideas) are predominantly pleasurable ones. Over time; these good sensations leave a definite imprint of their value upon the memory, and so when we come to associate the ideas that are contained therein to form our moral principles, our thoughts necessarily reflect the preeminence of good. Therefore, all our aspirations are towards the achievement of "'pure ultimate spiritual happiness,'" a happiness which is within our reach.<sup>6</sup>

This aspect of Hartley's philosophy offered the essential elements of the empirical epistemology to Coleridge in a particularly enticing form. The spirit of optimism that pervades his work--the idea that man can, indeed must evolve towards goodness--and the foundation of sound belief in a beneficent God were very appealing features

to Coleridge, whose whole nature directed him towards such conclusions; and they served to obscure for a time the fallacy of the mechanistic concept of mind which lay underneath. Furthermore, the empiricist notion that certain ideas recall others by virtue of a material or situational relationship was an uncontroversial belief of the day dating from the time of Aristotle, a premise which Coleridge accepted early and which he continued to accept even after he had refuted Hartley's system. The association of ideas was not in itself a faulty concept; it was merely insufficient to explain the whole operation of the mind.<sup>3</sup>

#### Coleridge's Rejection of Empiricism

Coleridge's dissatisfaction with the empirical explanation of the universe began to manifest itself in terms of a feeling arising from his own particular sense of the universe. He articulated this conviction--a very platonic one--to Thelwall and Poole in two letters in 1797:

I can at times feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves & for themselves --but more frequently all things appear little--all the knowledge, that can be acquired, child's play----the universe itself--what but an immense heap of little things?--I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all little--!--My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great--something one & indivisible--and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!--But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!--

CL I p. 349.

The need for unity, for a principle to integrate all disparate

elements into a single whole was the overriding force of Coleridge's quest of the unity of all things. The realization of the unity of all things was for him the ultimate perception of the universe, a perception realized by a "sense" not part of the epistemological equipment of Lockean philosophy, but yet a sense as real and as substantiated as any experience originating in the five physical senses of the body:

from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii etc. etc.--my mind had been habituated to the Vast----. I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my sight --even at that age. . . . Those who have been led to the same truths of "'the Great', & 'the Whole.'" step by step thro' the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess--They contemplate nothing but parts--and all parts are necessarily little--and the Universe to them is but a mass of little things. . . . Are not the Experimentalists credulous even to madness in believing any absurdity, rather than believe the grandest truths, if they have not the testimony of their own senses in their favor--I have known some who have been rationally educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became a blank & they saw nothing--and denied (very illogically) that any thing could be seen; and uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power--& called the want of imagination Judgement, & the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy.....

CL I p. 354-55.

Even in 1797, then, Coleridge was already "feelingly" convinced of the insufficiency of a system based upon the concept of the mind as passive, a concept that he was later to disclaim as "the wilful resignation of intellect" (BL 79). From his own experience, from his own active searching to understand the workings of his mind, he knew that the human mind was capable of activity greater than merely collecting detailed facts for classification, that it must,

in its highest moods, comprehend a sense of something greater, something essentially unified.

By his own testimony, Coleridge owed much to certain mystics for nurturing the feelings expressed in these letters and "preventing his mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system" during this period. Coleridge's zealous appreciation of people such as "the Teutonic theosophist" Jacob Boehme has been used by would-be detractors as confirmation of the lack of foundation in Coleridge's thought. Kathleen Coburn suggests rather that this appreciation "was aroused more by sympathetic psychological understanding than by any agreement in mystical opinions" (IS 16). And Coleridge's own words no doubt best explain their importance to him:

They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentment, that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of death, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter into which a sap was yet to be propelled from some root to which I had not penetrated, if they were to afford my soul either food or shelter. If they were too often a moving cloud of smoke to me by day, yet they were always a pillar of fire throughout the night, during my wanderings through the wilderness of doubt, and enabled me to skirt, without crossing, the sandy deserts of utter unbelief.

BL 83.

### Poetic Experience

At the same time, experience of another kind was working to shape Coleridge's feelings into a more definite and definable form. His contact with Wordsworth, in 1795 a cause for critical admiration, was now a daily reality and a source of poetic inspiration. In

July, 1797, Dorothy and William Wordsworth moved to Alfoxden, a manor house about three miles from Coleridge's cottage in Nether Stowey, Somerset, and in the year that followed, Coleridge produced almost all of his best poetry: four of the six conversation poems--"This Lime-tree Bower my Prison", "Frost at Midnight", "Fears in Solitude" and "The Nightingale"--and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, "Kubla Khan" and Part I of "Christabel".

In these poems, Coleridge began to define his feelings and his fledgling ideas both about what poetry is and about how the mind operates. John Hill remarks that one of the key distinguishing characteristics of Coleridge's poetry in this annus mirabilis is "its heightened rendering of perceptual experience."<sup>7</sup> And by attempting to express his own perceptions, Coleridge was also striving to explain the process by which they occur. If we examine one of these poems more closely, we may see how he undertakes to do this. "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" is about a particular occasion in Coleridge's life: one day, because "dear Sara had accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk" on his foot (CL I, p. 334), Coleridge lost a rare opportunity to accompany his close friend Charles Lamb and the Wordsworths on a ramble through the woods of Stowey. Having arisen then, out of actual experience, this poem is a genuine representation of an attempt by Coleridge to understand the perceptual process as it took place within himself.

Miserable because he has had to relinquish a pleasant and unique afternoon walk with his friends, the poet at first believes that he has been denied the great happiness that would have come

from this experience: "I have lost/Beauties and feelings, such as would have been/Most sweet to remembrance even when age/Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness!"<sup>8</sup> But when he starts to think about his friends, something interesting and exciting occurs. His feelings of sorrow and self-pity begin to dissolve into ones of rousing excitement, swelling in intensity as his mental picture of his friends' experience becomes increasingly more immediate:

They, meanwhile,  
 Friends, whom I never more may meet again,  
 On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,  
 Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,  
 To that still roaring dell, of which I told;  
 The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,  
 And only speckled by the mid-day sun;  
 Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock  
 Flings arching like a bridge;--that branchless ash,  
 Unsun'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves  
 Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,  
 Fann'd by the water-fall! and there my friends  
 Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,  
 That all at once (A most fantastic sight!)  
 Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge  
 Of the blue clay-stone.

11. 5-19.

As he pictures to himself the idea of his friends emerging into the magnificence of open fields and sea "beneath the wide wide Heaven" (1.21), his own thoughts and feelings rise to the grandeur of the view he visualizes. His love for his friends suddenly bursts forth in unmitigated joy for their "gladness". And for the "gentle-hearted Charles", long a captive of city life, he sends up a sincere and moving prayer:

Ah! slowly sink  
 Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!  
 Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,  
 Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn ye clouds!  
 Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!  
 And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend  
 Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,

Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round  
 On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem  
 Less gross than bodily; and of such hues  
 As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes  
 Spirits perceive his presence.

11. 32-43.

Through this act of unselfish prayer, by wishing for Charles the same breathtaking experience as he himself has known, Coleridge attains unity with his friend, and is thus released back into his immediate physical situation with the conscious realization of what has taken place: "A delight/Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad/As I myself were there!" (11. 43-45). And what is more, his spiritual perception and the exaltation ensuing from it are not without their correlatives in the physical world:

Nor in this bower,  
 This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd  
 Much that has sooth'd me. Pale beneath the blaze  
 Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd  
 Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see  
 The shadow of the leaf and stem above  
 Dappling its sunshine!

11. 45-51.

Coleridge's perception of the lime-tree bower and his appreciation of it have increased to the degree of his awareness of and his rejoicing in his friends' experience. In the process of thinking about his friends and picturing to himself their experience, he simultaneously connected himself to them and began to 'participate' in the walk himself. And in uniting himself in this way with his friends he was able to perceive the "beauties and feelings" that he thought he had "lost". By means of his mind, then, he has achieved what he had first thought possible only through a physical act. And this, this union of spiritual and physical realms, ideal and

real, manifesting itself in and through the poetic process, is later to form the substance of his theory of Imagination. In 1797, however, Coleridge was still unable to give an adequate theoretical account of what had happened in the poem. His interpretation of it at the end of the poem is stoutly didactic: "Henceforth I shall know/That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure" (ll. 59-60).

One is put in mind of his answer to Mrs. Barbauld's complaint that The Rime of the Ancient Mariner had no moral:

I told her that in my own judgement the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I may say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure Imagination.

TT May 31, 1830.

Imagination, at this point in Coleridge's life, is an experience, not yet defined in theoretical terms. Not understanding, as he would later, that it is the power of Imagination which makes him able to transform this potentially painful situation into a joyful one, he attributes the happy resolution solely to his return to a state of fundamental moral goodness. If Coleridge <sup>had</sup> written this poem with his later understanding of the Imagination, then the "moral sentiment", the idea that happiness through spiritual unity is consequent upon wisdom and purity, would possibly not have been so explicitly stated.

Philosophical Background of the Theory

In his copy of "This Lime-tree Bower" to Southey, Coleridge tells of a philosophical influence on his thinking at this time much different from the Hartleyan. To line 40, "On the wide landscape. . . ." he appended the remark, "You remember I am a Berklerian" (CL I p. 335). Coleridge read Berkeley in the spring of 1796, and from several references to the philosopher it is apparent that he found much in his writings that was sympathetic with his own view of the universe.<sup>9</sup> Chief among the notions that Coleridge found attractive are the ideas that man's mind is essentially active and that God is the living source from whom all things derive their existence and their meaning.

Berkeley challenged the leading concept of empirical philosophy in his belief that man's perception of the objective world was an active and necessary condition of that world's existence, or in other words, that in order for that world to be, it had to be perceived:

as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their esse is percipi, nor is it possible that they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them. . . . what are [all sensible] objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations. . . ?

For Berkeley, the corporeal was necessarily tied to the spiritual, and God the ultimate spirit from Whom all things received life and to Whom all things referred:

And it is the searching after and endeavouring to understand those signs instituted by the Author of Nature, that ought to be the employment of the natural philosopher, and not the pretending to explain things by corporeal causes; which doctrine seems to have too much estranged the minds of men from that active principle, that supreme and wise spirit, in whom we live, move, and have our being.<sup>10</sup>

The italicized words, from the Book of Acts (17:28), are later echoed by Coleridge in his own ontological explanation of life.

The idea that nature was a symbolic representation of the ever present spirit of God was not a new one, of course, and prior to his contact with Berkeley, Coleridge had become aware of it through his reading of Ralph Cudworth's The True Intellectual System of the Universe. Cudworth, a Neoplatonist in the school of Cambridge Neoplatonism, was greeted with an enthusiastic response by Coleridge who, immediately upon reading the work, in May, 1795, incorporated the concept of the organic connection between man and God through nature into his writings.<sup>11</sup> "The Eolian Harp", so often cited as an example of Coleridge's early pantheism, is in fact a reflection of Cudworth's philosophy. Written some three months after Coleridge's first encounter with Cudworth's writings, this poem suggests his dissatisfaction with a view of nature divorced from spirituality:

And what if all of animated nature  
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,  
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

11. 44-48.

His later understanding of nature will differ considerably from the idea expressed here that nature is "animated" from without

by a somewhat indifferent God; but it is important, as will be seen later, as an expression of his native understanding of the world as symbolic.

In "Religious Musings" (1794-96), "Destiny of Nations" (1796), and "Frost at Midnight" (1798), the same theme of nature as "one mighty alphabet/For infant minds" ("Destiny of Nations" l. 19f.) appears, evidence of the influence of Cudworth and Berkeley (at least). In a more general sense, their philosophies, as his own footnote to "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" indicates, underlie Coleridge's basic attitude towards nature, an attitude which in Chapter Two will be seen to constitute the beginning of his concept of symbol. There is, therefore, reason to accept their contribution to Coleridge's thought as foundationally significant. For, just as his philosophy is later to draw upon his poetic experience for conviction, so his poetry at the time drew upon the philosophy available to him that spoke most sympathetically to his beliefs. We see that thought and feeling always were intermingled in Coleridge's expression of truth, that philosophy and poetry were always linked in his search for true understanding.

In September, 1798, Coleridge departed for Germany and when he returned in 1799, brought with him "30 pounds worth of books" that were "chiefly metaphysics" (CL I p. 519). By December, 1799, he was remarking to Southey: "I am afraid that I have scarce poetic Enthusiasm enough to finish Christabel" (CL I p. 549). And by September of the following year, he announced the end of his career as a poet, and his assumption of a new role:

I abandon Poetry altogether--I leave the  
higher & deeper Kinds to Wordsworth, the  
delightful, popular & simply dignified to

Southey; & reserve for myself the honorable attempt to make others feel and understand their writings, as they deserve to be felt and understood.

CL I p. 623.

In pursuit of this end, he defined for himself a more precise task, "a metaphysical Investigation of the Laws, by which our Feelings form affinities with each other, with Ideas, & with words" (CL I p. 656).

Early in 1801, Coleridge began a serious study of the works of several German metaphysical writers: "Changes of Ministry interest me not--I turn at times half reluctantly from Leibnitz or Kant even to read a smoking new newspaper/such a purus putus Metaphysicus I am become" (CL II p. 676). The immediate result of this intense study was a series of five letters addressed to Josiah Wedgwood, in which Coleridge disassembled Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding to discover the central flaws of the Lockean system:

If I do not greatly delude myself, I have not only completely extricated the notions of Time, and Space;<sup>12</sup> but have overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern infidels--especially, the doctrine of Necessity.

CL II p. 706.

At last Coleridge had freed himself of the hold that empirical philosophy had had upon him. At the conclusion of this study, he wrote to Poole, "My opinion is this--that deep Thinking is attainable only by a man of deep Feeling, and that all Truth is a species of Révelation" (CL II p. 709). It was this "Truth", the truth of first causes knowable only through revelation, that the great experimentalist geniuses of the age failed to perceive. While the knowledge that people like the great scientist Sir Isaac Newton gleaned may have

proffered a correct description of appearances, it was insufficient to explain them. In order to comprehend this "Truth", Coleridge was convinced, a mind essentially active was necessary:

I am exceedingly delighted with the beauty & neatness of Newton's experiments, & with the accuracy of his immediate Deductions from them--but the opinions founded on these Deductions, and indeed his whole Theory is, I am persuaded, so exceedingly superficial as without impropriety to be deemed false. Newton was a mere materialist--Mind in his system is always passive--a lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not passive if it be indeed made in God's Image, & that too in the sublimest sense--the Image of the Creator--there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.

CL II p. 709.

Here is the epistemological conviction that led Coleridge to his first formulation of the concept of Imagination.

### The Theory of Imagination

#### a) Fancy/Imagination

To William Sotheby on September 10, 1802, he wrote:

Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of it's own, & that we are all one Life. A Poet's Heart & Intellect should be combined, intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature--& not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similies. I do not mean to exclude these formal Similies--there are moods of mind, in which they are natural--pleasing moods of mind, & such as a Poet will often have, & sometimes express; but they are not his highest, & most appropriate moods. . . .It must occur to every Reader that the Greeks in their religious poems address always the Numina Loci, the Genii, the Dryads,

the Naiads, &c &c--All natural Objects were dead--mere hollow Statues--but there was a Godkin or Goddessling included in each--In the Hebrew Poetry you find nothing of this poor Stuff--as poor in genuine Imagination, as it is mean in Intellect--/At best, it is but Fancy, or the aggregating Faculty of the mind--not Imagination, or the modifying, and coadunating Faculty. This the Hebrew Poets appear to me to have possessed beyond all other --next to them the English. In the Hebrew poets each Thing has a Life of it's own, & yet they are all one Life. In God they move & live, & have their Being--not had, as the cold System of Newtonian Theology represents/but have.

CL II pp. 864-66.

In cleaving Fancy from Imagination, Coleridge here both defined and explained the difference between two kinds of poetry. Fancy and Imagination, as defined here, are the powers of poetic creativity operative in Neoclassical poetry and in the Wordsworthian (of which Bowles' poetry is an example) respectively. The reason for the great variation in poetic achievement of these two creative powers lies in the two widely divergent world views underlying each.

The Fancy, as it is described here and as it will be reasserted later, occupies an inferior place in the process of poetic creation. While it is a genuine poetic activity, it is not the ultimate means of expression. Fancy, Coleridge tells us, is the "aggregating Faculty"; that is, it confers the ability to perceive connections between things and to yoke them together in a new and interesting way to create "formal Similies", or comparisons of different images by one or more points of likeness. By this description, the work of poets like Pope and Darwin consists chiefly of Fancy. Although Fancy can produce pleasing lines of verse, it should never be the

sole or even the predominant creative dictate because it denies the primary truth of existence, that is, that we are intrinsically, inextricably a part of the world around us. The Fancy gives rise to a short-sighted and "cold" world-view that man exists in isolation from all other things in the universe, that all these other things are, essentially, dead.

The Imagination, on the other hand, is peculiarly adapted to the expression of the highest truths of life. Imagination renders it possible for the poet to portray the beauty and uniqueness of one single flower while at the same time revealing that flower's inherent connection with all other things and beings in the universe. The Hebrew poets had Imagination, according to Coleridge, because for them "each Thing had a Life of it's own, & yet they are all one Life." It would thus appear that the operation of Imagination is first dependent on a belief that all things are indeed one. In one sense, as shall be seen later, insofar as Imagination is the poetry-making faculty, this is so. But Coleridge's concept of Imagination is, in fact, more complete. By his idea of it, Imagination demands this belief by the very conditions of its operation: in order to operate, to truly be a power, Imagination must unify.

Somehow, Coleridge suggests, by unifying heart and intellect intimately with each other and then with the objects of his sight, the poet becomes capable of the truly great in poetry. Although he clearly does not yet, in 1802, fully understand this act of perceptual synthesis as the activity of Imagination,<sup>13</sup> it is nonetheless at the centre of his ideas. A knowledge of unity is essential for poetry, and perception is the primary level at which this knowledge is manifested. Looking ahead to the Biographia we see

that Coleridge, in attempting to define Imagination, calls it, before anything else, "the living power and prime agent of all human perception" (BL 167).. Perception is necessarily prior to and suggestive for creation.

In the exercise of Fancy, the heart and intellect are bound only loosely with the images that the eye receives from the outside world. There is a distance between the poet as percipient and the world of nature as perceived, and because of this, the poet of Fancy views nature as a collection of inanimate objects to be rearranged according to his whim. The disassociated stance of the poet of Fancy in relation to the objects he describes is made eminently clear in Coleridge's concise definition of Fancy in the Biographia:

Fancy . . . has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space. . . .But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of Association.

BL 167.

Here again the relationship between Fancy and empirical epistemology is affirmed.

The poet of Imagination, on the other hand, works by bringing his thoughts and feelings into complete consonance with his sensory response to the world about him. In this, he performs a dynamic act: he projects his own vital spirit into the appearance before him, and so awakens--or rather, makes known to himself-- the spirit of life that is within them. By this act, he realizes that both he and nature share in a common source of being,

that is, the spirit of life that is God. At the same time as he becomes aware of this, he is also enlightened by the knowledge of each thing's singular essence, for in knowing what constitutes sameness between himself and the object of his perception, he simultaneously becomes aware of what makes each thing different, uniquely itself.

b) Primary and Secondary Imagination

"All Truth", Coleridge had said, "is a species of Revelation," and hence it was only natural that ultimate truth (or, Truth) should, for him, be arrived at through perception in the highest sense of the word, as perception of revelation. Coleridge's famous (or perhaps infamous) distinction between the "primary" and the "secondary" Imagination in the Biographia Literaria makes sense within the context of this idea:

The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

BL 167.

Primary Imagination is the synthesizing perception by which an act of life-giving is performed. In completely marrying his spirit to the forms of nature, the poet gives life to the

dead forms of nature. In such a way, the primary Imagination, as the power of unified perception, is "a dim Analogue of Creation, not all that we can believe, but all that we can conceive of creation" (CL II p. 1034). In unifying and thereby giving life, Imagination repeats, if but faintly, Divine creativity. The knowledge of the unity of life that the poet brings through Imagination to his poetry is thus invested with the authority of experience. By perceiving nature in complete solution with his thoughts and feelings, the poet is led not simply to faith in the idea that each thing has a life and that all things are one life, but to the actual creation of that truth within himself.

In the Biographia Literaria, an entire chapter is devoted to explaining the root of this concept. In Chapter XII, Coleridge presents the key epistemological concepts of transcendental Idealism (largely through the words of Friedrich von Schelling)<sup>14</sup> which constitute the principal foundation of his "dynamic philosophy". The primary and most crucial notion here is the idea that all knowledge "rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject" (BL 144). A third thing, or tertium aliquid, is created at the point where both subject and object meet (BL 164). It is only at this point that the potential of each as an agent of knowledge is fulfilled. Hence, in the perceptual synthesis of man and nature--the paradigmatic 'subject' and 'object'--the appearances of nature become known for their underlying spirit of life, and man's spirit is embodied with the shape and substance by which to understand nature's essence .

It is here that we begin to see the function of the secon-

dary Imagination. Operating in its highest degree, Imagination gives rise to a 'secondary' creation, to art. And it is there revealed "in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities; . . . of the general, with the concrete; the idea with the image. . . ." (BL 174). It works first of all to "produce out of many things . . . a oneness" (CN III 3290) and hence is perceived in poetry as "a subtle Spirit, all in each part, reconciling & unifying all" (CL III p. 361). Second, it is able to humanize nature by "impressing the stamp of humanity, of human feeling over inanimate Objects." And, in its ultimate performance, Imagination confers the ability to convey the truth nakedly, as though the medium of words were but a transparent film, virtually imperceptible. In this capacity, Imagination has "the power of so carrying on the Eye of the Reader as to make him almost lose the consciousness of words--to make him see every thing" (CN III 3290). The greatest power of which a poet may be capable is to make present for the reader the revelation that he himself has glimpsed with his keen primary Imagination.

c) Imagination and the Powers of Mind

What is the exact nature of the knowledge that the poet, blessed with Imagination to the highest possible degree, is able to render so pellucid to the understanding? The categories of knowledge in man for Coleridge are, in ascending order, Sense, Understanding and Reason, and these he believed to be bound together in the mind by the mediating powers of Fancy and Imagination. A marginal note in W.G. Tennemann's Geschichte der Philosophie shows clearly this order:

The simplest yet practically sufficient order of the Mental Powers is, beginning from the

lowest	highest
Sense	Reason
Fancy	Imagination
Understanding	Understanding
<hr/>	
Understanding	Understanding
Imagination	Fancy
Reason	Sense

Fancy and Imagination are Oscillations, this [Imagination] connecting R[eason] and U[nderstanding]; that [Fancy] connecting Sense and Understanding.

CSC 693-4.

The knowledge of Sense is the information received through the five physical senses of the body about the outside world; that is, it is experience in the sense in which the empirical philosophers understood it. It is the lowest form of knowledge, but it is clearly vital to the act of knowing. It is the first step in this act; Coleridge calls it "vision nascent", pointing out that it is "not the cause of intelligence but intelligence itself revealed as an earlier power in the process of self-construction" (BL 155). The importance of sense will become clear when we examine the meaning of the symbol, for we shall then see that all truth comes to us through the medium of the senses, that all truth is clothed in material dress.

The Understanding Coleridge considers to be man's ability to "reflect and generalize" (AR 217), constituting, in essence, "Man himself, contemplated as an intelligent Creature" (CSC 692). The Understanding is the level at which all of us operate most, if not all, of the time; it is "the spontaneous consciousness natural to

all reflecting beings." And while it is "highly useful in rendering our knowledge more distinct, it does not really add to it" (BL 137, 136). It may be helpful here to think of "the Understanding" in terms similar to our own, modern-day meaning of the word "understanding." The Understanding, as Coleridge used the word, is the level at which we are operating when things become clear to us, when we are truly able to say, "Yes, I understand what you mean." The Understanding, then, is the power to make things clear, or fully present to ourselves.

The Fancy, with its attention to "fixities and definites", performs effectively the task of interpreting to the Understanding the information of Sense so that the Understanding may form its general conceptions. We have seen how Fancy works in poetry, that is, by joining together thoughts (and feelings) by one or more points of similarity. Fancy is thus the associating power. And it is truly a power, alive and actuating, as it allows for the first "making sense" of the Understanding from nascent, raw perceptions. Its work is absolutely necessary to the process of knowing because, without it, there would be "no distinct perception or conception." Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that Fancy is "only a means of arriving at" ultimate truth; it is not alone capable of arriving at this truth, nor is it the end in itself (CN III 4066).

It is Reason which contains the highest knowledge of which man is capable. The knowledge of Reason is the knowledge of absolute ideas. These ideas which Reason alone is able to know explain the principle of being of things. They are concerned with "all such notices, as are characterized by UNIVERSALITY and NECESSITY, as

that every Triangle must in all places and at all times have it's two sides greater than it's third." Hence, these ideas are not the effect but rather "the condition of all Experience," the ultimate source of all being, containing within themselves the law of their own being (CL II p. 1198). To perceive with the Reason is thus to glimpse pure spirit or essence; it is "the immediate and inward beholding of the spiritual as sense is of the material" (SM 259). In fact, for Coleridge, Reason is man's direct link with God; it is "that part of the Image of God in us" (AR 162). David Keppel-Jones, in his thorough and penetrating essay, "Coleridge's Scheme of Reason", summarizes Reason's relationship to the other powers of knowing in this way:

Reason [is] the source of ideas, or truths above sense, and of necessary and universal principles; in fact [it is] as a light shining down into man's Understanding and transforming it into the faculty of logic. . . . [For the Imagination it is the] principle in all existence, manifesting itself both as the self-consciousness in man and as the laws of the universe . . . . [And for the Will it acts as] the source of principles.<sup>15</sup>

Reason is a luminary allowing for knowing to occur because it contains the source of all knowledge.

Seminal to Coleridge's understanding of the powers of the mind and his vision of truth is the distinction he makes between Reason and Understanding.<sup>16</sup> In his extended delineation of the difference between the two in Aids to Reflection (1825), he clarifies greatly the definition of each. The following passage is particularly helpful:

## UNDERSTANDING

1. Understanding is discursive.
2. The understanding in all its judgments refers to some other faculty as its ultimate authority.
3. Understanding is the faculty of reflection

## REASON

1. Reason is fixed.
2. The reason in all its decisions appeals to itself as the ground and substance of the truth. (Heb. vi 13.)
3. Reason of contemplation. Reason indeed is much nearer to Sense than to Understanding: for Reason (says our great Hooker) is a direct aspect of truth, an inward beholding, having a similar relation to the intelligible or spiritual, as sense has to the material or phaenomenal.

AR 216-217.

Reason and Sense are in hierarchical opposition to one another: Reason is the "highest", Sense the "lowest". Yet, as Coleridge points out in Aids to Reflection, they are somehow "close" to one another. They are the two opposing forces from which the dynamic philosopher seeks to evolve one power which for Coleridge is Imagination. The important point for Coleridge is that, in each of these two, their opposite always and necessarily inheres: ". . . as the Ideal is realized in Nature, so is the Real idealized in man" (CL IV p. 769). Reason or ideality can only be known through concrete form or reality: "How and whence to these thoughts, [that is, thoughts on the source of being] . . . the intuitive knowledge, may finally supervene, can be learnt only by the fact" (BL 138). And the highest knowledge of nature, contained in the study of natural philosophy, known first through Sense, "would consist in the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect" (BL 146).

The problem lies in how to make this knowledge, which is the only true knowledge, manifest to man, who for the most part is unaware of his "ulterior consciousness", and hence will never experience an "original intuition or absolute affirmation" of the "immediate" or material reality that constitutes natural being (BL 140). The Imagination, in mediating between the idea and the image, is the power necessary to achieve this task. And this is where one must turn to the concept of symbol, for it is through symbols that Imagination works its power.

## Chapter Two

## SYMBOL

An idea, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol; and, except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction.

BL 85.

[I]n nothing is Scriptural history more strongly contrasted with the histories of highest note in the present age than in its freedom from the hollowness of abstractions. While the latter present a shadow-fight of Things and Quantities, the former gives us the history of Men, and balances the important influence of individual Minds with the previous state of the national morals manners, in which, as constituting a specific susceptibility, it presents to us the true cause both of the Influence itself, and of the Weal or Woe that were its Consequents. How should it be otherwise? The histories and political economy of the present and preceding century partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy, and are the product of an unenlivened generalizing Understanding. In the Scriptures they are the living educts of the Imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors. These are the Wheels which Ezekiel beheld, when the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he saw visions of God as he sate among the captives by the river of Chebar. Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, the wheels went, and thither was their spirit to go: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels also. The truths and the symbols that represent them move in conjunction and form the living chariot that bears up (for us) the throne of the Divine Humanity. Hence, by a derivative, indeed, but not a divided, influence, and though in a secondary yet in more than a metaphorical sense, the Sacred Book is worthily intitled the WORD OF GOD. Hence too, its contents present to us the stream of time continuous as Life and a symbol of Eternity, inasmuch as the Past and the Future are virtually contained in the Present.

SM 28-29.

These words of Coleridge's offer a tantalizing glimpse into his understanding of the concept of symbol. In keeping with his desire for unity, the meaning that he suggests here for the symbol is presented to us as a seamless, unified whole consisting of many different elements. In attempting to reconstruct the ideas in a more academic form, one risks the danger of destroying the meaning inherent in such unity itself. And unity is central to Coleridge's concept of symbol. The lexical definition of symbol is "something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else . . . especially a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial and abstract;"<sup>1</sup> and for Coleridge, the aspects of reference and external representation are clearly fundamental to the notion of symbol. But as the original Greek word 'súmbolon' (*συμβολον*) further suggests, between the symbol and the thing it represents there is a togetherness of a singularly binding nature.<sup>2</sup> It is this quality that Coleridge is addressing and emphasizing in the words "consubstantial"<sup>3</sup> and "conductors"<sup>4</sup> in the above passage. A symbol, in a profoundly more intimate way than a sign, is like the thing it signifies. It is, in fact, for Coleridge, part of what it signifies. And furthermore, conversely, the signified thing itself constitutes part of the symbol.

For this reason, Coleridge's explicit discussions of symbol appear at once to be intensely substantial and frustratingly intangible. The passage above begins in a highly relevant context of meaning: the recording of history is both accessible and important to us. Yet just as we begin to expect an increasingly

clear definition of the ideas, we are met with one of the most mystifying visionary passages of the Old Testament. The understanding we thought we had achieved dissolves beneath our feet in the puzzling and seemingly tangential digression of the vision of Ezekiel.

What for us is a vexing difficulty with Coleridge's meaning is, in fact, "the riddle of the World" upon which he has founded and authorized his notion of symbol. It is with no great surprise that we discover the unity of opposing elements, so central to the theory of Imagination, to be key to understanding this concept. And what he writes in the Biographia Literaria, quoted as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, that all symbols "of necessity involve an apparent contradiction," becomes ever more appropriate as we attempt to understand Coleridge. But what must also become clear to us in searching to understand his concept of symbol is the undeniable foundation of this concept in faith and the degree to which the cracking of the riddles depends upon our willingness to believe. Coleridge's concept of symbol is grounded upon his belief in the Christian God, and ultimately our understanding of this concept is contingent upon a kind of faith. Saint Augustine wrote: "Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand."<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that we must believe or come to believe in the Christian God to learn from Coleridge. Rather, it is to say that his concept of symbol cannot be fully understood unless and until we are willing to make an inductive leap--a kind of leap of faith--concerning its truth. We must bring to it a preliminary acceptance of the concept of reality it defines. I have discussed

this belief indirectly in Chapter One. Inherent in the theory of Imagination is the belief in the existence of a dynamic universe with which it is possible for man to be spiritually united.

The references to wheels in the passage quoted above from The Statesman's Manual are far from being irrelevant or meaningless. They point us, I think, to a very significant form by which Coleridge's concept of symbol may be understood. The wheel, I believe, is the form of all of Coleridge's thought; and it is for him the symbol for meaning itself.<sup>6</sup> His concept of symbol and consequently, of Imagination, may be understood in terms of this form; his understanding of art and religion as well. These four areas of interest --being (symbol), believing (religion), knowing (Imagination) and expression (art)--understood in terms of the wheel, reveal themselves to be harmoniously interrelated, in turn revealing the wheel to be the symbol of perfect unity.

#### The Nature of the Symbol

Coleridge was, as we have seen, early convinced of the referential aspect of the natural world. In the writings of Cudworth and Berkeley he found authority for this early conviction, and in 1795 he proclaimed, in one of his lectures on the slave-trade, that "The Omnipotent has unfolded to us the Volume of the World, that there we may read the Transcript of himself" (CC I 94). The poems from the period 1794-96, mentioned briefly in Chapter One ("The Eolian Harp", "Religious Musings", and "Destiny of Nations"), also speak of the world from this neoplatonic point of view. In

"Destiny of Nations" Coleridge is particularly explicit:

For what is Freedom, but the unfettered use  
 Of all the powers which God for use has given?  
 But chiefly this, him First, him Last to view  
 Through meaner powers and secondary things  
 Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze.  
 For all that meets the bodily sense I deem  
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet  
 For infant minds; and we in this low world  
 Placed with our backs to bright Reality,  
 That we may learn with young unwounded ken  
 The substance from its shadow. Infinite Love,  
 Whose latence is the pleroude of All,  
 Thou with retracted beams and self-eclipse  
 Veiling, revealest thine eternal Sun.

ll. 13-26.

The natural world here is significant as it points to and reveals greater truth, that is, God. In the discussion of Sense and Reason in Chapter One, the same description of knowledge, the same hierarchical structure of truth was evidenced. The power of Sense was meaningful as it directed us to and opened the door for the ideas of Reason. Coleridge is clearly addressing the same point in this poem: the power of "bodily sense" operates on the level of the "low world"; but full "Reality" is knowable only through the power of sense.

But the understanding of reality with which we are presented in this poem is that our world--the earth-- is itself only a secondary witness to the glory of God, that it is only a "shadow" or suggestion--and not reality itself. We find this notion again expressed in "Religious Musings", where "Life is a vision shadowy of Truth" (l. 396). The hierarchy of being that culminates in God is thus satisfactorily established by such an understanding. Yet a real sense of God's immediacy, of His personal relationship to life is lacking. And what Coleridge "deems/Symbolical" might be

better described by his mature definition of allegory, "that [which] express [es] a different subject but with a resemblance" (AR 204). The "symbolical" world that he speaks of here is not truly symbolical, as he will later understand that concept, but allegorical. There is not a unity of kind or essence between the "low world" of Sense and the "Reality" of God. Rather, the metaphor of the alphabet would suggest that the relationship between the two worlds--man's and God's--is like that of "a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses."<sup>7</sup> The two worlds are essentially different, and are united only by the ability of the first to inform us in a secondary and insufficient way of the second. God and His Creation, in this view, then, are not substantially bound together, but only metaphorically<sup>8</sup> so.

It is possible, however, to begin with this passage from "Destiny of Nations" to understand Coleridge's concept of symbol in terms of the natural world. Coleridge believed with the Neoplatonists that all nature is symbolical because it refers to God's truth. At the same time, this world is a revelation of truth. What we see is God's world, and all things therein instruct us of His nature. In a very real way, the empirical world is vital to the idea of knowledge of God through symbol. Symbol takes much of its meaning from the fact that it is 'of nature', that is, material, for it is thereby knowable on the primary or sensual level of our awareness. The natural or symbolical world is thus, for Coleridge, a revealed world. And in order to understand it, one must seek to know the One who has revealed it.

Reference and revelation are thus the two major knowable truths of the natural--"symbolical"--world, and they must be understood to comprise one indivisible truth. In other words, the meaning of the natural world depends upon our simultaneous recognition of these two truths: we must see the world as both revelatory and as referential. Without reference to God in our interpretation, we cannot know the nature of the revelation. Put in reverse order, we have a statement of Coleridge's reason for belief: without the revelation of the natural world there would of course be no reference to God because there would be no world.

This may well appear to be a circular explanation of the nature of reality, one which demands faith in God to be meaningful. But in fact, Coleridge's hierarchy of meaning rescues the premise from such irony, and his frame of reference is hardly so limiting. As was pointed out in Chapter One, at the centre of Coleridge's quest for meaning is the knowledge of Reason. This knowledge is not that of logic, as we might today first believe, but rather that of first causes: Reason is the answer to the metaphysical question Why? It is to this central question of existence that Coleridge addressed his search and upon which the symbol takes shape. A symbol for Coleridge is an expression of an idea. And not only is the natural world of trees and lakes symbolical; for Coleridge, as well, all things material--that is, everything existing in time and space--are properly called symbols.

Let me turn to some of Coleridge's other remarks on the nature of being. In a letter to William Godwin in 1800, he offers a partial (if somewhat tongue-in-cheek<sup>9</sup>) definition of his ideas of

material things, informing us of the relationship of feelings to the things that demonstrate these feelings:

as I am not behind you in affectionate esteem, so I would not be thought to lag in those outward & visible signs, that both shew & vivify the inward & spiritual grace.

CL I p. 588.

Material things, obviously, have something to do with the actual being of the thing, which derives its raison d'être from an internal source, from spirit. Without the external manifestation, the inner thing would remain mute and invisible, meaningless to our Sense.

Language is especially representative of this idea for Coleridge: "Language and all symbols," he says, "give outness [Berkeley's term]<sup>10</sup> to Thoughts & this [is] the philosophical essence & purpose of Language" (CN I 1387, March-July, 1808). Language symbolizes, by establishing in time and space, the thoughts that we have in our minds and thus makes it possible for us to communicate these ideas. While the real truth of our words lies within our minds, the expression of this truth requires something existing outside of them.

The question of the significance of language for thought (and, hence, of symbol for truth) greatly concerned Coleridge, and shortly after declaring in 1799 his decision to abandon the writing of poetry and to turn his energies in the direction of metaphysics, he writes to Godwin:

I wish you . . . to solve the great Questions --whether there be reason to hold, that an action bearing all the semblance of pre-designing Consciousness may yet be simply organic,

& whether a series of such actions are possible --and close on the heels of this question would follow the old 'Is Logic the Essence of Thinking?' in other words--Is thinking impossible without arbitrary signs? & how far is the word 'arbitrary' a misnomer? Are not words & parts & germinations of the Plant? And what is the Law of their Growth?--In something of this order I would endeavor to destroy the old antithesis of Words & Things, elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too.

CL I pp. 625-26.

Here is an indication of Coleridge's later thought on symbol:

"Are not words & parts & germinations of the Plant?" Reluctant to entertain, even theoretically, the notion of division, he perceives all aspects of the process of expression to be unified. Later, he seems to have reached a conclusion regarding the relationship of the external thing to the internal thought:

All minds must think by some symbols--the strongest minds possess the most vivid Symbols in the Imagination--yet this ingenerates a want, πρόθυμα<sup>1</sup> desiderium, for vividness of Symbol: which something that is without, that has the property of Outness (a word which Berkeley preferred to "Externality") can alone fully gratify/even that indeed not fully--for the utmost is only an approximation to that absolute Union, which the soul sensible of its imperfection in itself, of its Halfness, years after, whenever it exists free from meaner passions, as Lust, Avarice, love of wordly power, passion for distinction. . . .I say, every generous mind not already filled by some one of these passions feel its Halfness--it cannot think without a symbol--neither can it live without something that is to be at once its Symbol, & its Other half. . . .Hence I deduce the habit . . . of writing my inmost thoughts. . . .

CN III 3325.

Coleridge's suggestion is that the symbols of communication-- language spoken and written--constitute part of the actual process

of thinking.

The human body is clearly also a symbol for Coleridge.

In a letter in 1811 he writes:

What is the Body, but the fixture of the mind the stereotype Impression? Arbitrary are the Symbols--yet Symbols they are.--Is Terror in my Soul--my heart beats against my side--Is Grief? Tears form in my eyes. In her homely way the Body tries to interpret all the movements of the Soul.

CL III p. 305.

The external, material form is, again, the expression of inner spirit and its importance lies in its being a referent to that inner spirit, to Reason, the cause of the external form.

In The Friend (1810), Coleridge strongly emphasizes the importance of this spiritual being:

[The] elevation of the spirit above the semblances of custom and the senses to a world of spirit, this life in the idea, even in the supreme and godlike, which alone merits the name of life, and without which our organic life is but a state of somnambulism, this it is which affords the sole sure anchorage in the storm, and at the same time, the substantiating principle of all true wisdom, the satisfactory solution of all the contradictions of human nature, of the whole riddle of the world.

F I 524.

By establishing the spirit as supreme, Coleridge secures the hierarchy of symbolical knowledge to an unquestionable foundation, saving it from a hopeless circularity.

We see the same insistence upon this concept of reality in virtually all of Coleridge's ideas. Human behaviour, for example, is symbolic: "the most glorious actions do not delight us, as separate acts or facts, but as representative of the Being of the

agent" (CN III 3312, May, 1808). In other words, what we do is symbolic of what we are. In the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge stated the concept this way:

Facts are valuable to a wise man chiefly as they lead to the discovery of the indwelling law which is the true being of things, the sole solution of their modes of existence and in the knowledge of which consists our dignity and our power.

BL 197.

In perhaps the most lovely expression of this idea, Coleridge marries poetry to philosophy:

No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.

BL 179.

Being, for Coleridge, is the source of everything. It is the determining cause of action. It is the heart of truth.

It thus becomes clear, however, that while the spiritual source of all things is what must be learned before one truly knows, yet it is only through the outward manifestations of this inner being, through "facts", through symbols, that one can know this being. Coleridge makes this very clear in a notebook entry in 1811: "we cannot arrive at the knowledge of the living Being but thro' the Body which is its Symbol & outward & visible Sign" (CN III 4066). One can see the principle of unity at work here, intimately combining reference and revelation: without reference to the inner essence of the body's movement, we can know nothing about these movements; they are not revealing of truth. On the other hand, they have to exist as revelations in order for us to know

that they are real. The presence of material life is itself proof of spiritual being.

The nature of being for Coleridge, then, seems to be something like this: existence is only meaningful as it points to essence, and yet essence is only knowable through existence. Things are, for us, in the first place because they exist in material form in the temporal and spatial world. Yet they only truly mean something to us as they reveal a living principle, a dynamic centre of being. Coleridge's note on the meaning of 'essence' and 'existence' is helpful here:

Essence in its primary signification, means the principle of individuation, the inmost principle of the possibility of any thing as that particular thing. It is equivalent to the idea of a thing, whenever we use the word idea with philosophic precision. Existence, on the other hand, is distinguished from essence by the superinduction of reality. Thus we speak of the essence and essential properties of a circle; but we do not therefore assert that any thing which really exists is mathematically circular. Thus too, without any tautology, we contend for the existence of the Supreme Being; that is for a reality correspondent to the idea.

BL 204.

A very simple example can perhaps illustrate this concept. The idea of a snowman, for instance, can only possibly be fully known when the balls of snow have been piled one on top of another, the lumps of coal, the carrot and the scarf added to designate facial features and character. Only then does the idea have reality in the full sense of the word. The snowman is only then made to exist and to have full value as an idea. By the same token, we can appreciate that the snowman never would have been at all

unless we had first had the idea for it. And we can also see that it would really mean nothing (or very little) apart from this idea: the reason such a thing pleases us is because we see our humanity reflected in it. In one sense, then, the snow-made man is simply the outward manifestation of an idea. In another sense, however, it is the only way we can ever know that idea. John Stuart Mill, describing Coleridge's theory of mind, summarizes it this way:

The appearances in nature excite in us, by an inherent law, ideas of those invisible things which are the causes of the visible appearances and on whose laws those appearances depend: and we then perceive that these things must have pre-existed to render the appearance possible. . . .<sup>12</sup>

And Coleridge put it this way:

We could never have learnt that we had eyes but by the process of seeing; yet having seen we know that the eyes must have pre-existed in order to render the process of sight possible.

BL 71.

We may now perhaps begin to understand what Coleridge meant in the Biographia Literaria by saying: "An idea, in the highest sense of the word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol. . . ." (BL 85). But what does he mean by the rest of this statement, that "except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction"? Let me return for a moment to the Imagination and to one of Coleridge's famous remarks on its powers. Imagination, he writes, confers the ability

"To find no contradiction in the union of old and new, to contemplate the Ancient of Days and all his works with feelings fresh as if all had then sprang forth at the first creative fiat,

characterizes the mind that feels the riddle of the world and may help to unravel it."

BL 49 (from The Friend).

Imagination, as Coleridge pointed out, confers the ability to perceive the newness and uniqueness of each thing in each moment of time while at the same time appreciating its enduring, unchanging essence throughout all time. It gives the ability to understand the language of symbols. In the following notebook entry, Coleridge is speaking of the difference between seeing with Imagination, and seeing without it:

Mountains & mountainous Scenery, taken collectively & cursorily, must depend for their charms on their novelty-/they put on their immortal interest then first, when we have resided among them, & learnt to understand their language, their written characters, & intelligible sounds, and all their eloquence so various, so unwearied.--Then you will hear no 'twice-told tale'.

CL I, p. 620.

It is through the Imagination that we perceive reality as symbolical. It is upon symbols that the Imagination works. And it is because things are symbols that we are able to perceive their reality as such.

Coleridge's complaint with the empiricists was exactly this: that they did not perceive matter as anything beyond itself, so that when they looked at things, they saw them as dead shapes, not as living forms. Using only Fancy, they "looked death into every thing-- and this not by accident, but from the nature of the faculty itself, the province of which is to give consciousness to the Subject by presenting to it its conceptions objectively. . . ." And, he continues, from this perspective, the nature of reality is distorted,

the true meaning of "form" lost:

the Soul differences itself from any other Soul for the purposes of symbolical knowledge by form or body only--but all form as body, i.e. as shape, & not as forma efformans, [that is, "form-forming form"] is dead--Life may be inferred, even as intelligence is from black marks on white paper--but the black marks themselves are truly "the dead letter".

CN III 4066.

"Revelation" in such a view is not dynamic, but static, not regenerative but stagnant. Yet it is one of the major properties of revelation that it is ongoing. This fact, which constitutes the "apparent contradiction" of the symbol, is expressed, in a graphic example of the true meaning of form, in the following passage from a letter to Sara Hutchinson:

What a sight it is to look down on such a Cataract!--the wheels, that circumsolve in it--the leaping up & plunging forward of that infinity of Pearls & Glass Bulbs--the continual change of the Matter, the perpetual Sameness of the Form.

CL II p. 853-54.

What appears contradictory in the symbol, then, is its capacity to contain both permanence and change.

Let me turn now to Coleridge's famous definition of symbol in

The Statesman's Manual:

a Symbol (ὅ ἐστιν ἄλλ' ταυτηγόριον)<sup>13</sup> is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the general in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative.

SM 30.

The Greek word "ταυτηγορικον" meaning "tautegorical" is Coleridge's own neologism which he coined to denote the seemingly contradictory nature of the symbol. It means "expressing the same subject but with a difference" (AR 209), or simply, "sameness with difference." The "sameness" of the symbol is its bond with the idea which is its formative principle, its Reason. The symbol is the same in kind, that is, in "essence" or true being, as the idea to which it refers. It is different in that, unlike the idea, the symbol is not a principle but a temporal and spatial expression of that principle. The two are not contradictory or mutually exclusive. Rather, they are mutually necessary, mutually sustaining. The symbol contains the idea and bodies it forth in a material shape. The idea maintains the life of the symbol. The symbol reveals this life. A lovely example of the tautegorical nature of the symbol is found in Aids to Reflection. Speaking of the way in which we learn of "the great fundamental truths of religion" as children, Coleridge notes that it is always in "close and vital association with whatever makes or marks reality for our infant minds."

what the blue sky is to the mother, the  
mother's upraised eyes and brow are to  
the a child, the type and symbol of an in-  
divisible heaven!

AR 226.

The solution to the problem of seeming contradiction, then, is found in the concept of unity. We can change the words "reference" and "revelation" to idea and symbol. The symbol refers to its idea which is 'ideally' greater than the symbol because it is permanent--the idea is "the Special in the Individual . . . the General in the Especial . . . the Universal in the General and

above all [understandably!] . . . the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (my emphasis). Always the idea is the empowering force, the foundation and the determination of the symbol. But the symbol is not itself insignificant. It is not merely a "meaner power and secondary thing[]." Since it contains the idea, revealing and referring to it, it is actually part of the reality of the idea. The fact that an absolute unity binds idea with symbol, symbol with idea, is the "riddle" of the "apparent contradiction".

### The Trinity

The meaning of the symbol, then, depends upon a tripartite structure of truth: idea, symbolic thing, and the unity of both. Translated into the terms of the powers of knowing (Coleridge's terms), these three parts correspond respectively to Reason, Sense and Imagination. The symbol speaks to us on the level of Sense as "vision nascent" and in order to understand this "vision" truly, we need the power of Reason; but such understanding (Coleridge's Understanding) can only occur by means of Imagination effecting fusion between immediate self (Reason) and immediate non-self (the objective reality that acts upon the Sense). There is an important remark by Coleridge on the relationship of this self to the external objective world in his notebook for "Saturday Night, April 14, 1805".

--In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing.

new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phaenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature/ It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is λογος, the Creator! and <the Evolver!>

CN II 2546.

Nature, he feels, reaches out to touch the immanent within him, that part--Reason--which he shares with God that allows him to know the source of being itself. Self and not-self are united at the point of Reason. This experience, which seems very much to resemble an epiphany, suggests the new-found basis for Coleridge's concept of symbol: the Trinity.

Two months prior to this notebook entry, Coleridge first announced his intellectual conviction that the concept of the Trinity was true. For twelve years, he had accepted the doctrine of Unitarianism put forth by Joseph Priestley and others.<sup>14</sup> Now he joyously proclaimed his acceptance of "the adorable Tri-unity", and this "Tri-unity" he clearly understood in terms of "Being, Intellect, and Spiritual Action, as the Father, Son and co-eternal Proccedent," the "distinguishable Triplicity in the indivisible Unity" (CN II 2444).

Kathleen Coburn notes that this return to belief<sup>14</sup> in the Trinity came about "through the Logos, not the Gospels" (CN II 2445 n.). 'Logos' is the Greek word meaning "word, speech, discourse, reason," and its theological significance lies in its referring both to the Word of God and to the Second Person of the Trinity--Christ.<sup>15</sup> It was this unity of meaning between God's 'Word' and the Person of Jesus Christ as the bodily expression of that Word

that convinced Coleridge of the significance of the Trinity. David Keppel-Jones notes that "through the idea of the Logos or Word, as both God and Reason, Coleridge found that he was able to reconcile and unite all his other beliefs."<sup>16</sup> Coleridge's reverence for the Logos remained life-long. The work of which he spoke in the Biographia Literaria, "that greater work" to which he had "devoted so many years, and study so intense and various", (BL 166), was his LOGOSOPHIA: or on the LOGOS divine and human in six treatises. As the Logos represented all knowledge, so Coleridge hoped his Logosophia to describe a system by which all knowledge could be understood. The Logosophia was to have attained its greatest height in the fourth treatise, on the Gospel of St. John. If we turn to the Fourth Gospel itself, we find there words suggesting its seminality for Coleridge's thought:

In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of man. . . .The Word became flesh, and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . .No man has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, this is the basis for Coleridge's mature concept of symbol. Christ, the fleshly manifestation of the Word spoken by the Father, is at once God, yet different. Proceeding outward from the source of being to make that being known, he is Son to the Father. His well-known remark to Thomas about who he is, is definitely an essential source for Coleridge's symbol: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except

through me" (John 14:6). Of flesh, and born to die in order to show the glory of God, Christ is the perfect symbol, the supreme example of sameness with difference.

The third component of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is what bound the Father to the Son while he was on earth, and what continues to unite man through Christ to the Father. John records Jesus' description of it:

I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

John 14:16-20.

Coleridge's description of the Trinity recalls that of John. The Father, "Being," is the "sole self-comprehending Being." The Son, the "Intellect," is "the substantial image of God in whom the Father beholds well-pleased his whole Being." And that by which they contemplate each other is "the action of Love", the "Spirit". God the Father acts "by and for the Word, and with and thro' the Holy Spirit" (CL II p. 1195-96, Letter to Thomas Clarkson, October 13, 1806).

For Coleridge the Trinity is "the 'general generalissima' of all knowledge" (CL II p. 1196), that is, "the most universal kind." It is the pattern which orders all his concepts of symbolical truth.

### The Wheel

The pattern of the Trinity--and therefore of all symbolical truth--is that of the wheel. References to the image of the wheel pervade Coleridge's writings. The wheel, in the shape of a cataract, as he mentioned in the above letter to Sara Hutchinson, is, for him, "an awful Image & Shadow of God & the World" (CL II p. 854). Eminently suggesting motion, the wheel is also a perfect form, uniting absolutely opposite forces. It consists of three parts: first, a perfect centre on which the whole turns but which is itself, within the context of the wheel, absolutely stationary; second, spokes which radiate outward from the centre to give expression to, or to symbolize the idea of motion that is contained in the centre; and third, a rim, really only the external connection of the axis and the spokes, which circles all and binds the whole together to make it possible for motion to occur. The wheel represents contained but progressive motion.

A poem, Coleridge explained to Joseph Cottle, is ideally to be in the form of a wheel:

The common end of all narrative, nay, of all, Poems is to convert a series into a Whole: to makes those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a strait Line, assume to our Understandings a circular motion--

In this way, the poem rises to its greatest dignity, because it thereby represents, in its very structure, the divine Creator:

what the Globe is in Geography, miniaturing in order to manifest the Truth, such is a Poem to that Image of God, which we were created into, and which still seeks that Unity, or Revelation of the One in and by

the Many, which reminds it, that tho' in order to be an individual Being it must go forth from God, yet as the receding from him is to proceed towards Nothingness and Privation, it must still at every step turn back toward him in order to be at all--Now a straight Line, continuously retracted forms of necessity a circular orbit.

CL IV p. 545.

The constant tension of opposing forces creates circularity and motion. In such a way, the form--the poem itself--is an expression of the truth of unity and motion.

In the description of the unity of opposites at the end of Chapter XIV of the Biographia Literaria, the idea of motion is clearly suggested by Coleridge's words. The Imagination, he says, is "first put in action by the will and understanding" and then it is "retained under their irremissive, through gentle and unnoticed, controul." The Latin phrase directly following these words, "laxis effertur habenis" meaning "'is borne onwards with loose reins,'"<sup>18</sup> further evokes the image of contained but progressive motion. At the end of this passage, Coleridge defines poetic genius specifically in terms of this image: motion, good sense dressed by Fancy, and Imagination are the three components that constitute the living whole:

Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is every where, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

BL 174.

We envisage here a symbolical wheel--motion is the centre, the indwelling life or idea that determines the whole; good sense

(by which we may speculate that he means sense perception) and fancy constitute the outward manifestation of that idea, the body or material being of that idea; and Imagination is the spirit that unites the parts together.

Religion, by Coleridge's definition, is also properly imaged as a wheel. Coleridge believed religion to embrace the whole sphere of man's intellectual and physical activity: "in its most perfect form [it] . . . is Philosophy elevated from Idea into Act and Fact by a Superinduction . . . of the extrinsic Conditions of Realization and Reality" (CN III 4489, February, 1819). Religion, for Coleridge, evolves endlessly through time and space, from mind through action, and in its breadth is completely encompassing. It contains knowledge of History and Philosophy both:

A Religion that is a true religion, must consist of ideas and facts both; not of ideas alone without facts, for then it would be mere Philosophy;--nor of facts alone without ideas of which those facts are the symbols, or out of which they arise, or upon which they are grounded, for then it would be mere History.

TT Dec. 3, 1831, p. 140.

Knowledge in its entirety--History and Philosophy as Coleridge understood them--constituted religion for Coleridge because through time and space it establishes itself as a kind of collective trust fund from the dead to the living. Hence, tradition. Hence also the quintessential importance of faith. In the light of Coleridge's understanding, faith is an integral component of knowledge. Faith is demanded of us by the very <sup>fact</sup> of the existence of knowledge. If there had not been those who had gone before us and into whose trust we place ourselves, we would not--we could not--

know what we do. This view has been expressed in recent times by people such as T.S. Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent"<sup>19</sup> and by the German hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>20</sup> It is also found beautifully expressed by John Donne in one of his Meditations:

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe, every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.<sup>21</sup>

At any given moment in time, as the statements of these men unanimously claim, we are bound together with all who have lived before us. Our reality, in this view, owes itself in great part to those who have preceded us and who have given shape to our destiny.

There is a strong and vital relationship between faith as understood in this way and the meaning of symbol for Coleridge. The ultimate extension of such a belief in knowledge is that one must hold a faith about the very beginning of life itself. One must "know" one's ground of existence if one is to hope to understand the truth that is revealed in tradition, and knowledge of this ultimate ground is possible only through faith, as faith. Coleridge's deep concern over the direction of mankind suggested by contemporary thought resided in his perception of a death of faith. His complaint with the empiricists and the "histories of highest note" in his age in the passage from The Statesman's Manual quoted at the beginning of this chapter springs from this

perception. In the minds of the empiricists there was no faith in tradition as the ground of all knowledge, as the basis on which to establish the meaning of "facts". There was no acceptance or acknowledgement at all of ultimate or original Truth. The symbolic thing, the fact, became the end in and of itself. For the Biblical writers, actions were always understood as symbolic. Scriptural history points to philosophical as well as historical, spiritual as well as factual truths. Hence, even if we are not willing to accept it as the Truth, we are compelled to admit its unquestionable superiority in terms of meaning as compared with the histories which speak only of facts and abstract (that is, not actually or fully "real") generalities.

At this point in his discussion, Coleridge<sup>6</sup> makes specific reference to "the wheel". Biblical history contains within itself the "reason" for itself--because it embodies primary causes--and is thus a truly living and progressive thing:

These are the Wheels which Ezekiel beheld, when the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he saw visions of God as he sate among the captives by the river of Chebar. Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, the wheels went, and thither was their spirit to go: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels also (Ezekiel 1:20).

The symbol, the truly living fact itself, for Coleridge supports a picture of another, and deeper, truth--that of God:

The truths [i.e. of the Scriptures] and the symbols that represent them move in conjunction and form the living chariot that bears up (for us) the throne of the Divine Humanity.

It is of the one God in which all past, present and future people participate as thinking beings that such truly expressed histories speak, and therefore, although the Scriptures were written by

human beings, yet they contain the divine *λογος*: "by a derivative, indeed, but not a divided, influence, and though in a secondary yet in more than a metaphorical sense, the Sacred Book is worthily intitled the WORD OF GOD" (SM 28-29).

Coleridge makes the relationship between faith and symbol explicit in another passage from The Statesman's Manual:

Eheu! paupertina philosophia in paupertinam religionem ducit:--A hunger-bitten and idealess philosophy naturally produces a starveling and comfortless religion. It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between Literal and Metaphorical. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds SYMBOLS with ALLEGORIES. Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from object of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot.

SM 30.

The same approach to reality that in poetry led to the "glittering, cold and transitory" ice-palace poetry of Darwin and the Neoclassicists resulted in a barren, meaningless religion, a religion void of true faith. The disintegration of faith arose, in Coleridge's view, from an increasing failure to use the power of Imagination. Reality was no longer being understood as symbolic, but rather as allegorical, no longer in terms of an essential unity of all being--past, present, and future--but as a collection of parts essentially separate, joined only by man's artificial, and imperfect, means.

Such a failure of perception is possible in the first place for Coleridge because there exists a symbolic universe. We may think

again of Coleridge's argument about sight and the eyes:

We could never have learnt that we had eyes but by the process of seeing; yet having seen we know that the eyes must have pre-existed in order to render the process of sight possible.

The symbol is, for Coleridge, proof of the existence of God, and all knowledge understood symbolically ultimately teaches us this.

In a powerful passage in Aids to Reflection he argues his case:

Though there may be no conclusive demonstrations of a good, wise, living, and personal God, there are so many convincing reasons for it, within and without--a grain of sand sufficing, and a whole universe at hand to echo the decision! --that for every mind not devoid of all reason, and desperately conscience-proof, the Truth which it is the least possible to prove, it is little less than impossible not to believe.

AR 189.

Symbolical knowledge teaches us that behind all phenomenal appearance there is an intelligent source creating that appearance.

And all truth is symbolical. The truth about man's being is that his actions represent, and are meaningful only as they inform us of, his thoughts. The truth about his power of knowing is that his perceptions of the outside world, deriving from his Sense, are significant only when he can understand their first cause, through his power of Reason. The truth about man's expression of truth is that what he says or writes or paints is only penetrating and valuable when he has first truly perceived Reason through his Imagination, and when he is then able to clothe that knowledge symbolically. And the truth about believing is that

it involves an understanding of all being and all action. These symbolical truths are like wheels. These are the wheels that "bear up the throne of the Divine Humanity." These are the clues to the vision of Ezekiel.

Chapter Three

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

"... all the Hows? may and should be answered by Look!"<sup>1</sup>

The epigraph to this chapter, a remark Coleridge made in reference to the Trinity, provides a helpful suggestion for understanding Coleridge's concept of symbol. The answer to the question "What does Coleridge mean by symbol?" may perhaps finally be found in one of his most visible expressions of meaning. Let me turn now from Coleridge's prose writings to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Written in 1797-8, some years before the theory of Imagination was explicitly present in Coleridge's mind, this poem, once called "one of the most perfect pieces of imaginative poetry, not only in our language, but in the literature of all Europe"<sup>2</sup> and described by one modern critic as "the astonishingly adequate symbol not only of much that Coleridge had experienced in the past but of much that was still latent within him,"<sup>3</sup> offers a living expression of both the theory of Imagination and the concept of symbol.

In analyzing the Ancient Mariner from this perspective, I should first like to examine Robert Penn Warren's important essay, "A Poem of Pure Imagination". Warren's thesis is that the poem consists of two themes, a primary theme, which is the sacramental vision of life, or Coleridge's "One Life" philosophy, and a secondary theme, which is the creative or poetic Imagination. Warren argues that Coleridge's expression of these themes is conveyed through a powerful structure of "symbols". In essence, Warren attempts to interpret the poem as a statement of Coleridge's later-articulated theory of the Imagination and (much less emphatically) of his concept of symbol. After referring to some of Coleridge's early comments on the importance of the unity of thought and feeling (see Chapter I),

Warren states:

In all of the quotations given above we find the idea that the truth is implicit in the poetic act as such, that the moral concern and the aesthetic concern are aspects of the same activity, the creative activity, and that this activity is expressive of the whole mind. Now my argument is that The Ancient Mariner is, first, written out of this general belief, and second, written about this general belief.

In conclusion, Warren writes, "the poem is, in general, about the unity of mind and the final unity of values, and in particular about poetry itself."<sup>4</sup>

William Walsh has called Warren's attempt to apply the theory of Imagination to the poem "unconvincing".<sup>5</sup> Humphry House, in an extended discussion of Warren's argument, complains, justifiably in this case, I think, that the critic's analysis denies the rich suggestiveness of the poem and makes it "seem more technical and diagrammatic than Mr. Warren himself first found it or than Coleridge could ever have admitted it to be." Hence, Warren's argument is, according to House, marked by an artificial categorization of detail, and the erroneous conclusion that Imagination is one of the themes of the poem. The problem, House claims, turns on Warren's definition of symbol. Yet rather than pursue the question of the true nature of Coleridge's definition of symbol, House dismisses the whole concept: "I suggest that if we accept the term 'symbol' we must allow symbols a freer, wider, less exact reference, and that therefore it is probably wiser to drop the term altogether."<sup>6</sup>

I do not find Warren's use of the concept of symbol to interpret the poem to be faithful to Coleridge's theory of the term. As House points out, the narrow definition of symbol implicit in Warren's

diagrammatic analysis is antithetical to its meaning for Coleridge. Nor do I accept Warren's attempt to interpret the poem as a statement of the poetic Imagination. Such an interpretation does not arise spontaneously from the evidence of the poem but is rather an artificial imposition upon it. But I do think that the meaning of the poem hinges on Imagination as perception, and I think that symbols are highly significant to its expression. As shown in chapter One in the explication of "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" (1797), the exploration of perception in terms of what he would later call the primary Imagination was clearly a major poetic concern of Coleridge's at this time. The primary theme that Warren speaks of, the sacramental vision of life, is central to the poem's meaning, but at the heart of this vision is the primary Imagination, for it is imaginative perception which reveals this vision.<sup>7</sup> And when the portrayal of the primary Imagination reaches its climax, in the blessing of the water-snakes, we can see clearly what Coleridge means by symbol. While I agree with House's claim that "the poem's very richness at once tempts and defeats definiteness of interpretation," I do not find this a reason to "drop the term" symbol altogether. For, one of the very qualities of symbol as Coleridge understood it is the delicateness of its meaning: involving an "apparent contradiction" and referring to a whole greater than itself, the nature of symbol is necessarily one of mystery and suggestiveness, not of unquestionable exactness. At the same time, symbol is substantial and real, and undeniably visible--revelation by which all truth is made known. To choose, therefore, not to seek the meaning in Coleridge's poem in terms of symbols as he understood them is not, I think, to avoid the fallacy of

imposing later critical theories upon early and necessarily untheoretical creative experience. It is rather to ignore the absolute truth that Coleridge perceived symbols to be, that is, the substance of reality.

Let us look now for a moment at the quotation from Thomas Burnet's Archeologiae Philosophicae at the beginning of the poem.

It provides, I believe, the most important response to House's suggestion. In translation it reads:

I readily believe that there are more invisible than visible things in the universe. But who shall describe for us their families, their ranks, relationships, distinguishing features and functions? What do they do? Where do they live? The human mind has always circled about knowledge of these things, but never attained it. I do not doubt, however, that it is sometimes good to contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of a greater and better world; otherwise the intellect, habituated to the petty things of daily life, may too much contract itself, and wholly sink down to trivial thoughts. But meanwhile we must be vigilant for truth and keep proportion, that we may distinguish the certain from the uncertain, day from night.<sup>8</sup>

J. Robert Barth offers to my mind the most lucid interpretation of this "motto" of the Ancient Mariner:

Essentially, as we enter this poem we are warned . . . not to expect overmuch clarity of vision. It is a complex world, or worlds, we are entering, and it is full of mysteries. Nor are they mysteries we can ever expect fully to comprehend. . . always searching, never simply finding once for all. We are warned even before we start that this is a poem about worlds too vast to be fully conquered, about mysteries too deep to be encompassed by mere words--and yet about the need to try to conquer them, to encompass them--a poem, therefore, of symbolic weight and import.<sup>9</sup>

I agree with House, then, that Warren's use of the term symbol ends in approximating the meaning of allegory for Coleridge, where unity is artificially posited between things of essentially different subjects. However, I do not further agree that the use of the term

symbol should therefore be dropped. A "symbol" as Coleridge understood it is not merely a literary "term"; it is a fundamental aspect of reality.

By way of introduction to the poem and to the act of Imagination which is, I think, the crux of the meaning, I wish first to address the question of the poem's "supernatural" quality, a question which ties in naturally with the discussion of symbol. The supernatural in the poem has long disquieted readers of symbol. "I dislike all the miraculous part of it," Charles Lamb wrote to Wordsworth in 1801.<sup>10</sup> Certain modern day critics, best represented by E.E. Bostetter in "The Nightmare World of The Ancient Mariner", interpret the supernatural quality of the poem in terms of nightmare, in terms of Coleridge's own personal nightmare, supernatural or "magical" because invested with and reflecting the "irrational fears and guilt feelings" of a self-styled neurotic. "The magical world and its values," writes Bostetter, "are contradicted by all our knowledge and experience. . . .Indeed this world seems irreconcilable with Coleridge's own religious pronouncements."<sup>11</sup>

George Whalley and Richard Haven have a more sensitive understanding of the meaning of the poem's supernatural quality. For Whalley, human feeling is central to the poem, and the significance of the miraculous is that it represents the intensity of the feeling that we experience in our intimate encounter with the vivid sensations of "personal suffering, perplexity, loneliness, longing, horror, fear" expressed in the poem. "Fundamentally," Whalley writes, "it is the personal quality of the poem that

accounts for its vivid haunting fascination."<sup>12</sup>

Haven, in a related fashion, also attaches the significance of the supernatural to the nature of feeling in the poem. On a purely "rational" level, he writes, the "mariner's experience is impossible. . . . We know this both because we have never seen such things [as "spectre-barks, figures of Death and Life-in-Death, and spirits"] and because our rational understanding of the universe convinces us that such things cannot be." But, he continues, "[i]nsofar as we read the poem as narrative, we can explain them as the Mariner's hallucinations." But the really troubling part about these impossible occurrences, he claims, is not that the Mariner sees them; it is rather that he "experiences extremes of agony and ecstasy, of alienation and communion which have no place in a Cartesian view of reality," feelings which "in our depths we recognize" and yet "have trouble accounting for, and . . . normally therefore disregard or . . . suppress."<sup>13</sup>

The answer to the vexing problem that the supernatural presents is best given by Coleridge himself. In Chapter XIV of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge tells us of the "two sorts" of poems he and Wordsworth set themselves to write in the Lyrical Ballads. For his own,

the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency.

The purpose, he continues, was

to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.

BL 168-69.

By this description, then, one might conclude that the sole purpose of employing "persons and characters supernatural" was for dramatic effect, as a kind of surrealist intensification of the truth in the feeling, as Whalley and Haven have suggested. Yet more insight into the meaning of the supernatural for this poem may be found in Coleridge's later work, Aids to Reflection, where he defines the contrast between the natural and the supernatural as the intervention of the will in the relationship of cause and effect. In his characteristic way, he seeks to define by turning to the source of word meaning--linguistic origin:

Nature is the term in which we comprehend all things that are representable in the forms of Time and Space, and subjected to the Relations of Cause and Effect: and the cause of the existence of which, therefore, is to be sought for perpetually in something Antecedent. The word itself expresses this in the strongest manner possible: Natura, that which is about to be born, that which is always becoming. It follows, therefore, that whatever originates in its own acts, or in any sense contains in itself the cause of its own state, must be spiritual: yet not on that account miraculous.

AR 236.

Further on he makes more clear the role of the will in actually creating the supernatural:

Nature is a line in constant and continuous evolution. Its beginning is lost in the supernatural: and for our understanding therefore it must appear as a continuous line without

beginning or end. But where there is no discontinuity there can be no origination, and every appearance of origination in nature is but a shadow of our own casting. It is a reflection from our own will or spirit. Herein, indeed, the will consists. This is the essential character by which will is opposed to nature, as spirit, and raised above nature, as self-determining spirit--this namely, that it is a power of originating an act or state.

AR 246 n.

The "supernatural", then, means that which is "above nature" and is the prerogative of every willing individual. Man's supernatural acts--acts of will--are not, of course, necessarily sinful, but sin is, by this definition, necessarily supernatural: "A sin is an evil which has its ground or origin in the agent and not in the compulsion of circumstances" (AR 244). We may now, perhaps, more easily understand why Coleridge could, with justice, write a poem of the "supernatural" around the Mariner's act of killing the Albatross. The act, having its origin in the will of the Mariner, was itself "supernatural".

#### The Killing of the Albatross

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Through the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
And round and round it flew.  
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
 The Albatross did follow,  
 And every day, for food or play,  
 Came to the mariner's hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
 It perched for vespers nine;  
 Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,  
 Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
 From the fiends, that plague thee thus!--  
 Why look'st thou so?'--With my cross-bow  
 I shot the ALBATROSS.

11. 59-82.

The nature of the act of killing the Albatross has been widely discussed by all critics of the poem and variously described as wanton, wicked and trivial. Walsh says that the shooting of the bird is "an expression of the state of a soul" and while it is an "act without a motive, it is certainly not one . . . without a purpose: which is to assert the primacy of the individual self against an impersonal, beneficent order."<sup>14</sup>

House, on the other hand, rejects the notion that the poem evidences such a purpose: "The killing of the Albatross," he writes, is a "violation of a great sanctity at the animal, human and spiritual levels." But the Mariner's sin

may or may not be partly the sin of pride and self-assertion against the order of the universe. As the poem stands it is a sin of ignorance, and links to that half-adumbrated sin of Cain, that he "neglected to make a proper use of his senses etc." It was a wicked ignorance because accompanied by a wildly thoughtless failure to consider what might be the truth about the order of the universe.<sup>15</sup>

And Robert Penn Warren, finding in the Albatross a symbol of God's Creation, interprets the act in terms of the Fall:

The bolt whizzes from the cross-bow and the bird falls and all comment that the Mariner has no proper dramatic motive or is the child of necessity or is innocent of everything except a little wantonness is completely irrelevant, for we are confronting the mystery which is the beginning of the "moral history of Man". . . . The lack of motivation, the perversity, which flies in the face of the Aristotelian doctrine of hamartia, is exactly the significant thing about the Mariner's act. The act symbolizes the Fall and the Fall has two qualities important here: it is a condition of will . . . and it is the result of no single human motive.<sup>16</sup>

Each of these interpretations contributes to our understanding of the act of killing the Albatross. The Mariner, ignorant of the true nature of the universe, commits an act of aggression against creation. Whether or not he is aware that such aggression is, as Walsh points, self-assertion against the created order is irrelevant to the fact that it is an act of aggression. "Ignorance" is lack of knowledge. An act of such lack of perception and thoughtlessness is, as represented by the fact of the killing, by nature one of aggression, of self-assertion.

We may be reminded here of what Coleridge later defined as "Fancy" and look again at one of his notebook entries in which he speaks of it:

[the Fancy] may not inaptly be compared to the Gorgon Head, which looked death into every thing--and this not by accident, but from the nature of the faculty itself, the province of which is to give consciousness to the Subject by presenting to it its conceptions objectively. . . .

Those who, through "gross idolatry", perceive in such a way "treat a living being as inanimate Body" (CN III 4066). This sounds suspiciously like the behaviour of the Mariner. Although no

explanation of the motivation behind it is given in the description of the act, yet the presentation of the act is highly suggestive of its cause:

God save thee ancient Mariner  
From the fiends that plague thee thus!--  
Why look'st thou so?--With my cross-bow  
I shot the ALBATROSS.

The bald, eight-word description of the act by the Mariner may partly be understood as an expression of the naked objectivity with which the act was originally committed.

But if the lack of description conveying the act fails explicitly to supply us with a cause, the description of the Albatross unmistakably proclaims the magnitude of the act. The crew of the ship, however fickle it proves itself to be, is nevertheless immediately aware of the beneficence of the bird: "As if it had been a Christian soul/We hailed it in God's name." And it proves itself to be worthy of this greeting, bringing warm winds and glimmering moon-light. The Mariner's action is, the gloss states, an inhospitable killing of "the pious bird of good omen." The bird represents all that is good in Christian Creation: it is, in fact, a symbol of that Creation, at once representing and participating in the whole of Creation. The Albatross is at once a real bird that is good, and a signifier of all living things which, coming from God, are good. The act of killing the Albatross, then, is indeed a powerfully sinful act: it is a thoughtless murder of one life, and an indication of man's capacity to destroy all life.

In its symbolic function, referring to and incorporating the capacity to kill, the Mariner's act may, without difficulty, remind us

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden. . . .17

It is not my wish here to analyze the Fall, and certainly not to interpret it in terms of Coleridge's theory of perception. But there is a significant relationship between the Mariner's act and that of Adam and Eve in bringing "death into the world." Clearly for Coleridge such bringing of death, founded as it is upon ignorance, is related to perception. The Mariner's outlook on life at the beginning of the poem was one which "looked death" into the objects of its sight. And the killing of the Albatross symbolizes this view. The act is, in Coleridge's terms an act of Fancy.

Warren's suggestion that the act is symbolic of the Fall is surely appropriate. Coleridge's own remarks would give weight to such a comparison.<sup>18</sup> There is a definite relationship between the two acts; yet I would disagree with Warren as to the exact nature of this relationship. Warren claims that the relationship is significant, first, because of the involvement of the will and, second, because the acts, in both cases, are the result of "no single human motive." Indeed, the will is an important point of relationship between the two, which I shall discuss shortly. But the question of lack of motivation is not quite as Warren claims it. As Walsh has argued about the killing of the Albatross, while there may be no motive, there is definitely a purpose. The distinction between "motive" and "purpose" is felicitously clarified by Coleridge himself in a helpful passage from Omniana:

It is a matter of infinite difficulty, but  
fortunately of comparative indifference, to  
to determine what a man's motive may have been

for this or that particular action. Rather seek to learn what his objects in general are. What does he habitually wish? habitually pursue? and thence deduce his impulses, which are commonly the true efficient causes of men's conduct; and without which the motive itself would not have become a motive. Let a haunch of venison represent the motive, and the keen appetite of health and exercise the impulse: then place the same or some more favourite dish, before the same man, sick, dyspeptic, and stomach-worn, and we may then weigh the comparative influences of motives and impulses.<sup>19</sup>

We may then say that the "impulse" of the Ancient Mariner, regardless of his motive, was to assert the self against the created order. The same may be said about the Fall, as Milton convincingly argues in Paradise Lost. This argument substantially alters the importance of a lack of motivation as a point of comparison between the Ancient Mariner and the Fall. The symbolic relationship between the Fall and the killing of the Albatross turns on the issue not simply of "wicked ignorance" but of wilful ignorance.

The question of the role of the will in the Mariner's act is an interesting one. J.A. Stuart, in a paper entitled "The Augustinian 'Cause of Action' in Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner", argues that Coleridge adheres to Saint Augustine's view of Original Sin as the predetermination of the will to evil, and he claims that the Ancient Mariner is predetermined, by the inherent inclination (bestowed by Adam) of his will to sin, to commit the act of killing the Albatross.<sup>20</sup> Let us look at a convincing piece of evidence for this argument. In March of 1798, just as he was completing the first major draft of the Ancient Mariner, Coleridge wrote in a letter to his brother George a comment about Original Sin:

Of GUILT I say nothing; but I believe most stedfastly in original Sin; that from our mothers' wombs our understandings are darkened; and even where our understandings are in the Light, that our organization is depraved, & our volitions imperfect; and we sometimes see the good without wishing to attain it, and oftener wish it without the energy that wills & performs--And for this inherent depravity, I believe, that the Spirit of the Gospel is the sole cure--but permit me to add, that I look for the spirit of the Gospel 'neither in the mountain, nor at Jerusalem'----

CL I p. 396.

Coleridge obviously believed at this time in the existence of Original Sin, and he clearly asserts the "inherent depravity" of the soul. But what is particularly interesting here, I think, is the precise description he gives in attempting to explain the nature of our sinning. Either, he says, our "understandings are darkened" and we cannot perceive good, or our understandings are enlightened and, while we see good, we do not wish to attain it, or we see good and wish to attain it but are unable because we lack "the energy that wills & performs" (my emphasis) the good.

I think that ultimately for Coleridge the will is the first requisite of goodness, and that it is, for him, by nature imperfect. But it is not the only requisite. Understanding and that somewhat enigmatic thing called "energy" by which I believe Coleridge means what he later terms Imagination, are also involved. If we think of these three things in terms of the form of the Trinity, we may discover their relationship: each has a distinct function yet together they constitute one whole. In the Biographia Literaria, some twenty years later, Coleridge again groups these three things together, describing Imagination as a "power, first put in action

by the will and understanding and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul" (BL 174). In Aids to Reflection, where his ideas attain their greatest maturity, Coleridge defines the will and its relationship to man in this way:

Whenever . . . man is determined (that is impelled and directed)<sup>21</sup> to act in harmony of inter-communion, must not something be attributed to this all-present power as acting in the will? and by what fitter names can we call this than THE LAW, as empowering; THE WORD, as informing; and THE SPIRIT, as actuating?

AR 107-108.

The will pervades man's being, and whatever he does, man acts with it. But involved in an act of will, are three things, the three things, significantly, that constitute the knowledge of truth-- "THE LAW" or Reason, "THE WORD" or symbol, and "THE SPIRIT" or Imagination.

Thus, the killing of the Albatross is not simply explained as an act of the predetermined state of the will to sin as Stuart would have it. Certainly the will had to be perverted for such an act to be performed. But the state of the will may be looked upon as simply a necessary condition, and not the sole cause of the Mariner's action. Intimately bound up in this action is the Mariner's lack of understanding about the Universe. True understanding is, of course, contingent upon a state of the will to do good. As well, however, it requires an act of Imagination. Imagination is called into being through the will, but it is in itself essential to true understanding and is, I believe, as much as the will, at the centre of the poem's meaning.

The Blessing of the Water-Snakes

The Mariner's punishment for killing the Albatross is the agony of living death. A parching heat takes the ship in its grasp soon after the act; the water of the sea becomes an inferno:

About, about, in reel and rout  
The death-fires dance at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green, and blue and white.

ll. 127-30.

At this point, the Mariner is aghast at what has happened and realizes he has "done a hellish thing" (l. 91), but still fails to see the true nature of his act. The created order itself seems wrong, and he lashes out at what seems to him an inherent injustice:

That very deep did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

ll. 123-26.

The Albatross hangs about his neck as a reminder of his deed, and as the clue to the true nature of it. Once again, the very substantive, very real nature of symbol is apparent.

The nature of the Mariner's plight is first revealed to him in the game of dice between Death and Life-in-Death in Part III of the poem. When the crew of the ship falls down in death, he, claimed by "the Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH" (l. 193), remains alive with the horrible realization that he will continue to stay alive. This punishment is, I believe, licensed by the poem's supernatural nature and is to bring the Mariner to the true understanding of the nature of his deed; it is reality heightened to convey "the

dramatic truth" of the emotions that should accompany the deed. Here I disagree with Bostetter who sees this event as proof that the Mariner's universe is one of utter "caprice". "Surely," he writes, "it knocks out any attempt to impose a systematic philosophical or religious interpretation . . . upon the poem."<sup>22</sup>

Bostetter also feels that the other side of the dice game, the death of the crew, would represent--if it was to have any real meaning at all--an extreme punishment for their having sided with the Mariner about the importance of the Albatross. I think, rather, that the death of the crew is merely an extension of the plot, a convenient yet important means of shaping the significance of the Mariner's act for him. (It is also, in view of the actual situation, a not unreasonable end to things--a ship, becalmed and without fresh water in the tropics might well lose its crew.) The death of the rest of the crew is, I think, intended to intensify the Mariner's sense of aloneness with the natural world and to associate the nature of his act with death itself. This association is made at the end of Part III in the following stanza:

The souls did from their bodies fly,--  
They fled to bliss or woe!  
And every soul, it passed me by,  
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

11. 220-23.

The loss of the souls from the bodies of the men is clearly associated with his act of shooting the arrow that killed the Albatross.

The Mariner's own punishment--the agony of Life-in-Death--is far more tormenting than death would be at this point. He is

"chosen" by Life-in-Death, "won" "capriciously" by her in purely literal terms, but in fact, by his own act he chose this punishment for himself. Like the Gorgon head, his act of Fancy, of "looking death" into the Albatross has brought this punishment upon him. This point is also made clear in the stanza quoted above, with the help of the gloss: Coleridge writes, "But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner." The spectres Death and Life-in-Death are not impossibly unrealistic beings. They are rather personifications--exaggerations or intensifications--of action that certainly follows from preceding events, and that certainly seems to have meaning.

The Mariner's relationship to the sudden coming of death is not immediately clear to him. At first he can only feel sorry for himself:

Alone, alone, all all alone,  
 Alone on a wide wide sea!  
 And never a saint took pity on  
 My soul in agony.

11. 232-35.

Wrapped within his own self-pity, the relationship between his murder of a part of Creation--in the killing of the Albatross--and the death of the men is invisible to him. His perception of the situation at this time is, interestingly, purely objective:

The many men, so beautiful!  
 And they all dead did lie:  
 And a thousand thousand slimy things  
 Lived on; and so did I.

11. 236-39.

The Mariner sees merely the outrageous disparity in value between the living and the dead, and again bemoans what he considers to be the flat injustice of the situation. Issuing from a source of self-

centred pity and focusing upon external appearance only, the Mariner's understanding of the situation is barren and poverty-stricken. Significantly in terms of the eventual resolution of the Mariner's situation, he turns to prayer, and also significantly--in terms of Coleridge's concept of Imagination--this attempt is futile. Thinking back to the passage on Original Sin in the letter to his brother, this is, I believe, what Coleridge means by lacking "the energy that wills & performs" the good even when the wish to do good is present. The Mariner continues in his miserable plight thus:

Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die.

ll. 261-62.

It is at this point that a change begins to occur. Unconsciously, the Mariner's focus of attention shifts from himself to the Moon:

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And no where did abide:  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside--

ll. 263-66.

Coleridge here affixes a beautiful and rich gloss:

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth toward the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward: and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

The Moon, as the gloss points out, is disposed in a way completely opposite to that of the Mariner. While he is lonely and unable to move, the Moon, infinitely befriended, journeys every-

where, and yet is everywhere at home. In contrast now to the self-pitying complaints of the earlier verses in Part IV, the Mariner's words are gentle and seem to express an unself-conscious love for the Moon's beauty. He continues:

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,  
Like April hoar-frost spread;

ll. 267-68.

and then remarks a curious fact:

But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
The charmed water burnt away  
A still and awful red.

ll. 269-71.

This passage suggests, by the colour red, the blood which has been lost: the Albatross', the Mariner's (in freeing his speech by biting his arm), and by extension, the crew's. It recalls also an earlier stanza, in Part II, where the Albatross is beginning to be avenged:

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

ll. 111-114.

Yet the meaning suggested in the later passage is of a much kindlier and much less intimidating nature than the one suggested here. Couched in thoughts and words of love, the description of "a still and awful red" is no bleak evocation of barrenness and desolation as is the description of a "bloody sun" in a "hot and copper sky" but rather appears as a portent of a mystery of significance. We are not aroused to fear but to expectation.

We are now very close to the climactic moment of liberation

for the Mariner, and that moment is directly signalled by the following two stanzas:

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
I watched the water-snakes:  
They moved in tracks of shining white,  
And when they reared, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire:  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
They coiled and swam; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

ll. 272-81.

What occurs in these two stanzas is a crucial act of perception.

"Beyond the shadow of the ship", by the light of the Moon, the Mariner tells us, he watched "the water-snakes". What he sees are "tracks of shining white" and "hoary flakes" of "elfish light" falling off as the snakes move. His perception of the snakes at this point is in terms of light and motion only. It is light and motion alone which here constitute "the water-snakes" for the Mariner.

In the second stanza, the Mariner's field of perception moves back "within the shadow of the ship." Here, he tells us that he watched the "rich attire" of the snakes. And suddenly they were beautiful to him. What before, as late as forty lines earlier, had been "a thousand thousand slimy things", dancing "death-fires" glimmering in the water "like a witch's oils" are now "blue, glossy green, and velvet black" beings moving in "a flash of golden fire." No longer are they detestable but rather so exceedingly beautiful as to be inspirational:

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:

A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
 And I blessed them unaware;  
 Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
 And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;  
 And from my neck so free  
 The Albatross fell off, and sank  
 Like lead into the sea.

ll. 282-91.

In reacting spontaneously with love for the snakes, the Mariner is freed of the burden of the Albatross.

What has happened here to render this great liberation possible is an act of Imagination. It is the Mariner's fundamental change in perception brought about through the coadunating power of the imagination that leads directly to his spiritual freedom. The Mariner is released from his burden the minute he is able to pray--and that is the "self-same moment" that, feeling an unconscious gush of love for them, he blesses the water-snakes. This great, liberating love has been wrought through the Mariner's newly-born perception of the snakes as "happy living things" of beauty. And this perception is the product of the Imagination.

When the Mariner first turns his gaze upon the Moon, his thoughts move away from himself and he attempts, for the first time, as when in "This Lime-tree Bower, my Prison" he thinks of his friends, to understand the life of something other than himself. The Moon, captivating his attention, becomes for him a living being, a woman, moving softly, spreading light. In the act of attempting to understand the Moon, the Mariner discovers its life, its essence. He has achieved true spiritual unity with the Moon, and thus come to know the spirit of life itself. Imaginative perception, as

pointed out in Chapter One, is exactly that act of perceiving the indwelling life of external reality through unity with it.

That the Mariner has indeed changed his manner of perception is clearly evidenced in his radically new perception of the water-snakes in the following lines. And that this change is owing to the understanding brought about through his spiritual union with the Moon is also affirmed in these lines. Let us look again at the first two lines in each of the following two stanzas:

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
I watched the water-snakes:

\* \* \*

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire:

As his gaze moves from the area washed by the light of the Moon to the water untouched by that light, the object of his vision also changes. And this is a change from the perception of true being--"the water-snakes"--to the perception of external appearance--"their rich attire". In the light of the Moon, he sees the essence of the water-snakes--their light and motion. He sees them as they really are--as living, moving beings, dynamic and glorious. Out of this light, in the circumference of the small and limited world of the ship, the Mariner sees the snakes at once more closely--he can know their colours--and yet more superficially: it is merely their "rich attire" that he sees. Having perceived the true life of the snakes, however, their essential life of light and motion, the Mariner is now able to understand the appearances for what they really are--as symbolic of life dwelling within--and therefore as beautiful.

The water-snakes, then, are the first things that the Mariner

perceives as symbols after the act of Imagination. He sees them, after the act of Imagination, as whole beings whose material bodies represent the universal, unifying principle of life. In a very substantial way, Coleridge has here, I believe, shown us the meaning of symbol and the way in which 'symbol'--in this case, the symbolic vision--is produced by the Imagination.

#### Parts V and VI

The blessing of the water-snakes at the end of Part IV is generally understood as the climactic moment of liberation for the Mariner. But the poem is not over yet, and before one can speak of the final resolution given in Part VII, one must determine the significance of Parts V and VI. Humphry House, in examining Warren's argument, finds these two parts to be poorly accounted for by the latter. In broad terms, House claims that these two Parts may be seen as a necessary extension of the theme of expiation, that while the Mariner has reconciled himself to the creatures, he must now do so with his Creator. But House also wants a more specific interpretation of the events and particularly of the supernatural beings in these parts. One helpful conclusion that he draws is the notion that in these Parts we are given information "not adequately expressed elsewhere" about the nature of the Mariner's act, that "the horror of the deaths, the violation of family ties" are here brought home to us, especially in lines 329-44, in a way not otherwise emphasized,<sup>23</sup> as for example in lines 341-44 which he quotes:

The body of my brother's son  
 Stood by me, knee to knee:  
 The body and I pulled at one rope,  
 But he said nought to me.

Yet House does not fully pursue with these Parts the interpretive implications of them as a "further necessary extension of the theme of expiation."<sup>24</sup> I should like to consider this for a moment. These two Parts have to do, I believe, with the role of God in the Mariner's redemption and with the Mariner's understanding of that redemption. Part IV describes the Mariner's role in his own redemption--his submission of his self to external nature, his choice to unite with the life around him rather than to divide--and hence destroy--it. Parts V and VI express the idea, I think, that God is the One who truly bestows redemption, that redemption is ultimately His gift. The purpose of the polar daemons is to show at once that there is a soul in nature (which can take many forms and be either good or bad), and that the foundation of this soul is in the Christian God. In an indirect way, perhaps, the presence of the polar daemons serves to reject pantheism.

The process of redemption has obviously begun: not only has the Albatross fallen from the neck of the Mariner, but also now, even though they have returned to visit the Mariner, the souls of the men come not "in pain" but as "a troop of spirits blest", moving gracefully, uttering "sweet sounds" (ll. 347-52). The activity of the natural world around him is pleasant--if mysterious--to the Mariner:

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky  
 I heard the sky-lark sing;  
 Sometimes all little birds that are,  
 How they seemed to fill the sea and air  
 With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
 Now like a lonely flute;  
 And now it is an angel's song  
 That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on  
 A pleasant noise till noon,  
 A noise like of a hidden brook  
 In the leafy month of June,  
 That to the sleeping woods all night  
 Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,  
 Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
 Slowly and smoothly went the ship,  
 Moved onward from beneath.

11.358-76.

At this point another supernatural being intervenes, this time "the lonesome Spirit from the South-pole" (Gloss, 11. 377-82). The Polar Spirit we are told, "still requireth vengeance" for the killing of the bird, but yet it moves the Mariner's ship through the polar waters "in obedience to the angelic troop." This would suggest a conflict of interest between the heavenly will--the will of the angelic troop--and the will of a natural, or, one is tempted to suggest, pantheistic spirit or "deity". The demand for vengeance and the subsequent action of the Polar Spirit in stirring the ship to frenzied motion would seem to be "wrong". With the "sudden bound" of the ship after "a short uneasy motion--/Backwards and forwards. . . ." (l. 386 f.) the Mariner falls down "in a swoond" (l. 392). Beside the lines

How long in that same fit I lay,  
 I have not to declare;  
 But ere my living life returned,  
 I heard and in my soul discerned  
 Two voices in the air.

11. 393-97.

Coleridge appended these words: "The Polar Spirit's fellow-daemons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong." The remainder of the gloss, "and two of them relate, one to the other, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit. . . ." is surely intended for the lines immediately following in the poem which begin "'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?'"

(l. 398). This would mean, I think, that the possessive pronoun "his" modifying "wrong" refers to the Polar Spirit, not to the Mariner. This interpretation is further attested in the use of the words "fellow-daemons" in the gloss, for this term contrasts with the term "angelic troop", as Coleridge deliberately points out in the gloss to lines 347-49 where the Mariner is telling the Wedding Guest about the visitation of the souls of the dead men: "But not by the souls of men," he writes, "nor by daemons of earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint." The Polar-Spirit and his two fellow spirits are spirits of nature. Clearly, the natural world is instinct with spiritual life and the polar spirits are the manifestation of this life. In making demands, as the demand for vengeance, the natural spirits are, in a sense, simply asserting their rights, rights which must be granted for the proper order of nature to be maintained. Yet in making demands, the spirits overstep their limits, for they cannot demand of God.

The speech of the two fellow-daemons tells us much about the relationship between the natural spirits and God. The first daemon is indignant over the Mariner's action and demands to know what

manner of man the Mariner is. The other has a kinder, gentler manner, and with a voice "as soft as honeydew" (l. 407) tells the first quietly, "'The man hath penance done,/And penance more will do'" (ll. 408-9). This second spirit tells what is true and would seem to represent the kind of understanding to which the natural spirits should come. This idea is furthered in the following few stanzas, at the beginning of Part VI, as the spirit speaks of the natural world's dependence upon God:

FIRST VOICE

'But tell me, tell me! Speak again,  
Thy soft response renewing--  
What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
What is the ocean doing?'

SECOND VOICE

'Still as a slave before his lord,  
The ocean hath no blast;  
His great bright eye most silently  
Up to the Moon is cast--

If he may know which way to go;  
For she guides him smooth or grim.  
See, brother, see! how graciously  
She looketh down on him.'

ll. 410-21.

Again, the Moon! Here, as in the passage at the end of Part IV in the blessing of the water-snakes, the Moon is a symbol of love, of the love, I think one may safely say, of God. The Moon is both supreme "lord", and giver of grace, and the power given to the ocean by the Moon is called, in the gloss that immediately follows these lines, "the angelic power".

By the supernatural motion of the Moon, the ship is now swiftly transported back to the Mariner's own northern temperate zone, and he awakes. The Mariner's "penance", Coleridge tells us, "begins

anew"--he is again the living man among the dead. Now while redemption, as was noted, had begun with the dropping off of the Albatross from the Mariner's neck upon his act of will--and Imagination--in blessing the water-snakes, "the pang, the curse, with which they [the men] died, /Had never passed away:" (ll. 438-39). And we realize that while the Mariner must take the first step--and choose to see truly--the completion of his redemption rests upon the grace of God.<sup>25</sup> He continues:

I could not draw my eyes from theirs,  
Nor turn them up to pray.

ll. 440-41.

The next line, glossed with the explanation, "The curse is finally expiated," is simply this:

And now this spell was snapt: . . .

l. 442.

Surely this can only be of God's divine will.

It is only after this final act of expiation that the Mariner truly feels joy, but this joy is preceded by and mingled with the sincere and immediate realization of his own very real tendency to sin:

Like one, that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

ll. 446-51.

Yet the beauty and generosity of God's gracious love is not far behind:

But soon there breathed a wind on me,  
Nor sound nor motion made:

Its path was not upon the sea,  
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek  
Like a meadow-gale of spring--  
It mingled strangely with my fears,  
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,  
Yet she sailed softly too:  
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze--  
On me alone it blew.

ll. 452-63.

### Resolution

The Mariner's redemption is now spiritually complete. What remains at this point is for him to be "reunited" with the world of matter and substance. The ship arrives back in the harbour from which it had departed, and the Mariner is now "home", home in the physical as well as in the spiritual sense. The dead men, no longer posing a fright to the Mariner, appear in a "seraph-band", as "signals to the land" (l. 494). The Pilot, the Pilot's boy and the Hermit, who arrive by boat to rescue the Mariner, are symbols of the Mariner's redemption: they represent, in a material, bodily form, the salvation that has occurred on the spiritual plane. And true to Coleridge's meaning of symbols, not only do they represent salvation, they are salvation in a very real sense. The Pilot and the Pilot's boy rescue the Mariner's body with their boat; the Hermit offers help of an even more significant kind. The Hermit is the vessel of God's grace on earth. Seeing him, the Mariner rejoices: "He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away/The Albatross's blood" (ll. 512-13). The Mariner has already been redeemed by

God, but it is through the Hermit, who is truly a man of God, who "kneels at morn, and noon, and eve" (l. 519), that the Mariner comes to know his salvation on earth.

'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!  
The Hermit crossed his brow.  
'Say quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say--  
What manner of man art thou?'

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched  
With a woful agony,  
Which forced me to begin my tale;  
And then it left me free.

11. 574-81.

The telling of the tale--teaching by example--is both the Mariner's penance for his act, and his salvation.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,  
That agony returns:  
And till my ghastly tale is told,  
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
I have strange power of speech;  
That moment that his face I see,  
I know the man that must hear me:  
To him my tale I teach.

11. 582-90.

In the Ancient Mariner, Coleridge has given us a portrait of fallen man made good through the mediating grace of God. Although Christ is explicitly mentioned in just two exclamations of "O Christ!" (ll. 123 and 487), a number of other references make His importance in the poem clear. The Albatross is hailed "As if it had been a Christian soul" (l. 65). The word 'Albatross rhymes with cross,' and the two words are quite pointedly collocated: "Instead of the cross, the Albatross/About my neck was hung" (l. 142). A later reference makes this collocation even more obvious: "'Is it he?'" asks the first polar daemon, "'Is this the

man?/By him who died on cross. With his cruel bow he laid full  
 low/The harmless Albatross" (ll./398-401). And finally, it is  
 surely no accident that the weapon used by the Mariner is a cross-  
 bow. The Albatross symbolizes the cross by which Christ was killed,  
 and which was made necessary by the Fall of Adam and Eve. It is  
 also the means by which that fallenness--and that death--were  
 defeated. The Albatross is the cross that the Mariner brought upon  
 himself and which he must bear until he truly changes and is granted  
 salvation. The Mariner is freed of the Albatross only through  
 continual remembrance of what the Albatross means, which, significantly,  
 occurs by teaching others about it, teaching, as Christ himself  
 taught, by example. The Ancient Mariner is Adam redeemed by  
 and now living in Christ.

In a letter to Sir George and Lady Beaumont in 1803, Coleridge  
 explains his early "speculative Principles":

--they were 'Dreams linked to purposes of  
 Reason'; but they were perfectly harmless--  
 a compound of Philosophy & Christianity.  
 They were Christian, for they demanded the  
 direct reformation & voluntary act of each  
 Individual prior to any change in his out-  
 ward circumstances.

CL II p. 999.

The Mariner's salvation is clearly of a Christian nature. Before  
 he could be released of the Albatross, he had to perform a "voluntary  
 act" of Imagination that allowed him to perceive rightly the nature  
 of the universe and come to love "all things both great and small"  
 (l. 615). Through Imagination, the Mariner becomes the man upon  
 whom God bestows forgiveness. The relationship between Imagination  
 and what Coleridge calls "Christian Honesty" is pointed out in

Omniana:

"O! that God," say Carey, in Journal in Hindostan, "would make the Gospel successful among them. That would undoubtedly make them honest men, and I fear nothing else ever will." Now this is a fact,--spite of infidels and philosophizing Christians, a fact. A perfect explanation of it would require and would show the psychology of faith,--the difference between the whole soul's modifying an action, and an action enforced by modifications of the soul amid prudential motives or favouring impulses.<sup>26</sup>

Through Imagination, the Mariner brings his whole soul into being and ceases to operate in terms of "prudential motive or favouring impulses" as he did when he killed the Albatross. He now perceives his relationship to the whole of God's creation. This creation is clearly sacramental for the Mariner, and we may hereby witness Coleridge's concept of 'symbolic things as sacramental, as revealing the ideas and spirit of God. We may also, I believe, discover herein the meaning of Coleridge's concept of symbol for art. The Albatross, the water-snakes, the Moon, and the Mariner himself are all symbols. They all point to and represent something greater than themselves. Yet at the same time they are all important-- and active--agents who make the story what it is. Born of Coleridge's Imagination to embody spiritual ideas, they live eternally in those who, reading and loving the poem, open their hearts and minds to them in "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (BL 169).

Chapter OneNotes

<sup>1</sup> John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 2 Vols. ed. John Yolton (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1961), Vol. I, pp. 77, 130, 78, 336.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1964), Vol. I, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> David Hartley, Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1971), Vol. I, pp. 21-25.

<sup>5</sup> Hartley was also following a lead given by John Gay, who had discussed association in terms of pain and pleasure: see Hartley, Vol. I, pp. iii, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Hartley, Vol. I, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> John S. Hill, Imagination in Coleridge (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), ll. 2-5. All quotations from Coleridge's poems are from this source and are hereafter noted internally by line only.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the following: CN I 174, in which Coleridge

states his plan to write "a bold avowal of Berkeley's system!!!!!!";  
 CL I p. 245: "I do not particularly admire Rousseau--Bishop Taylor,  
 David Hartley & the Bishop of Cloyne are my men."; CL I p. 278:  
 "Now this opinion I do not hold--not that I am a Materialist; but  
 because I am a Berkleian."

<sup>10</sup> George Berkeley, Principles (A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge) in Philosophical Writings, ed. T.E. Jessop (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 50-51, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, Introduction to STC's Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, in CC, Vol. 1, p. xxxvi.

<sup>12</sup> Compare with Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. F. Max Müller (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1966), pp. 23-25. Kant establishes the concepts of time and space as two necessary conditions of all experience.

<sup>13</sup> In 1804, Coleridge still speaks, referring to Wordsworth, of great poetry as the product of "a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought & Feeling [in combination] with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the modifying Power" (CL II p. 1034), that is, he still considers the synthesis of thought, feeling and form as a perceptual activity distinct from Imagination.

<sup>14</sup> There can be no question that Coleridge was, in this chapter, drawing heavily upon Schelling's System des Transcendentalen Idealismus. Coleridge's daughter, Sara, noted this in her edition of the Biographia Literaria (London, 1847). George Watson, in his edition of the work (London, 1977), notes that "apart from the mention of God," the discussion of pages 144-160 is "based upon Schelling."

And Kathleen Coburn has cited the passages from the System in CN III 4265 n. which reveal the relationship between the two.

The significance for Coleridge's argument of such dependency has been the subject of great controversy. There have been those, like J.F. Ferrier ("The Plagiarisms of S.T. Coleridge," Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XLVII (1840), 287-99) and Sir William Hamilton (Supplementary Dissertations to The Works of Thomas Reid, (Edinburgh, 1972), II, 748, 890), who have attempted to destroy Coleridge's importance as a thinker by the arrogant suggestion that "By far the greater part of his metaphysical reputation" was founded upon "verbatim plagiarisms" (Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, p. 288). More recently, René Wellek has supported this view of Coleridge (see Immanuel Kant in England, 1793-1838, (Princeton, 1931), pp. 65-135 and A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, (New Haven, 1955-65), II; 151-187), arguing that "we must insist on a fundamental lack of real philosophical individuality in Coleridge" (Kant in England, p. 66).

A true understanding of the nature of Coleridge's borrowings is shown by Thomas McFarland in his work, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition. McFarland asserts that Coleridge's borrowings "were not the thefts of a poverty-stricken mind, but the mosaic materials of a neurotic technique of composition" (London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 32). The facts, he states, are these:

Firstly, Coleridge's borrowings are not only real, but so honeycomb his work as to form virtually a mode of composition. Secondly, he was, on the evidence, a deeply neurotic man. Thirdly, he expected much of himself and his friends expected much of him, but his blocks and frustrations compressed his powers in a humiliating and often impotent bondage. . . . Fourthly, his cultural situation was isolated, and, compared

with the philosophical activities of Germany, provincial. . . . Then against these facts we have to take account of his huge erudition, his meditative habits, his flashing insight— even Carlyle concedes him "a subtle, lynx-eyed intellect" and speaks of "his pious, ever-labouring, subtle mind". Thus we can see, perhaps, the elements that might fuse into his unorthodox and disingenuous mode of composition: on the one hand, the sense of understanding and insight into problems that baffled lesser minds (and did not even exist for many), and on the other, the humiliation before his neurotic incapacity to perform the mere busy work necessary to body forth his insight. We may then be able to see in, say, the translations of the Biographia . . . a kind of intellectual promissory note. We may be willing to concede that the psychological background of such borrowings was not a dearth of ideas, but a profusion of ideas along with a dearth of energy. Why, otherwise, "plagiarize"? If one intends to steal the tiara, rather than merely borrow it, surely one does not keep it intact but rather dismantles it and resets its gems.

pp. 28-29.

The question of originality is highly significant to the problem of plagiarism, and McFarland's answer to that question supplies a wanted perspective for understanding the value of Coleridge's thought in general:

A great philosopher's originality lies not in terminology, but rather in viewpoint and tone, and, above all, in the organic quality of his position. His historical importance doubtless depends upon facts of race, moment, and milieu, but his intrinsic quality, that which distinguishes him from other thinkers of similar persuasion, is almost wholly dependent upon the character of his work as an organism.

p. xxxi.

And Coleridge, the great organicist, is virtually without equal for his capacity to understand all knowledge within the single sphere of his mind.

McFarland's argument in Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition

is that, in fact, despite his use of Schelling in the Biographia, Coleridge's mature philosophical position differed widely from that of the nature philosopher; "that their thought is not only not identical, but also not even parallel. Their relationship should rather be conceived as an athwartness. . . ." (xxxvi), a relationship which stemmed from Coleridge's hope that Schelling could reconcile the polar tensions of subject and object, and which dissolved when Coleridge realized that Schelling was, in the end, merely propounding another pantheist vision of reality (see especially pp. 116-60).

To realize that Coleridge used long passages in translation from Schelling's System in the Biographia Literaria is just observation, if cause for bewilderment. To claim that his entire reputation as a thinker was founded upon these passages is certainly to ignore not only everything else he wrote but also the original synthesis <sup>in the</sup> BL.

<sup>15</sup> David Keppel-Jones, "Coleridge's Scheme of Reason," in Literary Monographs I, eds. Eric Rothstein and Thomas K. Dunseath (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 82-83.

<sup>16</sup> The distinction is not, of course, original with Coleridge. Kant has previously outlined a distinction between Verstand (Understanding) and Vernunft (Reason) very similar to Coleridge's later statement of it. But unlike Coleridge, Kant had stated that only the phenomenal aspect, or material manifestation of these ideas could be known. In other words, ideas for Kant were regulative only and the task of Vernunft was to interpret the judgments of Verstand in light of valid (as distinct from true) universal ideas. Coleridge's concept of Reason derived from his belief in ideas as

constructive, or knowable in an ultimate sense (through God). Again we are drawn back much further into the past: the distinction between constitutive and regulative ideas originated with Plato.

Chapter TwoNotes

<sup>1</sup> OED.

<sup>2</sup> "Súmbolon" translates literally as "to throw together" from "sum" meaning "together with" and "ballein" meaning "throw". The word "symbol", then, derives from this idea of "thrown together-ness".

<sup>3</sup> The word "consubstantial" is formed on the Latin con - together - plus substantia - substance - and means "of one and the same substance or essence" (OED). The word "substance", further - more, in theological terms refers to "the being of God, the divine nature of which the three Persons of the Trinity are one" (OED).

The theological meaning of the word "consubstantial" is indeed central. Its origin is the Greek "homoousios" (ὁμοούσιος), and it was brought into the Latin in 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicea to describe the nature of the relationship between the Son and the Father in the Holy Trinity.

Coleridge's use of the word is no doubt a direct reference to its significance in Christian theology. John Calvin, in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, points out the importance of the concept of consubstantiality in purging Christian faith of a false ideology. Speaking of the heresy of Arius, he writes:

The ancients, to drag the man's versatile craftiness out of its hiding places, went farther, declaring Christ the eternal Son of the Father, consubstantial with the Father. Here impiety boiled over when the

Arians began most wickedly to hate and curse the word homoousios. But if at first they had sincerely and wholeheartedly confessed Christ to be God, they would not have denied him to be consubstantial with the Father. Who would dare inveigh against those upright men as wranglers and contentious persons because they became aroused to such heated discussions through one little word, and disturbed the peace of the church? Yet that mere word marked the distinction between Christians of pure faith and sacrilegious Arians.

p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> "Conductor" is from the Latin "cum" meaning "with" and "duco" meaning "to lead." Its precise linguistic meaning is "leading together with."

<sup>5</sup> Saint Augustine, On the Gospel of Saint John, XXIX, 6, in Homilies on the Gospel of St. John, trans. H. Browne and J.H. Parker (Oxford: A Library of Fathers, 1848), I, 440.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, his letter to James Gillman in 1816: "by the eternal Identity of Allness and Oneness, the whole Universe becomes an infinity of Concentric Circles" (CL IV, p. 689). Another remark he makes clarifies this one:

Imagine the concentric circles, from the fall of a pebble on a lake perpendicular, like a Wheel, in motion instead of horizontal: or combine the images of the water with that of the scala or Ladder: and you will have perhaps, as tolerable an exponent as the outward Senses can supply.

Note by S.T.C.  
MS. New York Public  
Library; in CL IV,  
p. 769, n.

<sup>7</sup> This is from Coleridge's definition of allegory in The Statesman's Manual, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> And "all metaphors are grounded on an apparent likeness of things essentially different" (AR 158).

<sup>9</sup> It is necessary to point out here that Coleridge could have written these words in jest. Writing to an atheist, he was himself still a Unitarian, and these words echo those of the Church of England Book of Common Prayer. Nevertheless, the words are appropriate ones in terms of his later beliefs and concept of symbol.

<sup>10</sup> The word "outness" is used by Berkeley to describe "the idea of space" in "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision" (1709) found in The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne. eds. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (London & Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964) I, 188. For further explication of Coleridge's use of the word, see Owen Barfield's What Coleridge Thought (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), pp. 59-68.

<sup>11</sup> "ποθον" means "longing for."

<sup>12</sup> John Stuart Mill, Mill on Bentham and Coleridge, ed. F.R. Leavis (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek translates "which is always tautegorical."

<sup>14</sup> Coleridge writes in the BL of this period in his religious belief: "more accurately I was a psilanthropist, one of those who believe our Lord to have been the real son of Joseph, and who lay the main stress on the resurrection rather on the crucifixion" (BL 97).

<sup>15</sup> OED.

<sup>16</sup> Keppel-Jones, pp. 51-52. See also pp. 84-90 on "The Word and the Trinity."

<sup>17</sup> The Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978), John 1:1-4, 14, 8.

All further biblical references are from this version and are noted internally.

<sup>18</sup> The Latin is from Virgil's Georgics II, 364 "laxis . . . immissus habenis" and is here as translated by George Watson.

<sup>19</sup> T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode, London: Faber and Faber, 1975, pp. 37-44) calls for a heightened awareness in "anyone who should continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year" of what he calls "the historical sense". This sense, he explains,

involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

p. 38

The reason for this need, he continues, concerns the essence of meaning: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (p. 38).

The whole question of what constitutes knowledge ultimately rests, for Eliot, upon our disposition to what there is to know and

the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an

awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show. Someone said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did'. Precisely, and they are that which we know.

p. 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> In Truth and Method, (Second Edition, New York: Seabury Press, 1975) Gadamer also insists upon the significance of tradition to our being and to the meaning of our works of art. Speaking about how we come to know ourselves, he asserts the primacy of history:

[H]istory does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family; society and state in which we live.

p. 245.

We may see our relationship to the past asserted also in the sheer process of becoming a civilized or "spiritual" (as opposed to a purely "natural") being:

Every single individual that raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own.

p. 15.

Finally, Gadamer claims tradition to be the true authority of all that we know. Noting that the "recognition of authority is always connected with the idea that what authority states is not irrational and arbitrary, but can be seen, in principle, to be true, he describes the determining influence of tradition upon us:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted--and not only what is clearly grounded--has power over our attitudes and behaviour. All education depends on this, and even though, in the case of education, the educator loses his function when his charge comes of age and sets his own insight and decisions in the place of the authority of the educator, this movement into maturity in his own life does not mean that a person becomes his own master in the sense that he becomes free of all tradition. The validity of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over, but by no means created by a free insight or justified by themselves. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity. . . .we stand always within tradition, and this is no objectifying process, ie. we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a recognition of ourselves which our later historical judgment would hardly see as a kind of knowledge, but as the simplest preservation of tradition.

pp. 249-50.

<sup>21</sup> John Donne, "Meditation XVII," in The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne, ed. Charles M. Coffin (New York: Modern Library, 1952), p. 441.

Chapter ThreeNotes

<sup>1</sup> MS note on Sherlock's A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and ever Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God, in Literary Remains, ed. H.N. Coleridge (1836-39), IV, 217.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Nelson Coleridge, extract from Quarterly Review LVII (August, 1834) in Coleridge, The Ancient Mariner and Other Poems, A Casebook, ed. Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman (New York: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1973), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Haven, Patterns of Consciousness (Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1969), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Penn Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination," Kenyon Review 8 (1946), 241.

<sup>5</sup> William Walsh, Coleridge; The Work and the Relevance (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Humphry House, Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52 (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1965), pp. 107-8.

<sup>7</sup> In a sense, then, the poem might be said to be "about the unity of mind and the final unity of values," but more distinctly, I think, one might say that it is about the union of mind with value.

<sup>8</sup> The translation is from English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins (New York, 1967), p. 405.

<sup>9</sup> J. Robert Barth, The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition (Princeton, 1977), p. 91.

- 10 Letter from Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, in Coleridge  
 . . . A Casebook, p. 48.
- 11 E.E. Bostetter, "The Nightmare World of The Ancient Mariner,"  
Studies in Romanticism 1 (1962), 251 and 248.
- 12 George Whalley, "The Mariner and the Albatross," University  
of Toronto Quarterly XVI (1946-7), 381-82, 393.
- 13 Haven, pp. 22-23.
- 14 Walsh, p. 118.
- 15 House, pp. 97-98.
- 16 Warren, p. 396.
- 17 John Milton, Paradise Lost, in Complete Poems and Major Prose,  
 ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1975), Book I,  
 ll. 1-4.

18 Coleridge's view of Original Sin is greatly elaborated in  
Aids to Reflection (see especially pp. 242-67):

Is there any such thing? That is not the  
 question. For it is a fact acknowledged on  
 all hands almost: and even those who will  
 not confess it in words, confess it is their  
 complaints. For my part I cannot but confess  
 that to be, which I feel and groan under,  
 and by which all the world is miserable.

pp. 242-43.

This is a much later-articulated view of Original Sin. As these  
 remarks are made many years after the composition of the Ancient  
Mariner, I mention them here only because they describe quite thor-  
 oughly his view. Much more chronologically significant is Coleridge's  
 remark in a letter to George Coleridge in March, 1798, which shall  
 be examined more closely in the body of the text following.

- 19 Omniana, entry 119, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> J.A. Stuart, "The Augustinian 'Cause of Action' in Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Harvard Theological Review 60 (1967), 117-211. See especially pp. 179-180.

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note here Coleridge's clarification of his use of the word "determined" as meaning "impelled and directed". From this clarification we get a sense of determination as force issuing from the inner being of man, not as being imposed dictatorially from without.

<sup>22</sup> Bostetter, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> House, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> House, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> To the extent that the Mariner's redemption is ultimately dependent upon God's grace, I agree with Stuart's emphasis on the importance of grace.

<sup>26</sup> Omniana, p. 330.

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