

A Secret Ministry: Journeying with Coleridge to the source of the Imagination

Introduction

Throughout this book, we have been making the case that the imagination far from being a merely subjective realm of fantasy, is in fact, as essential instrument with which we grasp the truth. In Chapter one, we looked at the way in which the philosophers of the enlightenment had sought to make a divorce between reason and imagination, and exclude imagination from any right to truth. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was living and working in the midst of this process. He saw from within, as it developed, the deadening effect of a falsely rationalistic and materialist philosophy. As a leading figure in the Romantic Movement he was already part of the reaction against a purely mechanical and materialist view of the world, but unlike some of the other romantic poets he was concerned with more than creating beautiful fantasies as an alternative to grim reality. He wanted to challenge the philosophers on their own ground and show that the insights of imagination are insights into reality itself. Although Coleridge is best known for a handful of brilliant poems written in the course of a few miraculous years when he was a young man at the end of the 18th century; it is less well known that he spent the rest of his life, the first 34 years of the 19th century, reflecting on the meaning of that intense experience; the experience of having been the mind through whom great works of imagination had been revealed. In this reflection Coleridge found himself compelled to reject the mechanistic, clockwork cosmos of Newton, to reject the distant and detached clock-maker that passed for God with many of his contemporaries. Instead he rediscovered for himself the mysterious and suddenly present God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, the mysterious and all-sustaining Word made flesh at Bethlehem, and the life-giving Holy Spirit through whom the imaginations of poets are kindled. After all his peregrinations Coleridge, like his ancient mariner, found haven and firm footing at last in the land of the Trinity. As we come to the end of the Enlightenment project, whose shortcomings Coleridge so strongly attacked whilst he was in the midst of it, we may find in his writings very useful guides for the seas we have to navigate in the new “post-modern” era.

In the course of this chapter we shall explore some of the key ideas and images in Coleridge’s work which might be of most help to us, in the great task of reintegrating the insights of the imagination with those of the reason.

At the heart of Coleridge’s poetry and prose is a profound reflection on the nature and meaning of symbols. Beginning with the experience of language as a set of symbols, Coleridge came to apprehend nature as a complex network of symbols. He asks the question, “who makes the symbols in nature?” Is it humanity, with our own imagination? Is it God alone in a single act of creation long since past? Or are these symbols created by a continuous meeting between His imagination and ours? In seeking an answer to these questions, Coleridge came to develop what might be called a “theology of the imagination”. We will move in this chapter from the roots of this theology in his early poetry to its flowering in his later prose works.

Frost at Midnight

We begin this journey with Coleridge, with the beautiful conversational poem which he had written in 1798, *Frost at Midnight*, in which he explores the relation between the inner world of our consciousness and the outer world we inhabit, between the imagined images with which we clothe and express our inner thoughts and the images of the world around us, which in their own way also seem to express our minds. The poem has a deceptive simplicity; Coleridge opens it in the beautiful setting of his little cottage in Somerset, sitting up late at night in front of the dying embers of the fire, in quiet and solitude, with his infant son Hartley, slumbering beside him. And a stream of association, partly mediated through the image of the fire dying in the grate, leads him back first to memories of his own childhood, and then forward and out to an imagined future for his own child, and then finally, back again to the cottage.

Frost at Midnight

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.
But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering *stranger* ! and as oft

With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!
So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face,
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!
Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
Fill up the interspersed vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought!
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
And in far other scenes! For I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

The images in this poem are beautifully realized with great fidelity to nature as Coleridge has observed it. There is no straining to introduce symbolism, or to reduce the things he observes in nature to the status of mere ciphers or allegories. He is not trying to seize upon an image in order to make a point, and indeed he would regard it as an infidelity to nature to do so. Nevertheless, we have the sense throughout this poem that as well as giving us these beautiful descriptions, Coleridge's mind is communing *through* the appearances of nature he describes, through the the seas and hills, the fire, frost and moonlight, with the mind behind nature. Nature herself, celebrated for her own beauties, becomes in the course of this poem both the language and medium of that communion.

So the poem opens,

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owl's cry
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.

Coleridge is opening his heart and speaking, directly to us in the present continuous, and the detail of the owl's cry, the word to us is *listen*, and hear it again, gives us an immediacy and a presence with him, which is part of the poem's many paradoxes; it's a poem in some senses about solitude, and yet we are invited vividly and presently into the intimacy of that solitude.

The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness.

Before we get the reflections and echoes between the inner and the outer, which form the poem's main theme, we start with a contrast between the hush of nature and the disquieting sense of movement and restlessness in Coleridge's own mind, which is of course, what kept him awake.

Sea, hill, and wood,

This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams!

This is simply a beautiful evocation of the sleeping village of nether-Stowey, in its setting among the hills by the sea. But also it introduces subtly to our minds the notion of the potential for speech hidden in silence. The “sea, and, hill and, wood, with all the numberless goings on of life”, are all for the present inaudible, but there is a distinct suggestion that they could speak had we but ears to hear them, that they have about them the intimations of a deeper meaning that adheres to the imagery of dreams.

So Coleridge continues:

the thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, every where
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
And makes a toy of Thought.

Now he introduces for the first time the notion of a direct reflection between the inner and the outer. He begins with the first, perhaps the easiest, one might say the lowest level of that sympathy or connection, which is the one that we make in fancy for ourselves. We see something exterior and seize upon it, and our imagination shapes it and turns it to a symbol for that which is within. Coleridge frankly admits that symbol he makes out of the film fluttering in the grate is entirely his own: “Only that film, which fluttered on the grate, /Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing. /Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature /Gives it dim sympathies with me who live, /Making it a companionable form.”

And yet, he introduces the idea that there is something within us which is not content to look at the mere surface of nature, something which looks out and beyond, and seeks in nature the echo or mirror of the stirrings it feels within itself. Then comes that common experience that we all have of how an outward and visible object becomes, as it were, the gateway or the vehicle through which the mind is drawn, either out into the imaginary world, or back through memory to other times. In this case the object which becomes the gateway to Coleridge’s past is the fire in the grate. The poem begins in the present, with Coleridge, a young father, gazing at the last embers of the fire through the grate, and shifts back to Coleridge the schoolboy, staring at the schoolroom fire, remembering the stories he had been told as a still younger boy, at home in the rural vicarage, of how the fluttering back and forth of the final last little film of ash on the fire, knocking at the grate, presaged the arrival of a stranger knocking at the cottage

door, which was why the country people called that last flapping film of ash was called the “stranger”. So Coleridge writes:

But O! how oft,
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
To watch that fluttering *stranger* ! and as oft
With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
Whose bells, the poor man’s only music, rang
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!

So Coleridge in the cottage at Stowey, is reminded as he looks at the fire, of Coleridge the schoolboy. But in turn, he’s reminded of Coleridge the schoolboy at that very time also being reminded by the fire to look further back, it’s as though we have not so much a double vision as a triple vision here; he is remembering himself remembering.

For the boy, unhappy at school, looks at the fire and thinks of visitors, home and holidays, and of his early childhood growing up in the little vicarage of Ottery St. Mary in Devon: “I dreamt /Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,” And when he remembers that, he remembers the experience as a young child, of hearing the bells ring in the Church, “Whose bells, the poor man’s only music, rang /From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day, /So sweetly”. And then these remembered bells themselves seem to be stirring in his imagination, and speaking of that which is beyond themselves, “So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me /With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear /Most like articulate sounds of things to come!” It is as though we pass through one layer after another; each layer seems to beckon us to the one beyond it. The passage thus far has been backwards, taking us closer and closer to the source of things in Coleridge’s childhood. (He’d written elsewhere his lectures on Shakespeare that the poet is one who carries the simplicity of childhood into powers of adulthood, and in another place that the poet contemplates all things with the freshness and wonder of the child.)

But now these remembered bells of childhood speak not only of the past but of the future, “like most articulate sounds of things to come”. And we are reminded that this vivid image of the bells ringing on the hot Fair day is itself and in the memory of Coleridge the schoolboy, who wakes guiltily from his reverie but takes comfort from the flapping of the *stranger* in the hope that the superstition might genuinely be true, that there would be a knock upon the door that would really set him free from the schoolroom and take him back in fact in not just in fancy, to his childhood home.

And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor’s face, mine eye

Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face,

This is a particular childhood memory, and yet in the gathering symbolism of the poem, it becomes much more. For in one sense, this whole poem is about listening for a knock from behind the door of nature; it's about hoping to find that the world around us is not a blank wall, but a door or a window. It's about hoping that we might meet glimpse that face which is behind nature. In a sense, Coleridge is saying of the whole cosmos what he says of the schoolroom door: "A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up, /For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face".

Coleridge returns us then to the present, to that continuous, immediate present, into which he had invited us at the beginning of the poem. He looks down at his sleeping child, and realizes that now, he, STC, is no longer the child, but an adult, with the care of a child himself. And so he speaks to Hartley:

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
Fill up the interspersed vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought!
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
And in far other scenes!

He goes on to contrast the childhood he hopes he can provide for Hartley, with his own devastating experience of having been taken from the bliss of his early days at Ottery St. Mary's, where he had been free to roam the fields, meadows and streams, and had walked in the evening and see the stars with his father, to be pent up in the grime of London as a schoolboy at Christ's Hospital, And he remembers how the stars were the one thing unsmudged by the dirt of the city, the one living link with the memories of his childhood and the beauties of nature:

For I was reared

In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.

The stars were certainly a link with his childhood, as he wrote much later in a letter to a friend about an experience as a young child, walking out at night, (and we must remember this in the days before the light-pollution came that prevents many of us from seeing the stars in their glory) he wrote this: "I remember that at eight years old, I walked with [my father] one winter evening from a farmer's house a mile from Ottery, and he told me the names of the stars, and how Jupiter was 1000 times larger than our world, and that the other twinkling stars were suns, that had worlds rolling round them, and when I came home, he showed me how they rolled round. I heard him with a profound delight and admiration,

but without least admixture of wonder or incredulity, for from my early reading of fairy-tales, and genii etc, my mind had been habituated to the Vast”.

But they were also a link with the great tradition in which human beings, amidst the struggles and sufferings of their life on earth, had looked up to the heavens and found in the stars emblems of hope and glory.

Stars and starlight were of huge symbolic importance to Coleridge, and he consciously participated in that great tradition of understanding and celebrating what the stars might mean, the truths that might be revealed by their order and beauty. This tradition of celebrating starlight and finding in the heavens signs of hope for earth, might be said to begin in Psalm 19, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.” Even in this psalm there is the hint that we might hear the voice of what we thought inarticulate which Coleridge develops in *Frost at Midnight*. If “night unto night sheweth knowledge”, then it is knowledge of a beauty and order unassailable by the depravities of earth.

From that first declaration in Scripture, Coleridge would have been conscious of the many wonderful moments in the course of European literature in which the stars feature as emblems of hope and renewal. He would have known the great passage which forms the last lines of the *Inferno*, in which Dante and Vergil at last emerge from that lowest pit of hell, besmired and begrimed and utterly exhausted, and turn back to the lit world:

“that hid way, my guide and I withal
back to the lit world from the darkened dens
toiled upwards, caring for no rest at all,
he first I following till my straining sense
glimpsed the bright burden of the heavenly cars
through a round hole; by this we climbed
and thence came forth to look once more upon the stars.”

Lying on that roof and gazing at the stars he would have been conscious, too, of the beautiful passage in *Merchant of Venice*, in which Lorenzo speaks to Jessica of the music of the spheres , the sense that we behold in the stars but cannot hear a harmony which resonates with something in our souls, which we strain to catch but cannot.

Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;

Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close in it, we cannot hear it.

Coleridge speaks of himself as being “in the great city *pent*”, and the contrast between the dark confines of our life on earth and the splendour and spaciousness of our glimpses of the heavens would have been articulated for him in the opening lines of *Comus*, when the daemon, a spirit from the realm of the stars comes down to earth and opens that masque with the words:

Before the starry threshold of Jove’s course
my mansion is, where those ariel spirits live ensphered
in regions mild of calm and serene air
above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
which men call earth. And with low-thoughted care
contrive to keep a frail and feverish being
confined and pestered in this pin-fold here.

The Bible, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton, were all forming and focusing Coleridge’s imagination. They were deepening the very way in which he saw the stars. And indeed, in his own poetry, in this very passage, and as we shall see, in the *Ancient Mariner*, especially its glosses, and perhaps most movingly in the concluding words of the *Biographia*, Coleridge himself developed and enriched this human celebration of the stars.

We see them differently because of what he wrote. But of course, the tradition did not end with Coleridge. It continued beyond him through those nurtured on his poetry and its antecedents. Keats, exiled and dying in Rome, gazing up at a star he hoped his beloved might also be watching, contributed to that tradition when he wrote his last sonnet in the fly-leaf of his Shakespeare:

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching with eternal lids apart
Like nature’s patient sleepless Eremite.
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round Earth’s human shores
Or gazing on the new, soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors.
No, but still steadfast, still unchangable,
Pillowed upon my fair love’s ripening breast
To feel forever its soft fall and swell

Awake forever in a sweet unrest.
Still, still to hear her tender, taken breath
And so live ever, or else swoon to death.

Keats achieves a particularly beautiful effect here by the change in perspective. We begin with him looking up at the star, when suddenly we are with the star looking down at the earth; and at last we return to an earth, but an earth transfigured and rendered almost eternal by the bliss of fulfilled love. Like so many of Keats' poems, this is a journey out and back, but the return is always a return to transfiguration. (It's interesting to note in passing that Keats' image of the sea as having a "priestlike task of pure ablution" is probably rooted in his reading of *Frost at Midnight*; is a development of Coleridge's notion that all the images of nature have a "secret ministry" to and through the human imagination.)

In the hands of Hopkins, this tradition is set alight again; in the breathless immediacy with which his sonnet on the starlit night opens:

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air

through the way he involves us, kindles our awe at the beauty of the stars, and almost dares us, in an astonishing conceit, to bid for them with virtue:

Buy then, bid then – what? – Prayer, patience, alms, vows

to the conclusion of the poem where the distant stars (at the beginning of the poem, each was its own "circled citadel") are suddenly reimagined as the blossoms on an orchard bough, close and domestic, and we are invited to turn, as it were, from the flowering bough of the heavens, to the barn and the house where we will be welcomed by Christ and his Mother. It's as though the whole cosmos is no more than a flowering tree beside the house of heaven.

Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!
Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow fallows!
These are indeed the barn; withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.

One might have expected this tradition of awe-struck contemplation of the heavenly bodies, to have withered under the perpetual irony of high modernism, but even Eliot, Joyce and Beckett all have their moments of astonished wonder in starlight. The tradition in which Coleridge participated as he lay on the school roof as a child, or voyaged with his Mariner as a young man, continues in the imagination of poets who are our own contemporaries. As, for example, in Micheal O'Siadhail's poem-sequence *Dance*, his beautiful re-reading of *Orchestra*; which consciously recollects the significance of stars from Plato to the present moment, which has these verses in its third poem, *Glimpse*:

A few are sitting this one out: spectators,

Thinkers on the outside, catching a glance
 Of how the dancers turn like Plato's stars.
 Dance in a cosmos, cosmos in the light of dance.
 An ancient image, I know, stuff of visionaries:
 Harmony, music of spheres, the mystic's trance.
 The whirl of it! Barefaced and fluid boundaries,
 I'm watching through a window, sipping iced beer
 In the night air. Ripe images. Old quandaries.
 To dance between infinities of quark and star,
 lost in a labyrinth we ourselves have planned.
 Detached and involved. Half-god, half-creature.
 Glimpse from a stillness beyond rhythm's command.
 An inner stillness in the shifting views of dancers.
 To stand under heavens you can never understand.
 Small wonder then, that the schoolboy poet amidst the dirt and the distresses of his London school, lay
 upon the roof to look upon the one lovely thing left to him, the sky and stars.
 So in *Frost at Midnight*, Coleridge moves from the memory of himself as a child on the roof of Christ's
 Hospital watching the stars, to think of how his own child might be brought up.
 But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
 By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
 Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
 Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
 And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
 The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
 Of that eternal language, which thy God
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.
 Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
 Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

In this passage, Coleridge approaches the heart of what he has to say in his poem. He prepares our mind
 for the notion that the beauties and particularities of nature might be themselves and yet be more than
 themselves, by beginning first at the level of analogy. He compares the wanderings of his boy as he
 grows up to a wandering breeze. Then he introduces the word "image", which he uses, not its usual
 sense as a noun but in a new sense, as a verb, and he suggests that one part of nature *images* another part
 of nature, like "by lakes and sandy shores, beneath the clouds /Which image in their bulk both lakes and

shores /And mountain crags”. Here, the cloud-mountains correspond to the physical mountains, which in turn of course, are reflected in the lakes. All these examples of one thing imaging and referring to another, prepare the imagination to receive the more explicit teaching, that nature herself may be *imaging* that which is beyond nature. That she may be not only a distinct series of opaque objects, but also a language of symbols.

The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters,

This is one of Coleridge’s most important insights. He never ceased to be amazed by the fact that nature is intelligible, by the fact that we not only perceive it in a coherent and ordered way, but that its very coherence and order provides us with a vocabulary of symbols with which to explore a similar coherence and order within ourselves, and beyond or through the veil of nature. Throughout his life, he tried to build a coherent system of thought on the foundation of this insight. In this system, the analogy of language is crucial. In *Biographia Literaria*, he works out the foundations and structure of such a system in a rigorous and rational way. But in one sense, the heart of it had already been disclosed to him intuitively in this poem. As always, his imagination was wiser than his reason. In this poem, he expresses the intuition that the world in which we find ourselves, and all its contents, “these lakes, these mountains, these shining stars”, are themselves *words*, within an eternal language which God utters. And what is taught in that language is not the accumulation of observations and statistics which passes for science, nor is it the tabulation of dry surfaces evoked, for example, in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, (“the facts are everything which is the case”), but rather the language of the cosmos, rightly heard, teaches, or perhaps reaches towards the speaker of that language; the One: “who from eternity doth teach /Himself in all, and all things in himself. /Great universal Teacher!” We shall return to this theme when we examine a notebook entry which forms a bridge between his intuitions here, and their outworking in *Biographia Literaria*.

The poem then returns through the speculation about Hartley growing up, back to its point of origin in that hush in the cottage, and we return with it; but we return changed by our journey through these images, and we come back to the first image with which the poem began, but in a sense we understand it for the first time. So Coleridge continues,

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night that
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall

Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

When we began the poem, we might have read the words, “The frost performs its secret ministry unhelped by any wind”, simply as an analogy. We might have thought it a quaint poeticism to suggest that frost had in any sense a ministry or service, let alone any of the aura which surrounds a word like “ministry”, the aura of “religious service”, the suggestion that in some sense the minister is concerned with sacraments, with gateways to God. By the time we’ve finished the poem and grasped that the frost and the moonlight are part of those “lovely shapes and sounds intelligible of that eternal language” uttered by God, we can understand at last the full freight of meaning concealed in the poem’s opening line, “The frost performs its secret ministry”. It is as though Coleridge is saying, “hark! and hark again” – when we hear the word “ministry” in the opening line, we don’t know what to make of it; but when we hark again to the closing lines of the poem, we have a completely new understanding of what it might mean to speak of the “secret ministry of frost”. This in turn opens our imagination to receive the final image of the “quiet moon” as the image of one who is also a minister of God.

Moonlight and the Mariner

This final picture of the quiet moon is an apt image with which to end *Frost at Midnight* just as later, “moonlight dim glimmering through the window-pane” would be an apt image for the notebook entry. (see below, pgs. XX) Apt not only because of the way moonlight transfigures the everyday, removes the “film of the familiar” and is therefore a natural symbol for the transformative power of the imagination which was of course, how Shakespeare used moonlight in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but apt also because in the tradition of platonic and neo-platonic thinking in which Coleridge participated, moonlight had come to be understood as the proper symbol for the way in which our grasp of eternal truth is rarely seen directly, but is rather mediated through nature.

The sun, in all its naked glory symbolizes the absolute truth in itself, which cannot be apprehended *directly* by fallen man any more than the naked eye can endure to look *directly* at the sun. The whole world is revealed to us in a light at the source of which we may not gaze. It is for this reason that the eagle is the type and symbol of St. John the Evangelist, for it was believed that the eagle could see directly into the sun and for many people, the preface to John’s Gospel seems to imply such a direct insight into God in Himself before all creation.

We cannot bear to look at the sun, but when we look to the moon we find “brilliance made bearable”. When his rays are reflected to us from her, then in her transfiguring light we get an image of what it might be to look at the sun if we could.

Another reason why the moon became so important a symbol is that in the old cosmography she is as it were, a dweller on the threshold between the human and the divine. The circle of the moon is the boundary between our sublunary world of mortality, mutability, change and decay, and the heavens upon

whose threshold she treads, the heavens beyond her where the sun and fixed stars are the signs God has set for the eternal and unchanging verities. The moon is the only one of the heavenly bodies who whilst shining resplendently like the other luminaries, nevertheless changes, and waxes and wanes as we do. For this reason we yearn towards her as a companionable form, and yet beyond her, as one whose changes, though we share them, we are called to transcend.

This special role of the moon as the one who so reflects the light and beauty of heaven that even fallen and corrupted men who cannot bear to look directly on its light and goodness are reached and moved by her gentler light, is made clear in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Before the Mariner's "fall" in shooting the Albatross, the sun is a bright and companionable presence.

The Sun came up upon the left

Out of the sea came he!

And he shone bright, and on the light

Went down into the sea.

Afterwards, the sun becomes unbearable in both its heat and light. It is the presence of God visited upon the soul which is in the very agony of denying that Presence.

All in a hot and copper sky,

the bloody Sun, at noon,

Right up above the mast did stand

No bigger than the moon.

And more striking still is the image of the sun staring at the Mariner through the bars of the skeleton ship as though through a dungeon:

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,

(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)

As if through a dungeon-grate he peered

With broad and burning face.

But when the time comes for grace to touch the Mariner's soul and for his vision to be transfigured, then it is by the ministry of the moon that the transformation happens. The Mariner's deed has alienated him from nature, humanity and God. He cannot bear to look upon the seas, to look upon the dead, or to look upon God.

I looked to heaven and tried to pray;

But or ever a prayer had gusht

A wicked whisper came, and made

My heart as dry as dust.

I close my lids and kept them close,

And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye
And the dead were at my feet.

It is after he has reached his worst agony, seven days and seven nights of longing but being unable to die, that we get the first intimations of change. First in the imagery of the poem itself, and second in the course of what actually happens to the Mariner. The key, almost as it were, musically, the “signature”, that accompanies these changes, is the image of the “moving moon”:

*In his loneliness and fixedness, he yearneth
towards the journeying moon and the stars
that still sojourn, yet still move onward;
and everywhere the blue sky belongs to
them, and is their appointed rest and native
country and their own natural homes,
which they enter unannounced as lords that
are unexpected, and yet there is a silent joy
at their arrival.*

The moving moon went up the sky
And nowhere did abide
Softly she was going up
And a star or two beside

Coleridge makes a beautiful and ambiguous play on the word, “moving”. We have to do with a “moving moon” in every sense. It is in the moon’s very nature both that she moves through space and is the cause of movement in others, and also that she moves us in the inner space of our hearts.

Accompanying this verse is the later gloss to which forms a kind of counterpoint to and commentary on the verse. “*In his loneliness and fixedness, he yearneth towards the journeying moon and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward...*” These glosses were added years later when Coleridge re-published the poem in 1816, after he had himself lived through much of what the poem describes. They form almost a separate poem and yet one which is in profound conversation with the text it glosses. So for example, this long and beautiful gloss on the “journeying moon and the stars that still sojourn yet still move onward”, although set there apparently only to explain a single verse, acts as a kind of premonition of the redemption which is to come. At the lowest point in the Mariner’s journey, just when he has cried in agony that he wishes to die and yet he cannot, just at the point where his own journey seems endless and hopeless, and home is an unimaginable possibility, just at that point comes a gloss whose imagery moves us from journeying to homecoming. The narrative of the poem will not arrive at a homecoming for many stanzas yet, but the hope of its possibility is mediated to the reader through key words in the gloss. Words like, “belongs” and “rest”, “native country”, “natural home”, gloss the text of the Mariner’s exile like the whispers of a good dream. The last phrase of that gloss, “there is a silent joy at their arrival” anticipates, with its echo of Christ’s words about the joy in heaven

over the sinner who repents, the final homecoming of the Mariner – even at that point in the story at which such a homecoming seem least likely.

The way in which Coleridge’s later gloss on the text of his poem allows us to return to a page we thought we knew and read it in a new way, is rather like the experience for Christians, of repentance, confession and grace. One lives through a page of one’s life, and looking back it can seem to have the finality of a printed text, a completed work. How can any of it ever be undone or unsaid, however much one wishes it could? But in prayer and confession, we offer that page to God for the commentary of His grace; we invite Him to surround the text of our life with a gloss that may reveal to us, many years later, glimpses of redeeming love that were hidden at the time.

The Mariner’s redemption can only come from a recognition of the truth he had denied when he shot the Albatross, the truth that all creatures are God’s and not his. In the following stanzas he looks out again at the water-snakes, which he had previously described as “a thousand, thousand slimy things”, and sees them utterly transfigured in the moonlight:

<i>By the light of the moon he beholdeth God’s creatures of the great calm</i>	Beyond the shadow of the ship I watched the water-snakes; They moved in tracks of shining wax And when they reared the elfish light Fell off in hoary flakes. . .
<i>Their beauty and their happiness</i>	O happy living things, no tongue Their beauty might declare: A spring of love gushed from my heart And I blessed them unaware:
<i>He blesseth them in his heart</i>	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
<i>The spell begins to break</i>	The Albatross fell off, and sank Like lead into the sea.

It is as though by seeing these creatures in moonlight he is given however briefly, some notion of how God sees them. Certainly Coleridge’s own experiences of moonlight, especially moonlight on water, had something of that quality, as for example this brief passage from one of the notebooks shows: “Quiet stream, with all its eddys & the moon light playing in them; quiet, as if they were Ideas in the divine Mind anterior to the Creation.”

For Coleridge, the meaning of the moon and moonlight is not a purely human invention; it is a symbol, but it is not a randomly chosen or arbitrarily constructed human symbol. It is a symbol which is given,

which is molded by and participates in the reality it represents. Coleridge distinguished true symbols from artificial analogies; he summed up his distinction in a late work, *The Statesman's Manual*: "The Symbol is characterized by 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 representative. Whereas analogies are "but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter, less beautiful but not less shadowy than the sloping orchard or hill-side pasture-field seen in the transparent lake below." (1816)

Coleridge spent most of the second part of his life reflecting in a rigorous and philosophically disciplined way on the very question of what a symbol is, and on the relation between language considered as a set of symbols given and articulated by humanity, and nature considered as a set of symbols given and articulated by God. It is to some of his later prose works that we now turn in order to travel with Coleridge on a journey which traces the full flow of his poetry back to its source in an Imagination which is more than the human.

Symbol and Imagination in Coleridge's Prose

We will begin with a notebook entry which continues, as it were, from where *Frost at Midnight* left off; it develops the notion that nature might itself be a language. But Coleridge has been thinking more deeply. In *Frost at Midnight*, the phrase, "eternal language" tells us something about God, but doesn't help us to understand His language. In the note, Coleridge is trying to grasp what it might mean to say that the language of God is a "symbolic" language.

Perhaps the most important of Coleridge's many insights was the profound parallel he discerned between our experience of language and our experience of the world. We could describe language in purely exterior and physical terms. As soon as a word is used it has a quantifiable physical presence; black ink and paper weighing so many grams, an audible sound at so many decibels. Yet, however accurate the measurements and description of language as a purely physical phenomenon were to be such a description would still say nothing of a speaker, listener, or reader's actual experience of language. When we use language, we pass through the physicality of the words so swiftly we hardly realise they are there. For the words we use are, of course, not simply dead physical objects, opaque and referring to nothing but themselves. The words we use are living symbols taking us the instant they are uttered through and beyond themselves, connecting us with an intricate network of reference, reference to other words and reference to the realities in nature and in ourselves of which the words are symbols. For most of us this process of meeting the word only to be ushered through it to that meaning beyond itself to which it points is so familiar and unconscious we scarcely notice it is happening. We cease to be conscious of the words, only of the images they summon up. But poets are concerned not only with the meanings of words, but with savouring and celebrating the words themselves, the very sounds. And so it is that in reading great poetry, our vision is doubled, we become aware simultaneously both of the word as a thing in itself, a delicious sound, a kind of music in the air, and also of that other reality, that mystery of truth of which the word is the gatekeeper. In language, we meet something which is both

itself and a mediator of that which is beyond itself. We can sometimes have the same experience, not just with words but with the world. Indeed as we have seen in earlier chapters before the enlightenment most people were free to read the world as being itself symbolic and constantly drawing us to truths beyond itself. For Coleridge this experience was so constant that it drove him first to doubt and then to demolish the new “Enlightened view” that the world was a set of dead objects meaning nothing.

Take, for example, this little passage from one of the notebooks he kept throughout his life:

In looking at objects of Nature, while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolic language for something within me that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim awaking of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature! It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is *Logos*, the Creator! and the Evolver!

(Notebook, 1805)

In looking at objects of nature while I am thinking. . .

This astonishing notebook passage was itself the fruit of reflection on the kind of writing and the kind of looking and listening at nature that Coleridge had already been engaged in. It turned out also to be the seed for later development in Coleridge’s thought, especially the *Biographia* and the lecture on the *Poesy considered as one of the Fine Arts*. It’s an enormously dense and rich passage that begins, apparently, in a world clearly divided between subject and object, which Coleridge inherited in the 18th century. That phrase, “in looking at objects of nature” could have been written by any materialist or mechanistic philosopher of Coleridge’s day. But the sentence continues, “*I am thinking*” – and this is one of the first things we observe about Coleridge: he is aware constantly of the fact that we are not merely passive *tabula rasa*, upon which the outside objects of nature impinge or impress themselves, but constantly active looking, thinking, shaping beings, and surely this constant awareness of our own conscious activity of the moment, what Coleridge in another place called, “the circling energies of our reason”, must itself have an influence on not only the way in which we see nature, but perhaps on the very nature itself that we see.

So he continues, “In looking at objects of nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were, asking. . .” We move here from the ideas and language about mind as being passive, to the notion that the mind is actively *asking*, actively *seeking*. And what the mind seeks is not simply the exterior recording of the opaque outsides of dead objects, what it’s seeking is *language*, intelligibility, meaning. “I seem rather to be seeking, as it were, asking for a symbolic language”.

Coleridge has the experience as he sees the moon dim-glimmering through the window pane, that, as it

were, there is a meaning behind it, that its like a word, that he could pass through it and see something beyond it; but he has simultaneously the experience that whatever is beyond it, is also resonant with something which is within him, something which “already and forever exists”. It is as though the experience of perception were a kind of medium or middle-state between a meaning which is beyond and a meaning which is within. It becomes, as it were, a language of communication between the inner and the outer, between the immanent and the transcendent. In some ways, he is rediscovering the correspondence between inner nature and outer nature, which was so beautifully expressed and ordered before the Enlightenment in the images of the microcosm and the macrocosm which we looked at in the poetry of Sir John Davies. It’s not surprising that Coleridge was deeply attracted to Davies, and when in the *Biographia Literaria* he wants to talk about the way in which the imagination works, he turns to Davies’ poem *Nosce Teipsum*.

So Coleridge continues in this startling little note, and this time he introduces the word, *Word*, significantly with a capital W, “It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol!” Now whose word, whose symbol is it? Coleridge in this note is certainly not suggesting that it is simply his own. Yes, this moonlight does seem somehow to correspond with something within Coleridge’s inner nature, which only that moonlight could express; but Coleridge is not saying that it is he, privately, Coleridge himself, who is, as it were, casting upon the moonlight the spell of its meaning.

It is still interesting he says, as a Word, a symbol, but he goes on to say, “this is Logos, the Creator and the evolver”, and here he anticipates by some years the formulation which he gives this idea in the famous 13th Chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*, where he asks at last, what is the deepest and purest source of creativity, of imagination? Is there a common source both for the outward and visible forms of nature, and for those inward and invisible imaginative apprehensions of that nature which we find in the human mind. Is there a common source for that beautifully expressed and ordered organic whole, that composition of one in many parts which we call the cosmos, and the beautifully expressed and ordered organic wholes in poetry and art which we call human creations. Might there be a single source for that ordering and imaginative power which is responsible for both? Coleridge anticipates and says, “this is Logos, the Creator and the Evolver.”

It is not by chance, as Coleridge is later to show, that we find in the world around us, so many apt representations and symbols of our own inner states and experiences. For the outward “objects” of nature are continuously given and made by that divine Mind and Imagination, they are the “eternal language” of that Poet, whose *poiesis* made us and our minds, and made our minds to be an image and reflection of His own.

If Coleridge is right in thinking that the whole creation including humankind is God’s poetry, and that the human being is made in God’s image, then we can ask whether the human experience in writing poetry has anything to teach us about God and the world. Not surprisingly, some of the best and most influential of Coleridge’s literary critical writing has turned out to be reflection on this very question.

Coleridge & Shakespeare

In many ways, Coleridge could be credited with helping the English to rediscover the greatness of Shakespeare; to appreciate Shakespeare for the real virtues of his work, and not, as the 18th century critics have done, to admit him grudgingly to the pantheon of great writers, as a kind of honorary rustic, a flawed, natural genius in whom many good things were to be found in spite of his woeful ignorance of the rules of composition. The pre-Coleridgian view of Shakespeare is best summed up in Milton's famously condescending praise, "merry Shakespeare, nature's child, warbled his native wood-notes wild. . ."

This monumental critical failure to understand the power and subtlety of Shakespeare's art arose from the mistake of trying to apply a rigid and literalistic reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, particularly the so-called, "unities", to Shakespeare's great tragedies. Shakespeare is shown as failing to apply the rules, and the power of his plays is conceded only as a success in spite of this failure.

Following the lead of German romantic philosophers and critics, Coleridge showed how beautifully and subtly wrought the plays are; that far from being "native wood-notes wild" they are *organic* wholes, whose inner-structure is perfectly accommodated to bear the weight of every line and animate the whole, whose smallest line or image carries and re-iterates the meaning of the whole. However, in the course of rescuing Shakespeare from perverse criticism, he *embraced* rather than repudiated the notion that Shakespeare is "natural", as distinct from "artificial". Indeed, he took this analogy more seriously than those who had used it as a slight, and it helped him not only to appreciate Shakespeare, but to understand the distinction between the *mechanic* and the *organic* in many other spheres as well. As we shall see, this pair of contrasting terms was important to Coleridge in his understanding of "cosmos" as well as his understanding of literature. Ultimately, the distinction he makes between mechanic and organic form is rooted in his distinction, to which we will come, between Imagination and Fancy. Fancy can manipulate the "fixities and definites" in order to make a mechanic form which is manufactured according to a prescribed set of rules. But only Imagination, in its Primary or Secondary form, is capable of the primary creative act which gives a living work its organic structure.

In the 1812 lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge praises him for rejecting the "mechanic" manipulation of formal image, so that it conformed to a schema worked up merely by the fancy of man, and praises him for his power like that of Nature herself, to develop and unfold naturally from the seed and the root, so that the finished work is still in vital touch with its own *fons et origo*.

"The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material - as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such is the life, such is the form. Nature the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms: each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, its true image relected and

thrown out from the concave mirror; and even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet, our own Shakespeare - himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and a[n] implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.”

Here, the parallel between human and divine *making* is explicit; it is not simply that images from nature provide Coleridge as a critic with metaphors like, “organic”, but rather that there is a genuine continuity and reflection between the “creativity” of nature, the prime genial artist, and the example of the power of imagination in Shakespeare. The key to understanding the way imagination works in Shakespeare and what it teaches not only about his art, or about art in general, but *about nature herself*, is that Shakespeare’s art is not simply the embroidering by fancy on the grave-clothes of the cold corpse of dead nature, but rather the operation in and through him as an artist of the very same power which itself gives nature life, and that power is the power of imagination.

What Shakespeare is doing, as an artist, as distinct from what we all do in merely perceiving nature at all, is, “directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.” By the time he came to write the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge was prepared to name that power and the Mind behind it more explicitly.

The *Biographia* also gave him a chance to develop his thought on Shakespeare further, and like many poets, when they write as critics about another poet, to give his readers some clues as to what he values in his own work:

“No man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher; for poetry is the blossom and the fragrant of human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.” In his detailed critical readings of particular plays of Shakespeare, Coleridge continually notices instances of the ways in which the organic form of the plays is at work; the way in which the fullness of the play’s development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. He gives many instances of how an opening scene, or even a single line, not only performs its particular function as a part of the whole plot or life of the play, but also expresses or recapitulates themes that range throughout the play. He is fascinated by the way even a single scene can “place before us at one glance both the past and the future in some effect which implies the continuance and full agency of its cause”.

In his famous close reading of the opening scene of *Hamlet*, he shows how the very first question, “Who’s there?” sets the tone of questioning uncertainty for the whole play. He points out how it is that the very common and ordinary language used by the watchmen before they see the ghost, serve to make the ghost’s appearance even more believable; whilst at the same time subtly preparing the imagination for the great poetry which is to come. “For its commonness in ordinary conversation tends to produce the sense of reality and at once hides the poet, and yet approximates the reader or spectator to that state in which the highest poetry will appear, and in its component parts, though not in the whole composition, really is, the language of nature”. This power of embodying the life of the whole poem vividly in even its smallest parts is a power which Coleridge himself exercised to a high degree. It is a

power which, as we saw, is at work throughout *Frost at Midnight*; a single phrase like, “hark! and hark again” carries with it the whole theme of echo and revelation which runs through the poem whilst being itself vivid and immediate. In that sense, its relation as a part to the whole in *Frost at Midnight* is just the same as the relation Coleridge observed in “Who’s there?” in *Hamlet*.

But, perhaps the most important contribution of the literary critical part of *Biographia*, to Coleridge’s final insights about God and the human imagination, came in his reflections on his own and Wordsworth’s experience as poets writing at the height of their powers.

Coleridge on Coleridge

Take for example, the famous passage in which he describes the occasion of the *Lyrical Ballads*:

“In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed, that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.”

This passage is most often cited for the justly famous phrase, “willing suspension of disbelief”; but it also contains two other key ideas for what might be called Coleridge’s, “theology of the imagination”. The first is the notion that the poet’s business is to discern and establish the links between our inward nature and the matter of his art: so, although he was writing about “persons or characters supernatural, or at least romantic”, persons or characters who, from the point of view of a rationalist, do not properly speaking exist (i.e, the *Mariner* and *Cristabel*), yet he does so in the full consciousness that these “shadows of imagination” are the language with which we may speak about “our inward nature”, and may perhaps be the only language in which some parts of that inward nature find expression. In some ways, most of his later writing was an attempt to understand how it was that such a marvellous correspondence between image and truth is possible.

The second key idea here is that poetry is not about lulling the mind, decorating its interior or making a pretended escape from a fixed and dead world, but rather to *awaken the mind’s attention* to a world that’s not properly seen at all. Coleridge contends that what we mistake for “objective” unemotional

observation of the natural world, is often no more than “the lethargy of custom”, contenting itself with “the film of familiarity”. The poet, as much as the philosopher or the scientist, is concerned with helping us to look beyond surfaces at what is really there. What he directs us to is not only “the loveliness and wonders of the world before us”, but also something “inexhaustible”; this is a vital term. The nature over which our lethargy has cast the film of familiarity is not, in Coleridge’s view, fixed and static, but continuously coming to be in the meeting of our minds with the Mind of God.

At the core of both of these ideas is Coleridge’s sense of or correspondence between “inner” or “outer” nature; a correspondence whose meaning he had been seeking since that first jotting in his notebook about seeing the moonlight through the window, “I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my *inner Nature*...” So in *Lyrical Ballads*, he felt himself trying “to transfer from our *inward nature* semblance of Truth”.

His lecture on *Poesy considered as one of the Fine Arts*, brought these obscure feelings or intuitions into crystal clear focus, and made explicit the pivotal role that the arts of the imagination have to play in the mediation between the “inner” and the “outer”. In the following quotation, he may have been consciously rewriting the Note of 1805, beginning with that same phrase about “looking at the objects of nature” - but this time, it is not a question of *dim intuition*; now he is clear both that the “mirror of nature” presents us with a picture of the inner as well as the outer, and also that it is imaginative poetry which establishes the link between the two:

“In the objects of nature are presented, as in a mirror, all the possible elements, steps and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness, and therefore to the full development of the intellectual act; and man’s mind is the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature. Now so to place these image, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature - this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts...”

The aim of the artist therefore is not simply to describe or imitate the outsides of the objects around him, but so to describe them as to elicit from them what it is that they might mean; so to describe them as to discern in them a hidden correspondence with our inner nature.

This is possible without being a merely arbitrary human act, a projection of our psyche on to the inanimate, because of the pivotal role which Coleridge saw for the human mind and imagination made in God’s image. It is as he calls it, “the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered through the images of nature.”

Biographia Literaria: Chapter 13

We turn now to the part of the *Biographia* in which all the ideas we have been tracing in this chapter so

far, from the first foray in *Frost at Midnight* onwards, find their greatest expression and deepest resolution. Throughout the *Biographia* Coleridge speaks of preparing the ground for the more important things he has to say later, and the reader comes at last to the much promised Chapter 13 with a great sense of expectation. That chapter is the most famous and the most perplexing, the most exciting and the most frustrating in all the annals of literary criticism. No sooner has this chapter titled, *On the Imagination*, begun, then it is broken off, and Coleridge interposes a “letter from a friend” (written by Coleridge himself!) pleading with him not to try and open the depth and complexity of what he has to say about imagination in so short a space as a single chapter, but to save it for his great proposed work on the constructive philosophy, the *Logosophia*. The letter urges him instead just to give a brief outline of what his conclusions might be and to save the detailed development of his argument for the later work. The letter ends, and Coleridge appends two powerful and provoking paragraphs on Imagination and Fancy, and so ends the chapter.

Richard Holmes, in second volume of his great biography of Coleridge, says of these two paragraphs:

“Coleridge left behind, at the end of Chapter 13, the most famous critical fragment of his career. It became in many ways the prose equivalent of “Kubla Khan”. Its 199 words - clear, compact, Delphic - were destined to generate as much discussion, as much source-hunting, as much praise and controversy, as the poem. It summed up seven chapters of argument, and defined for the English-speaking world the Romantic concept of creativity.”

[*Coleridge: Darker Reflections*, Harper Collins, 1998, p. 410].

I shall cite these paragraphs in full, since they are so crucial to our understanding of Coleridge:

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

FANCY, on the contrary, 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; while it is belnded with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE.

But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

Whatever more than this, I shall think it fit to declare concerning the powers and privileges of the imagination is the present work, will be found in the critical essay on the uses of the Supernatural in poetry, and the principles that regulate its introduction; which the reader will find prefixed to the poem of *The Ancient Mariner*.”

Here, the intimation which Coleridge had in the notebook of 1805, that the phenomena of nature might form a symbolic language, and that the words of this language might both articulate hidden truths about our inner nature and also point to God the Creator as Logos, all these are made explicit and grounded in a philosophical system. “The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” It is vital that we understand what it means for Coleridge to call the Imagination a “living power” and an “agent”. Throughout the first part of the *Biographia*, and indeed throughout the first part of his life, he battled with, and in the end defeated, a system of thought in which not only the imagination and all perception, but mind itself was understood as a ‘passive faculty’ rather than a living power, a patient, not an agent. It was a view of the world which saw the mind as at best, passively recording material phenomena, and at worst as merely a mirage, the accidental by-product of the movement of atoms in a mechanical universe. Coleridge saw the falsehood at the bottom of this view, and these two paragraphs are a kind of cry of triumph in winning that victory. He understood that from Descartes onwards, we had simply been beginning from the wrong end of things; as he put it in a letter, “They are all deriving sense from objects; my system derives objects from sense.”

The former view made for a universe devoid of mind and intrinsically unintelligible, and made mind itself almost an absurdity, and something which was to be experienced in isolation, individually, and only ever on the inside of one’s small part of a cosmos which otherwise consisted of nothing but outsides. Coleridge was now in a position to see things from an entirely different perspective; he was no longer obliged to confine his sense of mind, intelligence, joy or wonder, within the confines of his own skull or other people’s, but to find it radiating through all the phenomena of the cosmos.

For Coleridge, the physical universe which is the object of our perception, is not something that merely strikes us from the outside, but something which is, as it were, being formed continuously, both from our side of it, and from an apprehended but as yet unknowable other side beyond it. The insight of these two paragraphs is that there is a deep connection between that which is below the level of our consciousness and is continually giving us the gift of ourselves and our mind, and that which is behind or beyond the phenomena and is continuously giving them their being, allowing them to well up from its own *inexhaustible* depths. Even so seemingly simple a thing as perception itself, let alone composition or art, results from the active powers of our imagination, meeting and reflecting the active power of that

Imagination which has caused all things to be.

By means of our Primary Imagination, we are constantly participating in a cosmos whose every part is fraught with the meaning of the Mind of God. For Coleridge, our Secondary Imagination (what we would now call, poetic imagination, or imagination of the artist) is of the same kind and comes from the same source of this Primary Imagination, and when we cooperate with it, it too produces and articulates eternal symbols; by contrast the Fancy simply manufactures artificial equivalences which are not, in Coleridge's terms, worthy of the name of "symbol". They have, as he would put it, "mechanic form" rather than "organic form", because they are not rooted in the Mind which is the source of the organic wholeness of the cosmos, considered as God's act of *poiesis*.

Even as quite a young man, and in his days as a Unitarian preacher, Coleridge had begun to speculate in this direction, but had drawn a very strict dividing line between philosophy and religion in general, let alone full-blooded Trinitarian Christianity in particular. But by the time he came to write the *Biographia*, he had indeed experienced "a more thorough revolution in my philosophic principles and a deeper revelation into my own heart", and, "my final reconversion to the whole truth in Christ" (*BL*, pgs. 204-5); and so here, he dares to name the Mind and Imagination behind all things, in an allusion to God's self-disclosure to Moses at the Burning Bush, "I AM that I AM".

The second part of this sentence on the Primary Imagination, is equally important; Coleridge calls it, "a repetition in the finite mind in the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM". In other words, the human mind, far from being an "epiphenomenon", a ghost in the machine or a kind of mist thrown up by the mere movement of matter is, in all its imaginative perceiving, correspondent to something else beyond itself, and beyond the cosmos it inhabits. It is scarcely surprising that we find everywhere tantalizing repetitions and echoes of ourselves in nature, that the mind is, "everywhere echo or mirror, seeking of itself"; since our mind itself is a repetition, an echo, of the Mind of the Maker, in whose image we are created.

Coleridge develops this thought in the later *Philosophical Lectures*, also intended, like the *Biographia*, as a kind of preface to his unwritten, *Logosophia*,

"the mind, looking abroad into nature, finds that in its own nature, it has been fathoming nature, and that nature itself is but the greater mirror in which he beholds his own present and his own past beinghe feels the necessity of that one great Being, whose eternal Reason is the ground and absolute condiditon of the ideas in the mind, and no less the ground and the absolute cause of all the correspondent realities in nature."

In God, the living power of Primary Imagination actually causes things to exist; indeed, it is the Logos "through whom all things were made". In the human being, the Primary Imagination is the living power, whereby all things, including humanity itself, are perceived. Because our Primary Imagination is a repetition in our finite mind of God's eternal act of creation, it enables us so to read God's works as to

glimpse through the Mind of our Maker. Unless of course, we perversely choose to refuse that glimpse, refuse to hear “that eternal language”, which “God utters”, just as we might choose to describe our own language entirely in terms of its physicality and not in terms of its meaning.

If we ask, “How is it that the Primary Imagination in God, which is the Logos through whom all things are made, the eternal act of creation, can be repeated in our finite mind” - we will find it in the preface of St. John’s Gospel. Coleridge had intended his great unwritten work, the *Logosophia*, to be a commentary on that preface. In that preface the Logos is described, first in His being with God, “In the beginning the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1) and second, in His being with us, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”. He is also described as *light*, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of humankind”, and again, “that was the true light with lighteth every one that cometh into the world.” Here, the Logos is understood both as what Davies called, “the Light that makes the light that makes the day”, and as that “inner light” whereby we perceive truth in the mind. Just as we require the light of day to perceive the objects outside us, so we require another light in which and through which to apprehend “the inner-landscape.”

That Power which gaue me eyes the World to view,
To see my selfe infus’d an inward light,
Whereby my soule, as by a mirror true,
Of her owne forme may take a perfect sight,
But as the sharpest eye discerneth nought,
Except the sunne-beames in the ayre doe shine:
So the best soule with her reflecting thought,
Sees not her selfe without some light diuine. . .
O Light which mak’st the light, which makes the day!
Which set’st the eye without, and mind within;
'Lighten my spirit with one cleare heauenly ray,
Which now to view it selfe doth first begin.

Davies was himself paraphrasing and versifying a passage from St. Augustine’s, *De Magistro*

But when it is a question of things which we behold with the mind, namely, with our intellect and reason, we give verbal expression to realities which we directly perceive as present in that inner light of truth by which the inner man, as he is called, is enlightened and made happy. But here again, if the one who hears my words sees those things himself with that clear and inner eye of the soul, he knows the things whereof I speak by contemplating them himself, and not by my words. Therefore,

even when I say what is true, and he sees what is true, it is not I who teach him. For he is being taught not by my words, but by the realities themselves made manifest to him by the enlightening action of God from within.

(*Fathers of the Church*, vol. 59, Washington DC: CUA Press, 1968, p. 53-54)

In *De Magistro*, and more largely, in the *Confessions*, and the *De Trinitate*, St. Augustine was developing what came to be known as the “doctrine of illumination”, the notion of the Logos as the inner-teacher confirming truth in us, as an inner light to which we bring all that is offered to us as truth to see whether it is indeed genuine. Christ is the inner light by which every human being recognizes truth as truth; the only difference for Christians is that they recognize Who that inner light is, they know Him by name, and know, in awe, what else He has done for them.

There are many striking similarities between Augustine and Coleridge, and indeed between *De Magistro/Confessions* and *Biographia Literaria*. “Our concern was speech, and speech impelled us. . .” These words (of Eliot’s) might apply equally to Augustine and Coleridge; Augustine was a professor of rhetoric before ever he was a theologian. It was his pursuit of truth in and through his love of literature and language which in the end, like Coleridge, compelled him to do theology. Like Coleridge, he was living in an age of enormous cultural transition and philosophical scepticism; like Coleridge he sensed that the beauty and lucidity of God lay beckoning tantalizingly just beyond the veil of phenomenon. Like Coleridge this apprehension led him to challenge the philosophers of his day on their own ground. As Coleridge was eventually to do, he came to understand that the mystery and freedom of human consciousness are not opposed to, but rather rooted in the mystery and freedom of God’s life as Holy Trinity.

De Magistro is an early work of St. Augustine’s written at the point of transition between rhetoric and theology; indeed, its teaching forms the bridge which links the two. The first part of *De Magistro* is concerned with what we now call semiotics, what is the distinction between sign and symbol? what kind of signs are words? how and in what way is it ever possible for one thing to mean another? The second part of the book shows that the revelation of God in Christ is as much concerned with answering these kinds of questions as it is concerned with addressing issues of “personal salvation”. These are precisely the concerns of the *Biographia*, which is a work that also bridges and connects Coleridge’s insights into language on the one hand, and his apprehensions of God on the other.

Curiously, both men wrote their respective books in an attempt to communicate their vision of life to their sons. *De Magistro* takes the form of a dialogue with Adeodatus, Augustine’s teenage son of whom he was immensely proud. When Adeodatus died the Easter after its composition, Augustine came to think of that dialogue as a memorial to his son’s genius and promise. Readers of *Frost at Midnight* feel they have been brought intimately in touch with Hartley, the sleeping infant, and with all Coleridge’s hopes and dreams for him as he grew up. So it is moving to know that parts of the *Biographia* may well

have been addressed to Hartley as an undergraduate, who came to stay with his father while part of the book was being written. (see Holmes' biography, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections*, p. 386)

If we can see in Coleridge's use of the doctrine of the Logos a continuation of what St. Augustine had begun in *De Magistro*, there is in Coleridge an important new development. Before Coleridge, all the writers, including Davies and Milton and others we have seen in this book, who drew on Augustine's doctrine of illumination, associated the Logos as inner light with *Reason*, albeit intuitive reason rather than discursive reason. Coleridge's great breakthrough was to see that it should be understood in terms of the *Imagination*. We do not, in fact, come to a perception of the world or any understanding of it, as a result of a series of logical deductions or calculations of the discursive reason. It is not the case that a certain quantum of manipulable data falls as it were, ready-made into the mind through the senses, and then we make the necessary calculations to make sense of it. But rather that our minds and hearts go *out* to embrace the world *imaginatively*. There is a kind of "leap of faith", a sudden shaping and finding of the whole; or rather, there is an alternation between our "passively receiving" the influx of what seems to be there, and "actively shaping" its sense and meaning.

Coleridge himself described the imagination as just such an alternation of looking out and taking in, of leaping forward and being borne along; but given the exclusively passive and deterministic caste of thinking against which he was fighting, his initial image of the "leap" in the following passage, is essential:

"Let us consider what we do when we leap. We first resist the gravitating power by an act purely voluntary, and then by another act, voluntary in part, we yield to it in order to light on the spot, which we had previously proposed to ourselves. Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous. 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. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION . . .)"

There is far more about the imagination in this image than even Coleridge purports to get out of it,

containing as it does, three of the deepest elements of Coleridge's symbolic language about imagination: the river, the light and the shadows. He might have made the point about the way in which our acts of perception are alternately active and passive simply by reference to the water-insect, and no more. But by placing his insect upon so vividly imagined a stream, with its surface of rivulets, and the sunlight striking through the water to the bottom of it, he is able to suggest far more than he makes explicit. For example, he implies that however wonderful our imaginative acts of perception might be, we are as yet still only on the surface of things; we move through life on the surface of a stream whose depths we could hardly guess. And yet, we do sometimes glimpse them, fringing the shadows we cast are prismatic colours, suggestive of the light we have not yet turned to face.

The image of the stream itself does so much in its life, its movement, its *inexhaustibility*, its transparency, to cleanse our mind of the alternative images our culture gives us of world and mind, the images of dark, dead matter, of fixed laws, of an inevitably unwinding clock-work mechanism. Along with Heraclitus, Coleridge is reminding us, as in our own age cosmologists and psychologists have reminded us again, that the world flows and the mind too is like a stream, both world and mind welling up from hidden depths.

The image of the inexhaustible river, a fountain of life and light, a force to be reckoned with, submerges and surfaces again at different points in Coleridge's life. He was fascinated by the river as something seen, but whose source is unseen. This fascination goes right back to his childhood, to the days when with his friends he tried to find the source of the river Otter, a river which was the subject of his first accomplished poem, *To the River Otter*, written when he was still an undergraduate, where already the sense of surface and depth, movement and transparency, had entered his imagination.

“What happy and what mournful hours, since last
I skimmed the smooth, thin stone along thy breast,
Numbering its light leaps! Yet so deep impresst
Sink the sweet scenes of childhood that mine eyes
I never shut amid the sunny ray, but straight
With all their tints thy waters rise,
Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows gray,
And bedded sand that veined with various dyes
Gleamed through thy bright transparents! . . .”

As Coleridge matured both as a man and a writer, he left the cloying sweetness of that early style behind; but the river which was its subject continued to flow through his mind and inform his thought. Notebook observations of the rivers and waterfalls, or “forces”, make it clear that he already understood the river as a symbol in his deepest sense of that word.

“The mad water rushes through its sinuous bed, or rather prison of rock,
with such rapid curves, as if it turned the corners, not from the mechanic

force, but with foreknowledge, but like a fierce and skillful driver, great masses of water, one after the other, that in twilight one might have feel-ignly compared them to a vast crowd of huge, white bears, rushing one over the other against the wind - their long, white hair shattering abroad in the wind.”

Here, with his rejection of “mechanic force” and his hint of “foreknowledge” he is already beginning to associate the river with mind and imagination. This is even clearer in another note, also about a lakeland waterfall:

“What a sight it is to look down on such a Cateract! - the wheels, that circumsolve in it - the leaping up and plunging forward of that infinity of Pearls and Glass Bulbs - the continual *change* of the *Matter*, the perpetual *sameness* of the *form* - it is an awful image and shadow of God and the world.”

Here he makes the symbol explicit, and in some respect it has only been in our own century that physicists have come to understand what it might mean to see the apparently static and solid world in terms of the “leaping and plunging Cateract”. It still remains for theology to recover an understanding of God as “that Fountain filling, running”, from whom all things come. (Heaney, translating St. John of the Cross; see ch. 9.)

In looking out at the world of the early 19th century, Coleridge saw a society obsessed only with the surface of the stream, aware only of its lower reaches, and in the *Biographia*, he remembers the projected poem which he and Wordsworth planned but never wrote while they walked together in the Quantock Hills:

“I sought for a subject that should give equal room and freedom for description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature and society, yet supply in itself a natural connection to the parts and unity to the whole. Such a subject I conceived myself to have found in a stream, traced from its source in the hills among the yellow-red moss and conical glass-shaped tufts of bent, to the first break or fall, where its drops become audible, and it begins to form a channel; thence to the peat and turf barn, itself built of the same dark squares as it sheltered; to the sheepfold; to the first cultivated plot of ground; to the lonely cottage and its bleak garden won from the heath; to the hamlet, the villages, the market-town, the manufactories and the seaport.”

Ironically, it was while he was elaborately planning, and signally failing, to write *The Brook*, that Coleridge - accidentally and almost in parenthesis - “retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton” and “without any sensation or consciousness of effort”, found *Kubla Khan* welling up within him, and wrote the great river-poem which was more than any other to embody truths about the imagination which he himself would not make explicit until many years after the poem had been

composed.

Were someone at last to master the whole of what Coleridge has said about God the Word as the hidden Source, at once of the world and of the imagination which apprehends that world, were someone to gather all his scattered observations and link them into the living whole which he hoped would have been his *magnum opus*, the unwritten, *Logosophia*, they might at the end of their endeavor look back to this little poem written in distraction and fever by the young Coleridge, and find that everything had already been said here, not in technical, theological language, but in what Coleridge called, “the language of living symbols”. The river that rises and runs through this poem is not only a sacred river, but is significantly called “Alph”, a name summoning both Hebrew *Aleph* and Greek *Alpha*, and the title of Christ the Logos, the *Alpha and Omega*. This river with its beauty, its dancing imagery, emerges from invisibility into visibility, and then dives deeply again to depths we cannot measure.

This sacred river makes our ground fertile; like Kubla, we can measure and fence, cultivate and build, have our art and our life and our imagination make, as it were, our garden on the side of the river, our “twice five miles of fertile ground”, our “gardens bright with sinuous rills”. But the river itself, we cannot contain; its source is beyond us, and so is the sea to which it flows. All our art and culture, beautiful as it may be, rightly as it may be called a *miracle of rare device*, is in comparison with the life of the sacred river on whose sides we are camping, no more than the shadow of the dome of pleasure floating mid-way on the waves. And yet the second movement of the poem closes with an intimation that we come from the source of that river flowing out of Paradise, and that we are called to find it again. This intimation is given through the final image of the inspired poet acknowledging the source of his inspiration, “weave a circle round him thrice, and close your eyes with holy dread, for he on honeydew hath fed, and drunk the milk of Paradise.”

The river is both the river of Imagination and the river of Being, arising from the same source; and Coleridge’s own account of writing the poem is just this image of that which wells up and finishes with the image of reflections on the surface of a stream. “All the images rose upthings with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions without any sensation of consciousness or effort. . .” and, “All the rest had passed away like images on the surface of a stream onto which a stone has been cast.”

If writing Kubla Khan had been the experience of the twin streams of Being and Imagination, flowing through Coleridge’s mind from their unknowable and unimagined Source in “caverns measureless to man”, then the experience of writing the *Biographia Literaria*, the *Lectures on Shakespeare*, the unfinished *Logosophia*, was the experience of trying to follow the twin streams back to their sacred source. As Coleridge himself wrote in a notebook of 1814:

"I have read of two rivers passing through the same lake, yet all the way preserving their streams visibly distinct a far finer distinction, yet in a subtler union, such, for the contemplative mind, are the streams of knowing and being. The lake is formed by the two streams in man and nature as it exists in and for man; and up this lake the philosopher sails on the junction-line of the

constituent streams, still pushing upward and sounding as he goes, towards the common fountain-head of both, the mysterious source whose being is knowledge, whose knowledge is being - the adorable I AM IN THAT I AM". (*The Portable Coleridge*, p. 315)

Returning then, to the passage on imagination in the *Biographia*, Coleridge has asserted that the power and prime agent of all human perception is not a material mechanism leaving its mark on the passive mind; but on the contrary, is a living power of imagination, "the repetition in our finite minds of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM". It is as though the creative word which speaks the cosmos into being echoes back to God from minds made in His image. Where our echo meshes with His Word, we perceive the world.

Many thinkers might have rested content there, in having achieved an epistemology, a theory of knowledge which set the mind free from mere material mechanism and found a central place for imagination as a distinctive and living human power. But Coleridge goes on to try and find a link between this Primary imagination and what he calls the Secondary Imagination, by which he means what most people would call the imagination of a great poet. He goes on to say that the reason why a human work of art can have such extraordinary coherence, such inner consistency, can "grow to something of great constancy", is because the imagination with which such art is made, is not simply a matter of private inventiveness or so-called self-expression, something Coleridge relegates to the role of Fancy, but is rather itself a living power, a river rising from somewhere deeper than the conscious mind of the artist. It is, as Coleridge calls it, an "echo of the Primary Imagination", but this time co-existing with the conscious will. It co-exists with the conscious will, that is to say the artist consciously co-operates with its agency; but it is not itself simply the product of the conscious will.

This understanding of secondary imagination, the imagination of the artist, as being essentially the same in kind as the Imagination which makes the world, provides the key to Coleridge's greatest literary criticism as well as to the understanding of his own poetry. When he calls Shakespeare a "nature humanized", we see that it is not an idle phrase. The heart of his appreciation of Shakespeare which changed forever the way the English read their own poet, was the discovery of *organic*, as opposed to *mechanic* unity in his plays. The discovery that it is not the fancied rules derived from a reading of Aristotle's, *Poetics*, which allow us to interpret the life and power of the great tragedies, but rather what Coleridge calls the "rules of the Imagination". He says later on, in chapter 18 of the *Biographia*, that the "rules of the Imagination are themselves the very powers of growth and production". This great phrase is often used in the context of his critical appreciation of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, but if we are really to come to terms with what Coleridge is saying about the link between Primary and Secondary Imagination, we should apply this sentence equally to the worlds of biology, astronomy, cosmology should look out, as he did, on the flowing streams around us, on the trees and mountains, on the stars rising in the heavens, and seeing the miraculous growth and production of the world around us, we should say, "the rules of the Imagination are themselves the very powers of this growth and production."

Certainly, if we are to understand the vision and power behind those many moments in Coleridge's prose and poetry in which an account of natural beauty becomes a revelation of truth, then we will reach that understanding by tracing both *world* and *word* back to their single source in the holy Logos, the Imagination of God. Coleridge came to comprehend a unity and continuity between his reason and his faith, both welling up from and animated by imagination. In the last words of the *Biographia*, he seems to revisit that evening walk as a little boy, holding his father's hands while the stars came out, but this time the grown man has found himself drawn into the life of another Father, with the Son, and Holy Spirit.

“, as taught in the Liturgy and Homilies of our Church, though not discoverable by human Reason, is yet in accordance with it; that link follows link by necessary consequence; that Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation: even as the Day softens away into the sweet Twilight, and Twilight, hushed and breathless, steals into the Darkness. It is Night, sacred Night! The upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone: and the outward Beholding is fixed on the sparks twinkling in the awful depth, though Suns of othe Worlds, only to preserve the Soul steady and collected in its pure *Act* of inward Adoration to the great I AM, and to the filial WORD that re-affirmeth it from Eternity to Eternity, whose choral Echo is the Universe.

iii© Miçii© Δiii®”

“There reigns thro’ all the blank-verse poems such a perpetual trick of *moralizing* every thing - which is very well, occasionally - but never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature, without connecting it by dim analogies with the moral world, proves faintness of Impression. 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*.” - Discussing Bowles's poetry - which he otherwise genuinely admired - in a letter of 1802; as quoted in Beer, J. B., *Coleridge the Visionary*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1970, p. 139.

from, *Lachrymae*, by Geoffrey Hill, in which he addresses Christ as, “the East light's embodiments, brilliance made bearable”.

6