



The Poetic Mind: Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge on the Imagination

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This article examines the contributions of three leading British Romantic writers toward advancing a theory of the poetic mind. I show how the works of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, by emphasizing the importance of the imagination, disrupted the conclusions reached by the Age of Enlightenment that championed rationality over spirituality, the scientist over the poet or prophet. In turn, I review a selection of the poetic and prosaic works of each of these writers which seem to best illustrate their evolutive theory of mind. While additionally having recourse to authoritative scholarship, I examine how the imagination becomes the fountainhead of metaphysical truth and perceptual integrity for the Romantic thinkers.

The nature of reality propounded by the so-called Age of “Enlightenment” was built upon systematic theory, a discourse of reason which for the most part renounced the capabilities of spiritual vision. It sought to supplant the emotional and the imaginative with the rational and the analytical. Committed to the demystification of existence, theorists of the time were apt to reduce and codify the world in terms of binaries: subjects and objects, spirits and bodies, universals and particulars, I and other. What the age thus engendered was a proliferation of metaphysical boundaries and, consequently, the narrowing of the “doors of perception.” Against this backdrop of limitation and perceptual diminution, the insurgent glow of Romanticism was born, igniting what Irving Babbitt rightly called “the most dangerous form of anarchy— anarchy of the imagination” (qtd. in Löwy 7). The British Romantic Movement indeed was foremost a rejection of the pervasive idolatry of abstract rationalism in favor of intuition, imagination, and exuberance. It was as well a dissent against modernity—which seemed to signal, with the rise of bourgeois culture and capitalist greed, a fall away from nature and instinctive morality—and the general decadence of the time which made one’s visual-perceptual capabilities dim, partial, and unsympathetic. Hazlitt spoke for his age when he wrote, “[T]he progress of mechanical knowledge...the necessary advances of civilization...are unfavorable to the spirit of poetry. We not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely, and look with more indifference, upon the regular routine of this” (397). In such a time, the poetic genius could not thrive, save by nonconformity and counterrevolu-

tion, by establishing, that is, an article of faith and instruction all their own. As I will show in this essay, the faculty of the imagination is to be considered the vital redemptive power, the antidote restoring to the world its basic unity and to consciousness its abode in infinity. I shall thus explore some of the poetic, as well as prosaic, works of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge in order to bring to light their formally unique, but essentially unified, theories of the imagination, in doing so, it will be made clear that the Romantic theory of mind remains to be a saving force in an increasingly less spiritual, less perceptive modern world.

Of all the British Romantics, William Blake possesses the most fervid antipathy toward doctrines that appear, to him, to enchain and set the limits of perception and action, these being, chiefly, the convictions of institutionalized religion and the fashion of empiricism that grew out of Lockean thought. "There is no natural religion," says Blake, clamoring against the sensationalist beliefs that the mind is imposed upon from the objective, outside world and that all knowledge is sense-perception: "Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. He perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can reason" (2; B. I). The argument against naturalism is very serious indeed, and Blake asserts that the consequence of such a reduction is not only epistemological, it is also ontological; thus he ends the argument:

He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God.

He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.

Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.

(*There is No Natural Religion* 3; B. VII)

A mind that emerges simply as a repository of sensuous experience, with the faculties of memory and reason to produce conceptual generalizations the "nets and gins" of reality, is a mind deprived of its actual and absolute Being—which for Blake is not "communion" with the divine, but divinity itself. Man and God are divorced so long as perception remains, not active and visionary, but passive and set to the controls of reason.

The Blakean disparagement of mechanistic rationalism and its self-caused privation from harmonious eternity is perhaps best exemplified in *The Book of Urizen*: a mythological vision of the cosmic fall from pure, undifferentiated energy to an isolated "unprolific! / Self-closed, all-repelling" orb bounded by universal laws and false injunctions (70; 1.2-3). It is, more symbolically, a myth about the creation-fall of the human mind, the mind that turns inward and "only sees himself only." The Urizenic world—that is, *our* world as it appears through superficial apprehension—is the venture made by the rational ideal (Urizen) to separate from eternal intuition and imaginative vision, so that it may construe itself the self-sufficient sovereign of its own world and enslave every being to its singular, objective legislature. It is, after all, the *reason* of man which prescribes

Laws of peace, of love, of unity:

Of pity, compassion, forgiveness. [...]

One command, one joy, one desire,

One curse, one weight, one measure

One king, one God, one Law. (72; 2. 34-40)

The repetition of “one” does not here signify unity, but oppression; it is an axiom we see Blake repeating in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and it is the vain endeavor to eradicate all contraries and creative differences, to subject each personality to one abstract standard.

Urizen, in the attempt to define a world of his own, is indeed constructing boundaries and taking measurements, but whether or not he is actually a source of creation is debatable, though, according to the text, and to the way in which Blake regards systematic reason, the answer seems evident. On this point, Ronald Grimes has keenly noted that “Blake's vision has no cosmogony. He is unconcerned with 'the' creation and writes only of creating. Urizen is said to have built the 'Mundane Shell,' but ... he builds it around the already existent 'Rock of Albion.'¹ [...] His work is the erection of 'solid obstruction,' which is a parody of visionary construction” (152). Reason alone cannot create. It is clear that Urizen's attempt for individualization and self-enclosure, furthermore, constitutes not creation but degeneration and, in a figurative but still ultimate sense, death.

Urizen laid in a stoney sleep

Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity

The eternal's said: What is this? Death [.]

Urizen is a clod of clay. (74; 3.7-10)

Urizen, the island of pure rationality, has cast himself out of Being, which for Blake signifies the unified state of mind where indivisible faculties and therefore incalculable power reign. Blake seems to associate the essence of the purely rational mind with the material, temporal world by predicating Urizen as a “clod of clay,” the mold of the physical earth. At the heart of this passage is Blake's argument that the ideal which Urizen embodies—the philosophical prescript which feverishly sanctions the tyranny of reason over the other, purportedly lesser faculties—ultimately sunders itself from the realm of the spiritual.

The other faculties, once undivided in the eternal void, are forced to make their fall into Urizen's world in order to curb his destruction. Los, the fallen zoo representing the faculty of imagination, must contain Urizen by framing him in bodily form, thence begetting Enitharmon and a race of imprisoned beings bound by their senses. We might conclude that, for Blake, man's original fall is not from innocence to experience in the Christian sense, but from the Edenic state of pure, eternal mind—which both perceives and *is* the whole—to an embodied dissolution and obscured perception. In arguing that Blake is concerned with the act of creation in its most artificial form, Grimes has, it seems, posited that *The Book of Urizen* is about the inferiority of the analytic to the poetic mind (i.e. the imaginative genius). Reason becomes only imposition on creative energy, and as such, Urizen is the antithesis of the Poet.

For Blake, the imaginative vision—poetic perception—is the creation of the true world in the mind of the “true Man.” Imagination is the power that allows us to “see a World in a grain of sand” (“Auguries of Innocence” 490; 1), to ascertain the macrocosm in the microcosm, to recognize the Absolute Spirit

in every particularity, and to glorify the holy “gifts in other men each according to his genius” (*Marriage* 43; plate 21). The world as he apprehends it is not, as one may be led to believe, devoid of reason and full of pure intoxicated energy, for that would be as incoherent as Urizen's primitive chaos. It is, rather, one where opposites are in a constant state of friction and, consequently, equilibrium; after all, “Without Contraries is no progression” (34; plate 3). “True, Blake's system is based upon intuition or imagination,” writes Hazard Adams, “but it does not therefore dissolve to logical inconsistency” (23). Profuse energy is curbed by rational limitation and vice versa; their union is symbolized in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

As we shall see later on, Wordsworth and Coleridge formulate theories of the imagination that are, to a much greater extent, corporeal and contingent on the external world; their works reveal an inclination toward empiricism (there is, for instance, a definite subject-object dichotomy apparent in Wordsworth's epistemology which Blake decidedly opposes). Wordsworth gives affirmation to the external world and a structure of knowledge gleaned via the observation and meditation of phenomena; his empiricism is easily illuminated in such phrases as “the objects of the Poet's thoughts are every where” [“Preface” 429]. Blake's view of imaginative vision, as Adams notes, is a true Berkeleyan idealism. Thus, we should better qualify perception in his view as *pure* imagination: “. . .the mental image, the form—the very act which creates the image—is the single reality” (24). Vision is not a product of a passive subject's abstracting its received impressions from the outside world; it is, rather, solely the perceptual experience as it occurs in the mind, the “concrete apprehension of an object as it is created in the act of apprehension” (Adams 24). Like Berkeley, Blake seems to believe that the only two existing things are ideas and the souls that perceive them, that materialism is a fiction and that forms are created solely in the human mind. That which is not perceived does not exist and thus he states, quite contrarily to Wordsworth, that “Where man is not, nature is barren” (*Marriage* 38; plate 10). And yet, as God perceives all things and therein gives them life, then to perceive as God perceives is to visualize the undifferentiated whole. This is the work of the imagination.

In the simplest terms, the Blakean scheme encompasses four concepts equally and simultaneously: vision, perception, being, and God. Divinity is reality is perception is vision is imagination. Imaginative energy is *the* distinguishing way of envisioning and apprehending the world, the vehicle essential to the mind of the poet—or the prophet, for to Blake there is no difference—as it battles against imposing Urizenic forces. Why this form of consciousness is particularly poetic may have been best described by Grimes when he proposed that the Blakean “vision is a radicalization of metaphor” (167), which I have interpreted to be a mode of uninhibited, infinitely expansive associationism, the impulse of which is to connect each particular entity to the absolute whole, to identify infinite links between apparently unrelated things. This mode of vision is only possible in a mind liberated from conceptual fixity. Poetry for Blake is divine inspiration; only the redemptive (the imaginative) mind sees

holiness in all things. Blake seems to believe that this ubiquitous holiness characterizes the immediate knowledge of primitive insight, when he writes:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects
with Gods or geniuses, calling them by the names and
adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers,
mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their
enlarged & numerous senses could perceive. (*Marriage* 38; plate 11)

In his exaltation of the “ancient Poets,” Blake is both suggesting that they represent a counterpart with the Romantic poet and is, moreover, reiterating his conception of modernity’s epistemological fall from spiritual vision-based knowledge to “enlightened” myopia. The “enlarged & numerous senses” of the ancients are, of course, set in opposition to the contracted, nominally quintuple senses of modern man. Blake implies that there was something fundamentally poetic about the primordial mind: a mind that is cosmic and, therefore, all-encompassing, a mind that necessitates rehabilitation in the modern world. It is only imagination, the highest mental function, which is capable of “melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite [i.e. the holiness] which was hid” (39; plate 14). The distinction, then, between the analytic and the poetic mind is that one is attuned to comprehend only the surface of reality—“he takes only portions of existence and fancies that the whole” (40; plate 16)—while the other has grasped its undivided, measureless depths.

I earlier contrasted Blake’s vision with Wordsworth and Coleridge, but the imagination in Blakean terms nevertheless has the same teleological significance as it appears in the latter two poets; that is, it constructs a metaphysical understanding and beholds a vision of that understanding that far transcends the surface reality of sense experience and abstraction. Thus, though noticeably different in their outward aspect, there is a fundamental correspondence among Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge on the concept of the imagination. It is primarily a *moral* faculty, which is what ultimately distinguishes it from the arbitrary and purposeless linkings of fancy. As a higher-order mental function, the poetic imagination transports one out of the fettered realm of diminished and wonted perception, and as such out of the mistaken feeling of subjective estrangement—the notion of separateness—to a vision of ultimate unity. As the gates to the poet’s perceptual vision are wholly opened and know no partiality: “observation of affinities / In objects where no brotherhood exists / To passive minds” (*Prelude* 2. 384-386); so, too, her sympathy knows no bounds: “There saw into the depth of human souls, / Souls that appear to have no depth at all / To careless eyes” (*Prelude* 13.166-169). The power of the poetic mind, the imaginative capacity to transcend falsely devised metaphysical perimeters and actually exist in a reality professedly pure and reintegrated, assumes that the poet’s mode of being-in-the-world is quite distinct from the common (i.e. “passive” and “careless”) perceiver. Imagination is a form of vitally active creativity which is, if not in itself a direct work of God, as Blake sees it, then at least a similitude of divine creation. And so, while Wordsworth may certainly have been more reliant on external phenomena and on the capabilities of emotion and recollection, his perception of the world was nonethe-

less not merely empirical naturalism, but an imaginative creation of his own, endowed with essentially the same Blakean moral purpose. For despite differences in perceptual means, there seems scarce difference, metaphysically speaking, between Wordsworth's triumphant assertion, "I felt the sentiment of Being spread / O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still," and Blake's basic doctrine that "...every thing that lives is Holy" (*Marriage* 45; plate 25).

At the same time, Wordsworth's analysis of poetry and the imaginative vision are strikingly at odds with Blake. The latter, for instance, upon criticizing Wordsworth said, "Natural objects always did and now do weaken, deaden, and obliterate imagination in me" (qtd. in Bloom 137). Wordsworth uses the "Preface" to unfold his philosophy and therein puts forth his most essential principles—that the imagination is "colouring...whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and...to make these incidents...interesting by tracing in them...the primary laws of our nature," that poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and that the poet is "a man...endowed with more lively sensibility...[and a] disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present" (428).

Emphasized in this passage are the two key aspects of Wordsworth's theory of the poetic mind: (1) the value of recollection, and (2) the power to modify the world of phenomena, bringing to light true reality and contemplation of the limitlessness of things.

The Wordsworthian imagination is one that reshapes external imagery perceived by the bodily eye to bestow on it, in the mind's eye, meaningful significance and moral value. It is one that reanimates the supposed commonplace images (including people) of daily life in such a way as to make them marvelous, rediscovered emblems of admiration and wonder. As such, his field of vision and recognition, in the Hegelian sense, is truly egalitarian. He seems to understand moral consciousness as being an outgrowth of the imagination

Which [...] —early tutored me
To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon the unassuming things that hold
A silent station in this beauteous world. (*Prelude*, 13. 40-47)

In a preface Wordsworth wrote on "The Thorn," the imagination is similarly defined as "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements" (289), like a sort of mental alchemy which, by transmutation, converts something of apparently base, unexceptional material into something of the richest value, because infused with the spirit of novelty.

Additional themes greatly interesting Wordsworth include the distinction between imagination and fancy, the ways in which the imaginative being is fundamentally incompatible with society, and the interrelationship between emotions, imagination, and perception, from whence is born the poetic "Genius, born to thrive by interchange / Of peace and excitation" (*Prelude*, 13.5-6). Wordsworth left little in the way of commenting on these philosophical concerns; I will examine them in more detail when we get to the work of Coleridge, for here they find developed and scrupulous elucidation. It is, in any

case, more crucial to explore, if we want to understand Wordsworth's imagination, the bearing of Nature in its threefold form and memory to the poetic mind.

The word "Nature," in Wordsworth's writings, is semantically immense. It embraces first the visible world of nature (lower-case "n") appreciated by the senses and simple perception of forms, which makes immediate and lasting impressions on the soul; as well as Nature (capital "N"), the perception of the harmony encompassing nature and man, the flow of divine, universal Being and immortal beauty and joy. Harold Bloom writes, "[t]he visible body of Nature is more than an outer testimony of the Spirit of God to him; it is our only way to God. [...] Ordinary perception is then a mode of salvation... provided that we are awake fully to what we see" (124). Nature may stand before ordinary (i.e. external, naturalistic) perception, but that is not to say it is apprehended by ordinary consciousness; for unless one's thoughts and imagination match in greatness—for these "half-create" our vision of the world ("Tintern" 106)—and are attuned to see Nature as a minister and interpreter of God/Truth, one sees only superficially or can be entertained in fancy alone. What distinguishes the poetic mind from ordinary consciousness is a matter of admitting a sort of transcendental continuity to otherwise disconnected objects in the world. The poet's vision sees every object in nature as a symbol of some spiritual truth, some representation of an aspect of universal humanity. Nature, writes Wordsworth, "can so inform / The mind that is within us, / ... and so feed / With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues, / ... nor all / The dreary intercourse of daily life, / Shall e'er ... disturb / Our cheerful faith" ("Tintern" 125-133).

Wordsworth traces the relationship between Nature and the forming of the poetic mind in "Tintern Abbey," a small-scale version of *The Prelude* which equally explores the poet's development from thoughtless childhood rapture to mature contemplation, an act of intentional looking which is aware of the infinitude of the spectacle. Here Wordsworth chronicles his return to the banks of the Wye, a landscape which recreates for him a vast image of childhood energy and its "aching joys," where he was imbued with the external world and simply blended with it, "like a roe / I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides / Of deep rivers, and the lonely streams, / Wherever nature led" (67-70). The enjoyments of nature then were purely passive. Now in adulthood, Wordsworth, though physically in the scene, senses that he is on the outside, a quiet admirer whose thoughts and imagination enchant the landscape. The sublime feelings experienced as a child have lulled one into a pleasant tranquility and a conscious understanding "of something far more deeply interfused" (96). Now Nature is not merely a playground of wild delight but the source of the awakening of infinite Being. For Nature gives to Wordsworth self-affirmation and, in turn, seems to emanate a moral law which teaches him to give respect and due recognition to all of humanity, determining in him that the love of nature leads to the love of man. Indeed, insofar as we can, and should, define religion as the relation of human consciousness to universal sympathy, free-

dom, and a metaphysical understanding of reality, then Wordsworth—like Blake—is a highly religious poet.

The imagination develops organically, first by virtue of intense feeling and sensuous experience, and later through the mediation of the higher faculties, specifically retrospection. “This faculty [imagination] hath been the moving soul / Of our long labour” (*Prelude*, 14.193-194), writes Wordsworth. The experiences of childhood under Nature's tutelage, particularly those sublime feelings of fear and awe which bond to the natural objects of the world, constantly fuel the growing soul. They become embedded in the memory and are recalled throughout later years in a “sober pleasure” (“Tintern” 139). Thus forms the poetic mind. Wordsworth writes:

...but that the soul,
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, whereto
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,
 With faculties still growing, feeling still
 That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
 Have something to pursue. (*Prelude*, 2.315-322)

Vital to the disciplining process is that the child confronts his emotional states as they are projected into the world. Recollecting his own experiences, Wordsworth paints for exemplification the “stolen boat” incident. Here he demonstrates how, coalescing with an acute sentiment of guilt, surroundings seem to take on terrific forms, merciless shapes that rise to enormous heights and engulf the child in his cosmic smallness. Such is the way Nature inculcates the growing soul with “unknown modes of being” (*Prelude*, 1.393)—metaphysical lessons. Wordsworth's imagination, in retaining the spirit of childhood and the “spots of time” which engender a perpetually “blessed mood” (“Tintern” 37), is directed invariably at the recognition of Universal Being in all things. Ultimately, it is pointed toward the same Blakean apocalyptic vision which fuses all “discordant elements” (*Prelude* 1.343): the transcendental obliteration of all distinction and limitation into absolute unity.

Coleridge's views about the imagination, though not radically disparate, are markedly erudite compared to Blake and Wordsworth; and intentionally so, for Coleridge, being heavily influenced by German Idealism, was wont to think analytically and philosophically about the mind. His systematic account of the human imagination in the *Biographia Literaria* sets forth preliminary distinctions: first between primary and secondary imagination, and then, more broadly, between imagination and fancy. Of the former, he writes: “The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former...differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to create” (159). This weaves two interrelated functions of the imagination: the first which intuits, feels, perceives, and the second—the poetic function—which shapes, re-creates, and coadunates in

order to give symbolical meaning and depth to otherwise opaque content. We are to understand it, then, in terms of gradation; all that separates the poetic mind from ordinary consciousness is the ability to leap from the lower to the higher imaginative potential. Coleridge coined the term “the esemplastic power” which he perhaps considered more refined or unequivocal than imagination, yet it has the same creative implication. “Esemplastic,” according to the OED, means “having the function of moulding into unity; unifying.” Mary Warnock gives a concise elucidation on the Coleridgean imagination which, we should discern, is but an echo of Blake and Wordsworth: “[Imagination] must try to create *one thing* (one thought or one form) out of the many different elements of experience; and this entails *extracting the essence* of the differing phenomena of experience” (92). It is the same function which makes the poet conscious of universality-in-particularity, of infinity in apparent finitude, and of the underlying unity of opposites.

The Romantic distinction between imagination and fancy is likewise given formal articulation by Coleridge. Fancy, he says, is “indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space...modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice” (160). As opposed to imagination, then, fancy is simply an aimless and passive association of images collected in memory from experience; in effect, it can only imitate nature, only re-produce by combining accidentalities or facts (fixities) already given. It is not a shaping or synthetic power, nor is it a proper vehicle to convey, through symbolism, the highest universal ideas or arrive cognitively at the Forms—here I am referring to the “generally held opinion among scholars,” as critic James Baker attests, that Coleridge was “a born Platonist” (62). Implied in the Platonism of Coleridge is the rejection, resounding Blake, that Absolute Ideas (i.e. universals) are grounded in the world of everyday experience and can be reached by empirical means. A closer reading of Plato's theory of art will show, Baker notes, that in accordance with Coleridge's thought it is the imagination that “intuits the real...ideas behind the sensuous forms and establishes...direct contact with the divine” (119). Coleridge declares emphatically that the true poet will, once apprehending this higher reality, thereafter employ a language of symbolism—the poet's preeminent device—to convey what only the imagination can unlock: the “translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal” (*Statesman's Manual* 30). Finally, the whimsical play of fancy cannot be, as imagination is, the source of organic aestheticism: “the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination” (qtd in Abrams, 225). It would, rather, be determined by a mechanism that is decidedly repellent to our three Romantics. We have seen that the poetic mind is not at all foremost involved in creating flights of clever verse, but in uncovering reality's equally immanent and transcendent poesy.

In considering what was to be the objective of their combined project, *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge chose more or less diametric material out of which the poems were to be composed. Though Wordsworth's was grounded on the familiar (i.e. nature), while Coleridge's the unfamiliar, both styles convey the same effect: to “excite [the] feeling” that common perception

sees but little of the spiritual reality of things, that there are more wonder-full things on earth than are dreamt of in our philosophies. Coleridge's mode of imagination thus characteristically gives way to pure "shadows of imagination" (*B.L* 161) in the form of the grotesque and supernatural, but only insofar as this form serves to symbolically represent truths of the inner phenomena of the human psyche. His poetic interest is primarily the exploration of the foreign, "twilight realms of consciousness" (*B.L*, 161), and the discrepancy between the unfamiliar mental experiences of the alienated individual, and the complacent, humdrum world of society. Thus, we may, for instance, read "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" or "Christabel" entirely as symbolic portrayals of psychological and/or spiritual occurrences, often transformative, which tend to ensue in moments when one is jolted out of, or willingly sequestered from, the ordinary world of collective consciousness.

In "The Eolian Harp"—a poem whose titular symbol Geoffrey Grigson was to brand "the really prime romantic image (qtd. in Warnock, 109)—Coleridge writes: "...never guiltless may I speak of him, / The Incomprehensible! Save when with awe / I praise him, and with Faith that inly *feels*" (58-60). For Coleridge, imaginative energy and, in fact, the efficacy of divine inspiration seem to be concurrent with, and contingent upon, one's capacity for feeling. What emerges in his later works, most notably "Dejection: An Ode," is a definitive rift from the Wordsworthian reliance on external nature and recollection, when he writes:

Though I should gaze for ever
 On that green light that lingers in the west:
 I may not hope from outward forms to win
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.
 Oh lady! We receive but what we give,
 And in our life alone does Nature live. (43-48)

Coleridge has, to some degree, sundered himself from the harp metaphor. Imagination radiates from the mind alone and from personal feeling: "from the soul itself must issue forth / A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud / Enveloping the Earth" (53-55). He seems to have turned more toward the Blakean Idealism that reiterates the notion that "Where man is not, nature is barren." As such the bodily eye is dismissed as a real source of vision, and nature is active and beautiful only insofar as it is spirited by the human mind. And yet, in a paradoxical manner, for Coleridge, influence and effluence seem to be equally dependent on each other; for if we are still to heed the metaphor, the poet, like an aeolian harp, is awoken only by the currents of outward life. This paradox puts Coleridge's imagination into an unprolific abeyance. In despair of mental vapidness, when the lamp of the soul's joy—which is imagination, the "beauty-making power" ("Dejection" 63)—is vanquished, Coleridge discovers that the loss can neither be revoked by the power of nature alone nor avail the remembrances of strong emotion where no tranquility remains. Thus, we see the mind-nature relationship as equally dependent on each other. They must be fitted together harmoniously, must form a synthesis, if genius is to occur and if they are to merge into unified identity. This equation of subject and object informs,

above all, the transcendental idealism that Coleridge adopted. There is, incidentally, a faint impression afforded to the reader that underlying Coleridge's dejection is the fact that he was never quite able to experience Nature as Wordsworth could; and that unlike Wordsworth, he, passively and in solitude, had to wait more patiently for a breeze to blow by and set his songs in motion.

The poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lived in a world that had clearly fallen. "Poets of earlier times," explains R.A Foakes, "had been able to assume as their frame of reference a concept of an ordered and stable universe, organized in a system of degrees ranging from God through angels, men and beasts to inanimate objects" (39). This concept of a well-organized universe was simply a rationalized, delimitating, and demoralizing (because fallacious) ideal that attracted neither the poetic mind nor the experienced commoner. As we have seen, the Romantics nevertheless did envision a world of order, one that would prove redemptive and, ultimately, provide an answer to philosophy's perennial problem of the one and the many. This was not, as in the past, a counterfeited order established through differentiation and systematic hierarchies of being, nor through concepts and laws imposed upon the human being from abstract speculation and dogma. It was through the given faculty of imagination available to all—provided it is in combination with intellect, a good will, and a spiritual faith to apprehend the world as it *really* is—but seldom manifested in any but the poetic genius. Whether it is Blake's mystical vision inspired by divine command, Wordsworth's worship of Nature and of sympathy all-embracing, or Coleridge's exploration of strange inner conscious and unconscious phenomena, it is important again to recognize that their idiosyncratic, technical differences concerning the theory of the imagination—in broader terms, the relationship of the inner and external world—should not obscure what, in essence, is all one. Arguably the most consummate explanation of the poetic mind as moral, religious, and creative apparatus is given by Coleridge himself:

The poet...brings the whole soul of man into activity. [...] He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that...fuses each into each, by the synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination. [It] reveals itself in the balance of reconciliation of...discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; ...the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement.
(*Biographia Literaria*, 166)

The imagination as active, transformative power is at bottom a reflection of the divinely creative constitution of Nature, transcending sensual bounds, reconciling apparent contraries, and penetrating the perceptual barriers that obscure intrinsic harmony. As such, the poetic mind not only acts to synthesize itself with Nature, Truth, and God—which are, we have seen, interchangeable signifiers—it simultaneously bridges the gap between art, philosophy, and religion.

Notes

1.) Albion, according to Blake's comprehensive creation-myth (best illustrated in his *Four Zoas*), is the first fallen being and therefore the true patriarch of the human race. Urizen is one of the four zoas (divisions) created by the fall of Albion—the others being Tharmas, Los, and Orc. The Rock of Albion, otherwise known as the Rock of Ages, is the location where Albion remains until the Last Judgment.

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