

**Towards a Poetics of Becoming:  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge's and John Keats's Aesthetics Between Idealism  
and Deconstruction**

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## **DEDICATION**

*To the memory of Professor John Akwe LAMBO and all the prematurely fallen intellectual and academic heroes.*

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## ABSTRACT

*Towards a Poetics of Becoming: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's and John Keats's Aesthetics Between Idealism and Deconstruction* grapples with a new aspect in reading and interpreting Romantic textuality, evident in both writers. Resisting the radical presuppositions of current idealist critical readings on the one hand, and modern and postmodern critical approaches that sideline Romantic aesthetic and spiritual idealism and dismiss Romantic theory as a whole respectively, the work sets forth to re-evaluate Romantic idealism from within the interpretative context of the philosophy of becoming. In this vein, it argues that a majority of the texts of Coleridge and Keats strongly substantiate their long sustained idealism, through a permanent process of transformation and changes in the developing self towards a desired goal.

The centrality of the poetics of becoming, the work conjectures, is understood from a reformulation of Schlegel's Romantic theory on irony and becoming, and Hegel's idealistic dialectics, which argue for the non-progressive contradictory self and the spiral attainment of absolute knowledge respectively. The hermeneutic and phenomenological understanding of logical and constructive irony, paradox, fragmentation, self-contradiction, anti-self-consciousness and constructive deferral, do not only place the texts treated as dynamic and highly interrelated with other texts, but most importantly the developing and transforming self of the writers, positing the argument that the question of self-presence and intentionality is tenable in the process of becoming.

## ABSTRACT

*Towards a Poetics of Becoming: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's and John Keats's Aesthetics Between Idealism and Deconstruction* befasst sich mit einem neuen Aspekt in der Interpretation romantischer Texte, die in beiden Autoren aufscheint. Im Gegensatz zu den radikalen Auffassungen gegenwärtiger idealistischer Lesarten einerseits und moderner und postmoderner kritischer Herangehensweisen, die romantischen ästhetischen und spirituellen Idealismus ebenso wie romantische Theorie als Ganze für nebensächlich betrachten, andererseits, versucht die vorliegende Arbeit, romantischen Idealismus ausgehend vom interpretativen Kontext einer Philosophie des Werdens zu betrachten. Auf diese Weise kann sie behaupten, dass die Mehrzahl der Texte von Coleridge und Keats ihren deutlich zum Ausdruck gebrachten Idealismus durch die Betonung eines andauernden Prozesses der Transformation des sich entwickelnden Selbsts hin zu einem ersehnten Ziel logisch aufrecht erhalten können.

Die Arbeit schließt daraus, dass die zentrale Rolle der Poetik des Werdens aus der Reformulierung von Schlegels Theorie von Ironie und Werden und Hegels idealistischer Dialektik, die sich für ein nicht immer fortschreitendes widersprüchliches Selbst und eine spiralförmige Annäherung an absolute Erkenntnis ausspricht, verstanden werden muss. Das hermeneutische und phänomenologische Verständnis von logischer und konstruktiver Ironie, des Paradoxen, der Fragmentierung, des Selbstwiderspruchs, des Anti-Selbstbewusstseins und der konstruktiven Verzögerung lässt die behandelten Texte nicht nur als dynamisch und hochgradig mit anderen Texten verbunden erscheinen, sondern am allerwichtigsten als Abbilder der sich entwickelnden und verändernden Selbstentwürfe ihrer Autoren, was zum Argument führt, dass eine Präsenz von Selbst und Intentionalität durchaus in einem Prozess der Werdens aufrecht erhalten werden kann.

## RESUME

Ce travail de recherche intitulé *Towards a Poetics of Becoming : Samuel Taylor Coleridge's and John Keats's Aesthetics Between Idealism and Deconstruction* est une thèse qui vise vers une nouvelle dimension du traitement de l'idéalisme et de la philosophie du Devenir dans les textes romantiques des deux écrivains. Il poursuit deux buts principaux: premièrement de re-évaluer les propositions idéalistes et peu convenables dans la théorie et critique traditionnelle du romantisme, et deuxièmement, de résister les théories modernes (la psycho-analyse et Nouvel Historicisme) et postmodernes (surtout la Déconstruction de type Derrida, de Man et Hillis), transposées sur l'esthétique et la philosophie romantique. La majorité des textes de Coleridge et Keats démontrent l'idéalisme romantique et la poétique du Devenir comme une continuité du soi, caractérisée par une permanente transformation constructive vers un but précis.

Tirant de la philosophie romantique et de l'idéalisme allemand, principalement l'ironie romantique de Friedrich Schlegel et la dialectique de Hegel, le concept du Devenir n'est pas vu dans le contexte de non-progression de forces psychiques opposées, comme envisagé par Schlegel, et non plus dans un contexte du savoir absolu, comme exigé par Hegel. Suivant un plan constructif d'herméneutique et phénoménologique de la théorie littéraire, de l'ironie, du paradoxe, la contradiction en soi, et de la construction déferale, les textes sont vus comme exprimant non seulement un dynamisme en relation avec d'autres textes, mais le plus important est un développement large et positif du soi, qui a une grande présence dans les textes. Dans ce sens, l'idéal n'est pas atteint, mais c'est possible qu'il soit poursuivi dans le contexte du Devenir.

# **TOWARDS A POETICS OF BECOMING: SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S AND JOHN KEATS'S AESTHETICS BETWEEN IDEALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THE AIMS OF THIS THESIS**

This work seeks to examine the hermeneutic and phenomenological implications of the Romantic poetics of becoming in selected poetic and prose texts of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats. The poetics of becoming may sound like a common theme in Romantic discourse, but it has not been given the particular attention it deserves. Though the formulations of this phenomenon can be traced in German Idealism and Romantic philosophy, Coleridge and Keats lend ample credence to it in a considerably large corpus of their writings. In fact, the thesis proposes to treat Coleridge's and Keats's Romantic idealism from a modified perspective, considering the philosophy of becoming as best describing Romantic thought, against the background of critical and practical concerns, pertaining to modernism and Deconstruction, which have altogether dismissed or sidelined idealism as a distinctive feature in Romantic philosophy and literature. Idealism and its centrality in Romanticism has met with a veritable amount of theoretical and practical criticism. Nevertheless, research in this domain is in-exhaustive and points to several ways with which critics can explore new theoretical concepts in discussing it, and/or re-evaluating what extant criticism has produced with regard to its implications. It is in this line that we proceed with our arguments, critically discussing Romantic texts both from an intrinsic and extrinsic perspective to reformulate the central issue of textual dynamism and becoming in English Romanticism.

The new approach in analysing Romantic textuality in this study is indebted to Anne Mellor, whose *English Romantic Irony* (1980) challenges M. H. Abrams's Romantic visionary scheme, and grapples with the main question of Romantic irony from Friedrich Schlegel's philosophical conceptualisation of becoming as the end result of what he calls Romantic Irony or the Critical Faculty. While Mellor argues the question of irony and paradox from an idealist and constructivist position, she, like Schlegel, paradoxically sees becoming as the non-progressive longing towards ultimate reality in the Romantic quest. Following Schlegel's theory of poetry and philosophy of life, the Romantic quest is never ending, it is conceived rather as an infinite continuity in stagnation. In other words, becoming is not perceived as progressive, but as a permanent contradiction of opposites with no possibility of reconciliation. Mellor sees the fragmentary and open-ended nature of Romantic texts as anti-systematic, asserting that Keats undermines his Romantic enthusiasm, and denying Coleridge this philosophical consideration. This complexity, as we will later see, necessitates a modification of Schlegelian philosophy and Hegel's idealist progressive dialectics in Coleridge's and Keats's idealism.

Tilottama Rajan in *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (1980), makes a kind of obituary on Romantic idealism when she dismisses the imagination, which is very central in understanding this domain of Romantic studies: "The official Romantic metaphysics of the Imagination is being put to rest" (p. 21). She re-iterates this view in "Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics" (1995), stressing that the only way to approach Romanticism is on deconstructive terms (p. 159). This typical deconstructionist and biased position, which is a legacy of Derridean and de Manian poetics of Deconstruction, has raged against Romantic philosophy and literature. Deconstruction, which will be given more attention in later parts of the thesis, has been adopted and espoused by many critics,

who see Romantic theory as demonstrating a misconstrued, deceptive and deconstructive poetics in linguistic discourse. In this vein, one principally baffling question which remains to be adequately answered is whether present Postmodernism and Poststructuralism in the particular guise of Deconstruction are sincerely doing service or disservice to the enterprise of literary studies, particularly Romantic studies.

More complicated are the adopted and expounded critical stances of Romantic visionary criticism. Visionary criticism has also problematised its ontological apprehension of the Romantic idealism, often interpreting texts as if they expressed the finality and permanence of imaginative, intuitive and metaphysical vision. Rolf Breuer's "Coleridge's Concept of Imagination – With an Interpretation of 'Kubla Khan'" (1980) treats the poem as exemplary of Hegelian dialectics, claiming that, 'Kubla Khan' has a totality of aesthetic and spiritual vision. This unconvincing reading gives the impression that Coleridge reached an end in his creativity with the composition of this poem. In *The Odes of John Keats* (1981), Helen Vendler adopts a structuralist approach, seeing 'Ode to Autumn' as a culmination of Keats's aesthetic vision. The impression once more is the problematic conceptualisation that Keats progressively attains his artistic achievement. In *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (1983), the New Historicist Jerome McGann has underscored his preoccupation with this problematic, reacting to M. H. Abrams's visionary and idealist convictions, and quarrelling that:

Like Hegel, Abrams offers a programme of Romanticism rather than a critical representation of its character; as such, both reify certain key Romantic self-conceptualisations like "spirituality," "creativity," "process," "uniqueness," "diversity." Indeed, the concept of "synthesis" and "reconciliation" as these appear in the received Romantic texts and their commentaries are themselves Romantic concepts whose meanings cannot be taken at face value. They lie at the very heart of Romanticism's self-representation and as such they must be subject to critical analysis. (p. 32)

McGann touches the core of the problem of uncritically treating idealism in Romantic texts with his mentioning of Romantic categorisations. He further echoes the collapse of Romantic idealism in his article “Rethinking Romanticism” (1992), where he stresses the need to reconsider the debate about the theory of Romanticism, strongly favouring cultural studies and feminist scholarship (p. 735). As we are going to see later in Chapter One, even though Abrams concedes to the question of critically evaluating key aspects of Romantic self-representation, he does not concretely offer a theoretical or practical base upon which modifications and re-conceptualisations of Romantic canons should be handled.

Other theoretical and critical positions, as will be seen later, posit arguments which no doubt acknowledge the philosophical and literary ramifications of Romantic idealism, but distance the from the poet in the sense that it is estranged from his sensibility and seen to function as an independent component of the poet’s creative mind, or advance other arguments about idealism that need to be re-evaluated. We are here referring to New Historicist, psychoanalytical and other negative hermeneutic and phenomenological readings on both writers.<sup>1</sup> The main thrust of the present investigation is not a resurrection or rebirth of Romantic idealism, which is the principal concern among Romantic visionary critics. It is rather a contention that even if the positions of those against it might be persuasively argued, it can still be appropriately re-conceptualised and strongly reaffirmed in Romantic and Post-romantic studies, for hermeneutic and phenomenological clues continue to offer innovative and acceptable ways to read and interpret Romantic literature. In other words, the attempt here is to map out a new dimension with which Romantic textuality can be understood as inconclusive and open-ended, or unfinished and unfinishable, but expressive of a constructive idealism rather than an anti-systematic consciousness of self.

This endeavour, therefore, moves in line with the attempts to throw more light on what research has produced, and in so doing would try to discover or break new grounds in reading and interpreting English Romantic literature. We are talking about the idealistic enthusiasm and dynamics of becoming in Coleridge and Keats, against the principal background of Deconstruction's dislocation and distortion of this idealism in the framework of Postmodern and Poststructural discourse, and other mentioned theories which share common features with Deconstruction. The interest taken here, however small or imperceptible it may be, rests on the poets' aesthetic and transcendental vision of life and experience through their conscious or unconscious attempt to work out a poetics of becoming that will be proven in this thesis to be unquestionably tenable. In their attempt to define themselves, to give meaning to life, it goes without doubt that Coleridge and Keats usually sought for means that were eccentric especially to the general culture, aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual context of their time and to an extent even today. Their artistic, mystical and transcendental longings demonstrated their idealist philosophy, and were justified by the magnifying and sharpening power of the imagination, which we must stress, is central in the discussion of Romantic idealism, interpreted here with a modified view from extant critical literature.

### **ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN S. T. COLERIDGE AND J. KEATS**

It may sound curious to carry out research on Coleridge and Keats, who though of the same literary movement, have been stereotypically characterised in two different categories. It is the intention here to debunk such categorisations that has partly inspired this thesis. Coleridge and Keats are usually considered at opposed ends of the scale: Coleridge as the universal philosopher, Keats as a limited aesthete. This thesis



wishes to show their similarities. In fact, it wishes to show that First-Generation and Second-Generation Romantics are still related in terms of their philosophy and aesthetics. And within the specific context of the poetics of becoming, their texts will be seen as demonstrating a sameness that no critical conjecture has grappled with. But before we go into details, it will be necessary to make certain considerations, which will facilitate the bridging of both writers.

Though Keats can arguably be said to have owed little or nothing to the elderly Coleridge, there exists proof that he discusses him in one of his canonical letters on poetry. In this letter, addressed to George and Thomas Keats, December 21 and 27 1817, Keats advances one of his authoritative views on the excellence of art in relation to beauty and truth, and also talks of literary achievement:

[S]everal things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet, the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 369 – 370)<sup>2</sup>

It can be understood here that placing Coleridge within his critical canon presupposes Keats having read Coleridge's work or somehow come into contact with him. Keats was aged 22 and by this time Coleridge had written and published most of his so-called enduring and canonical poems. The main paradox in this letter points to the difference which Keats supposes to make as the distinction between Coleridge and himself. Keats denies Coleridge the quality of negative capability, which as we shall see, is one of the common features that they both share. There is also clear evidence that both poets met, at least once, and discussed several topics – poetry, poetical sensation, metaphysics. Keats's account of this encounter, sent to George and

Georgiana Keats and supposedly dated, April 15 1819, is recorded in one of his letters:

Last Sunday I took a walk towards Highgate and in the lane that winds by the side of Lord Mansfield's park I met Mr [Joseph] Green our Demonstrator at Guy's [Hospital] in conversation with Coleridge – I joined them, after enquiring by a look whether it would be agreeable – I walked with him a[t] his alderman-after dinner pace for two miles I suppose. In those two miles he broached a thousand things – Nightingales, Poetry – on Poetical sensation – Metaphysics – Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmares – a dream accompanied by a sense of touch – single and double touch – A dream related – First and Second consciousness – a difference explained between will and Volition – so many metaphysicians from want of smoking the second consciousness - Monsters – Kraken – Mermaids – [S]outhey believes in them – [S]outhey's belief too much diluted – A Ghost story – I heard his voice as he came towards me – I heard his voice as he moved away – I heard it at all interval – if it may be called so. He was civil enough to ask me to call on him at Highgate. (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 468)

From every account as indicated in the letter, Coleridge in his usual style must have overshadowed the young Keats. Reputed for his eloquence and charisma, qualities that fitted very well into his preaching and lecturing spirit, Coleridge loved to be listened to. Seen from the letter's contents, there is evidence of commonly shared issues, even though Keats does not name them all. The various topics Coleridge discussed pertaining to dreams, consciousness, preoccupied their aesthetics as well as metaphysical investigations. As to Coleridge's invitation there is, unfortunately, no indication (as of now) that Keats eventually called on him at Highgate.

In his interesting article, "Keats, Coleridge and the Reflective Imagination" (1998), Jeffrey Branch attempts an intertextual study in which he is of the fervent conviction that this famous chance encounter must have influenced Keats's poetry in certain ways. He contends that Coleridge must have exerted a degree of influence on 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' in which the affinities he finds between these two poems and Coleridge's *Christabel* and *Love* cannot have been mere coincidence. This fascinating evidence of Coleridge, he continues, is also decipherable in 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' which Keats

echoes in his Chapman poem (p. 183). Branch however reminds his reader that his intention is not to label Keats a plagiarist since he reveals an unmistakably individual voice (p. 185). Branch's presuppositions do not give a satisfactory account of the relationship, since he is limited to the scope of poetic influences on Keats by Coleridge.

Another very revealing account of the relationship between the poets is to be found in Richard Holmes extensive and critical biography, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (1999), (pp. 496 – 500). Holmes provides evidence from *Table Talk* (1830) to substantiate the fact that not only Keats reacted and responded to their 1819 meeting. Extracting excerpts from the questioning and answering session, piloted by Hookham Frere, Holmes proves that Coleridge was also affected by the young poet and had his own account of the encounter:

He (Keats: *my emphasis*) passed on, but a few moments sprung back and said, "Mr. Coleridge, allow me the honour of shaking your hand." I was struck by the energy of his manner, and gave him my hand. He passed on and we stood looking after him, when Mr. Green said, "Do you know who that is? That is Keats, the poet." "Heavens," I said, "when I shook him by the hand there was death!" That was about two years before he died. (Holmes, p. 499)

This prophesying potential is a very intriguing aspect of Coleridge's character. As a child, he is said to have predicted the death of his father after getting up from a dream (his fourth biographical letter to Thomas Poole in 1797 to be examined in Chapter Three bears testimony to this). This is a phenomenon which he had previously expressed on another young man before Keats, Adam Steinmetz, who died in 1832. Though Holmes expresses some reservation and scepticism on the issue, supposing that Coleridge might simply have been retrospectively inspired by Steinmetz's death, he all the same argues favourably that Coleridge's extraordinary responsiveness to gifted young people, and his preternatural sensitivity to Keats's state may have been perfectly genuine (p. 499).

Of great interest, also, is the fact that Coleridge read Keats's poetry. He is said to have read two of Keats's sonnets and 'Hyperion.' During his final years he also read with keen delight the whole of 'The Eve of St. Agnes' to visitors at Highgate, and was moved to discover that the Paris publisher Galignani had produced an anthology of three English poets, featuring Keats, Shelley and Coleridge (*Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats* 1829). The relevance of establishing all this material is to show that relating the two poets is far from being a casual or mere incidental issue.

A comparison of both poets, moreover, shows that their lives, poetry, philosophy and literary thought pointed significantly to the same direction in a number of ways. A biographical comparison can perhaps account for the context within which they wrote and espoused their thought.<sup>3</sup> From his childhood to old age, Coleridge led a very difficult life. Financial insecurity haunted him. He took to different means of raising money to sustain his family, but hardly did he have a satisfying situation. He took to opium as a means to killing pain but ended up addicted to it, was domestically not very responsible and was emotionally tortured by tempestuous and never satisfying love. He suffered from the stress of having married Sara Fricker, a circumstantial and ill-fated marriage, which led to separation because of unbearable incompatibility of temperament. Before his marriage, he had known and fallen in love with a certain Mary Evans, and after marriage his idealistic love for Sara Hutchinson, sister-in-law to Wordsworth, only worsened things for him and his family on the one hand, and his great friendship with Wordsworth, who was very critical of his attitude on the other hand. Poems like 'The Pains of Sleep,' 'Dejection: A Letter' and 'Dejection: An Ode' typify his emotional and spiritual needs, moral failures and psychological dependence, and most importantly his permanent struggle to focus on his aesthetic and spiritual enthusiasm and hopes. More specifically, his relationship with Evans and Hutchinson greatly fuelled a good part of his poetic creativity, and showed the extent to which

questions on gender and its relationship with his monistic philosophy can be understood in his work, as will be seen later.

As with Coleridge, suffering, tragedy, despair, are all familiar words in Keats's experience and poetic productivity and spiritual speculations and investigation. He lived a short life that registered so many calamities. His mother died in 1804, a shattering experience as it left him in "a horrid Morbidity of Temperament," his father died in 1810, he himself suffered from illness as a result of fatigue and exposure during his travels in the West Highlands in 1818. He caught a sore throat and subsequently tuberculosis from which he was never to be free till his own death. He agonised about the permanent departure of his brother George to America in 1818. Another brother, Tom, died that same year. The vicious attacks on his poetry by *The Quarterly* only helped to complicate things, as he suffered from the anxiety of becoming a great poet. His obsessive love for Fanny Brawne brought him no happiness, and this was undoubtedly worsened by his constant lack of financial means to support his life, let alone a wife. Yet, these all point to the core of his paradoxical apprehension of life.

While he might have been emotionally traumatised, these experiences provided a fuelling energy for his poetic and artistic creativity. They also shaped his philosophical and certainly spiritual outlook of life. He accepted life's bitter experiences, its grimness. So he can be seen in his work as seriously engaged with a finely blended apprehension of human tragedy and the quest for a certain degree of order and happiness. In other words, his work can be interpreted as an expression of a profound sense of kinship with suffering humanity, and the tension between it and his sensuous and spiritual love for Beauty. His philosophical formulations of the "vale of tears" and the "vale of Soul-making" evince this argument.

Both Coleridge and Keats found poetry to be the primary interest in their life, for it was considered the highest form of human expression. Coleridge was to take holy orders for priesthood. Though he preached, lectured and was deeply concerned with philosophical investigations, his supreme interest lay in poetry. He equally had a great interest in chemistry and biological sciences, some of whose vocabulary finds expression in his works. He is even alleged to have had an interest in Medicine.<sup>4</sup> Keats, though he had no formal education, practised to become a surgeon. He qualified but abandoned this field for poetry (informed and enriched by his wide reading) which occupied the rest of his life. The truth is that it is principally through the medium of poetry that both could articulate not only their aesthetic ambitions, but equally their transcendental and spiritual speculations. We can cite the glaring examples of Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' and 'Kubla Khan' and Keats's 'Sleep and Poetry' and 'The Fall of Hyperion,' which respectively engage the poetics of becoming as a continued quest towards attaining a specific ideal.

Nature to both poets had a symbolic significance. The difference between them lies in the magnitude attributed to it. While nature to Coleridge formed the basis of his creative and spiritual aspirations, Keats reductively used nature, though not without a Coleridgean colouring, but principally as a metaphor for the early stages of poetic growth and self-discovery. His conscious antithetical use of extant literature, the particular case here being classical Greek literature and art, concretises his individualism, as it points not to an uncritically assimilated material but a distinctive self-definition. An intriguing and subtle argument arises here. The idea of seeing Coleridge as a universalist philosopher always tends to overshadow a very important aspect of his life that matches Keats's reductionist aestheticism and individualistic spirituality. The argument is that Coleridge basically remains a convinced individualist in his attempt at articulating a universal philosophy. The dynamics of self as subject

and the inherent processes of individuation in his texts demonstrate Coleridge's pantheist and monistic idealism as principally individualistic, and his expression of the influences on him of other philosophical or aesthetic concepts, either of English or German stock, convincingly evinces this individualism.

As we have already discussed, the role of the imagination for both poets was fundamental in their epistemological and ontological concerns. As a pivotal instrument in poetic composition and transcendental and spiritual speculations, the imagination was affiliated to other preoccupying concepts. For example their psychological outlook on dreams and sleep and what these represented to poetic creativity was closely similar. Sleep to Keats was as significant as dreams to Coleridge in the creative process. Coleridge's psychology expounded on dreams which exposed the mind to deeper undercurrents of consciousness. Sleep which can also be seen as an analogue of death was a trance-like experience of intense mental activity for Keats, and contributed to aesthetic and spiritual maturity. The question of the imagination points to yet another very pivotal argument that justifies the choice of both poets. The irony, paradox and anti-self-consciousness that both poets exhibit in their texts shows their understanding of the imagination as aesthetically and spiritually limiting, but as a permanently generating possibility for the transcendence and overcoming of such limitations in their various idealist quests. This is a crucial point that argues well for the poetics of becoming in their works.

Though a point that is not directly concerned with the thrust of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that Coleridge was politically versatile, having witnessed the beginning of the French Revolution through to its lost ideals, epitomised in the Reign of Terror. He was highly involved in the socio-political debates of his day. Keats too was conscious and concerned with social and political problems of his time. His poetry has been read and convincingly interpreted from an ideological paradigm to bear

testimony of this. Besides, some of his letters like the one dated October 25 1818 to George and Georgiana Keats show his disgust for certain socio-political and even religious policies of his time.<sup>5</sup> The specificity of Keats needs some attention here. A poem like 'Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition' articulates Keats's attitude towards the state and church, and points significantly to the different stance that he adopted towards proposing an alternative spiritual system.

Finally, another thread that ties them together is their unorthodox religious views. Even though Coleridge is said to have abandoned his idealism in his early religious and spiritual views and constantly revised his works to show this supposed change of stance, his eccentricity remains distinct. His most remarkable spiritual conviction is evident in his early and later works which grappled with his pantheistic and Neo-platonic concerns. His abandoning of Unitarianism to embrace the Anglican Church could be interpreted as a matter of necessity or circumstances and thus be accepted with suspicion, however engagingly he tried to justify himself. The main point here is, whatever the eventual conservatism he later in life adopted, he was a relatively isolated individual who defied and estranged himself from institutionalised orthodoxies and had the tendency of working out philosophies of his own. If at all he is judged as conservative, the focus of such conservatism being his recourse to orthodoxy, it can convincingly be argued from an antithetical stance that his true conservatism reflects his idealist philosophy, which he never abandoned.

Keats, both in his letters and poetry, was a non-conformist individual. He found it difficult to come to terms with Christian tenets as a redeeming medium for man's so-called sinful state. His criticism of Christianity and proposed myth of salvation, to be interpreted from within the psycho-spirituality of Gnosticism, has only earned him hostilities and the title of an agnostic or atheist. The foregoing arguments close the stereotypical gap between Coleridge and Keats as pertaining to two clearly defined and



distinctive strands of English Romanticism, and treat them primarily under the canon of Radical Romantics. It must be stressed at this juncture that though Coleridge and Keats are to be treated in separate chapters, we shall, in the analyses of their texts, point time and again to these relevant points about them.

### **SOME CENTRAL CRITICAL TERMS**

It will be necessary to briefly comment on, or attempt to define and/or characterise certain terms and expressions so as to clearly situate their operative context in this investigation. The different chapters of the work will then provide, where necessary, details to them and other ones which are not mentioned here. These include, Romanticism, English Romantics; First Generation and Second Generation, the Imagination, Reality, Truth, Beauty, Romantic Idealism, Romantic Visionary Criticism, the Creative Process, The Poetics of Becoming, Constructive Deferral, and Deconstruction.

#### **-ROMANTICISM**

The question of defining terms like Romanticism is such a slippery and complex issue that cannot be adequately or satisfactorily handled here.<sup>6</sup> It poses enormous difficulties in its definitions and conceptualisation. However, it is imperative to situate the Romantic context in which we discuss Coleridge and Keats. This context is that which sees Romanticism in the limited confines of the traditionally received notion of the six canonical English poets. Romanticism's heterogeneous nature is seen in the multiplicity of concerns attached to it; a return to the Middle Ages, a love of the exotic, the revolt against reason, a vindication of the individual, a return to emotionalism, a return to nature, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against

scientific method, a revival of Pantheism, a revival of Idealism, a revival of Neoplatonism, a reaction against Judeo-Christianity, a rejection of artistic convention. One thing that is commonly discerned here is change and evolution. This question of change and transformation is strongly connected with the fervent conviction of the poetics of becoming as a distinguished Romantic trait.

More specifically, Romanticism is a historical movement involving a revolution in art and ideas of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe and America. This revolution was triggered by the scientific, political, social, philosophical and theological circumstances that informed the times. It had correspondences in music, painting and architecture as well. The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries against which Romanticism reacted, emphasised Rationalism. This emphasis on the rational and deterministic universe stifled the freedom and creativity of the human spirit. Romanticism, therefore, placed a new emphasis on art, with regard to the aesthetic and metaphysical implications of the creative imagination, symbol and myth, organic conception of nature, individuality and subjectivity, growth, imperfection, diversity, and the unconscious. Freedom and liberalism became watchwords not only in art, but religious and spiritual engagements. For example, the concept of the Great Chain of Being was conceived during the Renaissance and fostered in Enlightenment as a machine, fixed, and as an expression of God's design to humanity. Romanticism involved a shift of thought from conceiving the cosmos as a static mechanism to conceiving it as a dynamic organism. Most Romantics saw this change differently. They sought for a new system. Machine was replaced by organism; it was not something made, it was being made, or growing. The universe was seen as alive – it was growing, indicative of transforming processes not only in aesthetic quest but spiritual certitude. Romantics like Coleridge and Keats felt and expounded that the human mind was active, synthetic, dynamic and even

visionary, it could achieve the truth of revelation without the instrumentality of ecclesiastical and scientific transmission and sanction. Inspired by Platonic, Neoplatonic, and national and continental aesthetic and philosophical influences, they formulated the bases of, and advocated a strong idealist poetics, which creates the interpretative context of discussing the philosophy of becoming.

The English Romantics principally wrote poetry against the ideals and practices of Augustanism or Neoclassicism. Neoclassicism with its revival of the artistic ideals of classical Greece and Rome, and championed by poets like John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson, laid stress on emotional restraint, order, logic, technical precision, wit and decorum. They equally responded unfavourably to the empiricist scientific method of John Locke and Isaac Newton, the dehumanising and soul-crushing system of the Industrial Revolution, the distrusted political machinery of the three governments that dominated the period under George III (1776-1820), George IV (1820-1830), William IV (1830-1837), and the religious and spiritual atmosphere of the time. To better understand the English Romantics is to categorise them. On the one hand were the First Generation Romantics, and on the other the Second Generation Romantics.<sup>7</sup>

The First Generation Romantics included William Blake, William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge. Within this group was a subcategory called the Lake Poets or Lake School, or Lakers made up of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. Though this classification identifies these poets with the Lake District and gives the apparent impression of their having written poetry in the glorification of nature and the new impetus ascribed to the concept of childhood, they seriously engaged this writing with the political turmoil of the time like the French Revolution, and domestic problems in England. We have already discussed that Coleridge's individualist tendencies are what

highly implicates the discussion on idealism and becoming. These aspects of his cannot be argued to breach the gap between his generation and Keats's.

The Second Generation or Younger Romantics were to 'continue' in the light of the First Romantics even though there were bound to be points of divergence between them. They included Shelley, Byron and Keats. Like the First Romantics, this group was subcategorised or given a more inclusive title, The Cockney School or The Hunt Circle. With the addition of writers and critics as Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Haydon and Servens, it was a self-consciously defined group of intellectuals who centred around Leigh Hunt, its leading figure. It is indisputable that the Second Generation Romantics like Keats and Shelley saw poetry as a social activity through which their political, economic as well as religious eccentricity was overtly or in a veiled manner expressed. Their radicalism was promoted by Hunt's *The Examiner* through which most of their poems were published. This magazine was at odds with the rival *The Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* which reacted to its literary and political stance. It is important, however, to note that reducing the Second Generation Romantics to the spectrum of politics and social issues would be a misrepresentation or misappropriation of their general philosophy to life and art. They were also individual writers whose poetry was in conformity with certain aspirations and yearnings they had other than politics, and which pointed to the particularity of their self. It is principally in this light that Keats has been discussed in relation with Coleridge, and in which he will be treated in connection with the poetics of becoming.

#### **-THE CONCEPT OF THE IMAGINATION**

What we propose to do here is merely to comment on the term imagination, for it is only in the course of analyses in the chapters that its interpretative value can be understood. It is a term that must be applied within a particular frame of reference.

Given that this study centres on the question of Romantic idealism and becoming as the most important concepts for which Coleridge and Keats are interpreted to have engagingly expressed their aestheticism, and the complex phenomenon of metaphysical and spiritual thought, through their writings, it becomes absolutely important to pay particular attention to its possible meanings. To attempt an appropriate definition or characterisation of the imagination, particularly in the Romantic strands of the word, it is important to give a brief account of some philosophical views prior to the period, which had an influential impact on the Romantics and shaped their basic definition of the aesthetics and philosophy of the concept. Unfortunately, this study cannot go that far, but will rather focus on Coleridge's and Keats's aesthetic and philosophical understanding of the work to point to the question of becoming.

The superiority of the imagination in Romantic aesthetic and spiritual philosophy points to the epistemological and ontological concerns of the Romantics who, even though they made important and enduring statements, uncritically idealised it by giving the impression it was an absolute faculty. We have to note that the complexity of language and expression justifies the difficulties the Romantics may have faced in explaining their theory or speculations with regard to the non-discursive implications of the imagination. What they were trying to articulate, particularly on the mystical aesthetic plane, however problematic, justified the distinct idealist convictions that they individually had. So no matter what faults or shortcomings this theory may embody, they should be credited with having tried to express a non-rational insight through the limitations of language. It is hoped that by the end of this investigation the imagination, as a pivotal component of Romantic idealism, would still be seen as a source of critical reference that would for a long time remain in the mainstream of any critical debate on Romantic textuality.

For an operational meaning in Romanticism, the imagination can be defined as a human faculty that operates from aesthetic and spiritual perspective. It is not an entirely autonomous force operating without conscious or unconscious awareness. The imagination has close relation with imagery, physical as well as psychological. It is a fertile and reproductive instrument, seen in its attempts at originality and novelty, though it should not be seen as capable of producing anything absolutely new. The question of originality and novelty would imply bringing to consciousness an awareness of what is, but is ordinarily difficult to perceive and express. Again, the imagination cannot be said to be implicated in all perception, neither can it be said to suppose the construction of all meaning. The imagination is a regenerative force compelling the power of recalling to mind and the fostering of the search for a self-sufficing mystical and spiritual energy. It, therefore, engenders expectation, anticipation and possibility. It can be impaired, which makes it susceptible to imperfection and non-idealisation. We will see in detail how these points suit the treatment of idealism and becoming in later parts of the work.

### **-REALITY AND TRUTH**

Reality and truth are very complex terms, which are characteristic in the discussion of Romantic idealism, and characterised by relativity in meaning. Though the main focus of this thesis does not give ample allowance to discuss them in detail, these terms are important in the discussion of Romantic idealism as they describe both the phenomenal and visionary perspective with which Coleridge and Keats saw them, and as pursued ideals they connect with the question of becoming. A generally agreed or constitutive meaning of the words is difficult to come by. They must be addressed in a specific context; scientific, psychological, aesthetic, philosophical and theological. It is only in the course of analysis in subsequent portions of our arguments that the

concepts can clearly be defined or contextually used. Reality can be understood as a state of consciousness, which is objective or subjective, and pertaining to a value or sets of values in a discourse. Objectively, it operates with observation of actual or empirical and therefore external phenomena. Subjectively, reality can assume an intuitive and therefore inner or intrinsic connotation involving the mind, spirit or soul. It thus implies a hermeneutic or phenomenological principle based on intuition and belief. In this case the self particularly as the subject “I” in language becomes very central since individual experiences and the need for individual expression is best possible through language. In other words, perceptions of reality could be seen as framed and determined by language. In the course of this work the various philosophical dispositions on reality will be discussed with regard to Plato, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Reality in Romantic thought would be seen as having a dual signification as discussed above, pertaining to the phenomenal and noumenal respectively. Reality may emphasise the outward appearance of things – realities of the physical, visible world acting as aids to reflection. The term also emphasises the invisible, subjective but greater reality than what is ordinarily perceived – gained understanding of the unseen organising principles from within with regard to transcendence and spirituality. Suffice it to add here that the nature of reality in this vein is dominantly characterised by the concept of becoming than being, since ultimate reality in the sense of metaphysics and spirituality could be attained only when one is completely spirit. Of the two modes of perceiving and understanding reality, Romanticism does not discard the one to proclaim the exclusiveness of the other even if one is given priority of place. It seems plausible to say that Romantic philosophy, as discernible in Coleridge and Keats, places high value on that side of the human mind that aspires beyond the ordinary and prefigures greater realms, not common in scientific and discursive

language. To put it differently, in the attempt to give meaning to life and existence, the ordinary and phenomenal, while very important in life, cannot satisfactorily answer the inner yearnings of spiritual quests and self-hood, which are dominantly subjective. The question of whether reality in this sense is graspable is what interests the discussion on the poetics of becoming.

Truth, in particular situations, is very closely related to reality and a real explication of the term is difficult as well, necessitating a context where it can only be explained with reference to particular authors. It becomes easy to list certain facts that characterise it rather than give a precise definition. Logicians and analytical philosophers have pondered on the word. This has resulted in various dimensions with which the word is apprehended. We have for example the pragmatist theory of truth, the relative concept of truth, the correspondence theory, and the intuitionist and metaphysical theories. The correspondence and metaphysical positions are of prime importance to the understanding of how the question of truth is used in this endeavour, especially on Keats's aesthetics in which it assumes a fundamental role alongside beauty.

Truth could be explained as a correspondence of reality to facts; for instance the correspondence of pictorial or symbolic representation to the thing being represented. This indicates accommodating truth to something that is provable or justifiable between language and the world. Metaphysically it can be seen as an experience of the extreme depths of the self; a total identification of what is, subjectively; an exploration of inner being. The difference here is between subjective and objective truth, with Keats expressly demonstrating that objective truth does not fit his idealist longings.



## **-BEAUTY**

Beauty is a complex aesthetic and philosophical concept, to which this study cannot claim to provide an insight, unless with regard to what is required in the treatment of idealism and the dynamics of becoming in Coleridge's and Keats's texts. It can be defined as something appealing to the intellect, the aesthetic faculty; style, exquisiteness, fascination and refinement, or the moral sense. It is, therefore, a highly inclusive category. In the Romantic sense of the word it refers to two distinctive categories. We have on the one hand outer beauty, which implicates the physical, sensual and sensuous domains of experience, and inner beauty, which pertains to the spiritual and transcendental domains of experience. Wordsworth and Coleridge for example identify beauty with the multiplicity of symmetrical parts unifying in a constituent whole. So their notion of beauty is inextricably linked to their sublime and monistic vision. For Keats beauty and truth are the organising principles of poetry and life, and comprise all the different levels of experience, joy, happiness, agony, frustration, ugliness. These all appeal to the senses as well as the spirit, though he understands and strives for the highest realm of beauty as purely spiritual.

## **-THE CREATIVE PROCESS**

The creative process is another term closely related to the aesthetic and to an extent metaphysical concept of Romantic idealism and becoming, and will be seen here from different dimensions depending on the context. The creative process can be seen as a process involving the reading of a work or works in the course of which the reader could be inspired to build their own layers of meaning and use them for new artistic designs, suggesting an assimilating or antithetical stance. This is evident in both Coleridge and Keats in poems like 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Fall of Hyperion.' A

recourse to Harold Bloom's visionary aesthetics of anxiety and antithesis will throw more light on this strand of discussion.

The creative process can mean the conscious or unconscious artistic urge of the poet in a given creative moment of a poem, that is, the psychological situation whereby the poet is either in control of his/her use of poetic material or otherwise in composing. This suggests a feasible link with the Jungian concept of extraversion in poetic composition, a psychological process whereby a piece of work imposes itself on the writer that he is self-conscious of his original thought and intention.

More importantly also, it can be defined as a longitudinal process in poetic creativity, which involves the systematic growth and maturity as discerned from a writer's consciousness in different works throughout his/her career. This could be either on the aesthetic or phenomenological domain or both, designating a situation that involves the constant adherence to and search for a defining principle. This strand of argument brings in again the reference of the two poems mentioned above. They do not only substantiate Bloom's theory, but most importantly indicate and prefigure contexts for further aesthetic or spiritual activity. From an ideological standpoint, it could involve an understanding of historical processes decipherable in a work or group of works.

## **-ROMANTIC IDEALISM AND ROMANTIC VISIONARY CRITICISM**

Romantic idealism and visionary criticism are inextricably related in the context of the arguments that will be posited in this thesis. Given the subtle complexity in treating or defining concepts of this sort, we will limit our understanding of Romantic idealism and visionary criticism only to the domain of the aesthetic and spiritual speculations of Coleridge and Keats, which necessitates the way the poetics of becoming will be viewed. The above-mentioned intriguing terms such as the imagination, reality, truth

and beauty cannot be evaded when discussing Romantic idealism, given that most of the Romantics conceived of them as primarily dealing with the transcendental and metaphysical. There is a connection here with Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy which wielded strong influences on Romantics like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. We have previously seen some of the fundamental notions of Romanticism, listed by Jerome McGann, and will also discuss them where necessary. They are inevitable in any idealist discourse of the period we are directly concerned with. Understanding Romantic visionary criticism largely depends on specific contexts. One generally accepted notion though is that it falls within the domain of traditional humanist readings and interpreting of Romantic literature. With a strong emphasis on hermeneutics and phenomenology, Romantic visionary criticism underscores Romantic idealism, through the theoretical formulations and practical investigations on the aesthetic and spiritual character of Romantic philosophy and textuality. More specifically, such formulations are derived both from the English Romantics' philosophical and literary conceptualisations and German Idealism and Romantic philosophy. M. H. Abrams, Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom are amongst the most renowned visionary critics in Romanticism, whose investigations prove that visionary criticism is more of a pluralistic issue rather than a monolithic one, and have reacted negatively to the scepticism and anti-idealist stance of Deconstructionists.<sup>8</sup> That visionary criticism has not been very critical of its presuppositions is largely true. This explains why it is increasingly under attack by other critical considerations, but it can certainly not be put to rest. This thesis seeks to demonstrate this contention reaffirming Romantic visionary consciousness through the critical evaluation of the poetics of becoming.

## **-THE POETICS OF BECOMING**

This is the pivotal concept in the critical reading and interpretation of Coleridge's and Keats's works throughout this research endeavour, and therefore must be clearly understood in the different interpretative contexts of the chapters. The paradigmatic model of the poetics of becoming places the aesthetic and spiritual idealism of Coleridge and Keats not in the categorisations of an unrealistic and unattainable ideal, but as indicative of the various interchanging and transforming processes through which the striving to attain this ideal is possible. It is in this vein, as we will later see, that both Schlegel's Romantic Irony and becoming and Hegel's progressive transcendental dialectics are respectively redefined from within the context of Coleridge's and Keats's works. Becoming will be analysed in English Romanticism, represented by both authors, as the the Romantic awareness of the self as a constructive progression towards a desired goal amidst contradictory and conflicting psychic experiences.

## **-CONSTRUCTIVE DEFERRAL**

Mutual exclusivity of terms is a fundamental issue of the analyses in this work. This is evident in the question of constructive deferral and deconstructive deferral. Deferral is a typical word in Derridean Deconstruction, whereby acts of meaning, or centres of meaning are constantly deferred, and as such the dismissal of theoretical formulations in textual analysis. Contrastively, constructive deferral situates deferral in Romantic textual discourse as a transforming process towards attaining an ideal. This ideal is not what is deferred per se, but the creative process deciphered in texts is a pointer not of fixity or impossibility, but a continuity to the ideal. It is therefore closely related with the concept of creative process, particularly that which indicates conscious growth and metamorphosis in aesthetic and metaphysical speculations. In other words,

constructive deferral does not designate shifts or instability in meaning, or relativity of meaning from a view point of the poetics of Deconstruction. The conceptualisation of meaning as consistent ambition and vision is what is important, for it justifies the poetics of becoming neither as a Schlegelian non-progressive conflict of psychic polarities, nor as a Hegelian dialectic attainment of the pursued ideal, but as a process of attaining this ideal.

### **-DECONSTRUCTION**

Deconstruction is going to be seen in this work from a heterogeneous or multiplex dimension. It proposes three principal perspectives. The first perspective will treat it in relation to critical theory and interpretation, and the second and third perspectives will see the term as a method in Romantic discourse, that is, a strand of discussion that is totally different from and opposed to the theoretical stance of the first presupposition. We will refer to this type with a small case letter as deconstruction to differentiate it from the former category. As a critical theory, the main focus will be based on the Postmodern or Poststructuralist<sup>9</sup> poetics, principally formulated and expounded by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and Hillis Miller, who assert among others that language imprisons all meaning and concepts and therefore resist and dismiss any aesthetic and metaphysical or spiritual understanding of Romantic textuality. It is therefore dominantly seen as a negation in all aspects of idealism and theory.

The second and third categories will respectively see the term as a constructive dismantling or decentering of Romantic idealism from a modern standpoint with regard to the psychoanalytic and New Historicist points of view, and the questionings and challenges brought to bear on negative extant hermeneutic and phenomenological readings on Coleridge and Keats, which principally represent the deconstructive stance of the thesis to situate its own convictions.

## **THE STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS**

This work is based on the hypothetical statement that Coleridge's and Keats's works conceptualise a poetics of becoming, characteristic of transitional and transforming processes of the self. This transformative processes, interpreted from the paradigmatic models of intratextual and extratextual critical perspectives, place the philosophy of becoming within the typical Romantic context of paradox, irony, antithetical thinking or constructive anti-self-consciousness or logical and constructive self-contradiction. Becoming presupposes the desire to achieve some aesthetic and/or spiritual ideal, and this ideal, while it lasts, is achievable only in futuristic terms. This brings in the question of constructive deferral, which will be very recurrent in the work. We have said that deferral is not a displacement of the ideal from a deconstructive perspective, but indicates the continued effort through the creative process to attain the ideal. In this vein, the works to be analysed are not to be seen as fixed statements, nor is the referential self in the texts to be apprehended as static and not dynamic. They are rather going to be interpreted as indicating contexts through which other layers of meanings can be structured to justify the issue of process and transformation and therefore self-development through becoming. This therefore indicates important strands of argument, which will be inclusive of the psychology of intentionality, individuation and the constructive poetics of the developing self as subject in most of the discussion. In other words, most of the readings will be viewed as a self-textualisation by the poets. This inherent poetics of becoming in selected texts resists radical idealist presuppositions, challenges negative psychological, hermeneutic and phenomenological and New Historicist readings, and dismisses the anti-theoretical and nihilistic tendencies expounded by Deconstruction.

This assumption takes us once more to the crucial issue of reformulating Schlegel and Hegel. Schlegel's aesthetics of becoming posits the assertion that becoming is not progressive. He sees this concept as characteristic of two conflicting psychic forces – one towards order and harmony (to become being) – the other towards chaos and freedom (to become non-being). The two forces are a thesis and antithesis that remain in permanent contradiction. Hegel proposes a dialectical progression, the outcome of which is definite attainment of a pursued ideal. We will see both positions of Schlegel and Hegel as progressive, but remain resistant to the question of Romantic textuality as evincing a finality of aesthetic or spiritual attainment.

The textual corpus of the work comprises extracts from poems (there is a breaking away here from the idea of capitalising only on certain poems as canonical), letters, notes and lectures, which deal with the aesthetic and transcendental hopes of Coleridge and Keats. A number of theoretical considerations will be used to practically analyse the texts so as to indicate the specified context within which the poetics of becoming is discussed. And while some of the interpretations will be judged to be entirely new, others will present a modified but extended dimension of extant readings.

## **A SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTERS**

Chapter One is based on a review of related literature and theoretical considerations, and a detailed statement of research. An attempt is to be made here on an examination of some of the major literary theories that inform interpretation, and the extent to which critics have applied them on Coleridge and Keats in extant literature. The purpose for this is dual. First, to have an overview of what exists in current research and, secondly, in so doing identify questions that remain partially or unsatisfactorily

answered. The gaps or unanswered questions in the extant literature will provide a rationale, and ultimately, justify the present line of research.

Chapter Two, “STC: Metaphysical Ecology: Nature and the Transcendental Realm,” proposes a critical discussion of transcendental idealism, embedded in the metaphysics of nature in Coleridge’s writings within the interpretative matrix of his spiritual speculations of becoming or ascending to the ultimate spiritual reality of the One. The attunement of mind and soul will be viewed from several perspectives or lines of philosophical or spiritual thought on the affinity between the beauty of nature and the human psyche. The following issues will be important: nature and psyche, the Greek notion of nature, the Augustan notion of nature, Deism and Natural Religion, the Romantic notion of nature. All these aspects will be coupled with major influences on Coleridge’s thought such as Plotinus, Berkeley, Burke, Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel and Kant to show his Neo-platonic mysticism and his monistic vision in the search for unity in a heterogeneous universe, and most importantly how these influences help to conceptualise the poetics of becoming. The imagination in this context serves primarily as an inspiring force and then as a transitional agent into the realm of the spiritual where there is an attempt at a reconciliation and harmonisation of perceived objects. Symbol and will are inextricably linked to the various processes of imagination at work here. The question of Romantic (or Philosophical) irony will be discussed to situate Coleridge’s constructive hermeneutics and struggle to unify in the midst of fragmentation and contradictions or polarities.

The exhibitionary representation and enactment of individual and collective memory as a process of imaginative and ideological identification through the works of Coleridge will be the central concern of Chapter Three, “STC: Psychological Introspection: the Self in Time.” In fact, the discussion of idealism and the poetics of becoming provides a new reading on Coleridge’s understanding and expression of the



self as constantly seeking an ideal. Among others there will be an examination of the myth of childhood in Romantic poetry, Greek analogies (Plato's theory of pre- and post-existence) with reference to myth and spirituality. The authenticity of memory serves as a poetic-therapeutic experience for Coleridge. There will be a re-evaluation of memory or spots of time as Coleridge's mind will be seen as engaging in the task of creating a context, or perfect form, that can give a sense of meaning and significance to his childhood longings. His attempt at reconciling the two major phases of his life, childhood and adulthood, moves in line with his continual reliance on the imagination's ability at unification and synthesis, and the formulation of the poetics of becoming. The unifying principle here is effected on the seemingly dividing self for self-unification and harmony. Central to the discussion will be the Freudian psychoanalytical theory of creative writing, which will facilitate the interpretative context of the concepts of self-mirroring and the Other as an engaging mirror to the self's struggle at unification and understanding. The question of the psycho-dynamics of narcissism will be viewed as well to counter most of the claims that Coleridge suffered from a degraded and non-progressive self.

That Keats was consciously striving for poetic greatness, but also self-conscious that it was a continuous and not a finished process, is what the fourth chapter will be grappling with. Many have seen Keats's obsession with myth and classical literature as an attempt and struggle at spiritual maturity. This chapter "Keats's Nature-consciousness and Mytho-poetic Experience: Self-Seeking" proposes to see Keats's integration of nature into the fabric of his aesthetic ambitions, and also to evaluate the poet's recourse to myth not in terms of spiritual striving, but in terms of the quest for artistic identity and grandeur, aesthetic intensity. This section, in fact, can be seen as the portrait of the poet as a myth explorer and poetry reader, or more precisely an aesthetic innovator. In his developing poetic energies, Keats no doubt is

indebted to Spenser, Shakespeare, Dante and Milton, but the issue is not here. Central to the debate are the reception of myth in Romanticism, mythology and mythography, myth-making and myth-revitalising, and the poetics of allegory. The discussion will be related to Harold Bloom's antithetical approach though not in strict Bloomian terms as to the love-hate relationship between the poet and his poetic father, and equally to the structural approach with regards to the creative process. The ekphrastic tradition will also be examined as Keats's interest was not only in narrative rhetoric but ancient Greek sculpture. In using these myths and sculptures Keats in the process constructs his own personal quest myth as he triumphantly emerges not as a mere representative but a mature poet, struggling to reach the goal of a distinct aesthetic identity.

Chapter Five, "Keats and the Gnostic Tradition: Inner Self-searching" seeks to rehabilitate Keats's spiritual thought and therefore engages a hermeneutic and phenomenological perspective in the spectrum of becoming. The controversies of the atmosphere of the Cockney School have left a lasting impression in the minds of many critics of Keats either as an atheist or someone who had no religion at all. His redemptive vision has been mocked and contemptuously dismissed. The argument here is that Keats, far from being an atheist or having no religious or spiritual consciousness, used the evidence of his experiences and tried to articulate in his letters and poems a spiritual and redemptive system which is at odds with mainstream Christianity. Instead of being seen as an agnostic, he was a Gnostic or tried to be one. But Keats's texts clearly point to the conviction that his idealist speculations were not a demonstration of complete spiritual certitude, but a continued search for this. This will be seen to justify the context of becoming in which he is viewed.

The proposed paradigmatic model here is therefore based on theories dealing with the basic tenets of Gnosticism, and the inspiring work of Maureen Roberts on Keats's individuation and response to basic Gnostic patterns. The structure of this

chapter is as follows; towards a definition; Gnosticism as a mystical clue to self-knowledge, self-realisation and self-redemption; Western Christian orthodoxy and Eastern mystical traditions; Keats's Gnostic scheme: the search for the new path, the seed and divine spark, the pearl in rubbish and the death instinct. The discussion ends with a critique as to whether this medium is realistic or simply ungrounded mystical speculation.

“The Erotic Motive: The Female Image in Coleridge's and Keats's Poetic Experience” preoccupies the concerns of the sixth chapter. The question of idealism and poetics of becoming will be seen as convincingly tenable in the analyses of this chapter. The Chapter underscores the subtle implications of female representations in both poets. A not unimportant bulk of their poems was inspired by their attachment, emotional and spiritual or both, to certain women in their lives, or put it differently, their imagination always projected an eroticised female or feminised object. The great question will be how this shaped the epistemological and ontological nature of both Coleridge and Keats. The chapter will proceed from a psycho-biographical approach to philosophical and gender studies of selected texts. In other words, while a psychosexual reading with reference to Freud's dream theories will inform much of the reading, attention will be paid to other analyses that transcend the politics of eroticism, to expressing the sublime and spiritual in poetic creativity, showing how his idealism connects with the question of eroticism.

The spiritualising characteristic of Coleridge's poetry points to a constant struggle to see all aspects of life and especially love as belonging to one unified spiritual sphere. Keats will equally be viewed from the perspective of Neo-platonic influence as his romance poetry indicates certain corresponding affinities to Plato's philosophy of love, and most importantly, points to the centrality of his aesthetic and spiritual speculations. So the quest for ideal love and the divine seen in the

spiritualisation of the female figure becomes a translation and deeper interpretation of the literal reading of the poems. Other alternative but related readings stressing the auto- and homo-erotic elements will be taken into consideration, (all these) as contexts for the reading of the poetics of becoming. The conclusion of this thesis will posit a re-evaluation of the entire work, and assess the extent to which it meets its ambitions.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Chapter One will substantiate the aims of the study. It will attempt an in-depth survey of extant criticism related to the study. A more theoretical and critical consideration on Romantic idealism will be viewed there.

<sup>2</sup> The letters of Keats have dominantly been excerpted from *John Keats* (Ed. Elizabeth Cook, 1991). All the references from this edition will be cited as *John Keats: Letters*. Due to different editorial policies, we have included Grant F. Scott's edition, *Selected Letters* (2002), which contains certain important details that are lacking in Cook's edition. For instance Scott includes all the poems accompanying the letters, and also some of the letters that Keats received from his correspondences. Besides, all of Keats's poems are extracted from Cook's edition.

<sup>3</sup> For more biographical information on Coleridge see R. L. Brett (ed.) *S. T. Coleridge: Writers and their Background* (1972), Oswald Doughty, *Perturbed Spirit: The Life and Personality of Samuel Coleridge* (1981), Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (1987), Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1996), Michael Schmidt *Lives of the Poets* (1998), "Liberty Vs Legitimacy: William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge" pp 348 – 368. Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (1990), *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (1999). As for Keats, Sidney Colvin's biography ( 1917, Rp.1971) still remains provides a valuable reading and fertile grounds for the rethinking and evaluation of Keats's writings and relationships. Amy Lowell's work falls under this category too. Other very useful sources include, Douglas Bush, *John Keats: His Life and Writings* (1966), Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (1979), William Walsh, *Introduction to Keats* (1981), Stephen Coote, *John Keats: A Life* (1995), Michael Schmidt, *Lives of the Poets* (1998), "Touch has a Memory: John Clare, William Cullen Bryant, John Keats, Thomas Lowell Beddoes" pp. 388 – 403, and Andrew Motion, *Keats, a Biography* (1998).

<sup>4</sup> Coleridge's interest in medicine is confirmed by G. N. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism: A Study in the History of Philosophy with Unpublished Material from Coleridge's Manuscripts* (1969), p. 67. According to his accounts Coleridge took interest in medicine at the age of 13. His brother Luke was studying in London Hospital to become a surgeon and Coleridge's attachment to him fired his spirit in this domain. He is said to have read all the medical books in Luke's possession. But of his school master's vigorous measures, he might have pursued this end. This account would certainly cast no doubt knowing how well it was characteristic of Coleridge to engage in whatever discipline that came his way.

<sup>5</sup> See Coleridge's revolutionary poems, especially on the French Revolution. Also, John Cornwell, *Coleridge: Poet and Revolutionary* (1973), Stephen Prickett, *England and the French Revolution* (1989), Patrick Keane, *Coleridge's Sunmerged Politics* (1994), and Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History* (2000). A good number of ideological readings especially in New Historicism show Keats as a politically conscious poet. Some include *Keats and History* (ed.) Nicholas Roe (1995), *Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997), Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics of the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (1998), Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, "Killing the Cockneys: Blackwood's Weapons of Choice against Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats." in *Keats – Shelley Journal* (1998), and Richard Cronin, *The Politics of the Romantic Poetry: In Search of a Pure Commonwealth* (2000), particularly "Leigh Hunt, Keats and the Politics of Cockney Poetry."

<sup>6</sup> The major problem of defining Romanticism largely stems from the difficulty of situating it within a specific historical, philosophical and literary time axis. The question of Romanticisms points to the highly heterogeneous and complex nature of the term. A. O. Lovejoy's "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" (1960), Lilian Furst's *Romanticism* (1969), Henri Peyre's *What is Romanticism?* (1978), Hugh Honour's *Romanticism* (1981), Jerome McGann's "Rethinking Romanticism" (1992), Geoffrey Thurley's *The Romantic Predicament* (1983), particularly "Defining Romanticism" pp. 1 – 23, Drummond Bone's "The Question of a European Romanticism" (1995), Aidan Day's *Romanticism* (1995), and *Alternative Romanticisms*. Eds. Werner Huber and Marie-Luise Egbert (2003), particularly Christoph Reinhardt's "Beyond Locations and Genres: The Romantic Ideology Revisited" pp. 13 – 25 and Rolf Lessenich's "Romantic to Victorian: A Study in Transition and Terminology" pp. 27 – 39, are among some of the studies that have grappled with the intriguing aspects of the term.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the treatment of Romanticism and the concept of Romantic idealism and the poetics of becoming in this thesis is exclusive, since it is limited only to the male writers. But there is the recognition that this limitation does not tell all about Romantic philosophy and definition as already indicated above. There is an ongoing debate as to whether Romanticism has a broad and expanded definition from its traditional understanding, or whether one has to talk about Romanticisms as a complex plurality of ideology. In fact, the female writers bring in another dimension in the definition and conceptualisation of the term, and there is critical investigation in this domain. See for example Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), *Re-mapping Romanticism: Gender – Text – Context*. Eds. Christoph Bode and Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann (2001), *Women Romantic Poets 1785 – 1832*. Ed. Jennifer Breen (1992), *Women Romantic Writers: Voices and Countervoices*. Eds. Paula Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (1995), and *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*. Ed. Duncan Wu (1997).

<sup>8</sup> Important works by these critics that typify Romantic visionary criticism include M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamb: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Poetry* (1973), *The Corresponding Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (1984), Harold Bloom, "Internalisation of Quest-Romance" (1970), *The Visionary Company* (1971), *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (1976), and Northrop Frye, "The Survival of Eros in Poetry" (1986). These works convey different but related strands of visionary discourse. Besides, the various reactions of the authors against the poetics of Deconstruction only go to confirm their theoretical convictions. The Bloomian dimension of Romantic visionary criticism, for example, implicates a psycho-spiritual aesthetics that is inclusive of psychoanalysis, intertextuality and transcendentalism. Frye is mostly concerned with the question of archetypal criticism in Romanticism. Other theorists and critics on Romantic visionary criticism include Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (1997) and Paul Davies, *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition: Studies in Imagination* (1998). Esoteric and mystical readings that connect Romanticism with Orientalism are also considered here to be part of visionary criticism. Chapters One and Six will throw more light on other readings that pertain to Romantic visionary criticism.

<sup>9</sup> There are a number of definitions or more appropriately characteristics of Poststructuralism and Postmodernism, which clearly demonstrate the dichotomy, especially in the guise of Deconstruction, that exists between it and Romanticism. For further reading see, *Approaching Postmodernism*. Eds. Doume Fokkema and Hans Bertens, 1986, particularly Helmut Lethen's "Postmodernism and Some Paradoxes of Periodization" pp. 239 – 254, and Matei Calinescu's "Naming and Difference: Reflections on "Modernism versus Postmodernism" in Literature" pp. 255 – 270. Others include, Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism* (2002), particularly Chapter One "Creatures of Difference" pp. 1 – 22, Chapter Two, "Difference and Culture" pp. 23 – 47, and Chapter Four "Difference or Truth?" pp. 69 – 88, Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism* (2002), particularly Chapter One "The Rise of Postmodernism" pp. 1 – 12 and Chapter Two "New Ways of Seeing the World" pp. 13 – 43, Peter Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002), particularly "Epilogue: Deconstruction Between Modernity and Post-Modernity" pp. 200 – 206, and finally *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory, and Culture*. Ed. Klaus Stierstorfer (2003). Here we have important essays which feature in this edition like Philip Tew's "A New Sense of Reality? A New Sense of the Text? Exploring Meta-Realism and the Literary-Critical Field" pp. 29 – 49, Bernd Klähn's "The Threefold Way: About the Heuristics and Paradigmatics of (Post)Modernist Culture and Literature" pp. 77 – 89, and Ihab Hassan's "Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust" pp. 199 – 212.

## CHAPTER ONE

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE; THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

As already pointed out in the introductory part of this thesis, the aim of this chapter is an attempt at a critical overview of some extant related literature pertaining both to Coleridge and Keats. This will be done alongside some critical theories that inform the reading and interpreting of literature, and how these have been used within the context of Romantic discourse. This review therefore purposively points to the direction that the investigation of this thesis will take, given that it would trace the shortcomings of existing positions and point to the gaps and questions that need re-evaluation. It will be after this examination that a statement of research will be proposed, to re-affirm the stated hypothesis, and to indicate or forecast any contribution or breaking of new grounds in subsequent chapters. In other words, it will primarily help in establishing a contrastive and antithetical background for the arguments on the poetics of becoming.

The history of criticism is very complex, but there are major approaches, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that have shaped literary thought from Platonism to postmodernism and post-structuralism. The present critical situation is dominated by Anglo-American theories which, it must be ascertained, owe much to the rest of the Western world. These include Formalism, Structuralism, New Historicism, Marxist Literary Theory, Cultural Studies, Gender Theory and Feminist Literary Studies, Intertextual Approach, Biographical Approach, Psychoanalysis and Myth Criticism, Hermeneutics and Phenomenological Approach, and Semiotics and Deconstruction/Metafiction. While some of these theories, for example, Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, reconcile to one another and even overlap, some posit irreconcilable arguments and even occasion bitter opposition. New Criticism which insists on the textuality

of literature, is at antipodes with hermeneutics and phenomenology which go beyond textual analysis. More complicated still is the case with Deconstruction as a critical theory, which altogether resists and refuses any centre of meaning, and can be said to be aversive and to an extent nihilistic to theory.

Literature is now viewed not only from the standpoint of conceptualisation of thought and meaning, but ranges to aspects of non-conceptualisation and meaninglessness as well. And even where there is systematisation of thought, there still remains the problem of which approaches best satisfy literature, given that there is always a point of divergence between critical theory and practical criticism. As the title of this thesis indicates, the problematic lies in Romantic idealism in Coleridge and Keats and Deconstruction. So we will primarily be concerned with these.

Research and criticism on Coleridge and Keats are diverse and exemplify some of these theoretical and practical concerns. It is important to note that though some critics undertake their research with a particular approach, there is still, however, the interplay of other approaches. It becomes common to find an agglomeration of different approaches in the same research work. The intention here is not to investigate exhaustively these approaches or theories, but to examine how critics have employed them for their critical designs.

The complexity of research on Coleridge is the result of the complexity of his multivariate and enigmatic mind. However great he has turned out to be, there is always a call for caution when engaging with his poetry and criticism. Walter Jackson Bate has rightly said that one could quote Coleridge to support either side of almost any argument, and, one might add, believe wholehearted in its one-sidedness. Criticism on him has usually pointed to two main directions, considerations of the general critical implications of his theory on the imagination, and the evaluation of his literary practice according to his theory. While the former is based on what one can term a “Traditional” evaluation of his poetry, the latter concerns itself with somewhat modern and post-modern views on his work. Again, critics

have been attracted either to particular poems or groups of poems, and his early poetry has enjoyed priority of place in the critical outlook on him.

Keats's works have also attracted copious research in several avenues, ranging from New Criticism to Poststructuralism. Like Coleridge, critical attention lays emphasis on a number of his poems, the odes and romances for example, which have come to assume canonical qualities. His only prose writings, the letters, have served as pointers to understanding his poems, and as his own theories on philosophy, art and literature, however informal they were. They can be read as literary and philosophical pieces in their own right as well.

For a comprehensive reading, the two poets will be reviewed separately, unless where it occurs that this cannot be avoided. The chapter assumes the following structure: The Dynamics of Spirit, The Psychological Periphery of Self, Historicising Romanticism, Subverting Visionary Romanticism: (De)Construction, and Statement of Research.

## **THE DYNAMICS OF SPIRIT**

In the introductory part of this endeavour, we have pointed out that hermeneutics and phenomenology are important in the attempt at methodologically and systematically searching for meaning in reading and interpreting texts. Both overlap or are highly inter-connected, and have formed a great part of the bases on which logocentric thought is built, seen in their common direction in the search for understanding. Romantic visionary criticism is built on hermeneutic and phenomenological grounds. To understand Romantic idealism therefore necessitates an apprehension of both. They have been discredited, discarded, or all together dismissed by New Criticism and Deconstruction. Hermeneutics is a difficult term to define, but constitutes a recognised body of discourse. Originally designating the interpretations of



canonical and biblical works, it presently goes beyond these and can be said to be the act of understanding in interpretative activities.

Hermeneutics names no systematic or unitary body of theory or method, but is inclusive of any attempt at meaning. In other words, hermeneutics is a means of avoiding misunderstanding which is always present in texts. Two distinctive but related factions characterise the general mode of hermeneutic thought, one group inclined to it dominantly from a philosophical perspective, and the other considering it as a theory or method in interpreting, therefore, useful in its applicability to research in literature and the humanities. Some exponents include Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, Joel Weinsheimer, M. H. Abrams, Ray Carney and A. Prasad. None of these accept hermeneutics uncritically, but unanimously share the conviction that meaning and understanding can be embedded in texts.

Weinsheimer's study "Hermeneutics" (1989), examines the works and various positions of the some of the hermeneutics here mentioned. Schleiermacher, for example, was concerned not with obstacles specific to understanding some canon, but the fact that understanding was problematic. As Weinsheimer quotes him, "strict interpretation begins with misunderstanding" (p. 118), and "no inspection of a work ever exhausts its meaning" (p. 119). This already points to the awareness of complications that are inevitable in interpreting, and also that, there is always some new or modified meaning or sense that can be discerned from texts. An important feature here is the notion of pre-understanding, or productive prejudice, whereby the interpretative act is guided by foreknowledge. Schleiermacher opted for a divinatory and contextual reconstruction of a work, divinatory referring to the interpretative process of intuitive and empathic understanding of the author's spirit and what they mean in their writing. Other critics have adopted and modified Schleiermacher's position. The essential postulate as Weinsheimer puts it, is that interpretation should and can be governed by self-conscious theoretical methodology (p. 133).

In a very recent essay, “The Contest Over Meaning: Hermeneutics as an Interpretative Methodology for Understanding Texts” (2002), A. Prasad points to the critical aspect of hermeneutics, stressing that any act of interpretation must be obliged to “provide a critique of the ideological aspects of the text being interpreted” (p. 15). Prasad focuses on language, which as a medium of transmission is usually complicated and can be manipulated to serve as a source of “truth and untruth, of beauty as well as violence.” In other terms, the interpretative process must not be indifferent to some of the obstacles that are involved in the quest for meaning. This study accepts the fact that there exist problems of understanding Romantic texts, but given the specific contexts in the interpretation of the works, it opts for the attempt to focus on what the Romantics might have meant in their oeuvre, or any meaningful interpretative paradigm that attempts constructive readings in the works of the authors.

In “Keeping the Faith: The Limits of Ideological Criticism” (1999), a review of *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (1995), Ray Carney, who strongly advocates the hermeneutic approach to literature, makes a number of valuable statements on the state of criticism that hold considerable importance for this thesis. This volume contains all the major approaches to literature, especially modern criticism. While Carney appreciates the undertaking and the variety of issues therein discussed, he has a major contention; the way experience is treated by the various exponents. That experience is treated as if it existed without the individual seems to be very problematic. To Carney, what literature (and indeed all art) shows us “is that the most important experiences and most valuable expressions are absolutely personal and distinctive, their uniqueness makes for their preciousness.”

Carney highlights that Formalists, Structuralists, Marxists, Gender Theorists and Cultural Studies (basically concerned with the level of content in literature) and all that is affiliated to them, and the Deconstructionists (basically preoccupied with the level of expression), afford excellent readings of literature but have limits and these limits have to do with their deliberate unwillingness to go beyond the values that inform their theories. Carney

sees them as hermeneutics of suspicion or scepticism, since they avoid and resist the spell of the text or the author. This beyond is the distinctive nature of the writer, who is constantly estranged or sidelined in the process of appreciation. Ignoring the power of the author, his intentionality, and his visionary insight could seriously undermine certain essential author-oriented aspects of literature. He is of the conviction that “the mystery, the eccentricity, the distinctiveness, the mercurial mystery of individual consciousness eludes the systematisations” of the aforementioned schools of thought.

Carney proposes an approach that could bring the author and his authority into the limelight of criticism, the hermeneutics of faith. He outlines the task of such a critic:

The faithful critic does not demystify texts, but reveals their unfathomable mysteries. He or she does not show us the limitations of works of art, but returns us to an appreciation of the inexplicable wonder and boundless complexity of artistic consciousness.

What is understood here is that the hermeneutics of faith has to open up to the unfamiliar insights of texts and authors and yield to the depth of their experience. Carney is by no means implying here that this serves as the best way in appreciating literature. He is simply proposing an alternative, a place which seems to find no expression in the existing rich variety of approaches which he accuses of depersonalising and despiritualising art. To revise Carney, one can say that the critic could objectively identify certain problems of expression and ideology, if at all they exist, pointing to shortcomings but which do not dismiss the theoretical and critical perspective used. This would make the concept of faith not to sound too dogmatic or uncritical.

Phenomenological criticism studies art and literature as an expression of consciousness, as an attempt at systematically penetrating a literary text in relation to conscious will of the author. It has aspects, pertaining to subjective and mystical or metaphysical assumptions, that can be recovered or re-inscribed in Romantic aesthetics. Friedrich Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) analysed phenomenology in connection to

his theory of the dialectics, as the attempt of the spirit to achieve self-understanding and self-identity through the cultural forms in which the spirit is objectified, stating that consciousness is not an essence but a process, the end result being the acquisition of absolute knowledge. There are several positions advanced in modifying or redirecting of Hegel's concepts, for example the Schlegelian notion of becoming, which shows the complexity of the subject. This is not intended to be part of this discourse. Another important phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), equally points to the presence of identifiable meaning and sense that can be discerned from art, therefore advancing claims that justify logocentrism. With regard to literature, and especially Romantic poetry, phenomenology is characteristic of the following features: art is expressive rather than mimetic, artistic forms are organic rather than artifacts, and there is a high subjective category characterised by self-presence and authorial intentions.

A very important critical approach on the phenomenological theory of art and literature is proposed by the German critic Wolfgang Iser. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1988 [1972]), Iser elaborates on the reception theory or reception aesthetics, which fall under what is today referred to as the Reader Response Theory. Influenced by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg-Gadamer, Iser asserts that all investigations of meaning must give priority of place to the question of consciousness. He strongly holds that literary works have an inherently dynamic character (p. 212), arguing that not all experience can be transcribed in a text. Central to his arguments on the act of reading and interpreting literary texts are what Iser calls "unwritten implications," "gaps," "missing parts," and "spaces" (p. 213). These demonstrate indeterminacy, which far from its deconstructive conception, stimulates the construction of meaning, depending on the interpretative context. To Iser, therefore, the reader is not just an interpreter, he must actively create alongside the author to complete his interpretation. So the act of interpreting is an act of creative participation. In the view of reading Coleridge's and Keats's texts not as completions in themselves, but as providing allowance for further reading

and interpretation, Iser's phenomenological approach sounds very useful in the poetics of becoming.

Phenomenology has increasingly come under attack, particularly in Postmodernism, but its centrality in logocentric thought, however modified, is persistent. And as we will see, Deconstruction is inevitably enmeshed in logocentric thought. The fourth part of this chapter will discuss some of its detected shortcomings. The discussion of this endeavour is not only centred on seeking the acquisition of absolute knowledge in the Romantic poet, but is also aimed at construing the spirit of the authors in their self-expression from specific contexts. And as will be seen, a phenomenological or hermeneutic reading does not suppose that a real or satisfactory meaning is found.

Hermeneutic and phenomenological criticism on Coleridge mostly centres on his spiritual, religious and theological character. Given that religion and philosophy are inextricably intertwined, it becomes impossible to discuss this domain without certain of his concepts on philosophy. But critics have pointed to the fact that Coleridge, because of his multiplicity of the strands of religious and spiritual consciousness owing to so many sources, most particularly German idealism, continues to pose difficulties as to any definite stands he might have taken during his life time. It could be safer all the same, as will be seen, to see his religious thought primarily in terms of his poetry for it is here that he showed his creative and critical potential before attempting to systematise it in his prose. This does not mean that his prose is not important, for it helps in providing an additional dimension in treating the former.

The diversity of thought in the domain of religion has seen him in different dimensions, a Neo-platonist, a Pantheist, a Deist, a Unitarian, an Anglican and even an Atheist or Agnostic. Some have seen him as an enigmatic embodiment of these varied conceptions. This, therefore, maps readings of his religious and spiritual engagements in two broad terms, orthodox and unorthodox, these words being used from the Christian theological point of view.

Basil Willey posits his argument on religious, and to an extent structural terms, structural in the sense of the creative process. In “Coleridge and Religion,” (1972), he pinpoints what he refers to as the pattern in the “Coleridgean carpet” as unbelievably complex, but undertakes to try and follow the thread that leads from the Unitarianism of his Cambridge and Somerset days to the Christian orthodoxy of his mature years.

Stressing that Coleridge had undergone the influence of a multitude of philosophical and religious concerns in his youth such as Lockean philosophy, the Associationism of Hartley, the Utilitarianism of Paley and Bentham, the Necessitarianism of Priestley and Godwin, the Jacobinism of France, the Pantheism of Spinoza and his followers, the Deism and Socinianism of the eighteenth century, he had the task of struggling to emancipate himself from them in the rest of his life. This, Willey adds, was an enormous effort of self-knowledge and self-conquest. His major contention is that:

The quest for truth, and the vindication of Christian faith as the true philosophy, formed the master-current of his life, to which all his other myriad interests were tributary rills. Thus any study of Coleridge in only one of his many guises – as literary critic, as poet, as political thinker, as metaphysician – is bound to be incomplete. (p. 221)

The major problem here is that Willey oversimplifies the importance of major modes of spiritual awareness like Pantheism for example, seeing them as tributary rills. Coleridge’s various religious concerns cannot be convincingly seen as a structural evolution to Christianity. They should be seen rather as separate and important religious or philosophical concepts in their own right with which Coleridge grappled.

So in seeing Coleridge as one to whom “the unity of all hath been revealed,” Willey is of the conviction that no subject, for him, existed in isolation from the central theme- the “ultimate concern” [Christianity] - or from all the others. Willey all the same ascertains that the result remained fragmentary and incomplete, and though Coleridge’s ill-health, personal unhappiness, and self-reproach for his weakness of will might have prevented him from

reaching his goal, he wonderfully achieved so much, for he left far more in advance of the time, all the essential “blue-prints” for the Christian apologetic in the nineteenth century and after; and he would not have been the great literary critic he is acknowledged to be if his theorising – notably about the imagination-had not been an inseparable part of his general philosophical campaign (p. 222). The reductionism of Willey does not provide a fair interpretation of Coleridge’s work.

G. W. Knight also sees Coleridge from a Christian and dominantly Catholic point of view. In “Coleridge’s Divine Comedy” (1975) he posits a hermeneutic study based on Coleridge’s three mystery poems, ‘Christabel,’ ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Kubla Khan.’ To Knight, these poems within a narrow range show an intensity comparable with that of Dante, and could be structured as a *Divina Commedia* exploring in turn Hell, Purgatory and Paradise which he asserts have a strong universal significance. In his argument Knight points to the nightmarish experiences of Christabel under Geraldine’s spell, the instances of horror which are intensified by the recurring serpent-image in Part Two as an expression of fear of some nameless obscenity that permeates the poem. He sees the implied erotic and sexual nature of the poem as perverse and horrifying. All these represent the hellish side of human experience and therefore ‘inferno’ in Dante’s terms. But Knight stresses that opposed to the nightmarish are images of religious grace like ‘Mary Mother’ and ‘Jesu, Maria,’ which strike a balance even though they are overshadowed. Knight proves in his understanding of this poem to be very reductionist in seeing Christabel and Geraldine as prototypes of the human condition of sin leading to salvation. Christabel is acted upon and so cannot represent original sin. Geraldine acts ‘sinfully’ but shows no consciousness of a Christian sinner seeking redemption. This already points to the inappropriateness of Knight’s scheme. Again, his treatment of the erotic nature of the poem based on Christian theology is very traditional and needs a re-examination.

Knight continues that 'Christabel' helps greatly our knowledge of 'The Ancient Mariner,' where he interprets the bird as suggesting some redeeming Christ-like force in creation that guides humanity from primitive and fearful origins (p. 203). The central crime, the slaying of the Albatross, may correspond to the fall, the thwarting of some guiding purpose by murderous self-will, or to loss of innocence in the maturing personality, or to the death of Christ. The Mariner undergoes spiritual agony and frustration. It is however at the extremity of despair and self-less feeling that the Mariner suddenly gains an insight into true spirituality whereby a sense of purity and freedom replaces horror and sin. The poem thus represents purgatory. Knight then goes on to make his main point:

Christabel's enforced and unhappy silence whilst under Geraldine's serpent spell may be directly related to the water-snakes of 'The Ancient Mariner.' She, like the becalmed ship, is helpless; perhaps, in her story too, until a certain frontier, involving spontaneous, but not willed, recognition, is reached. Just as she cannot speak, that is, confess, so the Mariner, when, as it were, saved, spends the rest of his life confessing. (p. 205)

Knight then comes in with 'Kubla Khan' which, accordingly, is a comprehensive creation and plays a synthesising role. The poem incorporates both the dark satanism and the water-purgatory of 'Christabel' and 'The Ancient Mariner' and therefore holds a comparable, or greater profundity, its images clearly belonging to the same order of poetic reasoning (p. 213). He attaches importance to two symbols, the pleasure dome and Mount Abora. These include and at the same time transcend the agony and frustration of the previously discussed poems. The poem, Knight strongly intimates, has a barbaric and oriental magnificence that asserts itself with a happy power and authenticity too often absent from visionary poems set within the Christian tradition (p. 213). The images here can be compared to Dante's final vision of a paradisaal experience.

While Knight's work provides an interesting reading of Coleridge, his hermeneutic approach is not very convincing unless his concern is that of making analogies between the issues raised in the poems and Christian theology of sin and redemption. These poems were



written almost during the same period, but working out a Christian scheme from them, especially 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan,' sounds curious, given that the symbols used do not really tie with an acceptable creative process in Coleridge. The comparison between the first and second poems is not binding since Christabel does not face the same fate as the Mariner who is responsible for having done something wrong. One thing, for sure, is that Knight stresses Coleridge's Christianity like Willey, but Coleridge can be seen hermeneutically from other religious perspectives other than Christianity.

Several critics have carried out research on the same lines of Willey's thesis. For example in *Coleridge's Career* (1990), David Graham comments on Coleridge in like terms, seeing Coleridge principally as a Christian hero who constantly tested and probed his religious convictions but constantly returned to Christianity, or to put it differently, Coleridge sought explanation of and expression of his private experience within the tradition of Christianity (p. 4 and pp. 152 - 180). The question which Graham does not answer is whether Coleridge's greatest poetry is a justification of his Christian thought. Ronald C. Wendling offers perhaps one of the best and insightful structural perspective on Coleridge's religious and spiritual preoccupations seen in his so called strive toward orthodox Christian values.

Wendling's investigation *Coleridge's Progress to Christianity: Experience and Authority in Religious Faith* (1996), demonstrates the question of process and becoming, though from a definite perspective. It proposes that Coleridge's religious evolution is everywhere in his oeuvre, for Coleridge was first and foremost a Christian religious thinker whose endeavours in other spheres were always subordinate to this end. It becomes impossible, Wendling asserts, to develop a rounded picture of Coleridge as poet, critic or metaphysician without referring to his religious beliefs, which formed collectively, as he said, "the keystone in the arch". "The keystone in the arch" echoes Willey's "ultimate concern" meaning Christianity. Wendling adopts a psycho-biographical stance to discuss the structural pattern of Coleridge's religious evolution, for he believes it is impossible to do justice to

Coleridge's religious thought without considering the background of his emotional needs which occasioned his longings. This personalist approach has, prior to Wendling's time, met with doubt and suspicion, especially that of Owen Barfield,<sup>1</sup> of which Wendling is aware. But he insists that a psycho-analytic study, though not serving as the end point of his analysis, is very essential in the understanding of Coleridge's feelings as expressed in his notebooks and letters.

To Wendling, biography in itself can never explain the religious impulse; it can only show the empirical context in which it took root and flourished (p. 12). Without it we turn to look through Coleridge, as it were, to his religious philosophy, as though a systematic transcendentalism could develop and be understood through pure thought isolated from experience (p. 12). Religious experience, accordingly, lies beyond the reach of psychological analysis. His defence position against Barfield's is made clear when he asserts that:

Barfield's Coleridge was someone who could discuss the Trinity in the same detached way as a problem in geometry ... But Coleridge regarded the subjectivity of the Christian faith as even more important than its elaboration into a philosophically well-grounded theological system. To maintain its vitality theological faith had to keep alive the heart in the head, constantly nourishing itself with a Lutheran awareness of the need for individual conversion and human dependence on supernatural intervention. This subjective sense of faith involves a sense of one's ontological, and not merely psychological, weakness, but in Coleridge's case it was his emotional needs, moral failures and psychological dependencies that provided the constantly daily reminders of his impoverished 'being' and consequently deep religious need. (p. 55)

This explains why he categorises his work into two main perspectives: the domain of the empirical ego in which psychology finds its application, and the transcendental ego, purely religious, and which goes above the empiricist ego. This is where he places his argument's centrality (p. 71-75). Wendling proceeds in the eight chapters of the work to validate his views. The first chapter "The Resource of Metaphysics" is informed by the personal circumstances that pushed Coleridge to drift from poetry to metaphysics. To Wendling, the trauma of loss Coleridge experienced in childhood and the disintegrating nature of his relationships which he was at pains to accept, turned him towards a monistic

inclination. This monistic inclination, he underscores, was an apt justification of deep religious yearnings. According to the critic, since monism is judged as not genuine in Coleridge's scheme, there is the need to search for a satisfying religion. Monism could thus be seen merely as a phase towards Christianity and not as an alternative spiritual or religious concept in its own right. This sounds disturbing because it is not easy to convince one that to be a Christian presupposes a rite of passage through other religious or spiritual tenets.

Chapter Two takes on "An Excess of Inwardness" in which the problem is presented in terms of Coleridge's emotional homelessness. This homelessness is seen in his inability to sustain relationships and is prefigured in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' which to the critic expresses a leave-taking and only incomplete return home. Wendling stresses that it was Coleridge's obsession with the absolute that destroyed his relationships though he was gaining in the domain of his religious and spiritual philosophy. This statement unfortunately turns out to be ironical since Coleridge's concept of friendship was in line with the religious and spiritual importance he attached to it. Coleridge's spiritual crisis is seen as "a dramatic instance of the anxiety of non-being that in some ways threatens all our lives" (p. 86-87). This thought might have been true for Coleridge, so generalising it sounds unconvincing.

The unacknowledged anger at his early abandonment by his mother and his unconscious fear of its recurrence,<sup>2</sup> and his determination to force strong men into the role of father-figure, make up the unconscious factors of Coleridge's psychological character in the third chapter, "Coleridge's Indigence of Being". Wendling also accounts for his addiction to opium. All these factors, accordingly, compelled Coleridge to be dependent on others and most particularly on God. Chapter Four, "A Religion for Democrats, 1792-1801" is based on the claim that during this period Coleridge had the primary interest to "construct a religion fit for late eighteen-century democrats" (p. 101). Wendling uses as substantiation Coleridge's 1795 *Lectures on Revealed Religion* to show his interest in Democracy which he supposes had the duty of guiding people back to the Bible.

Chapters Five and Six concentrate on “Negative Unitarianism” and “The Approach to Trinitarianism, 1806-1816” respectively. While in the former Wendling’s main concern is Coleridge’s entertainment of quasi-orthodox dispositions, the latter is an account of Coleridge’s rejection of the unipersonality of God and the move toward the concept of the Trinitarian orbit. Coleridge, accordingly, started showing sympathy towards the Anglican Church by abandoning the Socinian Christology he had adopted from Priestley in the mid 1790s which saw Jesus as “above humanity only in the purity of the moral altruism of which he is the perfect example and towards which the necessitarian progress is necessarily leading all of us” (p. 111). Coleridge also became reconciled to the doctrine of atonement which was out of question in his early days, and the central relevance of Christ, strongly attracted also to the anthropomorphic concept of God. Wendling highlights the issue with clarity; the anthropomorphic conception preserved God as a divine person distinct from finite forms at the expense of a living relation with those forms. Pantheism preserved that relation but sacrificed the personality – and freedom – of God and also any existence of finite forms as substance in their own right. Therefore the only rational consistent way to preserve both the transcendent personality of God and his contemporaneity with a substantial though derived world of finite forms was through the trinity (p. 117).

Coleridge was first to work out a distinction between God as a living, existing person, and God as a ground or substance of every living thing. While the former is the God of Christian religious worship whose nature lies beyond human comprehension, the latter is God as found in philosophy whose internal relations or polarities can be described by analogy with what we know of natural or human processes. Wendling intimates and provides evidence from the notebooks and letters that Coleridge adopted the former and tried to justify his religious orthodoxy by working out a trinity that led to a subjective Christianity. This trinity was made up of reason, understanding and imagination, significantly pertaining to the level of psychology and deferring from the true Christian sense of it. The imagination was playing a

key role between reason and understanding and was seen as the continuously recreating and redeeming divine Logos existing within each human soul. Wendling continues that the next task for Coleridge was to show how this same process was mirrored objectively in the history of revelation and the history of the church, stressing that as early as 1810 Coleridge was eventually becoming more Anglican while regretting and rejecting amongst the over-individualistic and anti-liturgical nature of his early days.

For all of Wendling's lofty investigation, one thing remains certain. It is unconvincing to posit an argument that would portray Coleridge as completely surrendering his individuality to community concerns. Coleridge's Christianity is portrayed still as having an individualistic touch. This shows how difficult it may be in trying to see him as a life that struggled through other modes of spiritual and religious consciousness to justify Christianity. Wendling's argument equally points to the difficulty that emerges when he tries to cut Coleridge from his early idealistic beliefs. This brings to mind Raimonda Modiano, who in her work entitled *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (1985), observes that, "Coleridge's downfall as a poet was the price he paid for the merits as a philosopher" (p. 3), and has rightly pointed out in her discussion of Coleridge's complex frame of mind that:

In working with Coleridge, one discovers sooner or later that one is dealing with an extraordinarily retentive mind and even conservative personality; that although Coleridge is moving forward in time, changing his views, developing new intellectual allegiances, he nevertheless retains ideas and preferences that he developed at an earlier time ... Early attitudes resurface in later years. (p. 5)

Though Modiano deals with the poems till 1804, claiming this period to be the end of Coleridge's nature poetry, and proposing a controversial dialectic; his thesis stating an early intense infatuation with nature's picturesque beauty, antithesis as alienation and grave doubts, and synthesis consisting of a higher consciousness where nature takes a prominent place in his philosophical system, her remarks on Coleridge's conservatism (conservatism in this sense being his avowed reverence for nature), is worth appreciating. It only goes to confirm the

distinct position of Coleridge. But considering 1804 as an endpoint to Coleridge's idealism in nature sounds very unconvincing and subversive to the poetics of becoming, which sees this idealism all through his life. He can be convincingly and substantially treated in any of the mentioned religious notions with which Wendling grapples.

In *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (1976), Stephen Prickett underscores the religious and philosophical implications of the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth and their influence on the theological atmosphere of the Victorian era. He considers Coleridge as very difficult to classify but thinks that his contribution was felt. He posits the argument that "Coleridge tried the possibility of unity between philosophy, theology, and aesthetics" (p. 2).

Focussing on the natural and secular which were for Coleridge the constituents of the outer world, and the world of religious experience, sacred and felt as super-natural which constituted the inner world, Prickett explains that Coleridge engaged these with the metaphorical and symbolic nature of language. These two notions were highly associated with the ideas of creativity which left its mark on the later Victorian poets and theologians such as Keble, Newman, Maurice and MacDonald. The idea of poetic "creativity," Prickett stresses, developed by Coleridge, Wordsworth, and their successors in Victorian England, which is usually seen in purely aesthetic terms, was in fact a re-discovery and a re-application of a much older Judeo-Christian way of thinking about religious experience (p. 7). Prickett, therefore, sees Coleridge within the limited scope of mainstream Christianity.

In his discussion of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' Leslie Brisman in "Coleridge and the Supernatural" (1982) employs the theological and implicitly the biographical approaches. His endeavour is to apply Coleridge's own hermeneutics to the poem within the sphere of biblical criticism. Brisman's thesis can be subcategorised: Coleridge's distinction between Reason and Understanding is the basis for a hermeneutic framework which exploits the tension between signifier and signified. Coleridge alligns Reason with the Primary and

Secondary Imagination, and Understanding with fancy. While Understanding is the natural faculty of sense perception, Reason is the supernatural light which illumines the mind of all humans, the ability to perceive the whole of which the parts are the manifestation, the faculty by which we participate in the divine Idea (p. 124).

In this light, Brisman continues, sensory phenomena such as miracles are signs which are incomplete in themselves and need to be referred to the realm of the idea so that interpretation can be possible: miracles are authenticated by doctrine, rather than authenticating doctrine. Brisman labels the notion that signs possess authority in and of themselves as preternaturalism. The interpretation of signs by referring them to an already established realm he labels supernaturalism. He sees typology and allegory as the two ways by which the material signifier is referred to its spiritual signified.

Typology closes the gap between the two and asserts the co-presence of the signifier and the signified. In this sense every disciple is Christ. Allegory introduces historical specificity into the scheme of typological equivalence, and thus opens the gap between the signifier and the signified, asserts their non identity. Even though the two may be manifesting the same moral precepts, Coleridge is not Christ. To resolve this tension Coleridge makes history itself typological, the historical analogue to the development of mind from matter, the emergence of Reason from Understanding, supernaturalism from preternaturalism. Allegorical non-identity is therefore accounted for by the typological periodisation of history.

With the illustration of Coleridge's hermeneutics, Brisman then proceeds to interpret the poem as an enactment from preternaturalism to supernaturalism. The Mariner, he highlights, gains salvation by reinterpreting the albatross as an allegorical figure referring to the Christian values embedded in Divine reason but previously clouded over by his superstitions. Brisman interestingly stresses, nevertheless, that the Mariner's supernatural vision does not last, for his is an existence in the intermediate stage in the development of Reason, and compares him to a first century Christian. David Graham seems to revise the

stance of Brisman and interprets the circumstances of the Mariner's experience, positively following the formalist consensus that the poem is structurally and thematically coherent, and in line with his orthodox view of Coleridge's Christianity as earlier seen.

Graham's "The Supernatural Poems: The Ancient Mariner" (1990) treats Reason and Understanding in the same vein as Brisman, but in line with his initial thesis, concludes that the Mariner's crime is a happy fall which brings to his consciousness the necessity for Reason to inform Understanding forming the basis of a new spirituality.

Other critics have also tried to map out the religious and spiritual character of Coleridge. They include Katherine Cooke, Catherine Mile Wallace, James J. Cutsinger, David Jasper and Robert Barth, who investigate the hermeneutics and phenomenological stance of Coleridge. Cooke's *Coleridge* (1980) discusses Coleridge's scepticism to Christianity from the time of the Pantisocratic scheme to his later life. Religion and spirituality for Coleridge, she highlights using the poet's work *Confessio Fidei* (1816), was a matter of free will and thought, it was existential whereby the human self-act of will could find correspondence with divine will (pp.173 – 175). Coleridge therefore accepts revealed religion as far as it can act as a medium for subjective truth. Cooke offers a balanced assessment of Coleridge when she asserts that "Coleridge's own system of belief does not fit into any orthodox creed; on the other hand, it would be hard to find any sustained passage in his works which did not add an implicit religious dimension to its main contents" (p. 176). This view gives the allowance to treat Coleridge's in religious or spiritual perspectives other than Christianity.

Wallace, in *The Design of Biographia Literaria* (1983), examines Coleridge's philosophy of unity, stressing the conviction that we believe instinctively in the possibility of order, and we act instinctively to order our world's perception. She intimates that a closed logical system excludes the divine, and that for Coleridge, any orderly explanation, any act of creating order is grounded in an act of faith. This, she insists, is not directly nor necessarily a faith in God but, rather, a faith in the possibility of order and knowledge that for many



individuals has culminated in religious experience (p. 11). Like Cooke, Wallace's view is inclusive and provides a clue to interpreting Coleridge from diverse religious concepts. Mark Storey also reflects the same concern, stressing in *The Problem of Poetry in the Romantic Period* (2000) that Coleridge remained caught between his revolutionary youth and conservative principles, between his belief in the power of the imagination and the imagination's failure, and between his belief in the divine creative power of the poet and his belief in the monotheistic God of Christianity (p. 36). But Storey goes on to make a remark that needs re-evaluation; that Coleridge fails whenever he tries to be prophetic. Though his point may hold within the context of being, it would be important to note that anticipation, translated in the act of becoming will appropriately suit the poet's struggle of envisioning and apprehending a realm of existence that is contextualised in the sphere of what is to come.

Robert Barth works on the same lines as Wallace. He handles the question of faith in "The Theological Implications of Coleridge's Theory of Imagination" (1989), where he points out that the creating of a meaningful whole from chaos is based on an implicit act of faith in the eternal logos (p. 3). In his explanation of Coleridge's understanding of the imagination, he treats faith in general terms like Wallace, not insisting on a Christian theological position, but on symbols:

In Coleridgean terms, symbolic experience involves not only a new awareness of divine reality, but is, at least potentially, an encounter with the transcendent reality of God and a call to engage oneself in the process of discovering and meeting him even more deeply (p. 9).

What is implicitly clear here is the notion of the underlying unity in things which are a reality of God's being or the Being of a transcendent reality. God is ever creating and man follows his same pattern. Otherwise said, the ongoing creative acts of God involve man. In any case, Coleridge did not try to work out a theological basis of faith. Rather, he was seeking the most satisfying means for his subjective spiritual speculations.

Cutsinger sees the situation in a different but related dimension in his remarkable essay “Coleridgean Polarity and Theological Vision” (1983). He argues cogently that in the polarity that underlies most of Coleridge’s theory of the imagination and which indeed underlies most of his thought, he is attempting to awaken nothing other than a possible way of seeing God (p. 92). Seeing his work as a new vision in theology, he turns his discussion of polarity to what he calls “the chief problem facing theologians, the problem of the knowledge of God (p. 101). The problem of knowledge in any realm, Cutsinger makes clear, is “a problem of barriers or dividing surfaces”. He finds that in much of modern theology, an “oppressive set of dividing surfaces” has arisen between the world and God. “Skepticism has made it appear that ours is a world of us and them: that there is, on the one hand, a region continuous with the self or subject, flowing under the direction of its own power and activity; and, on the other hand, a second region, discontinuous with the self or subject, possessing unknown and unknowable motions and configurations of its own.” The resulting consequence in theology has been a series of dichotomies between “the immanent and the transcendent, reason and revelation, the secular and the sacred, the scientific and the religious, and the natural and the supernatural” (p. 102). Cutsinger then argues for the importance of the Coleridgean polarity. If the task of the theologian is to “render intelligible man’s relationship to God who is forever overflowing custom’s bounds,” he must do so in a vision that is true both to the divine reality and to the human experience of that reality, to allow “for the immanence yet transcendence, the sameness yet otherness, the “in” and the “out” of the “in” of this strange one called God (p. 105).

In *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker: Inspiration and Revelation* (1985) David Jasper views Coleridge from a Christian theological perspective, seeing poetry as divine revelation, the poet as prophet. His intention is to treat Coleridge as a poet of original genius and not as a channel for the works and ideas of others. In this vein, he posits the conviction that “art and aesthetics can illuminate and refresh the religious life.” Obversely, theology may

be the conserving source for a theory of the almost limitless freedom of the artist as inspired creator (discoverer: *my emphasis*) (p.3). It becomes certain that theology, according to Jasper, can find a new language in literature.

Quoting extensively from thinkers like Novalis who sees the poet as priest and poetry in terms of religious mysticism and in its feeling for the arcane and revelatory (pp. 9 – 11), Friedrich Schlegel who sees Romantic poetry as a spiritual expression of becoming and holds that only a divinatory criticism can dare characterise its ideal (p. 18), and Pierre-Simon Ballanche who elaborates the poet's transcendental powers and sees him as an instrument of divine revelation and expression (p. 20), Jasper argues that Coleridge's notions of symbol and imagination give an integrity to his attention to religion and that his experience as a poet seems to have suggested an analogy between the poetic mind and the mind which is imaginatively responsive to the fundamental mystery of divine inspiration.

The main problem with Jasper is that his treatment of the spiritual implications of the imagination leaves the impression of Coleridge as subject to transcendental free will. In seeing Coleridge as a divine instrument of spiritual awareness the whole notion of self-conscious will is relegated and the imagination treated as autonomous. Uncaused acts of will misrepresent the Romantic imagination and there is evidence to prove that Coleridge's notion of will was a conscious aspect in connection with the creative and divine self.

While the foregoing review has tried to focus on the positive hermeneutic concerns on Coleridge, there still remain questions to be answered. For example the readings are almost entirely pro-Christian and tend to simplify other major modes of spiritual consciousness which can be treated with the same intensity of Christianity. Nature is treated no doubt, but where this is the case it is limited to a specific period as marking the end of Coleridge's idealist temperament. Phenomenology goes beyond mere theological investigations and tries to study the spirit of the poet in a wider perspective. In this wise Coleridge's poetry may provide substantial grounds for re-examining some of these perspectives.

There are critics who, however, discuss Coleridge from a very negative point of view. These critics discuss him on similar religious lines above, but completely condemn all in him that can open new avenues for investigation. In other terms, what some of the above critics may have simplified or taken to be an ongoing process in Coleridge's religious quest is simply dismissed. The negative criticism therefore sees Coleridge from the perspective of an altogether failed religious life because of his eccentricity to Christianity and adoption of religious or spiritual modes considered blasphemous, atheistic and agnostic.

Douglas Kenning in *Necessity, Freedom and Transcendence in the Romantic Poets: A Failed Religion* (1998), sees English Romanticism essentially as revelation, spirituality and the workings of a private mind, but that the Romantics, especially Coleridge, Wordsworth and Keats, failed in their mission to free teleology from the bondage of Christianity. Seeing teleology as a unique preserve of Christianity, his main contention on Coleridge lies in his treatment of teleological necessity which he categorises as external (providence, fate, chance), and internal (providence, organicism, the voice of conscience) (p. 3), in other words, nature and mind. The main issue is Coleridge's Spinozist inclinations which lead to his monism. Kenning refuses to see will in this vein as a self-conscious activity of the poet. Analysing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "This Lime Tree Bower my Prison" he sees it rather as dominantly divine will.

Like Jasper, Kenning handles the imagination as an autonomous power seeing the poet as a passive receptor to its dictates. He accepts, no doubt, the fact that it is through the imagination that the Romantics sought to explain experience, but feels that the imagination seemed to have been a power beyond their will, it was a noumenal cause, self-motivated, self-justified (p. 127). In fact, it is this aspect of self-conscious will which to him caused Coleridge's religious failure. In distinguishing between the temporal and eternal, Kenning dismisses Coleridge's pantheism and monism as temporal, his vision as temporal since it is not connected to divine will and therefore not eternal even if it informs eternity (p. 262). With

regard to memory, Kenning views it as a reinforcement of loss and decay rather than a constructive aspect of personality. This view rejects the existential terms of Coleridge's psychological or individuating engagement at self-harmony and unification.

Kenning's view here re-echoes an earlier position by Charles J. Rzepka who in *The Self as Mind* (1986), discussed the Romantic poets' visionary solipsism whereby he sees the disembodied poet as identifying solely with the mind. To Rzepka, the poet, when freed from his sense of embodiment, delights in the speculative fiction of seeing into the souls of others, in the manner of a deity who is omniscient yet obscure, spiritually intimate yet physically indistinct. Solipsism, he asserts, becomes visionary, opening to the mind vistas inaccessible to ordinary sight (p. 5). Coleridge, unlike Wordsworth and Keats, according to Rzepka, failed to achieve a mature sense of self-certainty not only in his personality but in his vocation as a poet (p. 20). The argument in this thesis is that processes in the Romantic poets, far from reaching "achievement," are to be convincingly seen as never ending or open ended, their efforts are relentless.

Religious eccentricity is a common characteristic in Romantic poetry. The religious and spiritual controversies during this period influenced the poets to advance other mediums through which the individual could strive for a new order of spiritual well-being. Coleridge, as will be seen later, is a perfect example as he grappled with religious and spiritual notions that were irreconcilable with Christianity. Given the dominantly Christian orthodoxy of the time, it is obvious that any new alternative spiritual position would meet stiff criticism. Romantic criticism also reflects this concern. In *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789 – 1824* (1997), Robert Ryan expresses his sense of unease with the view that the logical extension of Protestantism is atheism. He accepts the Romantics' sufficiently self-doubting, yet highly individualistic, reforming zeal and asserts that, "The thoroughgoing scepticism of the Romantic movement is not really atheism, but simply part of the Romantic Reformation, namely, its protestant heritage of doubt attendant on faith (p. 46).

This is actually a rescue attempt on what the dissenting spirit of Romanticism meant and can open up a wider perspective in the treatment of the subject of religious deviance. This study, however interesting in its central argument that literature can contribute greatly to religious thinking, unfortunately excludes Coleridge from the list of authors, Ryan seeing him as dominantly Christian, and therefore undermining his early spiritual views which hardly deserted him in life.

Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Free-thought, 1780 – 1830* (1999), discusses the eccentric, in fact, the atheistic nature of the Romantics in their quest for a new spiritual certitude. He adopts a New Historical position and a Hermeneutics of suspicion to discuss what he calls this "infidel phase" of the Romantic poets (p. 6). His treatment of the complexity of atheistic thought, which is generally seen as a negative or subversive attitude to mainstream Christianity, is embedded within a historical perspective, given that he traces this thought from the pre-Romantic era and believes that its prevalence in the Romantic period was not unconnected to the past, and also not unconnected to republicanism, reform agitation, Unitarian Dissent, and millenarian enthusiasm that characterised the era (p. 43).

Priestman holds that the study of mythology and Orientalist philosophy initially fuelled atheistic tendencies (pp. 22, 26), and more specifically in the second chapter of the book, he focuses on the poetry of three distinctive English writers whom he thinks directly impacted on the Romantics. These are Sir William Jones (1746 – 1794), Richard Payne Knight (1751 – 1824), and Erasmus Darwin (1731 – 1802). With regard to Jones, Priestman asserts that, "the strongest impact of his Indian-based writings was to establish the idea of a rich, vivid and largely admirable belief system outside of both Christianity and the classical mythology which long habituation had drained of its alternative potency" (p. 50), and his poetry presented "all world religions and mythological systems as interrelated and as equally worthwhile objects of study" (p. 54). Jones's position was an indication of the challenge on the so called superiority of Christianity. As for Knight, Priestman perceives his poetry as "the

perfect links between libertinism, religious infidelity and political radicalism” (p. 55), and Darwin as a real scientific threat to Christian orthodox theology as his works like *Economy of Vegetation* and *The Temple of Nature*, offer “an increasingly organised assault on the biblical account of creation” (p 62). As his title indicates, free-thought was gaining grounds and explains why Romantics might have been at liberty to subvert Christian theology. It is with regard to these important collective insights that Priestman proceeds to examine the individual writers and their social and cultural contexts.

Priestman’s fourth chapter “The Tribes of the Mind: The Coleridge Circle in the 1790s,” examines the poet as obsessed with atheism, an obsession which haunts much of his poetry (p. 122). Tracing Coleridge’s Pantisocracy scheme to his settlement in the Lake District, Priestman sees him as a true public embodiment of deistic and atheistic thought, which he was to abandon only in his later life as he struggled towards a “Christianising progress beyond an initially shared theory of energy as the principle unifying mind and matter” (p. 132 – 136). Besides, the critic holds, Coleridge’s developing philosophy, discernible in his interest in German Philosophy, Platonic Idealism, and Spinoza and Pantheistic commitment, were clear pointers to the ‘dangerous’ position he adopted. In analysing this complex in poems such as ‘The Eolian Harp,’ ‘Kublan Khan,’ and ‘The Ancient Mariner,’ Priestman unequivocally interprets Coleridge as a writer seriously “torn between the unorthodoxies of pantheism and idealism” (p. 154). To re-evaluate Priestman, Coleridge’s pantheism and idealism need to be examined and judged on the general framework of man’s positive spiritual engagements no matter what form or creed.

A very disturbing aspect of Priestman’s work, however important it is, is the fact that he fails to critically assess the Romantics within a broader scope in their attempt at alternative and conflicting views to orthodox theology, that is, he seems to treat them equally as a convinced Christian critic without pointing to or appreciating objectively the positive ramifications that were encapsulated in their aversion to mainstream Christianity. That the

Romantics believed in God or a transcendent divine reality is beyond doubt. While they might have failed as Christians, there is evidence that they advanced and expounded views that are worth reconsidering, rather than being sidelined for the simple reason that they do not comply with Christian orthodox theology. Their engagements in this domain as will be seen were not a simple matter of philosophical or intellectual curiosity, but a serious yearning for spiritual satiety.

In the domain of research pertaining to the phenomenological aspects of Keats's works, much has been said about the poet which needs critical re-evaluation. The various strands of argument significantly point to three distinctive directions. The first sees the poet as having no religious or spiritual consciousness, interpreting him on the grounds of atheism or agnosticism. The second dwells on matters concerning some kind of spiritual awareness in the poet, a spirituality and religiosity which had no firm, convincing and orthodox bases. But it falls short of concretising its arguments in determining in detail whatever alternative the poet might have engaged in. The third acknowledges that all the accredited systems of ordering experience were breaking down or had broken down, and sees spirituality in Keats in terms of his subjective recourse to myth for spiritual exuberance. This camp has two directions of thought, the one being that he succeeded, and the other, that he failed.

Hoxie Neale Fairchild, in *Religious Trends in English Poetry* (1949), seems to have set the pace on the controversy over Keats's spirituality, which many critics have long followed. He claims that no authentic religious attitude finds expression in Keats's poetry, therefore dismissing any idealistic tendencies that Keats had. He sees Keats's poetry as an expression of some exuberant paganism, but insists that "even when most earnest and intense, his paganism is much more aesthetic than religious" (p. 462). What Fairchild in effect implies here is the old myth that aesthetics was Keats's life-long interest more than anything else. Other critics have advanced arguments, at times more radical, in the light of Fairchild's.



Herbert Wright's "Has Keats 'Eve of St. Agnes' a Tragic Ending?" (1975: rpt. 1995) tries to lend credence to the assumption that Keats's poem offers no transcendent spirituality for the lovers, nor does it have any spiritual bearing on Keats himself. He thus sidelines Romantic visionary criticism, since he discards Keats's idealistic speculations. Wright asserts that from the beginning to the end of the poem, the atmosphere is fused with gloom. He judges that the vision scene is simply a momentary interlude of bliss in an atmosphere that is generally characterised by grimness and hopelessness, and that the extinction of the light of the moon is symbolically significant, for it coincides with and marks the end of the happiness of the lovers (p. 10). In this regard, the imagination offers not a breakthrough into a spiritual realm. Rather, it translates the clarity of tragic vision.

To sum up his argument, Wright accentuates that for all the religious mood evoked by the title and the picture of the Beadsman in the act of prayer, the poem has a sinister aspect which becomes more and more visible in the course of the narrative. This sinister aspect, the critic writes, is also evident in 'Lamia,' 'Isabella,' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci.' Thus, the question of religiosity and spirituality should be ruled out in interpreting any of these poems. While Wright's argument may be right, Keats's aesthetic experience can be related to the metaphysical, which points to an inner vision that inheres these poems. The gloomy atmosphere, for example, matches Keats's philosophy of the life of suffering and pain as mile stones toward achieving spiritual goals, a greater reality that supersedes mortality.

Jack Stillinger's reading also falls into the mainstream of the debate that opposes any religious or spiritual ramifications in the poem as well as any other poem of Keats. In the "Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in 'The Eve of St. Agnes'" (1975), he dismisses metaphysical critics on the grounds that they have been misled by Keats's language into believing that there exists spirituality or transcendence in the poem. The presence of religious language which the metaphysical critics have misconstrued, he asserts, is simply the use of

religious terms to hyperbolise sensuous love that bears no relationship with spirituality. To Stillinger, neither Madeline nor Porphyro offers a clue to spiritual expectation or achievement.

In line with his reading of the poem's lack of spirituality, Stillinger interestingly styles Keats an agnostic, pointing out that the poet's criticism and blasphemy of the Christian church is a justification of his having nothing to do with religious principles. This outrageous accusation needs to be re-examined because Stillinger obviously judges him with a typically traditional Christian orthodox mind. Keats was not indifferent to spirituality, and the fact that he proposed a different system should not be literally taken for agnosticism or atheism.

In *The Romantic Atheist* (1991), Sunday Uche discusses Keats on the premise of a sexually perverse poet whose religion becomes sexual worship and gratification (p. 15). To the critic, Keats could achieve this only by subverting the tenets of the Christian church. In analysing the romances, Uche cites John Barnard who, in *John Keats* (1987), comments on Keats's agnosticism with regard to the essence of the Greek spirit in Keats's poetry, to foster his argument: "Keats shared Hunt's dislike of institutionalised Christianity, parsons, and the Christian belief in man's innate corruption, but as an unassertive agnostic, held well short of Shelley's atheism" (p. 17, Barnard, pp. 38 – 39).

In what turns out to be a very pro-Christian, in fact Puritan reading, Uche holds that Keats's disregard for the church and his refuge in sexuality point to no metaphysical or transcendental engagements he might have held in life. His imagination was a poetic space for his erotic ejaculations, and only a misguided reading will see it as an expression of the sublime or spiritual. Uche concludes that he was not just a confessed agnostic, but also a devoted atheist (p. 98).

The supposed agnostic character of Keats also concerns Jean-Claude Salle who, in his article "Negative Capability" (1992), contends that the roots of Keats's philosophy of negative capability are to be found in Keats's agnosticism, in his capacity of submission. Salle stresses that Keats's spiritual testament, the exhilarating freedom of doubt, has been converted

into the agony of ignorance (p. 189). Here again, Keats is seen as a poet who had no spiritual conviction because he was suffering from ignorance. This unfair claim, which is also taken up by Glenn Everett in “Keats’s Lack of Religious Belief” (2000), needs a critical evaluation.

As pointed out earlier, some critics have credited Keats with the awareness and expression of a religious and spiritual consciousness, even though not on Christian bases. Unfortunately, these critics, most of whom point to mythology as an alternative source for Keats, do not go further than their recognition to show in detail how Keats manifested his spiritual stance in the domain.

The deconstructionist Paul de Man in “Introduction: The Negative Road,” *Selected Poetry of John Keats* (1966), saw spiritual and transcendental hope in Keats, asserting that “Keats lived always oriented toward the future (p. xxvi). De Man’s statement was geared towards his later deconstructionist convictions that Keats’s poetry offers a sense of self-destruction and self-prevention in his attempts to achieve his aesthetic and idealist goals. The question here is whether a Romantic could have self-consciously wanted to destroy himself in the struggle for achievement, even if postmodern criticism identifies problems of meaning in their works.

Anne Mellor’s interesting study *English Romantic Irony* (1980) grapples with certain strands of German Romantic philosophy, which provide a path to understanding Keats’s spiritual engagements. Mellor appreciates Keats’s strive at something transcendental, not necessarily in the sense of spiritual longing, but using the paradigm of Schlegelian dialectics, “The Paradigm of Romantic Irony” (pp. 3 – 30), “Keats and the Vale of Soul Making” (pp. 77 – 108), she portrays Keats as a quintessential Romantic ironist, whose imagination only taught him a profound lesson of his limitations as well as of humanity (p. 77). Nevertheless, Mellor, in pointing out the open-ended nature of most of Keats’s poems which she sees as unresolved debates, in stressing that Keats constantly lives with opposing thoughts in mind, a mark of empathic openness, he was as such participating in the process of becoming which he finally

came to see as the ultimate human reality (p. 78). Mellor does not offer a systematic detail of Keats's spiritual or religious broodings, nor does she explicitly state that Keats had a transcendent spiritual vision. But her expounding of the philosophy of becoming is fundamentally important as it will be subsequently seen to play a significant role both at the level of Keats's aesthetic and transcendental longings. To revise Mellor, becoming is not necessarily the ultimate reality in itself, but could be the process towards achieving an envisaged ultimate reality by the poet.

In her structural study of the odes (1983), Helen Vendler points to religious consciousness in Keats's 'Ode to Psyche.' This spiritual verisimilitude is justified as she portrays Keats both as worshipper and possessor of a divinity. Elaborating Keats's preoccupation with mythology, she stresses that Keats could always find penetration to the region of eternity provided by myth: "Keats's first sophisticating of mythology is evident in his assumption that it exists not so much in the pagan past as in an eternal region where, by purifying himself of sceptical modernity of thought, he may once again find himself" (p. 53). Stressing the liturgical and sacrificial nature inherent in the poem, Vendler underscores the point that Keats's mythological and allegorical personages, whether Psyche, Moneta, Apollo, Autumn, represent his groping after a method he thought common to all systems of salvation and therefore true in a way beyond fancifulness. Her argument ends here. While she sees Keats's spirituality in the realm of myth, we will take a different perspective in this endeavour which will be more engaging than myth, and will provide an appropriate context for the discussion of the philosophy of becoming.

Peter Vassallo in "Keats's 'Dying into Life': The Fall of Hyperion and Dante's Purgatorio" (1995), follows the stream of Vendler's argument, highlighting the theme with Dante's *Purgatorio* which, accordingly, Keats uses as substitute for Milton, to serve as a new paradigm for spiritual pilgrimage, "In moving away from Miltonic epic, with its inherent moral strictures, Keats strove to replace Biblical moralising sternness with a humanised version

of Hellenic myth which would not lose sight of suffering and pain in the world around him” (p. 214). The Moneta episode, with its far-reaching allegorical implications, therefore, is in the main a poetical enactment of Keats’s experience in Dantean terms, where a more mature vision of the original happy dreamer of redemption emerges out of the encounter with Moneta. What complicates Vassallo’s argument is how he tries to blend Hellenic myth with Dante who has a typical Catholic vision. Whatever the case may be, this self-seeking religious alternative to the canonical laws of Christian theology is not without shortcomings. From a typical visionary and idealist perspective, Vassallo is of the conviction that final redemptive vision is achieved. This conclusion may provide the avenue to think that complete poetic vision is attained as well. But given that the poem is a fragment, one can conveniently situate it within the realm of an ongoing process that ushers new hopes and anxieties. Denis Haskell’s study “Keats and the Notion of Truth” (1995), concentrates on the aesthetics Keats’s poetry, but makes a passing remark about the question of religious that Keats was no Christian. He too goes no further in situating Keats within any other system.

Jeffrey Cox’s New Historical reading *Poetry and Politics of the Cockney School* (1998), points to Keats’s sonnet ‘Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition’ and Hunt’s ‘To Percy Shelley, on the Degrading Notion of Deity,’ as part of the School’s disenchantment with Christian values. These sonnets demonstrate the nature of the debate of myth and religion at the time. Cox asserts that both poets were at ease with the infinite beauties of pagan mythology in contrast to the gloomy repentance of Christianity. Their religious scepticism was fostered by their regard of the church as a mere cultural function that had lost its value. In other words, the poems confirm the attached importance to the poetical as an ideological move against the Christianity of establishment bishops (p. 112). Though Cox acknowledges Keats’s concerns with religious and spiritual matters, but offers no depth, the tendency here is towards myth.

Amongst those who have centred on detail studies on a positive religious and spiritual perspective on Keats, are Walter Evert and John Barnard. Both critics advance the argument that Greek mythology was the firm basis on which Keats built a new religion for himself. In *Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats* (1965), Evert concentrates on the religious mind of Keats, contending from an existentialist view that the poet's attachment to Greek art justified his beingness. Providing evidence to substantiate Keats's anti-clerical attitude and disgust for the church as a social institution, Evert argues that Keats was inclined to speculative activity and a basically religious view of life, but shared no sympathy for the dominant metaphysical mode of organising experience in the culture in which he wrote (pp. 12 – 13).

To Evert, therefore, mythology that was centred on deity, and classical antiquity were Keats's spiritual taproot. The redemptive nature of the imagination, the critic upholds, creates a new sphere of spiritual energy. He takes the example of *Endymion*, pointing out that in it are hymns to, characterisations of, or addresses to Apollo, Maia, Bacchus, Cupid, Diana, Neptune, Pan and Venus, and the odes to Aoplo, Maia, Psyche, Fame, Hope, Sleep and Solitude. All these, Evert asserts, provided fertile grounds for the poet's spiritual broodings and maturity.

John Barnard takes on the same theme in *John Keats* (1987), though from a dual perspective. He acknowledges the inspiring power of myth as the avenue for Keats's poetic and aesthetic achievements, and then focuses on the notion of love and sexuality which, he claims, are fused with spiritual undertones. In substantiating his argument on this vitality in *Endymion*, Barnard asserts that:

The animist worship of Pan Book I, the belief in a 'Created Maker' and the Shepherd-king's ascent to godhead, imagine a pattern of belief which ignores the doctrines of the Trinity and original sin in favour of a theistic natural religion. It is a religion which believes in an after-life and the immortality of the individual human soul, and which regards human love, both in its physical and spiritual manifestations, as generic and self-transcending. (p. 41)

Barnard's conclusion, which is also echoed in Robert Ryan's *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789 – 1824* (1997) and Christoph Bode's "Keats as a Reader of Myth: *Endymion*" (1998), is that Keats achieves a fulfilment of an immense of human potential, a potential was denied him by the dominant political and religious beliefs of his day.

In line with his main argument, Barnard sees 'Ode to Psyche' as an attempt by the self-conscious imagination to create its own myth. In other words, the poet creates a shrine in his own consciousness. This desire to create Psyche's worship in imaginative and inner time is a clear denial of Christian history (p. 43). Barnard interprets Porphyro and Madeline in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' as true pilgrims, young love and true spirituality. He even proposes that the poem parallels the mythical story of Adam and Eve, and hence a paradigm of the transforming nature of the creative imagination (p. 91). The imaginative power exerted on myths also finds expression in the odes which are also related to myth. In this vein, Barnard says they are concerned with the challenge which experienced reality presents to the possibility of spiritual transcendence (p. 100)

Though Evert, Barnard, Ryan and Bode provide very rich readings of the religious and spiritual nature of myths, Keats's attachment to Greek classical values is more to be seen in conformity with his aesthetic quest for poetic identity and grandeur rather than religious longings. But as we are going to argue, his aestheticism has a spiritual dimension. From all the various positions examined, the critics all adhere to one major consensus. Their general trend of argument focuses on Keats as a believer in, worshipper and adorer of deities. In other words, Keats pays reverence to these deities in his quest for spiritual wellbeing. Thus, Keats is seen as using pre-Christian mythology to question Christianity's claims to ultimate and unique truth. The argument to be taken in this endeavour is that Keats's spirituality transcends mere adoration or reverence for deities to a more subjective consciousness, where the self becomes

the centre of its own spiritual search, and from here foreshadows its affinity with divine energy after death.

Douglas Kenning (1998) and Martin Priestman (1999), are among critics who acknowledge Keats's recourse to myth, but interpret him with scepticism as a failed spiritual life, thus a futile idealism. We have already seen how both critics treat Coleridge. With regard to Keats, Kenning's premise is that, like Coleridge, he failed to free teleological necessity from the bondage of Christianity. "Keats," he highlights, "completely lacked the mind and temperament for any analytic thought. His mind flowed with intermittent power and frequent turbulence, but across a wide plain, not a deep channel" (p. 138). This assessment already foreshadows a prejudice and bias against the poet, and cannot be taken to be convincing. In pointing to Keats's theory on teleological immortality as expressed in his letter on the "Vale of Soul Making," Kenning expresses the conviction that it is feeble, "Keats's theory has no firm bases and provides no assurance or certainty in post existence" (p. 266).

Using the example of 'Fall of Hyperion,' Kenning clearly states that Keats's mission in this poem is a promethean one characterised by martyrdom. But with an almost deconstructionist emphasis, he asserts that there is no revelatory vision in the poem. Normally, Moneta (Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, the mother of the muses) represents the right to revelation and poetic achievement, but as Kenning accentuates, she rather represents hopelessness, separateness under the lash of regret and remorse (p. 342). Memory, he stresses, becomes torment, loss, and decay. Moneta is the antithesis of what Keats hoped for in his revelation, spiritual or poetic. The imagination lies in ruins and offers no possibility to the poet. Moneta is a mockery of transcendental dreams, of a synthesis of death and life. The impression Kenning is giving here is that Keats seems to have written this poem to express his failure. This cannot be true if looked at from a different perspective than scepticism.



Priestman as seen earlier, points out the dangers of mythology and oriental philosophy in England during the Romantic period. These, according to him, coupled with the prevailing free thought and provided firm grounds for the expression of religious infidelity and atheism. In Chapter Seven of his work, "Pretty Paganism: The Shelley Generation in the 1810s," he asserts that Shelley, Byron and Keats all fit easily into any definition of infidelism, and actively and unashamedly declare themselves as such (p. 219). 'Endymion' and 'Hyperion' serve as examples which he uses to analyse Keats's supposed avowed atheism. The same conclusions that have been discussed under Coleridge with regard to the shortcomings of the author apply here.

### **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERIPHERY OF SELF**

Coleridge's oeuvre has been subject to a number of studies in psychoanalysis. His concept of the imagination and the psychology of the mind finds expression not only in his prose but poems as well. Criticism has concerned itself with the systematisation and interpretation of dreams, nightmares and the exploration of the gothic in the bid to arrive at a psychological validity of Coleridge's mystery or supernatural poems like 'Kubla Khan,' 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel,' and to an extent 'Frost at Midnight' and 'Dejection: An Ode.' The following comments centre on specific psychological perspectives with regard to Freudian and Jungian readings to an extent, given that these are embedded in most of the approaches under investigation. For example aspects of psychology have been discussed above within the framework of Coleridge's religious transformation process. The important question to answer here is whether such readings are favourable to Romantic visionary criticism, given that they are related to Deconstruction.

We already saw the interesting psychological study of David Beres who reads Coleridge's symbolism in 'The Ancient Mariner' in the psycho-analytic terms of Freud as suggesting the poet's psyche as characterised by an oral fixation resulting from a repressed

conflict between love and hatred for his mother. He equally sees 'Christabel' as manifesting the same trait. This ambivalent and conflicting emotions about the mother could find expression only in his poetry, and not for the purpose of solving his problem as such, since this process of sublimation is not seen as resolving the conflict and guilt in his consciousness even if it were Coleridge's intention. This is the same view that Wendling uses to support his argument in Chapter Three of his work, though he thinks that this resulted in Coleridge seeking solace from God.

Other critics, who have employed psychological concepts on Coleridge include Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge's Nightmare Poetry* (1974), *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (1988), James B. Twitchell, "The World Above The Ancient Mariner" (1975), Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (1980), Kathleen Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (1981), Joseph C. Sitterson Jr., "'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and Freudian Dream Theory" (1982), Jean Pierre Mileur, *Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence* (1982), Edward Bostetter, "The Nightmare World of The Ancient Mariner," (1984), Davis S. Miall, "Guilt and Death: The Predicament of the Ancient Mariner" (1984), "The Displacement of Emotions: The Case of 'Frost at Midnight'" (1989), Jennifer Ford, Coleridge on *Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (1998), Eric K. W. Yu, "Romantic Alienation Reconsidered" (1999), and Ash Tekinay, "Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel': Doubts About the Universe" (1999). These critics focus on aspects like fear, guilt, repression and infantile fantasies, depression, regression, nightmare and alienation.

Magnuson (1974) suggests, for example, that as Coleridge's sense of depression and isolation increased towards the end of 1802, his familiarity with nightmares increased correspondingly, resulting in the identification of himself with the Mariner's nightmare state (p. 35). And with regard to the calm that is characteristic of the opening of the conversation poems, he sees them not as a psychological calm: "But it is not a calm of plenitude, a quiet

repose when the heart listens. The calm is more often a threatening stasis, something to be overcome by an act of faith and imagination” (p. 37). He re-echoes this view of stasis in *Coleridge and Wordsworth* (1988), arguing that “By forgetting, sorrow may be repressed, but fear and guilt cannot be forgotten and cannot be transformed into other emotions. They exist only to return unmodified (pp. 43 – 44)<sup>3</sup>. He highlights the fact that for the poet “there is a certain evil in daydreams and imaginings and that subjective random trains of association cannot be innocent because the passive mind dissolves into a phantasmagoria of images and feelings” (p. 68). He holds that the mind in the nightmare state is cut off from stabilising external realities and forsakes the familiar world for the freely associating and uncontrolled imagination, and that Coleridge’s fear and detachment from the stabilising influences of the external reality leads him in a distorted fashion to identify the Albatross with the malevolent storm. Magnuson concludes that Coleridge’s act of will as well as the Mariner’s is overwhelmed by the current of fear, and this loss of will coupled with the loss of external support leads to the a destruction of a sense of personal identity (p. 72).

Though Anne Mellor’s *English Romantic Irony* focuses on the frame work of the Schlegelian philosophy of becoming, her discussion on Coleridge, “Guilt and Samuel Taylor Coleridge” (pp. 137 – 164) curiously, if not disturbingly, denies his poetry this ideal. Rather, she premises her argument with regard to psychoanalysis, stressing her convictions on almost similar lines to Magnuson’s. In this vein, she accentuates that Coleridge desperately wanted to believe in the validity of an ordered Christian universe but could not, because his own acute intelligence perceived the existence of an underlying [and insurmountable] chaos (p. 137).

Substantiating her argument with ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’ for instance, Mellor is of the conviction that both the reader and the Mariner enter a universe of chaotic and unpredictable strange things. The world presented here is subversive of any systematic and logical order of things. The overall conclusion of Mellor’s arguments is that Coleridge was obsessed with fear and his poetry was born out of guilt rather than Schlegelian (or even

Romantic) enthusiasm. This is a position that needs careful re-evaluation. With specific regard to Coleridge, Mellor interestingly seems to defend the opposite of her thesis, assuming an equally ironic or paradoxical twist. It would appear that much criticism is idealising or expressing an enthusiasm more than the Romantics or Romantic texts seem to translate. That is, it seems to misconstrue what Romantic speculations are actually all about, expecting it to have been faultless or interpreting it as making claims to be so. If irony implicates possibility, then it works well for the psychology of self in Coleridge as will be examined subsequently.

While Sitterson shares a similar view with Magnuson, he comments on the question of infantile fantasies and regression, stating that a psychological reading can go beyond that. He therefore sees the poem as “concerned with the affective significance of the world as it impinges upon the self” (p. 33), the world not being limited only to the infantile world but including aspects besides the psychological. In other words, it is not only the internal conflicting mechanisms that account for the state of things. The external world, in this case nature and the supernatural forces that it inhabits, are contributing factors. The overall impression is that the self is permanently endangered, it is split, and the poet expresses his inability to overcome them. This is obviously a wrong narcissistic interpretation of Coleridge, who is self-conscious of self-progress and self-restitution amid inevitable difficulties.

By examining the moral nature of Coleridge’s vision of the universe expressed in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’ Bostetter posits the premise that its vision is morally significant only within the nightmarish universe created by human fears (p. 241). Arguing against a critic like Lowes, who advances the position of the poem as reflecting a sacramental vision of sin, punishment, repentance and redemption, he holds that at the heart of the poem is the reality of a universe being controlled by a hierarchy of capricious, merciless, supernatural beings and, therefore, an expression of Coleridge’s fears that the universe is malignant and vicious. The poem is a nightmarish parody of a dream, fulfilling fears rather than wishes, and expresses not only an individualised Coleridge, but humanity as a whole. Idealism is here

again refused Coleridge. David Miall and Ash Tekinay take this position further, and even on harsher terms, emphasising the dark strain and psychological distortion that permeate Coleridge's poems.

Focussing on 'Frost at Midnight,' Miall sees anxiety, guilt and fear as anticipating a worse emotion, some ultimate terror or despair, and perhaps an eternity of suffering. He asserts that the visionary state of the imagination, which makes the familiar into something of awe, thus has a direct equivalent in nightmare, where the familiar is transformed into an object of terror (p. 98). In seeing nightmare as embedded in the traditional demonology of evil spirits existing eternally, Miall asks to know why in his discussion of the modifying power of the imagination in Chapter 18 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge chose to draw attention to the parallel between the imagination and the power of nightmare. This suggests, he intimates, a half-repressed ambivalence over the work of the imagination by the nightmare (p. 99).

Miall contrasts the patterns of consciousness between Wordsworth and Coleridge, seeing the former as having attributed a positive and understandable prophetic role to childhood, and the latter as suffering from ambivalence and distortion of vision. 'Frost at Midnight' accordingly lacks any "explicit connections of adulthood with childhood modes of thought," for the adult Coleridge writing the poem is still in some obscure way a victim of a self-confuting wish. Miall here is outrightly dismissing any possible therapeutic reading of the poem as an attempt at self-unification.<sup>4</sup> The poet is fixed within the state that it caused, instead of being caught up in the process of reciprocal and developing oneness with nature that he then invokes for Hartley (pp. 100).

More curious about Miall's psychoanalytical stance is what he says the poem conceals about Coleridge's life. In the light of Beer's argument, he takes his position to a psycho-biographical dimension whereby he interprets the poet's desire as an early childhood wish to be independent because of hatred and repulsion of his parents, especially his father whose death he might have wished to cause. In this case, the broodings over his son are a veiled

expression of his desire for retribution and therefore evil (p. 100). Miall concludes on the grounds that the poem is an act of displacement, a turning away from two major emotions of the self which is the central and motivating cause of the poem; first the emotion that displaces the self towards the ideal, and second the emotion that, being a source of anxiety, is itself displaced, because it threatens to turn (because it has already once turned) that oneness of thought and world into something uncanny and destructive (p. 102). The argumentative context of this thesis will resist such readings and place the self as engaged in constructive developmental processes.

Tekinay's psychological study situates Coleridge within the nightmare and the gothic with emphasis on the point that if dreams, from a Freudian perspective, are to be treated as expressing a realm of reality, the case of Coleridge will aptly justify the dangers and lurking darkness of the human mind and the universe. Within this scope, the two major poems as indicated by the work's title are seen as impressively expressing a sense of the loss of metaphysical certainty and faith in the presence of any benevolent power. Tekinay's parallel poem is Thomas Hardy's 'Hap,' which expresses the bleakness and predicament of humanity's fate in the hands of merciless unseen forces. Coleridge's recourse to the gothic in expressing his scepticism about the universal order and his fears regarding the cosmic 'hap', the critic claims, is because the gothic provides a medium which discusses things that do not bear the light of day, or to put it differently, issues that are not easily graspable; the gothic implies complexity and unknowability, which unknowability is compared to the "iceberg" in each individual which psychoanalysis can only partly bring to light (p. 2).

The main issues that Tekinay raises are as follows: He dismisses critics who interpret any philosophical notion, positive hermeneutics or phenomenology in Coleridge, strongly accentuating that Coleridge's psychology destructs such philosophical and hermeneutic reading. Denying claims that tend to read 'The Ancient Mariner' as an expression of a psychic pilgrimage, he asserts that the poem is a nightmare, and like all nightmares, it is horrifying

and often irrational. The poem like 'Hap,' envisions a universe where man is in the hands of arbitrary and unpredictable forces. So trying to impose a rational order or cause-and-effect relationship on such a dream landscape is a vain venture (pp. 3 - 4).

Tekinay makes an interesting remark with reference to the casting of dice in Part Two of the poem, seeing the game, as it were, as a matter of chance and a clear implication of the negation at any attempts to impose a systematic philosophical or religious order onto the poem. There is no sense of serenity nor peace of mind, no sense of the oneness in life, the Mariner is the best example of an illogical and incomprehensible world.

With regard to 'Christabel,' Tekinay strongly holds that it further transcribes Coleridge's fear and anxiety about a chaotic and ambivalent universe. The main issue here is again the exploration of the human psyche through the medium of the gothic, which expresses the paralysis of innocence under the spell of evil whose vagueness owes much to its unknowability. Christabel and Geraldine represent innocence and evil respectively. There is no universal benevolism because the cosmic presence of evil embodied in Geraldine prevails and triumphs. The atmosphere is fascinating, mysterious, erotic and ultimately horrifying. Gothic imagery is used, Tekinay emphasises, not only for a stylistic but also a thematic purpose in revealing the immediacy and fear of the approaching encounter between innocence and evil, and later its horrifying effects (p.6). Innocence is vulnerable to the effects of evil and therefore cannot in a Blakean sense transcend beyond to a complex and sophisticated stage of experience.

Tekinay's interpretation of the erotic and sexual in the guise of homosexuality or lesbianism falls within the frame work of the presence of evil. Christabel's innocence suffers from what the critic calls a lifelong imprisonment, it is unequipped with the necessary means to fight against and surmount evil, it is doomed to lose because the guardian spirit she seeks from her religion, mother, her father, all prove ineffective. Moral order and justice are

conspicuously absent (p. 9). This is a typical traditional interpretation, which needs to be decentred for other less polemical but interesting readings.

Jennifer Ford and Eric Yu offer analyses that show a blend of historicism and psychoanalysis. Ford accepts the well established views that see the imagination as an intellectual, spiritual and ideal force, but proposes to investigate a new and challenging concept of this faculty. Using historical and psycho-biographical evidence she interprets the imagination as a medical faculty distinctly linked to the material, to the corporeal (p. 185), stressing that Coleridge gave a pathological dimension to his analysis of its implications. Her concern, therefore, is the psychosomatic effects of the imagination and how poetry best transcribes this in Coleridge. The medical imagination, she points out, has its grounding in contemporary medical debates whose arguments find exemplary evidence in works pertaining to psycho- and physiotherapy.<sup>5</sup> Ford shows that “in adopting a fundamentally physiological doctrine of the source and production of dreams, Coleridge was also able to explore the physiological, medical nature of the imagination” (p. 3).

She goes on to explore Coleridge’s apprehension of three specific prevailing theories of dream causation; dreams that “are caused by gods intervening in the lives of men,” “are a result of the action of malignant spirits,” and that “The dreamer’s bodily position and state of health both cause and influence dreams” (p. 130). While her analysis of the first two provide the same results as Miall and Tekinay, the last notion dominantly preoccupies the investigation and points to her conclusions. Using evidence from the notebooks, she sums up her arguments as follows: Guilt and falsehood could be “traced in Gastric Life” (STCNB; III: 4409); the liver provides the organic source for “life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame” (p. 163); the need to urinate might provoke dreams containing water imagery; a dream of many colours might be a translation of feces accumulating in the bowels (p. 173); fear has its origin in the digestive system; rage, in the vascular system (p. 175). The concepts Coleridge used to name the phenomenon of the material made psychological are translation and transmutation:



“certain intellectual and psychological faculties could be translated into dream emotion, thoughts and passions (167). In the sphere of nightmares, Ford sees the imagination from a dual perspective; the imagination may prove too active a power in translating the material effects of gastric and other disease organs into images and sensations, or it is a stagnant and nightmares of suffocation result.

Taking her argument to heights verifiable only by medical experts, she alludes to the phenomenon known as the “maternal impressions theory.” The issue here is the “impressions” produced on the foetus by the imagination of the pregnant woman with the results being good or bad (p. 189). Could this justify the link between the oral fixation and hatred theory which a critic like Beres advances? The analysis seems particularly obscure here. Her conclusion is that the operation of the imagination involves a psychosomatic translation, and that once Coleridge recognised this, he increasingly perceived dreams to have physical properties and pathological causes, dreams and nightmares belong to the physiological world of organs (pp. 200 – 202). The medical imagination is thus the link between the body and the mental activities of dreams and poetry. The problem with Ford’s innovating study is that she seems to be concerned with psychosomatic connections and interactions, but without really pointing out the effects this had on Coleridge and his poetry. In other words, poetry to her seems to be simply the medium of Coleridge’s medical concepts, poetry does not help Coleridge’s problems of self-analysis and self-therapy. More explicitly, it would appear Coleridge used himself as a case study to diagnose psychosomatic problems without providing a remedy.

Yu’s interpretative model rests on the psychoanalytic perspective about narcissism on the one hand, and a Marxist-historical one. The latter will be examined later. Romantic alienation is seen here from the perspective of poets’ response not in the sense of their individual yearnings, but as the effects of a capitalist mode of production. This had little to do with the Romantic quest for spirituality and transcendence. Rather, anxiety and fear are seen

in terms of the business of poetry in a market society where the concept of patronage was steadily going out of currency.

We have argued that to understand the discourse on becoming necessitates the poetics of Romantic visionary criticism, which cannot evade the idealism of Romanticism as depicted by Coleridge and Keats. In all the views advanced on the psychological functioning of the imagination and its relation to Romantic idealism, the critics of psychoanalysis so far have tended to look at it as expressing unresolved problems of the dynamics of personality. The imagination, as it were, has no holistic or therapeutic effects in the face of conflicting mental mechanisms. They firmly assert that it is self-deceptive and only points to the true and realistic nature of Coleridge's embattled life. It is equally in this vein that they see nature to have a negative impact, and reject any meaningful spirituality in Coleridge that relates to it. These critics' treatment seems to sound very unsatisfactory, given that Coleridge was no doubt aware of and expressed the psycho-physical problems he faced viz, infantile fantasies, drug addiction (opium at his time, it should be recalled, was a medical prescription for pain-killing), emotional turbulence, and even philosophical and theological conflicts. But his engagement in poetry and idealist philosophy should be seen as pointing positively to the fact that he was trying to come to terms with himself, and to transcend these problems. To solve a problem is to accept its reality and express it. In expressing it, it is inevitable that a psychological therapy is ensued or envisaged. So to judge him as a failure during his life time is biased. Alternative interpretations are therefore deemed necessary.

There is a category of psychological analyses not pertaining to Freud or Jung that concerns a great bulk of Romantic poetry. This is the revisionist approach. It is characterised by controversy since critics are not agreed on a commonly acceptable definition of the term. In any case, there seem to be two distinctive directions to which the concept points. It may have to do with how the author handles and manipulates existing works that serve as a source

of inspiration to their own work, it may concern the poets alterations and modifications of their written works.<sup>6</sup>

Norman Fruman, in “Creative Process and Concealment in Coleridge’s Poetry” (1992), is inclined to the former position where he lays charges of dishonesty against the poet in relation to forgery and plagiarism. He holds that concealment is an insistent need in Coleridge that regularly shapes his creative process and characterises many of his revisions, and this concealment sometimes is fashioned to obscure debts: “In some cases, his dependence on sources is so pronounced that his alterations and departures seem dictated by little more than desire to muddy or obliterate the trail back to origins (p. 155). Fruman’s reading, therefore, challenges the reputation of Coleridge as an established Romantic poet, and puts to question any originality, or more appropriately, innovations that is attributed to him.

To sum up his argument, he accentuates that “Coleridge would have had a more productive career and a less problematic life had he been honest, had he been less driven to present himself as free from all human shortcomings, pride, ambition, envy” (p. 167). This assessment should obviously be considered unfair, given that the impression it gives is one which shows Coleridge as simply reproducing other people’s works without recourse to distinction. It is not easy to write poetry that would be considered to be entirely free from having a relation to some existing poem or other piece of writing. Again, the poet must not necessarily acknowledge his source especially as his poem will certainly achieve its own distinction. One should not forget that Coleridge’s poems are largely centred on the psychology self. This means that he struggles to write his life and its distinctive experiences rather than emulating that of an Other.

The Romantic visionary critic Harold Bloom offers a more objective and productive stance which, even though susceptible to criticism, has to do with the second distinction above. He calls this the psychology of anxiety and antithesis which, in effect, is a subset of the

Intertextual Approach. Bloom holds that a poet is usually under the influence of a 'poetic father,' and his writing is a struggle to differentiate or free himself from the influence of this father so as to achieve his own identity:

What we call a poem is mostly what is not there on the page. The strength of any poem is the poems that it has managed to exclude. No poem, not even Shakespeare or Milton or Chaucer, is ever strong to totally exclude every crucial precursor text or poem ... clearly indirect or revisionary allusion would be considerably more relevant than overt or calculated allusion.<sup>7</sup>

Bloom's assertion may sound paradoxical, but when carefully examined, it indicates the imaginative struggles in the creative act of writing to recontextualise sources, and to produce new results along the lines of the poet's distinctive thinking. This position justifies the persistent need to reiterate the imagination's importance in the quest for distinction. Distinction here has to do with the poet's eccentricity which is arguably justified by his self-conviction of adopting a position that does not fit any formal and generally accepted one.

There have been fundamentally two main tendencies in reading Keats's poetry from a psychological perspective. On the one hand, we have interpretations pertaining to eroticism, where the argument is centred on Keats's sexuality, and on the other hand, we have the psychological theory of anxiety and influence, which is a sub-branch of intertextual studies as indicated above. As they presently stand, both perspectives need a revision, given the limitations that are inherent in them.

We have already seen under "The Dynamics of Spirit" how much Keats has been criticised for infusing erotic and sensual imagery in his poetry. Pro-Christian or traditional moralist critics have misread Keats's eroticism on purely moral grounds, arguing that Keats by this, meant no spirituality, but an imaginative valve through which he could assuage his repressed sexual desires. Jack Stillinger (1973), accuses Keats of hiding behind religious

language to celebrate and hyperbolise sensual love. He compares Madeline with the mythic Philomel, and portrays Porphyro as lustful, as a rapist, and unheroic.

Sunday Uche (1991) has equally interpreted Keats like Stillinger, seeing most of his poems as imbued with sexuality that offers no key to spirituality. It is rather a subversion of morality. We may be reminded that Uche's criticism is dominantly from a Christian dogmatic standpoint. His results are not satisfactory.

Stuart Sperry's treatment of *Endymion* assesses it as a love poem that powerfully energised Keats's adolescent carnal desires. But interestingly, he sees this sexuality as part of the culminated visionary experience inherent in the poem: "Keats's use of erotic imagery is integrally related to the visionary concerns of his poem, that habitually calls into play instincts and feelings that, while connected with the sexual impulse, run deep" (p. 101). One can say that through erotic knowledge the poet explores hidden springs of inspirations; the pursuit of visionary beauty. Sperry does not pursue or provide detail arguments for the last phrase of his assertion which needs critical attention, and can show an alternative and more positive and credible outlook of Keats's romanticising love.

John Barnard (1988), attempts to give a balanced reading of Keats's sexual politics, though he is more inclined to the physical component of love. From a psycho-biographical standpoint, he interprets Keats's love and erotic desires in connection with Fanny Brawn whom Keats passionately loved, a love he could not physically satisfy except through the medium of art. With the examples of 'Isabella,' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci,' *Endymion*, and 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' Barnard holds that they "resemble the uncritical transformation of conventional, sexual fantasy into safely ingenuous poetic romances (p. 69). Poetry is seen here as a veiled expression of inner turmoil propelled by sexual fantasies and wish fulfilment. Pointing to what he calls the "overwhelming eroticism" in 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' Barnard states that "the passionate and erotic atmosphere of the poem fully taps Keats's sensuality" (p.

84), and even quotes Byron's assertion of a kind of "mental masturbation" inherent in the poem.

Barnard, however, offers a more acceptable account when he suggests a religious dimension by drawing a parallel between Madeline and Porphyro and Adam and Eve. In his reading of *Endymion*, he refers to the generative power of human love both physical and ideal, but leaves his argument here with adequate or detail commentary. The overall impression is that Barnard is more concerned with human love and its erotic aspects than with the sublime and spiritual side of it.

The second category of the psychological mind frame of Keats and his preoccupation with creative productivity relates to the psychoanalytic process which Harold Bloom has termed the psychology of anxiety and influence as discussed above. As aforementioned, this theory is a constitutive part of Intertextual Studies. Here, the question of a precursor arises as critics trace previous poems authored by different writers in others works. This review presents four studies, Harold Bloom, *Romantic Poetry and Prose* (1973), Cynthia Chase, "'Viewless Wings': Intertextual Interpretation of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'" (1985), Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (1986), and James O'Rourke, *Keats's Odes and Contemporary Criticism* (1998), specifically Chapter One, "Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds: Intertextuality and Agency in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'" (pp. 1 - 43). All four critics direct their investigations on the influences behind 'Ode to a Nightingale.'

Bloom and Chase identify a unique Miltonic influence behind the poem's composition, drawing parallels with *Paradise Lost* pertaining to poetic technicalities like lexicon and syntax to which they limit their studies, without actually pointing to the aesthetic and spiritual implications that may be inherent in it. Bate, on the other hand, acknowledges multiple sources to the poem, therefore dismissing the previous claims of a uni-poetic father,

but insists that Shakespeare had the greatest voice behind the composing of the poem. His intertextual reference is *Hamlet* which he shows to have a lot of affinities with Keats's poem.

Bate goes beyond mere stylistic and technical imitations and foreshadows what will be of great interest with regard to Keats's mythological orientation. Bate casts the Shakespeare-Keats relationship in terms more protective of Keats's personal integrity, when he urges that Keats is left enriched by the voice of Shakespeare; he returns from the Shakespearean with a "new phoenix wings" (p. 197). Keats does not simply imitate, but he creates. Bate's comment is obviously specifying the aesthetic innovations in the poem. This aestheticism can be matched with the poet's distinctive meditative engagements that go beyond mere aestheticising.

To O'Rourke, the greatest value in the poem lies not in more definitive answers than those the poem itself provides to its closing questions, but instead in the vehicle itself, in the access that the 'Nightingale' ode allows to a highly unstructured process of composition that enters literary history as an echo chamber (pp. 2 – 3). O'Rourke seems to be favouring art for art's sake, given that his emphasis is not on the philosophising character of the poem: "The signifying process of the ode involves not only what Keats borrowed but how he borrowed ... as discrete moments of phonetic repetition lead to the rapid assimilation of broad networks of interwoven reference (p. 4). The question here is not intertextuality, but Keats's autonomous poetic potential and his infusion of supra artistic qualities into the poem. Supra artistic qualities is to be understood as issues that go beyond poetic aesthetics like Keats's spirituality which this endeavour will attempt to affiliate with Gnosticism.

To sum up our critique here, these critics are concerned with poems as aesthetic products of a creative process, not as an expression of process in aesthetic vision. This is what will interest our study on the poetics of becoming.

## **HISTORICISING ROMANTICISM: ROMANTIC IDEALISM ON THE PEDESTALS OF HISTORY**

The past decades have recorded an outstanding number of works on what has come to be called Romantic Ideological Criticism. This takes the particular guise of New Historicism which, among others, sidelines the aesthetic, hermeneutic and phenomenological interpretations of Romantic visionary criticism to viewing poetry as a substrata of historical, anthropological, sociological and cultural discourse.<sup>8</sup> The egotistical, individualistic and subjective, or to put it differently, Romantic solipsism and narcissism have little or no place in such analyses. Coleridge's and Keats's poetry has flourished in this domain, in which they are seen as using poetry as a medium for the expression of their socio-political consciousness and commitment in their time. It is, at this juncture, worth examining some of the diverse evaluations of Coleridge's poetry to see exactly where the role of Romantic idealism is placed in such a criticism.

There are a number of prevailing socio-political and economic circumstances during Coleridge's time that have influenced historicist critics to see his poetry in a historical context. Two of them attract much attention. These are the French Revolution and slave trade. The French Revolution was obviously one of the most inspiring factors that contributed to the rise of English Romanticism, with Wordsworth and Coleridge using the occasion to air out their revolutionary freedom and idealism not only in politics but in arts, aesthetics, and religion as well. The consequences of the revolution, especially the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars, dashed most of the hopes of these poets. Poems like 'Ode to the Departing Year,' 'Fears in Solitude,' 'France: An Ode,' 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' and 'Frost at Midnight' are all infused with historical and social reverberations, and reflect some of the critical concerns in the domain of historical and ideological interpretations.



We will examine the views posited by critics like J. B. Ebbatson, “Coleridge’s Mariner and the Rights of Man,” (1972), Jerome MacGann, “The Meaning of the Ancient Mariner,” (1981), Daniel Watkins, “History as Demon in Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” (1988), Peter Kitson, “Coleridge, the French Revolution, and ‘The Ancient Mariner:’ Collective Guilt and Individual Salvation,” (1989), Robert Maniquis, “Holy Savagery and Wild Justice: English Romanticism and Terror,” (1989), Chris Rubinstein, “A New Identity for the Mariner? A Further Exploration of ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’” (1990), Paul Magnuson, “The Politics of ‘Frost at Midnight,’” (1991), *Reading Public Romanticism* (1998), Patrick Keane, *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* (1994), Raimonda Modiano, “Sameness or Difference? Historicist Readings of ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’” (1999), Erick Yu, “Romantic Alienation Reconsidered,” (1999), and Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History* (2000).

We have pointed out that, there is a very problematic tendency expressed by critics to particularise critical arguments on specific poems. As seen above, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ has attracted much attention. Ebbatson historically reads the poem from the viewpoint of slavery and imperialism. He advances claims that the poem enacts the gigantic historical process of colonial conquest, and that the shooting of the Albatross represents “a symbolic rehearsal of the crux of colonial expansion, the enslavement and murder of native peoples” (pp. 180, 198). His concern here lies not only within the British expansionist policy in her colonies, but interestingly connects the French Revolution to slavery in the French colonies (p. 187).

Rubinstein sees the Albatross as representing the victims of colonial exploitation, further linking maritime expansion to colonialism and slavery. He identifies the Mariner as “a sometime seafarer engaged in the Slave Trade, guilty of the most appalling atrocities, but now endeavouring to come to terms with his deep despair and mental torment” (p. 16). The role of the imagination is that of expressing guilt as a consequence of the inhuman attitude of slavery.

It is impersonal and becomes a poetic instrument of historical relevance, providing different layers of reality in historical perspectives. In this sense Coleridge or his poem is a symbolic representative of the colonialism and slavery, or more precisely, the Coleridgean imagination is a history-making instrument.

Kitson reads the poem as “an early attempt to enrich the world with a transcendent ideal forged, like *Paradise Lost*, from the wreck of his [Coleridge’s] political aspirations” (p. 270). Specifically, Kitson’s argument is that Coleridge no longer has faith in the ability of political action to effect significant improvement; he has internalised and naturalised his notions of change, crediting the imagination with the restorative powers and perceiving not a political paradise but a paradise within, a personal and subjective sense of spiritual fulfilment. Attributing the source of the poem to the French Revolution, Kitson stresses that the guilt powerfully articulated in the poem stems from two sources connected with Coleridge’s experience of the Revolution. It expresses, as it were, the collective guilt of the British Nation whose action against France generated atrocities, and Coleridge’s personal guilt and disillusionment that the Revolution would usher the dawn of a new era for human progress (p. 274). A poem like ‘Ode to the Departing Year’ also belies the fragility of Coleridge’s optimism and feeling of guilt about the terror of the Revolution. Maniquis reverberates the same concerns taken by Kitson with regard to the issue of the French Revolution and its psychological implications of guilt.

In 1798, Kitson elaborates, Coleridge had abandoned hope of improvement through political action, beginning to develop instead “an inward process of redemption achieved through the contemplation of the divine in nature” (p. 275). The interconnection between the historical perspective and the visionary nature of Coleridge is what takes the interest of this investigation, given that the issue is whether Coleridge was pushed by necessity as a result of socio-political pressure, or an ingrained desire to express much inclination to the nature and its spiritual meanings.

MacGann's reading of the poem is historicist but apolitical. Rather, his analysis is embedded within a hermeneutical sphere. Seeing the poem as written to illustrate "a special theory of historical interpretation of texts" (p. 50), MacGann situates Coleridge's Christian hermeneutics within history. In this light, he elaborates the fact that the poem incorporates material "from the earliest and most primitive to the latest and most sophisticated manifestations of religious experience (pp. 48 – 50). The historical levels, accordingly, represent different theological and spiritual modes of consciousness in terms of the pagan, Catholic and Broad Church Protestant ideologies.<sup>9</sup> MacGann firmly holds that the poem is a story of salvation or an ultimate redemptive meaning, and even goes as far as qualifying it as an English national scripture.

Magnuson continues with the historicist poetics in his treatment of 'Frost at Midnight.' He challenges visionary readings of the poem, insisting on its insertion within the political atmosphere of the time of its composition, "it is a political poem if it is read in the dialogic and public context of Coleridge's other poems and the political debate of the 1790s" (p. 3). The poem, he accentuates, is not a private meditation of an isolated consciousness, but the testimony of a public figure. With regard to its language, Magnuson highlights that:

It is not the creation of private circumstances or private meditation. Its language is defined by the rhetoric of public oratory, not the rhetoric of symbolism and allegory... Since it was placed in 1798 in the public dialogue, it cannot represent rural retirement as an evasion of political issues, although it is certainly evasive. (p.9)

The distancing of the meditative or mystical ramifications in the poet's consciousness in this sense reduces Coleridge to a mere historian and subverts any reading pertaining to his eccentric self-portrait. In *Reading Public Romanticism* (1998), Magnuson takes a broader perspective, tracing the public significance of poems that hitherto are considered unlikely to be engaged with social or political issues. His locating Romantic poetry with public discourse, he combines politics, nationalism, domesticity, law and legitimacy and sexuality.

Modiano traverses much covered grounds in her historicist treatment of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.' She challenges MacGann's premise that only a Christian schema should be privileged as the relevant context for the poem's reading, arguing that this scheme is a jeopardy at certain key moments of the poem. Her approach is inclusive in the sense that she sees the poem as having a universal significance, as a formidable challenge to Christian values, as connecting with the French Revolution and slave trade, "The story is a fracture at the heart of things, which fracture is caused by history itself which in Coleridge's time provided terrifying spectacles of man's behaviour" (p. 215). With regards to colonialism and Slave Trade, she brings in a new touch with the claim that there is a dual guilt in the Mariner's consciousness. The mariner colonises and is in turn colonised, that is, he does not only represent colonial and imperial might, but he himself is a victim since he expresses the agony of the loss of homeland, of freedom.

Eric Yu's "Romantic Alienation Reconsidered" takes a new and interesting dimension within the paradigm of Historicism. His study of alienated selfhood in Romanticism is not seen much from within the visionary aspects embedded in solipsism or narcissism, but from a Hegelian and Marxist dimension which treats the effects of social alienation under capitalist modes of production and distribution.<sup>10</sup> Yu systematically connects the notion of alienation to Hegel's and Marx's theories of privacy and individual ownership of property to show that the Romantics were very preoccupied with the commercialisation of poetry in an age which was increasingly dominated by capitalism rather than the patronage system that had hitherto prevailed in England (p. 243 – 245).

Yu sidelines interpretations of Coleridge that aim at working out a systematisation of his metaphysics, arguing that this leads to an over-generalisation and the oversight of specific social context, especially with respect to eighteenth-century poetic traditions, and the socio-political implications of Romantic poetry. Most of the changes in art, the critic explains,

express feelings of dissatisfaction with the reading public, and that with the change from aristocratic patronage through subscription patronage to commercial publishing, there was also change in the material for poetry. The self became the immediate source and the work of the imagination an intellectual property. In other words, the recoil to the self by the romantics was in response to the changing economic times, their poetry equally expressing such changes even though emphasis became more subjective than objective. So Yu sees the Romantics from a strict materialist point of view, but the disturbing question that remains to be answered is whether the alienated selfhood of the Romantics was money-minded or aesthetically or spiritually motivated, when alternatively read in terms of individuation and quest not only of aesthetic identity but also for spiritual certitude.

Keats's poetry has registered a proliferation of criticism pertaining to New Historicism. Most of the critics place Keats's works within a socio-political context. His works are also seen from a Cultural, Gender and Postcolonial point of view. Keats is not interpreted as an aesthete, nor is he seen as a visionary, but as an exemplification of humanist and ideological ideals. The situation leaves out the question of his individuality and his concept of the imagination as unimportant factors in the understanding of his oeuvre. Or, if at all the imagination features and is given any consideration, it is taken to represent a productive machinery for history. As Greg Kucich puts it in "Keats's Literary Tradition and the Politics of Historiographical Invention" (1995), Clio the Greek muse of history plays a central role in the development of Keats's creative imagination (p. 238). In fact, some critics have even interpreted his recourse to mythography and mythology as an expression of the imagination's inability and failure to transcend the harsh realities of his time.

Stuart Sprerry, in *Keats the Poet* (1973), had already identified Keats's poetry with History, intimating that Keats attempts in 'Hyperion' among others, to define the poet and his function with relation to some of the major intellectual, political, and historical movements of the age (p. 155). Jerome McGann is the Romantic historicist who in his critique of

Deconstruction in “Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism” (1979, rpt., 1985) theorises and demonstrates the place of the historical method as the key to Keats as well as Romantic poetry in general, insisting that from the poems can be retrieved the material and ideological contexts in which they were written. The visionary imagination is therefore transformed to a historical imagination, where aesthetics and phenomenology play almost no role. Critics have since then answered, developed and redirected McGann’s argument.

Two Romantic historicists who have centred their studies on Cultural and Gender studies are Daniel Watkins and Froma Zeithin. Their studies interpret Keats’s consciousness as articulating some key issues pertaining to culturally derived variants between the sexes. Daniel Watkins’s “Historical Amnesia and Patriarchal Morality in Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’” (1990) sees the poem as a straightforward articulation of patriarchal morality as it existed in Keats’s day (p. 246), and interprets the progress from the one-sided ecstatic to the imminent sacrifice of the heifer in the fourth stanza as a conquest of a femaleness associated with lower material nature as the poem appropriates the urn (p. 249).

Zeithin, in “On Ravishing Urns: Keats in his Tradition” (1991), argues on the same lines with Watkins, locating the distance between the poem’s speaker and the urn not in an unbridgeable gap between antiquity and modernity, but in gender stereotypes that persist across Western patriarchal history. Zeithin connects the persistent dissatisfaction with the ode’s ending to the collapse of that narrative of desire, proposing that between its overheated opening and the final “drastic shift from the poetic to the philosophical, the imagistic to the propositional, the imagination creates in the male reader a sexual excitement that is never quite discharged in a gratifying lyric conclusion” (pp. 279 – 280).

Mythographical poetry has to do with the relationship between visual arts and the poet’s consciousness. Keats’s recourse to Greek mythography has been connected with history and socio-political concerns of his time. A. W. Phinney’s “Keats in the Museum: Between Aesthetics and History” (1991) focuses on ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn.’ Keats’s

encounter with Greek arts, he reminds us, always occurred in some form of museum which separates the artwork from its original context, and citing Hans-Georg Gadamer's observation of the "similarity between the isolation of the artwork as an aesthetic object in the museum and the alienation of the artist in modern society," Phinney continues that "the urn is finally a 'cold pastoral'" (p. 217). "Warm and inviting as it may appear," he asserts, the urn "must remain a kind of 'cold beauty' for him, since he cannot, in the world and time in which he lives, relish the real beauty (p. 224). Phinney's historicist argument describes an aestheticised reading of the poem as nothing but a mystified repetition of an ideological illusion of the time of the poem's production.

Theresa Kelley pursues Phinney's stream of argument. In "Keats, Ekprasis, and History" (1995), she evaluates 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' the sonnet on Chapman's translation of Homer, 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,' and 'Hyperion.' She claims, for example, that though Keats identifies with the Haydonesque view of the marble as great artistic wonders, he all the same calls them "a shadow of a magnitude" (p. 217). Keats, in other words, is simply articulating the ruin and mortality he identifies with the marbles, the atmosphere, as it were, reminding him of his own fate. To Kelley, therefore, Keats situates Greek culture in its real antiquity and history which appears to offer little or no nothing to the present modern generation, and his imaginative powers offering no ontological meaning to his being.

Gillen D'Arcy Wood's *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760 – 1860* (2001) takes a similar argument as Kelley. Wood's engagement in cultural analysis and history posits a theory of visual culture which sees the real (referring here to sculpture, painting, photography and print, and the media, especially the television) strictly within its material context, arguing that the business of the real in Romanticism has to do only with entertaining, amazing and shocking. The effects of the real, Wood stresses, are not for any aesthetic education nor are they for any amelioration of the human ideal. His investigating,

therefore, deals with the commercial aspects of art, high culture and mass production, aesthetics and economics, and denies a reading that is not material.

With regard to Keats, Wood takes the example of the Elgin marbles to reassert Kelley's position that the confrontation with these broken fragments does nothing other than remind the poet of the past as a material reality in itself, with no possibility of engendering a consciousness of wholeness towards which humanity could be striving. In his fascinating reading of the Hyperion poems, Wood asks us to see them as an encounter with the future rather than a desire for a lost past, the future itself being a museum in which we look purely for the sake of looking, and in so doing suffer the fate of "marmorealisation" of ourselves, "a turning to stone" (p. 156).

While these readings may sound interesting and convincing, they are all the same are not satisfactory with regards to Keats's aesthetic and spiritual pursuits. The marbles or the urns, contrary to what the critics say, are part of Keats's working philosophy on the meditation of the life of suffering and pain as clues to aesthetic, and most importantly, spiritual vision. In other words, if read alternatively, they may provide an understanding of Keats's life-long epistemological and ontological investigations.

Two interesting critical views come to mind in connection with Keats's poetry as an articulation of Colonial or Postcolonial consciousness. These are Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels, Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760 – 1830* (1981) and Debbie Lee's "Poetic Voodoo in Lamia: Keats in Possession of African Magic" (1998). Butler discusses social progress and revolution, using the examples of 'Hyperion' and 'Fall of Hyperion' as poems that represent historical changes in the eyes of a liberal. Change, she asserts, is "continuous, inevitable, and on the most universal level grand, for it is progress – the survival of the fittest, the best, the most beautiful and quintessential human" (p.151). Pointing out to Oceanus's explanation of the law of progress in 'Hyperion,' (II. 212 – 214),



and imperial progress in course of which Neptune triumphs over Oceanus, (II. 232 – 234), Butler argues that Keats cannot have been evasive to History and social and political change.

The Postcolonial nature of these poems relates to the struggle for change in the social, political and economic landscape of any group of persons suffering from suppression or imperialism. When it comes to using these same poems to relate to Keats's distinctiveness and self-conscious quest for poetic expression, the historicist approach will less likely be the alternative to adopt.

Lee offers, perhaps, one of the most interesting and intriguing reviews of Keats's imagination. In what turns out to be a very Eurocentric and unfortunately pejorative reading of Keats, she engages in a misconstrued idea of colonial legacy. Interpreting Lamia's palace as an allegorical representation of Africa and Lamia's ability to cast spells as a representation of African magic, Lee reads Keats's narrative in terms of colonial explorations. The result is both revivifying and dangerous: "Keats takes hold of or possesses Lamia's African mysteries and so re-enlivens his poetic imagination. At the same time the poem sounds a cautionary note: British possession of African magic could be brutally destructive to both cultures" (p. 133). The danger implicit in casting spells is likened on the one hand to a kind of voodoo and on the other to Keats's own practice of writing poetry. This is an unfair representation of the Keatsian imagination and obviously a misleading outlook on colonial and postcolonial Africa, even if Lee can be rightly credited for highlighting the concept of exorcism in Keats's poetry. Identifying the imagination with witchcraft and magic certainly transcribes a wrong impression of the concept.

The historical readings that place Keats on a typical socio-political and economic sphere include Majorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (1988), Kelvin Everest, *English Romantic Poetry: An Introduction to Historical Context and Literary Scene* (1990), particularly "Keats, Shelley, Byron" (pp. 54 – 63), James Heffernan, "Adonais: Shelley's Consumption of Keats" (1995), Michael O'Neil "When this Warm Scribe my

Hand:’ Writing and History in ‘Hyperion’ and ‘Fall of Hyperion’” (1995), Daniel Watkins, “History, Self, and Gender in ‘Ode to Psyche’” (1995), Vincent Newey “Keats, History and the Poets” (1995), Nicholas Roe, “Keats’s Commonwealth” (1995), *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997), “John Keats’s ‘Green World:’ Politics, Nature and the Poems” (2000), Jeffrey Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (1998), Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (1998), Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999), and Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of a Pure Commonwealth* (2002), particularly “Leigh Hunt, Keats, and the Politics of Cockney Poetry” (pp. 181 – 199). All of these critics focus on different strands of historicist poetics, distancing in most cases Keats’s aesthetic and visionary spirit from his works. They fall short of calling Keats a historian rather than a poet.

Roe stands among the most distinctive historicist critics to assert that Keats was an intensely self-conscious political thinker whose radical sympathy complicated his best poetry. In *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, he documents great and significant accounts of Keats’s political engagements in the Cockney School, where he supposedly gained much inspiration to expand within a larger context. Roe is also preoccupied with how intellectual history and poetic interpretation can work together. His discussion of Keats’s use of nature imagery in connection with his political ideology is very interesting and takes a particular emphasis in “Keats’s ‘Green World’” (2000). One disturbing thing about Roe’s work is the title. Dissent is a word pertaining to religious terminology, which he uses in the context of political radicalism. In this vein, he sidelines the implications of religious doctrines or principles that characterised the reformist and radical politics of the time.

In “Keats’s ‘Green World,’” Roe’s preoccupation is to explore Keats’s green world and how it might have stirred Z’s hostility, by looking at the political associations of the verdant imagery in Keats’s poems and relating Keats’s politics with greenery, insisting that “a proto-ecological awareness in Keats is inextricably linked to the political commitments which

strongly inform his works” (p. 64). Roe takes the example of Keats’s dedicatory poem sonnet ‘To Leigh Hunt Esq,’ where he associates the imagery with revolutionary and radical movements and establishes the relationship between liberal politics and the poet’s imaginative life. In this sonnet, Roe argues, national crisis is associated with the dislocation from the classical world, with the loss of pastoral innocence and “a time, when under the pleasant tress/Pan is no longer sought.” Keats is seen here to have associated paganism and the cult of Pan with liberty of conscience (p. 69). To Roe, “Green World” is a lyrical code for reform and opposition, and natural imagery are interpreted as a transposition of Keats’s ideals of community and love.

While Roe dominantly sees Keats as a self-conscious political thinker, Jeffrey Cox posits a modified opinion, arguing that Keats’s early poetry (*Poems* 1817 and *Endymion*), carries a lot of Huntian influence both politically and religiously. The real Keats to Cox is the Keats of the odes, independent and self-commanding. Romantic poets, Cox states, were not concerned about their inner-selves, but most particularly, the social, political and economic circumstances in their era. From what appears to be a Marxist-based argument, Cox holds that they wrote intentionally and had a targeted audience in mind. In the light of his premise, Cox stresses that Keats’s *Poems* of 1817 are not to be read as his engagement in apprenticeship in poetic creativity, but as key statements of the Hunt Circle’s project and self-definition in face of the cultural battles of the day. This does not, however, imply that the poems’ aesthetic qualities are not recognised according to the critic. On the contrary, he sees them as a credit to the larger cultural project that Keats shared with the Circle. They are to be seen as the poet’s involvement in the Cockney School as an ideological as well as a stylistic development (p. 85).

Andrew Bennett’s *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999) advances a quite different perspective in the general tendency to read and interpret Romanticism in terms of politics, revolution and social reform. He presents the Romantic poets as self-conscious of

posterity, engaging in writing for a posthumous immortality. Posterity sounds a note of historicising, though not on Roean or Cronian terms, Cronian terms here because Cronin states in his work that “to historicise is to politicise” (p. 9). In the sections “The Romantic Culture of Posterity and Engendering Posterity” (pp. 38 – 91), and “Keats’s Prescience” (pp. 139 – 157), Bennett offers substantial evidence and persuasive argument of Keats’s life-long preoccupation with death and art in relation to his afterlife. He places Keats within historical circumstance and celebrates his greatness which was not recognised during his life time. The limitation of Bennett’s work is that he sees posterity principally as artistic and aesthetic immortality, that is, from what Keats left in literary productivity and criticism, not in terms of the poet’s own personal broodings over spirituality and transcendence.

We have so far examined some of the various positions laid forth by historicist critics on both Coleridge and Keats. While what is very interesting is its characteristic of referentiality and interdisciplinary nature, it systematically averts any recourse to visionary poetics, seeing the poets within the larger social and political framework of the Romantic period, shifting, as it were, the subject as self to the subject as the broader and collective network of social, cultural, political and economic variants. In fact, the poet is defaced. The historicist, in other words, depersonalises and despiritualises the Romantic poem, given that his reading sidelines whatever importance that is placed on individualism, and the visionary and metaphysical dimension of the imagination. Poems become historical treatises, and the imagination, if it performs any function at all, is a mere instrument for historical enactment and discourse. And reality is also seen from the prevailing socio-political and cultural circumstances that the poems are supposed to transcribe. Most Romantic poems go beyond the social, historical or ideological, and material context that inform them. This move beyond, that is, transcending the preceding four aspects, falls back on the eccentric nature, the individualism and subjectivity, and spirituality of the poets. If there is any recourse to historical perspectives in this endeavour, it will not be to satisfy the demands of historicism,

but to help situate the context which explains the visionary nature of the Romantic poets, or other related issues.

### **SUBVERTING VISIONARY ROMANTICISM: (DE)CONSTRUCTION**

The term Deconstruction is a Postmodern coinage which has broken new grounds on the problems pertaining to theoretical and practical criticism in literature. Given that Deconstruction is important to the terms of argument and direction that this endeavour proposes to take, it is worthwhile to briefly examine it. It is quite a difficult term to define, but there are a number of distinctive characteristics that it has. It is clearly at odds with Western idealism and logic; epistemologically, it is opposed to logocentric knowledge, and theologically, it is opposed to belief and faith, given that its basic premise is a subversion of or aversion to these though, it should be noted, its serious engagement with these makes it difficult for it to extricate itself completely from them. Its roots can be traced in the philosophy of thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hegel, and Friedrich Schlegel, and the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. It is rhetorically oriented and contemplates knowledge and meaning as representations unavoidably enmeshed in the heterodox and contradictory nature of language and interpretation. In other terms, Deconstruction points to the ability of uncovering systematic incoherence in literary texts, it is the aversion to any logically concluded conception and argument. Method has come to be the canonical conception of literature, but Deconstruction underscores the inherent fragmentations, ironies, contradictions, ambivalence, and the irreconcilable nature of perplexities inherent in it. Literary texts are seen to have an authority that overpowers and destabilises any theoretical conception. In this vein, textuality ultimately subverts the attempt to master knowledge through language, and meaning through interpretation.

It will be important at this juncture to comment on the connection that Deconstruction has with Romantic idealism on which most of the poetics of Romantic visionary criticism is

based. Deconstruction is primarily a critique of philosophy. Its heavy presence in literary studies has to do with strands of philosophical discourse that have been used to formulate and expound literary theory. It is in this vein that Romanticism has been mercilessly subject to Deconstruction, given that deconstructive critique implicates the problematic of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, which strongly contributes to the formulations of visionary criticism.

Some of Deconstruction's greatest exponents include Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman and Hillis Miller. Derrida's critique of Structuralism and Formalism brought to prominence the place of Deconstruction in which he formulates the deconstructive notion of language with his understanding of de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1959). In his linguistic considerations, he favours speech/presence to writing/absence or mere white and black representation. The latter, he asserts, is unoriginal speech and less reliable. In literature, this kind of atmosphere gives room to suspicion and scepticism since words are not the things they necessarily name. They are arbitrarily associated with those things. Derrida puts the metaphysics of presence in literary texts to question. This brings in the strand of his critique on philosophy, especially Hegelian dialectics, which places emphasis on consciousness and the strive towards absolute knowledge. To him meaning is caught up in the system of language where each element has significance only by virtue of its difference from the other elements of the system. Meaning is not present, as an essence, within any linguistic unit. To put it differently, Derrida is arguing that the clearest meaning possible in a text is no real conceptualised meaning, that is, the text has no centre of meaning or of logically attuned thought. Any counterpart of meanings are attributed to undecidability and indeterminacy. Seeing texts simply as white and black spaces, Derrida intimates that there is nothing outside the text. This interestingly brings to mind the relationship that Deconstruction entertains with theories or approaches to literary interpretation. It does not necessarily refute them, but shows

that a text can have opposite discourses, different strands of narratives, different threads of meanings, but which are very problematic in themselves.

In fact, in *Of Grammatology* (1974), Derrida talks about a double interpretative procedure, which involves the double act of reading. The first reading consists in grasping the original text, and the second reading implicates the creation of a completely new text that subverts the original text of the first reading. The first reading, which Derrida also refers to as the standard constitutive reading, has always only *protected*, it has never *opened* a reading (pp. 158 – 159). It is the second reading that gives room for systematic incoherence and the undecipherable and indeterminate nature of meaning.

From a philosophical perspective, his critique of Kant, Hegel and Rousseau throws more light on the problem of conceptualising thought and meaning. With these philosophers, he demonstrates a strong counter-philosophical and anti-metaphysical stance. We must stress, however, that Derrida is self-conscious of the limitations of his claims on Deconstruction. He therefore concedes that Deconstruction cannot escape the resources of logocentric thought. It is impossible to cut away from Western metaphysics and logic on which it relies for its implicit postulations (pp. 24, 164, 250 – 251, 314).

Following the same deconstructive principles of Derrida, John Hillis Miller stresses that:

Deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth. ... The deconstructive critic seeks to find, by this process of retracing, the element in the system studied which is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building. The deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilated that ground, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not the dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air.<sup>11</sup>

This is an apt view on the poetics of Deconstruction. Here again Deconstruction can be seen as aiming its critique against a conception of knowledge and meaning as graspable essences that independently precede or follow expression. Miller outrightly dismisses Romantic visionary critics like M. H Abrams, falsely accusing him of being univocal in his approach to Romanticism. In his essay “The Critic as a Host” (1988), Miller once again reasserts his radically sceptical view of philosophy and literature, “Nihilism is an inalienable alien presence within Occidental metaphysics, both poems and in the criticism of poems” (p. 285).

Paul de Man sees Deconstruction as a resistance to theory, since it undercuts any move at logically or systematically arriving at conceptualised positions. It is discursive futility, though he interestingly comes to the rescue of literary critics when he remarks that well reasoned arguments have contradictions at their core, yet there is no alternative path to insight. From all the viewed positions, we come back once more to the direction where Deconstruction leads literary criticism. It sees texts as radically heterogeneous; a text is inextricable from the myriad discourses that inform it, there is always shifting in meaning and the text. Its radically sceptical poetics centres on aesthetic, critical, philosophical and spiritual impasse. Deconstruction is therefore a process of terminal uncertainty since texts are ultimately unreadable in terms of finding homogeneity.<sup>12</sup>

There is a variety of attitudes to the specific nature and function of deconstruction which throw light on the stance of this work. To Douglas G. Atkins in *Reading Deconstruction/Deconstructive Reading* (1983), it is the “dehellenization of literary criticism” (pp. 34 – 48). In *The Sceptic Disposition in Contemporary Criticism* (1984), Eugene Goodheart describes it as the most radical and powerful of literary scepticism. Not only does it disarm method, it is nihilistic to theory as well (p. 9). In *Against Deconstruction* (1989) John Ellis argues that Derrida never rids himself of idealist philosophy, rendering Deconstruction a discourse that indirectly strengthens the basis of logocentric thought.



Kenneth Kierans's "Beyond Deconstruction" (1997) echoes Ellis's resentment. Kierans stresses that all appeals and protests against reason can only use the language of reason. In this vein, Derrida adopts the language of metaphysics, of reason and critique, and works within it, but does so in order to renounce that language over and over again. Eric Yu, in his article "Romantic Alienation Reconsidered" (1999), identifies with Hartman in calling it the "Poetics of Error" (p. 237). Ray Carney also takes sides with Paul Ricoeur in calling Deconstruction a hermeneutics of suspicion. Peter Zima's *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002) shares a similar view with Ellis. In his critique, he highlights Derrida's shortcomings:

Derrida and his followers seem to observe aporias or forms of iterability and dissemination in almost all texts, and tend to all their predecessors - project constructions of their own metadiscourses into the texts they comment on. Thus they contribute, without intending it, to the consolidation of absolutist and monological tendencies in philosophy. (p. 168)

The following part of this review undertakes to examine how deconstructive criticism has treated Romantic poetry, with close attention to how it views the aestheticism and metaphysics of Romanticism, and theoretical and practical issues that have pursued research in this domain. This will be followed by a critique and justification of the line of argument in this work.

Romantic poetry has served as conducive grounds for critics who delight in the poetics of Deconstruction. Amongst others, this criticism has, on the basis of its conception of the heterogeneous nature of language, tried not only to put to question, but to deconstruct the canonical concepts of the Romantic period like the phenomenological notion of self-presence as a clue to reading and interpreting the metaphysics and spirituality of the Romantics. The subjectivity of the individual, the inspirational and metaphysic potential of the imagination, the intentionality of the poet, are systematically deconstructed. In fact, their authenticity is seen as deceptive, contradictory, ironical, and unreliable by the very linguistic construct of the poets. Romantic tenets such as truth, reality, and beauty have no place in interpretation. In this

vein, shifting their attention to aporias, textuality or linguistic revisionism, deconstructive critics assume the defensive position that they are not responsible for the dangling conceptual nature of the poets. On the contrary, the Romantic poets deconstructed themselves, or their texts tend to substantiate Deconstruction.

This problematic takes us back to the question of resistance to deconstructive poetics, the focus this time being typical Romantic visionary critics like M.H. Abrams's, Harold Bloom and Northrop Frye, who have variously reacted against the way Deconstruction treats Romanticism. Two important essays show Abrams' objective critique of Deconstruction, "Construing and Deconstructing" (1989 [1986]) and "The Deconstructive Angel" (1986). As a visionary and pluralist critic, Abrams strongly holds that expressionist aesthetics is what characterises Romanticism, and that it should be interpreted on lines of construable determinacy of meaning. In both essays he accepts the relevance of Deconstruction, seeing it particularly from the context of modern literature as having a constitutive value, for example, in drawing attention to the subtle play in the literary work of figurative language, concealed rhetorical devices and modes, but insists that Deconstruction cannot escape from Western metaphysics as it is struggling to. In the first essay Abrams asserts that Deconstruction cannot dispense with a determinate construal aspect of a text, and with specific regard to Derrida:

He cannot demonstrate the impossibility of a standard reading except by giving through the stage of manifesting its possibility; a text must be read determinately in order to be disseminated into an undecidability that never strikes completely from its initial determination; deconstruction can only subvert the meanings of the texts that has always been construed. (139)

Abrams goes on to add that it may be a prose or poetic text (creative work), or a critical text (interpretative work). In the second essay Abrams is still concerned with the problem of Deconstruction's nihilistic scepticism to aestheticism and critical theory. The title is a subtle paradox on Deconstruction, which holds that no reading of a text is meaningful, but

wants the reader to logically follow its own arguments in condemning other theories or methods. Describing Derrida's poetics as graphocentric, Abrams fervently holds that it is extraordinarily limited in the conception of texts. Reacting against Hillis Miller's claim that he is unequivocal in interpreting, Abrams restates that texts are multiplex in meaning. Abrams believes that one has to surrender to the language of an author and critic to grasp what they are trying to articulate.

What is fundamentally important in Abrams' critique is his recognition of "off-centre expectations" and the fact that idealist criticism should use postmodern criticism to reinstate, modify and reaffirm its grounds in traditional humanist criticism. Apart of much theorising, Abrams has not suggested some of the ways this challenge has to be faced in the handling of Romantic philosophy and literature, but his awareness and articulation that extant critical positions on visionary criticism must be adjusted, is important. This thesis points to the direction of re-inscribing, re-conceptualising and maintaining of Romantic idealism on acceptable grounds in modern or postmodern discourse.

Bloom thinks from a hermeneutic perspective that literature's greatness stems from aesthetic intensity and spiritual sublimity, and sees poetry particularly as the scene and trope for mankind's deepest longings for transfiguration and immortality. He includes Deconstructionists in what he calls the school of resentment. Frye's archetypal approach to Romanticism and literature as a whole points to a constructivist stance. He believes that Deconstruction cannot dismantle the bases of logocentric thought nor Romantic idealism the relevance of which will persist no matter what challenges met. The foregoing comments only go to confirm the incompatibility between Romantic idealism and Deconstruction.

Coleridge and Keats have been widely read and wrongly interpreted out of their aesthetic and philosophical context as precursors or founders of the poetics of Deconstruction. Tilottama Rajan in *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (1980) undertakes a deconstructive analysis of Romanticism and particularly Coleridge. To her, she claims that

have given the priority of place to the Romantic imagination are misleading. Due to its deceptive, contradictory and ambiguous nature, the imagination should be laid to rest, and all attempts at logically explaining its metaphysics, be abandoned since they all lead to futility (p. 20). In fact, she sees Romantic solipsism and narcissism merely as unconvincing stereotypes. The current debate between organicists and Deconstructionists over Romanticism, Rajan contends, was originally waged by the Romantics themselves and was not resolved in favour of either side (p.19). So she sees the Romantics as creating the grounds for deconstructive interpretation. In other words, Romantic poetry is better seen as a literature involved in the restless process of self-examination, and in search of a model discourse which accommodates rather than simplifies its ambivalence toward the inherited equation of art with idealisation (p. 25).

In “Deconstruction and Reconstruction” (1984), she reiterates her stance that Romantic literature marks the dawning of an age of linguistic anxiety (p. 317), pointing, as it were, to the problematic nature of conceptualising texts. The decentralisation of the self is the only way to understand Romanticism, and so instead of transcendence, we now have ambivalence, tensions and unresolved enigmatic contradictions. In the continuation of her deconstructive argument, Rajan comes in again in “Phenomenology and Romantic Theory: Hegel and the Subversion of Aesthetics” (1995). Here, she further stresses the re-inscribing of Deconstruction within the hermeneutic and phenomenological reading of Romantic poems, insisting on the discarding of the imagination from the critical lexicon of the Romantic period (p. 159). She asserts that Romantic theory is a sub-version of aesthetics, which generates phenomenological aesthetics, as a mediation between organicism and idealism on the one hand, and Deconstruction on the other. Phenomenology, she intimates, provides a first site of the emergence of Deconstruction. In what appears to be a very complex argument, she holds that modern phenomenological criticism identifies a problem of mediation in form and representation, for there is the impossibility of a consciousness fully present to itself. With

this, she questions the validity of Hegel's phenomenology as one of the fundamental basis of Coleridge's philosophy of the imagination (pp. 160 – 165). To better understand Rajan at this point, we will have to go later to a previous study, Jean-Pierre Mileur's "Deconstruction as Imagination and Method" (1989). Suffice it here to say that Rajan's critique of Hegel points to the shortcomings of his philosophy which has provided much ground for the reading of the visionary aspects of Romantic poetry.

Rajan's deconstructive critique of Coleridge's idealism, encapsulated in his theory of the imagination, is based on an examination of alienation and equivocation in the conversation poems in which she sees Coleridge as trying to give himself, yet not give himself to imaginative illusion. There is, in essence, a kind of inauthenticity that persistently haunts the idealisings of the imagination. Coleridge is said to be suffering from an acute problem of self-doubt, and in dealing with his doubts in these poems, he projects himself onto another being – Lamb, Sara, or Hartley. These are used by the poet as an "usher of what he cannot feel completely free to advance himself" (p. 230). This tendency, which Rajan sees as vicariousness, is a devastating self-indictment:

Vicariousness, like imitation, is the language of a mind which can see the forms of beauty but cannot feel them except ambiguously, and which recognises something substitutive and sentimental in the claim of poetry to possess the plenitudes it designates. It arises from the emptiness of imaginative dispossession, and is the form taken by imitation in a period which condemns as illegitimate the deviation of presence into representation. (p. 231)

This sense of vicariousness, Rajan holds, applies not only to the poems in question, but also to Coleridge's definition of imagination. Accusing Coleridge of having spoken in voices not truly his own, like German idealism, eighteenth-century rationalism, the language of the sciences, she stresses that Coleridge engages these in ill-fitting discourses which he restlessly takes on and leaves off, as if never quite managing to say what he means to his own satisfaction. Coleridge, she fervently underscores, clearly suffered a certain degree of self-

awareness in this matter, thus justifying the view that he must have been a proto-deconstructionist. Rajan, however, remarks that this need not have been Coleridge's intentions:

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that this aspect of the conversation poems constitutes a deliberate deconstruction of their assumptions. Coleridge's vicariousness involves a complex mixture of what psychologists call projection and introjection: he at once attributes to another what he wishes to disown and claims his own what he cannot have. In a very real sense, vicariousness can be seen as a sentimental form: a way of keeping innocence recoverable by entrusting it to someone else. Yet it is also a tortured, self-doubting form which constantly reveals the hollowness of such recovery ... Coleridge betrays a duplicity at the heart of imaginative faith, which can constitute the ideal only as existing outside itself. (p 213)

Art to Rajan is a dialogue of illusion and Deconstruction and, by implication, deconstructive criticism, far from being an arbitrary imposition, is a response to one implicitly privileged aspect of the text. Rajan's privileging of deconstruction demonstrates her resistance to whatever meaning or concept can be given to Romantic poetry, and her ready acceptance to conceptual disjointedness. Her express desire to deconstruct the imagination even complicates the matter. Her arguments, while they can be convincing within the specified context of her investigation, pose a problem of bias, and as will be seen later, it is not easy to extricate Romantic criticism from the implicit metaphysics of the imagination. In fact, in Chapter Three we will positively and constructively use Rajan's deconstructionist approach to affirm Coleridge's positive use of the Other as a major for self-realisation.

Jean-Pierre Mileur's deconstruction of the Coleridgean philosophy of the imagination places the imagination in ruins. He rejects New Criticism and its imposition of a rigid method of reading texts which he claims has a Coleridgean colouring. In "Deconstruction as Imagination and Method" (1989), he uses de Man as his paradigm to dismiss Coleridge, contending that his notion is a poison pill with lots of discrepancies that has turned modern

criticism against him so much. Mileur quotes de Man's own Deconstruction of Coleridge's philosophy to substantiate his views:

Its refinement into method was a misguided attempt, haunted by a sense of inauthenticity from the very start, to give a human project, with its inevitable dimension of fictionality, the stability and assurance of natural fact. In this same movement, the drama of interpretation degenerated into ritual and then parody, as this inauthenticity undermined belief in the exemplary power of literary form. (p. 67)

In the light of this, Mileur asserts that Coleridge's insistence on will presupposes that his concept of the imagination was founded not on an analogy with nature but on intentionality. On this ground, the imagination cannot become a mode of realising the ideal. Coleridge, the critic stresses, might have imagined a poetry of immanence, but he never wrote it (p. 69). Mileur fails, however, to understand that will to Coleridge was not unconnected to divine will to which every human soul could be affiliated. Man's will had to be in affinity to the transcendent good will that was embodied in nature and the elements. Coleridge's self-redemption in this light can be argued as a self-willed desire to the realm of divine and spiritual reality.

Mileur is of the strong conviction that Coleridge abandoned his earlier thought, an indication that he was self-aware of the limits of his own considerations. Here again, Mileur fails to understand the core of Coleridge's thought. It is becoming increasingly established that Coleridge never abandoned his early philosophy even in the face of Christianity. At the very heart of his life, there remained his distinct individuality and subjectivity, the founding bases for his early thoughts.

Mileur's notion of Romantic alienation is curious and not very convincing. He sees the Romantic poet as alienated from his own work, stressing this time not only language's inability to synthesise thought, but an irreconcilable dynamics between perception and reality. To him, alienation is the principal notion in *Biographia Literaria* where his deconstructive

move is aimed at showing the difference between perception of imagination and reality. With regard to this, Mileur makes the claim that Coleridge's definition does not appear to describe any poem he succeeded in writing. Coleridge, accordingly, is, after all, describing the poet, poetry and the operation of the poetic imagination in ideal perfection, and by implication, this is something he does not necessarily claim for himself and which, by definition, is not to be available to anyone in actuality (p. 74). It should be noted that *Biographia Literaria* was published when Coleridge had written most of his famous poems. This work should be taken positively as Coleridge's struggle among others, to conceptualise experience that is not easy to transcribe in clear language. Representing the mystical in language is not an easy task and needs mostly a hermeneutic and esoteric mind to come to terms with what is expressed by language. To say that Coleridge wrote this prose work without a thought on his poetry, or his epistemological and ontological interests, sounds misleading and grossly subjective.

Brian Wilkie's critique of the Romantic idealism of the imagination is centred on the notion of wholeness and interdependence. In "The Romantic Ideal of Unity" (1989), he assesses the Romantic quest for this desire. To him the Romantics' obsession with unity was also complemented with an awareness of the enormous complexity of experience. To cope with the need to satisfy this obsession and awareness, Wilkie argues, they created in their most characteristic work overlays or superimpositions. "These overlays," the critic asserts, "do not fuse, they cling together and cohere while also retaining a high independence competing with each other at times a point of contradiction" (p. 33). This deconstructive move challenges the Coleridgean organicist concept of the imagination.

Wilkie goes on to substantiate his view with 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' not on the grounds of Coleridge's metaphysics of nature, but on established orthodoxy. The poem, accordingly, perfectly demonstrates the notion of overlays seen in the form of two vastly different modes of spiritual redemption; Part IV, a radical Protestant theology, and Parts V and VI, a Catholic purgatorial model of redemption. Wilkie elaborates that the Catholic model



encompasses both, that is, itself and the other, but disturbingly, tension still persists both to the reader and Mariner at least from a psychological level. Absolution heralded in the gloss woefully fails to absolve, and the Mariner still finds himself confessing to the Hermit and Wedding Guest. This view is supported by Tim Fulford, who in *Coleridge's Figurative Languages* (1991), particularly "Poetry of Isolation: The Ancient Mariner" (pp. 62 – 73), argues that the poem's discourses disrupts the hermeneutic circle of believers posited by biblical hermeneutics, and illustrate the isolating freedom provided by an exegesis discontinuous with tradition. While certain readings tend to see Coleridge's poem in the domain of different Christian modes, his organicist theory of the imagination will be seen to have firm stance with his spiritual broodings over nature.

With regard to the dynamics of personality, Wilkie claims that innocence and experience are a large scale set of intricate overlays. Or to put it differently, there is no such thing as a fusion of childhood and adulthood. Rather, they conjoin and are distinctively independent. We should, he intimates, learn to distrust the notion of a reconciling higher consciousness (p. 37). Wilkie's thesis here is far from convincing because it is hard to believe that one's childhood can exist separately from one's youth and adulthood. Human psychological growth is a stream of different but related stages, and every attempt to keep the stream flowing on a desired direction should be appreciated rather than dismissed. In Coleridge's case, as will be seen later, Wilkie's argument must be distrusted.

In "Coleridge and Modern Critical Theory" (1989), Kathleen Wheeler undertakes an investigation to demonstrate Deconstruction in Coleridge's poetry and prose. This Deconstruction is seen as undermining the apocalyptic account of perception that he advanced on literature and criticism.<sup>13</sup> Wheeler holds that all of Coleridge's canonical works, both prose and poetry, constantly make remarks either suggestive of or directly anticipating many aspects of deconstructive thinking, both in relation to philosophy and to literary criticism. Coleridge is seen as a precursor of modern critical theories, sharing a particular affinity with Derrida, who

developed the poetics of Deconstruction (p. 84). In other words, he tends to make it very difficult to construe textual meanings because he enacts deconstructive gestures to his reader.

As points of reference and substantiation, Wheeler uses 'The Ancient Mariner,' 'Kubla Khan,' and 'Christabel,' stressing that other poems, such as 'Frost at Midnight,' 'Dejection: An Ode,' and 'The Aeolian Harp,' aptly demonstrate deconstructive tendencies, seen in their degenerate forms of thought that are dead metaphors, tyrannising over innovative efforts to perceive in new ways (p. 88). Wheeler contends that deconstructive elements are identifiable in four major aspects of 'The Ancient Mariner.' These are the various versions of prefaces, the Gloss, the Wedding Guest, and the verse itself. The Gloss, for example, constantly intrudes and confronts the reader in the process of making sense of the verse part of the poem. It is far from helping the reader to conceptualise patterns of understanding, and taken for a persona who is constantly reducing the richness of the literary verse language to factual, geographical, time-space, external-reality terminology, while the verse language seems to be luring the reader into a world freed from such discursive devices of ordering, categorising, and labelling. Wheeler does not see the complication ending here, given that the imaginative realm into which the verse entices its reader is even more problematic because it is characterised by ambiguities, uncertainties, inexplicable events, and strange occurrences. Borrowing Keats's words, Wheeler asserts that it is a realm avoiding that "irritable reaching after fact and reason" (p. 88). She says for example that in the Gloss, social and cultural presuppositions, usually based on Christianity and its morality, are contrasted with the naked power of the pantheistic, elemental forces that the verse exemplifies. These contradictions are irreconcilable.<sup>14</sup>

'Christabel' also leads to serious difficulties in establishing meaning. In Wheeler's words, "it deconstructs any authoritative meaning in the poem and confronts the reader with his own reductive, moralising habits by saturating the narrative voice in a double reflection with ambiguities, avowals, disavowals, questionings, uncertainties" (p. 90). The narrative becomes more complicated with the introduction of Bracy and his narrating of an unfinished

and desperately ambiguous dream. The two rival interpretations of this dream as to who of the two girls represent good and evil, reflect the paradox of the poem as a whole. Wheeler also sees the unfinished nature of the poem as a structural problem that is added to the undermining of narrative authority and the ambiguity of the core-content of the poem. One disturbing point here is that Wheeler seems to be arguing that any good meaning of a poem must be arrived at only through an austere structural reading of the poem. As will be seen later, present modern theories of eroticism and sexuality can be aptly applied to this poem without recourse to structuralism. The fragmentary nature of 'Kubla Khan,' the undermining of the preface to the poem's rich contents also provide fertile ground for Deconstruction.

The unifying strand that runs throughout her discussion points to a number of interesting issues. The Deconstructionists do not try to differentiate between literary criticism and literary texts because they claim that texts are not pure art or pure literature. They are saturated with criticism too. In this vein, Coleridge's works are exemplary pieces as they work out a modified deconstructive poetics of the Derridean or de Manian sort. Coleridge's concept of organicism, she holds, is highly deconstructive, not structuralist if we have to base our attention on the poetics of error and misunderstanding rather than meaning. Wheeler, nevertheless, demonstrates her sense of objectivity by appealing that the Coleridgean should come to terms with trying to understand the complexity of his conception, that is, avoiding to trace errors but looking for meaning.

John Beer and David Hogsette continue in the line of the previous critics, especially Wheeler's, to offer even more radical deconstructive readings of Coleridge that completely destroy his philosophy, and try to put the imagination to rest as advocated by Rajan. Beer's "Fragmentations and Ironies" (1995) sees fragmentation in a dominantly modern perspective not only in terms of the unfinished nature of Romantic poems, but also from the view point of fragmentariness in meaning. What characterises Romantic thought, he firmly contends, was fragmentation, not oneness or unity (p. 234). And taking Coleridge to be the forefather of the

Romantic fragment, he asserts that, “As he tried to satisfy his various intellectual needs, his thinking was not only caught into fragmentary modes but began to generate writing that was itself riven, particularly in its poetic expression” (p. 237). As a champion of fragmentation Coleridge is seen as giving no room for clarity, as rendering the impossibility of conceptualisation through his express display of ambiguity, irony and undecidability. In fact, Beer falls short of saying that Coleridge was a complete failure. In ‘Kubla Khan,’ ‘Christabel,’ and ‘The Ancient Mariner,’ he reverberates Wheeler’s arguments, but adds that no optimistic interpretation of Coleridge can be said to be authoritative or plausible.

Hogsette’s “Eclipsed by the Pleasure Dome: Poetic Failure in Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’” (1997), sees the poem as presenting scholars with chronic critical problems, reiterating that its textual history remains unclear,<sup>15</sup> its prefatory explanation suspicious, and the poem itself generally cloudy in meaning. In analysing the subtitle and preface as metalinguistic keys to the poem’s interpretative and performative context, Hogsette posits the thesis that the poem will be discovered to have nothing to do with imaginative redemption or Romantic irony. On the contrary, it offers a series of false poetic figures, ultimately demonstrating that the ideal (pro)creative redemptive imagination lies beyond the grasp of the mortal poet, remaining an external and unobtainable Other.

Hogsette asserts that the Khan figure is associated with fancy, not with the primary and secondary imagination, and thus destabilises any reading that attempts to see it as an expression of the creative energy of the imagination. Instead of depicting what poetic creativity is, the poem engages in demonstrating what it is not. It is, therefore, negatively purposive, for the poet’s ability to create sublime aesthetic moments to achieve imaginative redemption and unity of self are lacking.<sup>16</sup> What Hogsette is trying to do here is to dissociate Coleridge from his work, a most radical attitude of New Critics, or to portray him as a self-conscious creator of all that falls within the critical outlook of Deconstruction. This tendency only helps to designate any construed idea of Romantic poetry as misleading. Coleridge’s

extensive writings never had this goal, and the enterprise of criticism will be more challenging in attempting to make meaning than showing that meaning cannot be arrived at in Romantic literature.

Keats's poetry has also been subject to the poetics of Deconstruction, though not as much as Coleridge's. Not only his work has been used as examples of deconstructive pieces, there is the tendency to paint him as a Deconstructionist as well. Paul de Man's relay of Derrida's critique of Kant, Hegel and Schlegel, thinkers who influenced most of the English Romantics' thought, can throw light on how he considered the Romantics themselves.<sup>17</sup> In his introduction to *The Selected Poetry of John Keats* (1966), later printed as "Introduction to the Poetry of Keats" (1989), he points to deconstructive tendencies in Keats's poems, contending that 'The Fall of Hyperion' is a subjective reworking of 'Hyperion' very objective, 'Lamia' deconstructs the unity and beauty found in 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' and that the 1819 poem to Fanny Brawne is an unwriting of 'Ode to a Nightingale' (p. xxvii). De Man also suggests that Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated October 27 1818, on poetical character, the chameleon poet, the lack of self or identity in the poet, corresponds to modern criticism in the sense of its characteristic of undecidability.

Our claim here is that Keats could never have wanted to deconstruct his writing and thought. On the contrary, his engagement with the opposites of life should be seen as an expression of his awareness of their inseparability. It should be taken from the view point of Romantic irony which Anne Mellor positively handles in *English Romantic Irony* (1980) as engendering open-endedness and becoming (pp. 1 – 30).

In *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (1987), Susan Wolfson premises her argument on a deconstructive preference for irony and indeterminacy. Wolfson uses as her deconstructive paradigm Kant's assertion that there are questions that human reason is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer. With this, she argues that the poets

draw the basic energy and complexity from questioning. Her concern, therefore, becomes the notion of questioning as state of mind open to doubts, uncertainties, insecurity, possibilities, and mystery. This actually sounds like a move towards destroying Keat's constructivist philosophy of negative capability. With regard to Keats, Wolfson sees his entire poetry as a perfect exemplification of questioning and interrogating than any attempt at answering or patterning thought and meaning. His poems, accordingly, are characterised by shifting and subtle combination of meaning, engendering, as it were, no clear pivotal point of the meaning. Contrary to Wolfson's deconstructive claims, questioning and interrogation are the qualities of a mind that is actively alive and conscious of the subtleties and mystery of life while constantly seeking for suitable answers. Without this distinctive quality of Keats, he would not have achieved the reputation he now has.

Wolfson emphasises her deconstructive stance once more in *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997). Her contention here is that Keats's last lyrics show how the poem's forms undermine the claims of form to create a privileged autonomy. She argues, for instance, that the dash at the end of 'Bright Star,' "refuses a closure of form" to register "the radical insecurities of experience" (p. 187). It would appear that the deconstructionist approach here, as elsewhere as well, expects Romanticism's idealism to mean or to have meant a paradise on earth. This is not the case. So it could be better to see the Romantics as aspiring to achieve than claiming to have achieved their ideals, especially in the realms of spirituality.

Joseph Swann proposes that Keats can be read in conjunction with Paul de Man or Hillis Miller. His deconstructive move is evidenced in his articles "The Language of Poetry and the Language of Criticism: Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and the Modern Reader" (1986), and "Shelley, Keats and Coleridge: The Romantics as Deconstructionists" (1995). In the former work, Swann points to the deconstructing nature of the poem's language and

theme. Its dream-reality nature and the dramatised experience of the Knight, usher a cloudy atmosphere of meaning that explicitly points to deconstructive principles:

For, as we move from questioner to Knight to lady to kings and princes, we are moving up a thermometer not of pleasure but of the mind, an intensity of figure caught within figure, each moment, it might seem, reflecting a specific act of meaning within the meaning which is the poem itself, and the whole amounting to a poetic vindication, par excellence, of deconstructionist principles. (p. 373)

The difficulty in making or deciding any clear or possible meaning, Swann elaborates, leaves the reader in confusion. In partaking in the Knight's transition, the reader finds at the centre of the poem a disjunction, not a dream, a loss of eidetic meaning, not a gain. Swann continues what Keats's branched thoughts beckon the reader into a perilous experience. Thus, he presents us in his ballad with a vision of language as a naming that does not name; he simulates a consummate experience only to show its ineffability; indeed he positively invites us to read his knight as a cursed poet of deconstructionism, torn in his awareness of the gulf between experience and language (p. 375).

Swann's second work takes his argument to a broader perspective, this time including Shelley and Coleridge. Once again, his claim is that the Romantics not only laid the poetic foundations of modernity, they also defined the intellectual concern of critics as each in their own way anticipated the mainstream of contemporary critical debate, in this sense, Deconstruction (p. 81, 98). Swann uses Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' to substantiate the poet's Deconstruction. In the first poem, his premise is that its language is physical and highly characterised by impenetrability rather than clarity. According to Swann, the subject matter of Keats's poem is knowing and unknowing, the death of meaning that is immanent in every word, the dark energy of otherness in the objects we meet, and the inescapable eroticism of speech (p. 94).

‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ on its path, is characteristic of shifting meanings without the possibility of grasping one. Seeing it as a drama of interpretation, Swann holds that the urn teases us into an awareness of the limits of interpretation, its final irony, as it were, revealing that paradox in all its force. He concludes that Keats, like Shelley and Coleridge, shows language to work as signed energy, an energy released only in the breaking of signs (p. 97).

James O’Rourke in *Keats’s Odes and Contemporary Criticism* (1998), also engages the deconstructive poetics of error in Keats. Using the paradigm of de Man, he points to the deflection and ongoing dialectic of linguistic displacement and condensation which accelerate to the point of annihilating a stable and centred self. In the pertinent chapter, “Negative Dialectics and Negative Capability: ‘To Autumn’” (pp. 143 - 177), O’Rourke’s contention is the poem’s own negative dialectics, between a nostalgic celebration of organic presence and an awareness of the unbridgeable gap between the unmoored activity of consciousness and the inexorable predictability of nature, is a more nuanced treatment of its central themes than is found in either the formalist celebrations of its perfection or the political critique of its supposedly reactionary intentions (pp. ix, 145, 152 – 158).

The Deconstructionists have expounded energetically on resistance to conceptualisation, theory, or method, though curiously, not on the resistance to the conceptualisation of their own philosophy through the very complex of language that they deconstruct in literature and philosophy. They have outrightly dismissed the notion of self-presence or the intentionality of the poets, arguing that reading entails new creation and never-ending interpretation. What is very problematic at the core of their argument is that Deconstruction is dismissive of Romantic visionary criticism, offering no allowance for its idealist philosophy or its aesthetic engagements. To transpose this postmodern critical perspective on Romanticism is to be nihilistic to its linguistic, aesthetic and philosophical thought. Nevertheless, Deconstruction can be very useful, in the sense it strongly engages the critic’s attention in the construction of meaning in texts, taking into consideration the



difficulties that texts pose in this process of constructing meaning. From an eclectic dimension, it could play a significant role in determining the difficulties of arriving at meanings in the interpretative process. The Romantics, it can be argued, need not have been consciously aware that their attempt at a holistic or unifying expression was fraught with problems that were to serve as firm bases to challenge their prose and poetic works. If their awareness and expression was not to deconstruct, it simply means that what they were trying to articulate, especially from a personal and subjective perspective, what was intended. Language, however difficult it is, lexically, grammatically, and semantically, remains the most conducive means of literary transmission. The building of meaning serves not only for academic and intellectual purposes, but can also engender important pursuits in the social, moral, religious, and spiritual life of a person. In this vein, those who judge Deconstruction as nihilistic to art and literature and as a hermeneutics of suspicion may be right. The position of this endeavour is, among others, the resistance to Deconstruction and a reaffirmation, but modified view of Romantic idealism.

### **STATEMENT OF RESEARCH**

This chapter has tried to review extant literature on Coleridge and Keats in relation to some theoretical and practical perspectives that characterise the enterprise of research in literature. The intention was to examine positions, revise and make a critique of them, for the purpose of shaping a possible direction for the endeavour's own analyses. It has focused on four main areas of criticism, pertaining to hermeneutics and phenomenology, psychoanalysis, New Historicism and Deconstruction, to show how Coleridge's and Keats's texts are treated. From the discussions raised in the examination of the various theoretical and practical stance, the following observations and propositions can be drawn: First, seeing Coleridge only within Christian hermeneutics and theology, and dismissing any other alternative(s) he at one moment of his life adopted and attributed to Romantic idealist philosophy, undermines the

very importance of these spiritual broodings he had that were at odds with Christianity. In this vein, the understanding of Coleridge's spiritual engagements in nature can prove to be complicated, but shows the extent to which he grappled with this, taking into consideration the difficulties involved in articulating the mystical and transcendental system he tried to explain in his prose writing with regard to his aesthetic and spiritual idealism. The engagement here is to show that his organicism should be seen as an inspiring and creative energy, and an ongoing process, which justifies his poetics of becoming. Coleridge's pantheist and monistic idealism, far from being subversive to orthodox philosophy, is an engaging alternative that transcribes a more subjectivised spiritual self, and constitutes an envisaged level of spiritual reality. In other words, reality to Coleridge goes beyond mere observable phenomena and pertains more to metarational, non-discursive and spiritual self-definition.

Second, Coleridge's romanticising of childhood should not be seen as a representation of an irrecoverably divided self, or as expressive of repressed psychological problems he could not come to face in life. Coleridge is not self-deconstructive, nor is he self-subversive. Rather, his self-awareness of the need to seek a psychological therapy and balance between the various phases of his life, and his connecting this with spirituality, should be taken in the framework of the philosophy of becoming that ties with a major part of the epistemological and ontological character of Romanticism which has not been adequately investigated.

Third, Keats's mythological orientation does not satisfactorily answer his religious and spiritual speculations. His recourse to myth convincingly points to, and fits his search for a mode of utterance, a quest for poetic energy and excellence, and aspiration to intellectual aptitude. In other words, the aim here is to show that his greatness owes much to classical Greek literature which his imaginative power recreated for his own artistic aims. He is therefore self-present in his work, and self-conscious of the fact that what it takes to achieve his aesthetic vision is a maturing process, which implicates spirituality as well.

The fourth observation centres on Keats's spiritual character. This endeavour proposes to investigate Keats as having been very conscious of spirituality and immortality in his poetry and epistolary self-consciousness. His un-Christian temperament, his philosophy of an alternative affirmation to the immortality of the soul in connection with the sublimity of the imagination, which we will discuss as having affinities with Gnostic patterns, should not be misconstrued or misrepresented for agnostic or atheistic labels, but as a complex system that takes individuation as the core of true spiritual light. In the mainstream of the hypothesis, this domain also falls in Keats's expressed consciousness of becoming. Becoming here presupposes the antithetical but positive transformation of the spiritual self, and an anticipation of a transcendent spiritual reality that is translated in Keats's conception of death and afterlife.

Finally, the fifth proposition anchors on a re-evaluation of eroticism in the poetry of both poets, which has been unfairly interpreted. Here again, the aim is to demonstrate that the erotic goes beyond the sensuous, and involves great artistic and spiritual energy and force, and that it brings to bear to mind certain modern aspects of life that can be fatally misconstrued from puritan or catholic grounds, or more precisely conservative terms. While psycho-biographical readings are to be taken seriously, the endeavour will go beyond this. Keats's interest in Spenser and Platonism, for example, shows that he saw more than the erotic in sexual life. His philosophising of love and death needs greater attention than extant literature has provided. A modern reading of sexuality in Coleridge will challenge the dominantly conservative stance that has characterised previous interpretations. Central again here will be the extent to which the poetics of becoming can be applied to affirm that this strand of discourse strongly relates to those of the previous chapters.

From these comments, Romantic aesthetics and idealism still have an important place in the discourse of Romantic poetry and prose. The comments should not necessarily be taken as explicit and definite conclusions, but as indicators of the centrality ascribed to the different

argumentative perspectives of this thesis. And as earlier said, to understand the poetics of becoming presupposes textual analysis from different theoretical and critical approaches. Eclecticism becomes pertinent as different theoretical and practical perspectives will surface in the endeavour, with each chapter operating within a specified and convenient approach, but where necessary, relating to others.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The personalist approach Wendling proposes for his work had strongly been criticised by Owen Barfield in *What Coleridge Thought* (1972). In his reaction to the claim that “Coleridge’s philosophy was really determined by his emotional need for Christian faith,” Barfield says “... Coleridge’s commitment to Christianity actually led him to betray his own nature which, from what we know of it, might have been more at ease with a different metaphysic – a black one for instance by which he could have assured himself that because life has no meaning, it [necessitated] no moral exertion” (p. 9), and, “I have never seen it adequately demonstrated ... and I am now convinced, far from actual study of Coleridge’s philosophy that it is impossible to reach [such a position] without the help of prescinding aversion from Christianity or at least the Christian Church” (p. 12). Other former works that treat Coleridge’s Christianity include, J. F. Bougler’s *Coleridge as Religious Thinker* (1961) and J. Robert Barth’s *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (1969).

<sup>2</sup> David Beres has pointed out in his reading of the Mariner’s symbolism in “A Dream, a Vision, and a Poem: A Psycho-Analytic Study of the Origins of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 32 (1951), that Coleridge’s psyche was characterised by an oral fixation resulting from a repressed conflict between love and hatred for his mother. He sought for love and protection from other women like Mary Evans and Thomas Poole’s mother; “My conclusions about Coleridge’s unhappy relationship with his mother, which I have gathered from his writings and his life, do not differ from those of the biographers ... Coleridge did not permit his hostile feelings to his mother to come to surface of his conscious mind. He repressed in his unconscious mind his conflicted ambivalent emotions about her, his crying need, his bitter frustration, and his guilt at the hate this must have engendered ... The repressed emotions and conflicts came to consciousness only in distorted and unrecognisable forms ... they appear in the symbolism of his poetry” (p. 104). Wendling is equally echoing this same concern, which will be critically examined in a latter part of the endeavour.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Pierre Mileur’s psychoanalysis of the conversational poems also advances the same argument of Magnuson. His contention is that the acts of bestowal of these poems are primarily a defence of the self; the “other,” in each of the poems, is silent or absent. *Vision and Revision: Coleridge’s Art of Immanence* (1982), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Wheeler offers a different view in *The Creative Mind in Coleridge’s Poetry* (1981), even though she seems to arrive at a consensus with Magnuson and Mileur. In her chapter, “‘Frost at Midnight’: A Study of Identity and Difference,” pp. 92 – 120, she dominantly reads the poem positively, but points to the dual and problematic nature of its frost imagery which frames the poem as it occurs at its beginning and its end. The opening of the poem develops what she calls the “landscape of the mind” and “generative conditions of imaginative awakening” (p. 95). From a Freudian perspective, Wheeler holds that Coleridge is mediating on his own infantile wishes, a process whereby memory provides the imagination with the treasure-house of objects to internalise. She stresses that the infantile fantasy remembered here is perhaps well interpreted as a metaphor for the craving for certainty that the adult hopes to see (pp. 99, 101). Through his child, the poet can transcend the

very limitations of his childhood, the myth of childhood becoming a “valuable metaphor for rejecting and overcoming preconditioned response, habit, and the prejudices of adulthood that spread a film over spontaneous perception” (102 – 104). Wheeler sees the frost as an antithesis with the wind in ‘The Eolian Harp’ and stresses that it makes its symbolic significance problematic; it can be seen as an image of the imagination, as mind is creative or as repressively mechanical, as “freezing over perception through inactivity, or at least in its cold and frozen lifelessness as antithetical to feeling and warmth” (p. 106). It is on this chilling sensation of stasis that Magnuson and Mileur capitalise.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Ford provides a series of works which she claims have an affinity with Coleridge’s thinking. These include John Brown’s *Elemente Medicinae* (1780), Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoomania* (1794 – 96), John Haygarth’s *Of the Imagination as Cause and Cure of Disorders in the Body* (1800), and William Falconer’s *A Dissertation on the Influence of the Passions of Disorders of the Body* (third edition, 1796). She notes that the substantial evidence of Coleridge’s reflection on the mysterious functioning of his imagination as a translator of bodily ailments and sensations into the dramatic dreaming spaces of his consciousness, is to be found in his letters, marginalia, and notebooks rather than his lectures, essays or the *Biographia Literaria*. Other authors that have briefly commented on the material understanding of the Romantic imagination include Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (1988) and G. S. Rousseau, *Enlightenment Crossing: Pre – and Post-Modern Discourses: Anthropological* (1991).

<sup>6</sup> See for example Jack Stillinger’s “Keats’s Exempore Effusions and the Question of Intentionality,” *Romantic Revisions* (1992), and *Coleridge and Textual Instability: Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (1994). Stillinger’s main concern is the alterations and revisions to which the poets, particularly Coleridge subjected his major poems. Poems like ‘The Ancient Mariner,’ ‘The Eolian Harp,’ and ‘This Lime-Tree Bower’ have at least twelve revised versions each, expressing his changing attitude towards philosophical and stylistic issues.

<sup>7</sup> See “Interviews With Harold Bloom,” <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lectures/bloom/interviews.html>. Also see Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), and “Harold Bloom: Influence and Misreading,” (pp. 151 – 166) of Peter Zima’s *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002).

<sup>8</sup> There is a distinction between what has been called Old Historicism (before Formalism and dating 1930 – 1940s) and New Historicism (after Formalism dating from the 1980s till present times). The Old Historicists were dominantly fact based and event-oriented. The New Historicists hold that a literary text does not have a single or easily identifiable context, and they are informed by Marxism, Feminism, Cultural Studies, Post-structuralist and Reader Response theories. They, therefore, opt for an interdisciplinary emphasis in literary reading and interpretation. Some outstanding exponents of New Historicism include Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) and *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990), Jerome MacGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (1985), Veenser H. Aram, ed. *The New Historicism* (1989), Herbert Lindenberger, *The History in Literature: On Value, Genre, Institutions* (1990), and Thomas Brook, *New Historicism and Old-Fashioned Topics* (1991).

<sup>9</sup> This reading brings to mind Brian Wilkie’s “The Romantic Ideal of Unity,” *Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination Today* (1989). Wilkie questions the Romantic complexity of unity and underscores an interesting challenge that deconstructs any unity in the imagination, insisting that what characterises the work of the Romantic is overlays or superimpositions and not a monistic transcendentalism (p. 33). These overlays, he intimates, do not fuse, they cling together and cohere while also retaining a high independence competing with each other to at times a point of unresolved contradiction. He then illustrates the example of ‘The Ancient Mariner,’ whereby he points to the two vastly different modes of spiritual redemption; the radical Protestant theology and the Catholic purgatorial model. Though Wilkie’s interest lies in Deconstruction and not in New Historicism, his analysis points to what MacGann is trying to expound.

<sup>10</sup> For further reading, see Marilyn Butler’s *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981), Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society* (1985), Clifford Siskin’s *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (1988), and Jerome Christensen’s *Romanticism at the End of History* (2000).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Ross Murfin in “Deconstruction” (1999). P. 261.

<sup>12</sup> For further reading, see for example Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982), Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (1982), Gerald L. Bruns, “Structuralism, Deconstruction and Hermeneutics” (1984), Danny J. Anderson, “Deconstruction: Critical Strategy/Strategic Criticism” (1989), Kenneth Kierans, “Beyond Deconstruction” (1997), and Peter Zima,

*Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002). These are all works that englobe the writings and views of the main contributors to deconstructive thought. They therefore offer a comprehensive reading of the subject.

<sup>13</sup> Wheeler had already detected deconstructive tendencies in Coleridge's oeuvre in an earlier investigation entitled *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* (1980). In the section "Structural Unity in Biographia," pp. 121 – 132, later reprinted in *Critical Essays* (1994), pp. 143 – 157, she remarked that ironies and inconsistencies are to be found in unifying poetry and philosophy and primary and secondary imagination as structural principle. But she insisted that good understanding of Coleridge's thought simply entails or necessitates the suspension of contradictions. The next chapter will closely examine this view as a critical construct.

<sup>14</sup> France Ferguson had already pointed out the deconstructive nature of the Gloss in "Coleridge and the Deluded Reader: 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" *Georgia Review* 31 (1977), 617 – 35. She contends that Coleridge's inclusion of the Gloss was paradoxical to his obvious intention of rendering clarity in the poem. Rather, it only helps in increasingly handicapping our ability to arrive at meaningful acts since Coleridge problematises moral decisions. Substantiating the problematic of the Gloss as a reading guide, Ferguson refers to the fact that when the Mariner sees "a something," the Gloss calls it "a sign." In terms of textuality, this is a very complex situation in which it cannot be convincing to say something is the same as a sign. The question of the validity of meaning takes a firm ground, since it becomes difficult to clearly determine what is meant.

<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Fleissner's recent work *Sources, Meaning, and Influences of Kubla Khan: Xanadu Re-Routed. A Study in the Ways of Romantic Variety* (2000), takes a further step from John Livingston Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (1927), to solve the mysteries surrounding the possible sources of the textual history of the poem.

<sup>16</sup> For a full text of Hogsette's essay, see Romanticism on the Net 5, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/eclipsed.html>. Other readings related to or based on Deconstruction include, Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (1980), Regina Hewitt, "False Poets in 'Kubla Khan'" (1988), Anthony John Harding, "Imagination, In and Out of Context" (1989), Joseph Swann, "Shelley, Keats and Coleridge: The Romantics as Deconstructionists" (1995), and Susan Eilenberg, "Voice and Ventriloquy in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'" (1999).

<sup>17</sup> For an elaborate treatment of de Man in this perspective, see Peter Zima's *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002), particularly "Paul de Man: Rhetoric and Aporia," pp. 83 – 111.

## CHAPTER TWO

### S. T. COLERIDGE: METAPHYSICAL ECOLOGY: NATURE AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL REALM

The imagination can offer a sort of prophetic existence present to us, which tells us what we are not, but yet, blending in us much that we are, promises great things of what we may be.  
S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare* (1811)

Is the power extinct? No! No! As in a still Summer Noon, when the lulled Air at irregular intervals wakes up with a startled *Hush-st*, that seems to re-demand the silence which it breaks, or heaves a long profound Sigh in its Sleep, and an Aeolian Harp has been left in the chink of the not quite shut Casement – even so – how often! – scarce a week of my Life shuffles by, that does not at some moment feel the spur of the old genial impulse – even so do there fall in my inward Ear swells, and broken snatches of sweet Melody, reminding me that I still have within me which is still Harp and Breeze.

(S.T. Coleridge, Letter to Lady Beaumont, March 1828. *Collected Letters* Vol. IV, 1971. P. 731)

The aim of this chapter is a re-evaluation of the notion of the metaphysics and spirituality of nature in Coleridge's poetry from a hermeneutic and phenomenological perspective, with regard to the poetics of becoming. The main focus here is not a structural treatment of the poems per se, but an outlook of symbols and emblems and how they operate with the imagination in terms of poetic inspiration and spiritual and transcendental awareness. In other words, a bulk of Coleridge's poems suggests and evokes a configured idea of the self and consciousness, based on a participatory view of consciousness and an understanding of human awareness as part of a greater ecosystem of world awareness.

This eco-psychological perspective presents the imagination as engaged in the process of a search for the organising principle of within and without, the connection between nature and the psyche, between being in the world and the world itself. So the idea of Coleridge's spirituality that is to be discussed here is precisely within the context of his broodings over the mystical and metaphysical affinities that relate the human psyche to nature and the forces inherent in it. Coleridge's apprehension of the heterogeneous but unified entities of nature are not to be seen from the view point of a completely achieved harmony and wholeness not susceptible to further change, but as an ever evolving process which justifies the organicism that characterised much of his thought and philosophy. To put it alternatively, the attempt here

as will be seen later is not a Hegelian dialectic unless its basic premise is reconceptualised to suit the notion of the argument in this endeavour, nor a Mellorian sense of the Romantic irony and becoming (Anne Mellor's *English Romantic Irony*, 1980), but a modified Schlegelian philosophy of becoming which places the definitive attainment of the absolute ideal in the future. This brings to mind the nature of treating certain Romantic texts as self-referential or self-representational of the author. This explains the fact that these texts are an expression not of the permanence in self-spiritualisation, but delineate a process that portrays the self as characteristic of change but pointing to a central transcendental goal.

Monism can be defined as a system of salvation that consists in union with the absolute in whatever form it is conceived. Pantheism is closely related to Monism, given that its basic premise advocates the worship or reverence of nature as divine, or the apprehension of nature as harbouring divine presences and participating in the universal collective One. One of the basic arguments here will be that any mystical or spiritual union experienced by Coleridge, is to be taken as prefiguring a definitive spiritual union possible only after death rather than a permanent state while he lives as body and flesh. This justifies the fervent conviction of the notion of becoming, which should be a common characteristic feature in all religions. And as earlier mentioned, this cosmic enthusiasm forms the greatest base of his early religious life<sup>1</sup> even if he was to take recourse to orthodox faith at a later part of his life. Besides, there is substantial evidence that even in his so called Christian phase, his eccentricity did not desert him. He remained committed to his early pantheistic and monistic thought. The above excerpts are some of the several examples that justify this stance. This said, this phase of his life will be hermeneutically and phenomenologically treated in its own right as a way other than the orthodox Christian one, or to put it more clearly, other than a structural move to Christianity, that the poet seriously engaged in his epistemological and ontological investigations in life.



As it is the case with most, if not all modes of religious and spiritual meditation, Coleridge's physical and transcendental engagement with nature is dualistic. In fact, dualism or oppositional or polarity-thinking characterised much of his aesthetic and spiritual concerns. This means that it is characterised both by moments of delight and inspiration, self-awareness of deep spiritual energy and certainty, and by moments of self-doubt, self-questioning, anxiety, rejection, alienation, and even despair. Within the operational bases of the imagination, and in the sphere of hermeneutics and phenomenology, this is to be positively seen rather than sceptically apprehended. This manifest and express characteristic of Coleridge should, therefore, not be treated or interpreted as imaginative failure, nor should it be seen as self-deconstruction or destruction, but as a complementary and inevitable component of the power of the imagination. And though he associated the imagination with will, he never lost the will to look forward rather than submit to despair or dejection.

That Coleridge at certain moments of his life expressed a great sense of alienation from nature, of losing sight of its spiritual potential, should be credited as a positive aspect of objective self-examination and investigation. For instance he wrote to William Godwin in 1801, "My imagination ... lies like a Cold Snuff on the Circular Rim of a Brass Candle-stick" (*Letters* Vol. II, p. 714), to Mary Robinson, 27 December 1802, "I have almost wholly weaned myself from the habit of making Verses ... poetic composition has become laborious and painful to me" (*Letters* Vol. II, p. 903), and to Stewart, 22 August 1806, "Endless heart-wasting ... irresolution, procrastination, languour, and former detestable habit of poison-taking" (*Letters* Vol. II, p. 1178). All these aptly sound a note of spiritual and poetic paucity which may lay credence to the assumption that after 1802 he lost his creative and visionary potentials, but Coleridge saw the matter differently. For the poet's continuous broodings over the subject all culminate in a "higher consciousness" to quote William Blake, which if not permanently attained but temporarily experienced, could be anticipating or prefiguring a greater realm of reality which to him pertains to the transcendental and spiritual spheres of

existence. Otherwise said, frustration illuminates new possibilities, not complete resignation, it is a stage in the rebirth pattern. To great minds frustration provides fertile space for philosophical and meditative investigation. The health of the imagination must be engendered and guaranteed both by passivity and activity without which its constructivist and idealist potential would be very problematic to accept. This brings to mind the subtle and intriguing quarrel that is raging between Romantic visionary criticism and their modern counterparts. The two camps apparently seem irreconcilable because of the extremity of their positions. Visionary criticism has always given a great idealist and at times uncritical interpretation of the Romantic imagination. One would think at certain occasions that visionary critics read the Romantics more than their texts express their attempts at self-expression. Modern criticism like New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and postmodern criticism like Deconstruction have resisted the hermeneutics and phenomenology of visionary criticism, positing arguments which are not only critical but some of which even refuse or are strongly aversive to the attempts to interpret Romantic texts as meaningful.

Postmodern or poststructural criticism like Deconstruction has rightly pointed out discrepancies in Coleridge's thought, especially pertaining to linguistic and semantic problems that lend credence to the questioning and scepticism of any firm bases or claims that the poet might have tried to articulate, or which constructivist criticism has tried to discern, given that there appear to be a lot of ironies and even aporias, in fact, a general atmosphere of linguistic and semantic anxiety, where one is left entangled with many questions and interrogations rather than answers or patterns of meaning. Such a stance has quite often problematised and even discarded or, as it were, dismissed the notion of authorial intention and self-presence, pointing out that the so called self-expression or intention is characterised by ironies and unresolved contradictions. New Historicists, as we saw previously, have also sidelined Romantic texts as an attempted self-textualisation, pointing to an affinity shared with their deconstructionist counterparts.

The fervent conviction here is that maintaining a certain consistency of thought in the face of great and challenging influences might have reduced Coleridge's undoubtedly deliberate multiplicity of engagements and speculations. This speculation is going to be examined from its varied perspectives as a sight and vision, especially intelligent or comprehensible vision; as observation or examination – especially of elemental images; as contemplation and profound study, and most particularly as abstract or hypothetical reasoning especially of a conjectural nature. For instance in Chapter Nine of *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge acknowledges and expresses his indebtedness to various influences on the formation of his philosophical and spiritual speculations, he asserts with specific regard to mystics like Plotinus and Spinoza that, “For the writings of these mystics acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any dogmatic system” (p. 152). An unfixing mind or unfixing self is always receptive, undergoes altering processes and therefore confirms the state of becoming. The impression one may thus have here is that Coleridge might have been engaged in a vast array or labyrinth of different systems without submitting to a central focus. But what is certain is that Coleridge was always bent at apprehending the absolute, not the relative, he was engaged in constructive rather than deconstructive thought. In this wise, credit should be given him. In a letter to Thomas Poole, dated February 1 1801, Coleridge had said that, “I shall look back on long & painful illness only as a Storehouse of Wild Dreams for poems, or intellectual Facts for metaphysical Speculation” (*Letters*, Vol. II, p. 668). ‘Dejection: An Ode,’ despite its explicit psychological tortures, ends with determination and optimism. ‘The Pains of Sleep’ also translates the same determination. This again clearly demonstrates the Romantic attempt at apprehending and expressing a holistic attitude to life. And as earlier said, the Romantics need not have been conscious that in their struggle to articulate what they claimed to have experienced, they at times expressed what poststructuralist criticism has taken as firm grounds for its justification that certain, if not all texts, are indicative of contradictions and complexities that are not easy

to clearly conceptualise. Fortunately though, a reconceptualisation of certain strands of discourse in Deconstruction clearly indicates that it is not after all entirely nihilistic with regard to theory and methodology, but it calls for a careful analysis that should not remain indifferent to the linguistic and semantic difficulties inherent in texts.

For a comprehensive understanding of this chapter, the following structure is adopted: First, we will seek to examine certain concepts of nature to understand the operational context in which Coleridge wrote his so-called nature poetry. In this vein, the Greek, Renaissance, Augustan/Neoclassic, and Romantic notions of the concept will be briefly examined. Second, will be an examination of some of the major influences on Coleridge as he struggled to work out his own distinctive philosophy of the imagination, will, symbol and reality in connection with the inspiring and spiritual aspect of the mind, soul, and nature. In other words, the underlying pantheist and monistic thought that permeates his poetry will be discussed in relation to existing positions, but with an emphasis on Coleridge's conscious deviations and a justification of the philosophy of becoming Being. This will be followed by a critical assessment of specific poems for substantiation, and finally, a critique of the chapter.

### **EXISTING NOTIONS ON NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY PRIOR TO THE ROMANTIC PERIOD**

The concept of nature is multifaceted and very complex. Nature can be applied to different contexts. For example the order and laws of the universe (physical science), the spirit of the universe (theology), the underlying laws of human thought and conduct (moral philosophy), the underlying order and laws of society (political philosophy), the norms and laws of art (critical theory), and the landscape and external creation, both animate and inanimate (aesthetics). Neo-classicism or the Enlightenment against which the Romantics claimed to have written, portrays the

above features and has a Romantic strain of the term. This is captured, for example, in Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Pope says:

First follow NATURE, and your judgment frame  
By her just Standard, which is still the same:  
*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,  
One *clear, unchang'd*, and *Universal Light*,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must all impart,  
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test of Art*.  
(L. 68 – 73)

These lines point to the different strands of meaning that are attributed to nature, and prefigure the dimension with which the Romantics were largely to conceive and express it. In Romantic poetry nature comprises all the aspects of the created universe like plants, trees, animals, clouds, mist, fog, and elemental features like the moon, the stars, and the sun. This notion of nature was not a discovery of the Romantics. But what particularises it is how it has been viewed on the grounds of epistemological and/or ontological explanations by philosophy, religion and spirituality in particular times in human history. The emphasis that the Romantics placed on it through poetry and the power of the imagination, gave it a central place not only in the Romantic canon, but Western literature and philosophy.

From early Greek times till the present day, the consciousness of nature has constantly been evoked in various dimensions. And poetry and metaphysics have proved to be the most important media for expressing its insights. Unfortunately though, recent postmodern and poststructuralist criticism, especially in the form of Deconstruction, is resisting the hermeneutics and phenomenology of the Romantic imagination and its affiliated components like truth, beauty and reality. While some of their claims may be right, any insistence on treating Romanticism only within the new context of (post)contemporary criticism, will greatly handicap the essential thought and ideology of the Romantics and give a misappropriated and at times a misguided

outlook of their philosophy. It may, in fact, be trying to refuse or avert an important, even if impeachable or questionable developmental phase of Western philosophy.

One of the most important notions of nature can be traced back in ancient Greek spiritual thought. The Greeks had a mythopoetic way of looking at the surrounding environment characterised by an underlying perception of the divine in the landscape. To them, the external landscape of the world was viewed as integral to the human psyche. Poetry is the original aesthetic form of myth, and if myths are viewed as a particular way of orienting an individual to the place in which they dwell, then the landscape itself would drive the archetypal experience in the individual's psyche. This was a clear manifestation of the link, transcendental or metaphysical, between man and his environment. The argument here is not that the Greek view must be accepted as the objective truth. What is important is how it ties in with the main thrust of the contention of the chapter.

A reading of Greek myths helps in the understanding of the relation between the human consciousness to different landscapes and their embodying divinities. For example Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* highlight the highly active personifying function of natural elements in the Greek mind, personifying seen here as the basic psychological activity, consisting in the spontaneous experiencing, envisioning and speaking of the configurations of existence as psychic presences. Though polytheistic in nature, the Greeks recognised a unified totality in this polytheistic nature of things. The examples of Greek philosophers like Plotinus will be explicitly examined under Coleridge's philosophy. This will also be the case with the Dutch, German and English influences.

Since the world of nature is not only of ceaseless motion and therefore alive, but also a world of orderly and regular motion, the Greeks accordingly held that the world of nature is not only alive but intelligent; not only a vast animal with a soul or

life of its own, but a rational animal with a mind of its own. The life and intelligence of creatures inhabiting the earth's surface and the regions adjacent to it, they argued, represent a specialised local organisation of this all-pervading vitality and rationality, so much so that a plant or animal participates in its own degree psychically in the life-process of the world's soul and intellectually in the activity of the world's mind (*anima mundi* or *spiritus mundi*), no less than it participates materially in the physical organisation of the world's body. What is important to note here is the fact that the Greeks see nature as ensouled or the divine as immanent in the environment, living things being visible signs of divine language and expression.

The Greek view of nature as an organism was based on an analogy: an analogy between the world of nature and the individual human being, who begins by finding characteristics in himself as an individual, and goes to think of nature as possessed of similar characteristics. By the work of his own self-consciousness he comes to think of himself as a body whose parts are in constant rhythmic motion, these motions being delicately adjusted to each other so as to preserve the vitality of the whole: and at the same time he finds himself to be a mind directing the activity of this body in accordance with its own desires. The world of nature as a whole is then explained as a macrocosm of this microcosm, or, to put it technically, anthropocentrism.

The Renaissance view of nature shares similar affinities with that of the Augustan period. This view accepted the Greek theory that the orderliness of the natural world is an expression of some intelligence, but while the Greeks posited the argument that this intelligence was nature's own intelligence, the Renaissance and later the Augustan stance, saw it as the intelligence of something other than nature. In other words, while both views support the existence of a supernatural and supra-personal energy in nature, there remained a difference as to where this energy emanates. The Greeks saw the power of landscape as mediated by the early and pre-

Christian myth-thinking in connection with the human psyche and spiritual awareness. The Renaissance and Augustan views were embedded within the context of the Christian era. This brings to question the religious or spiritual notion of Deism which prevailed in the Augustan period and is finely manifested in Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man," where reason supersedes and stands supreme to all other human faculties.

Deism was a new concept of religion, not wholly compatible with Christianity. The intelligence which Renaissance thinking accepted in nature but attributed to a supreme power, was systematically crystallised in Deistic thinking. God, who was believed to be the architect who produced and maintained a marvellous order in the universe, had been discovered in nature, and there was no longer a place for the God of Christian dogma, the God who bestowed upon Adam the power to sin and to reverse the order. To put it differently, God was analysed by naturalists and biologists and no longer in the human conscience, with the feelings of sin, disgrace, or grace that accompanied His presence; He had left man in charge of his destiny. Deism was, therefore, strongly backed by the new scientific discoveries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, John Locke, Isaac Newton and David Hume being some of its representative scientists. Hume's essay *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) is a living testimony of deist philosophy. Faith was based on the observation of natural phenomena and empirical experimentation and explanation. The Bible was sidelined, and the notion of the gospels and revelation considered irrelevant. Deism was in other terms referred to as natural or rational religion, based on pragmatic and scientific dogma, which apprehended the notion of the Great Chain of Being as its operational paradigm.

What is certainly curious about Deism in England is that it took deep roots from within the Anglican church and clergy. Advocates like Gastrell, Samuel Clarke,



and Matthew Tindal all occupied high positions in the church. Gastrell, a Bishop, while defining himself a Deist, stressed the new morality that had replaced the dictates of the human conscience:

The Deist is one who, while he accepts God, denies providence or at least restricts it to such a degree that he excludes any revelation and believes that his obligations are determined solely by public or private interest, without consideration of another life.<sup>2</sup>

This assertion is not a Christian one and may point to the dissatisfactory state of the orthodox nature of the National church. Samuel Clarke also advocated that reason and faith were one and the same thing. Tindal, one of the most celebrated of the Deists, aired his views in his publication entitled *Christianity as Old as the Creation, or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730). Here, he drew his conclusion concerning the comparison of natural religion and the Gospel, “The religion of nature and external revelation correspond exactly to each other, with no difference between them except the manner in which they are communicated.”<sup>3</sup>

Deism had roots in other European countries, France for example.<sup>4</sup> Deists met with a lot of criticism from orthodox Christians, who accused them of being atheists in disguise. What remains obvious is the influence of this philosophy on Romantic thinking. This position that was held against the Augustan or Neoclassic view was already a prefiguring of a similar dislike that was subsequently to be manifested against the Romantic stance which reverberated the pre-Christian Greek conception of nature.

There is no debate that nature has assumed one of the canonical themes in Romantic philosophy and poetry. Both generations of the Romantics grappled with nature from different perspectives and magnitude. Generally speaking, nature was a source of inspiration and an awareness of artistic possibility and creativity. In the light of the present investigation, both the Greek and the Renaissance and Neoclassical

views of nature will be seen to shape the Romantic view, which was systematically expounded within the framework of the Romantic imagination as a consequence of its aversion to the prevailing orthodox Christian theologies. While this may not be new to Romantic discourse, the issue at stake will be how this ideal remained a persistent consciousness in Coleridge, justifying the contention that his visionary gleam, embedded in his idealist philosophy, never deserted him. So what actually lies in the thrust of the argument is a modified concept of Coleridge's aesthetic and spiritual broodings with nature in the context of the philosophy of becoming.

The mechanistic and empirical thought pattern that had shaped much of Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment, was largely resisted by the Romantics, whose epistemological and ontological concerns saw nature as dynamic, artistic and most importantly, organic. Poetry and art were seen as the expression of the innermost feelings and sensations of the individual poet. The expressiveness of nature was also evident, serving as a new path to transcendental knowledge and truth and reality, aptly exemplifying the associative conception of the imagination. In other words, the inward self was apprehended as corresponding with the outward character of nature which in itself shared in a psychic life process, characterised by the tendency to transform heterogeneity to homogeneity. In line with the premise of this work, the shared relationship that is discernible from the texts does not presuppose the attaining of a final spiritual and transcendental vision or union in themselves, but point to a process that was characterised by continuity and transformation, a becoming in which the self is an unfolding process rather than a fixed identity. One can, therefore, conclude that most Romantics were self-conscious that transcendental and mystical vision ends prematurely, or their texts seem to justify such an argument. Yet given that they had a vision of the final outcome of momentarily lived experiences, fulfilment might be

achieved within one life. In other words, the states of being that are expressed in the poems are a prefiguring of the attainment of Being.

As Maureen Roberts has noted in “The ‘Gregarious Advance of Intellect:’ Romanticism, Platonism and the Evolution of Western Consciousness” (1997), she engages in what she describes as an apologetic approach, the basic premise of which is a psycho-dynamics to the holistic nature of Romanticism. Her aim is to show how Jung’s basic ideas about the unity of knowledge and existence are in principle synonymous with those of the Platonic tradition, Romanticism, alchemy and Gnosticism. Commenting on the synchronicity and the wholeness of Romanticism as opposed to Neoclassicism, Roberts posits the argument that:

The literality of perspective in Romanticism reflects what Wordsworth calls the “primal sympathy” which is diffused throughout mind and Nature. Poetically, the discriminatory analogy inherent in the predominance of simile in Neoclassical literature becomes superseded in Romanticism by metaphor and symbol as representative of the tendency to replace distinction by identity. While the Neoclassical thinker is self-divided through the discontinuity between the subjective and objective, Romantic self-awareness, though conscious of the inner tension between opposites, retains an immediacy of knowledge within the sense of a universality of psychic transcendent to self and Nature. Seeing as a distancing idiom of perception gives way in Romanticism to more empathetic sensations that imply within each separate experience the “feeling of the whole.”<sup>5</sup>

Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley, all in one way or the other exemplify the renewed claims on nature. The affinity that their concept had with Platonism and Neoplatonism shows the continued reverberation and impact of the stream of thought of the Greek philosophical and spiritual outlook on the subject. Their later influence on Victorianism and American Romanticism/Transcendentalism,<sup>6</sup> demonstrates that there lie in nature philosophy important strands of issues that characterise an unquestionable developmental stage of Western philosophy which, as it were, can be justly discredited, but not easily dismissed or discarded as it is the case with the current state of contemporary criticism. As pointed out earlier,

postmodernism is characterised by the philosophical concept of relativity and scepticism, with no clear centres of meaning, or with the idea that there could actually be meaning or a move towards it, but the very texts deconstruct or avert meaning in themselves. Imposing this attitude on Romanticism cannot deny or replace its centrality in Western thought as an advocating period in the continuity of ontological and epistemological concerns of life on metaphysical and logocentric terms.

Blake for example saw the latent affinities between nature and the human spirit. In a letter to Dr. Trusler, dated 23 August 1799, he talked of the aesthetic and visionary/spiritual dimension of nature, stressing the harmony of all things within the unifying perception of imaginative vision:

I know that this World is a World of the IMAGINATION and vision ... I see everything I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands on the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule and Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & some scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself.<sup>7</sup>

Blake idealises nature against the background of those who merely observe it and are not moved by its inhabiting aesthetic and/or spiritual presence because they are devoid of imaginative perception. This view ties in with that of William Godwin, one of the leading influences on Romantic thought.<sup>8</sup> Most of Blake's poetry is infused with natural imagery, and a considerable portion of his convictions resemble those of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The cult of nature also is inevitably the moral, intellectual, philosophical and spiritual basis of existence in most of Wordsworth's life, even though he, like Coleridge, was to revert to Anglicanism in old age.<sup>9</sup>

## COLERIDGE'S QUEST FOR DISTINCTION: HIS METAPHYSICS OF NATURE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF BECOMING

Discussing the various influences on Coleridge has always proven to be a very complex and difficult venture. The influences are too vast and multifaceted, an indication of his life-long engagement in almost all branches of knowledge. Selectivity, therefore, becomes vitally necessary for any context in which his work has to be discussed. The case here may overlook certain important facts, but the general aim is to establish some basis under which his poetry and prose can be understood in relation to his reception and use of existing ideas in relation to his supposed modifying thought pattern.

For someone who was born and started growing up under the prevailing philosophical age of empiricism and Enlightenment, it seems inevitably just and appropriate to assert that Coleridge's resistance to being assimilated in this fabric, indicated a move towards the opposite philosophy, idealism. He felt and expressed an ingrained characteristic trait which pointed more towards his spiritual edification and metarational speculations. Writing about his youth to Thomas Poole in a letter dated 1797, he says, "I never regarded my *sense* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by *sight* ... I know of no other way of giving the mind the love of "the Great" & "the Whole" (*Letters* Vol. I, 354). This strong and irresistible attraction towards metaphysical synthesis signalled Coleridge's eccentric and dissenting attitude to organised or established religion and theology. In fact, his personal volition and ardent views on nature demonstrate that he tried to free himself from the constraints of conformity; a defiance of the Christian constricts of spirituality, and therefore a decentring of the orthodox notions on the apocalypse, sin and spiritual redemption. His early life, his early and even later poetry, the influence on him by Platonism and Neoplatonism, and of German metaphysics and idealism,

formed the basic context and complex in which we shall discuss his transcendental philosophy of nature, symbol, imagination, non-discursive or spiritual reality and becoming.

Since Coleridge styled himself a poet-philosopher,<sup>10</sup> reading and interpreting him presupposes an attempt on the complex and at times enigmatic thought pattern of the inter-implication of his philosophical and literary engagements. Coleridge's readings and reactions to Platonism/Neoplatonism and German idealism, and to an extent certain English philosophical positions, is vast and encapsulated in *Biographia Literaria* as well as his notebooks, lectures and letters. For the purpose of convenience and comprehension, and with the limitations (the issue here is not a detail study of philosophy, but certain philosophical clues to understanding Coleridge's writings) of the present endeavour, only those particularly influential philosophers will be discussed. They include Plotinus, Kant, Schelling, Schiller, Hegel, Novalis, Fichte, the Schlegels, Berkeley, Edmund Burke, and William Godwin.

Most of Coleridge's views are to be found in his prose writings, and reference here is made to the letters, notebooks, and most particularly *Biographia Literaria*. Some of these were written alongside his poetic productivity, and some after. For instance *Biographia Literaria* (1817) was written after he had composed most of his famous poems. Some of his views here affiliate with what some of these poems seem to express. In this sense, the work can be interpreted as a retrospection of his poetic life as well as an advancement in philosophy of what he hitherto expressed in poetry. For the purpose of convenience and comprehension, both should be taken to work together since discussing Coleridge as a poet necessitates seeing him also in the light of a philosopher. Again, it should be recalled that a poem like "Nature" was written in 1820, five years after the start and publication of *Biographia*. The above letter to Lady

Beaumont was written in 1828, a few years before his death. The overall impression is that a systematic attempt can be made in matching his prose and poetry.

The fundamental bases of his epistemological and ontological system was a reception and critical reaction to the existent views premised and put forth by these influences, that is, the various ideas of influential philosophers and thinkers he was exposed to. And Coleridge's quest for distinction can be justified in the critique he made on them so as to put forth a system that could be uniquely his own. This, therefore, engenders a kind of psychology of influence, anxiety and antithesis whose end product becomes his self-conscious fabric, whatever shortcomings have been detected.

It should be recalled that the question of the complexity of meaning generated by linguistic anxiety should be interpreted within the hermeneutics and phenomenology of Romanticism not from the postmodernist and deconstructionist point of view, but as a struggle to articulate states of experience and consciousness that pertain to metaphysics and the spiritual, where discursive language can be very problematic. In this vein, Romanticism at times necessitates an esoteric consciousness in the interpretative processes in some of its writings. There is no doubt that ours is presently a modern world that dominantly despises the spiritual and metaphysical, looking at them, as it were, with sheer scorn and at times gross scepticism. The difficulty deciphered in Coleridge's philosophy and poetry no doubt justifies the complexity of interpreting text as an expression of spirit or consciousness. But this does not deny or deprive the essentiality of the struggle towards a holistic thought pattern.

Coleridge was a reverberation of what the early Greeks had postulated with regard to the ongoing processes that characterised man's physical and metarational relationship with the surrounding landscape. This also was in consideration to what

eighteenth-century English landscape descriptions of the sublime meant.<sup>11</sup> His pertaining to the Lake School was no doubt a clear sign on the renewed emphasis that was placed on the transcendental outlook of the universe, an aspect he shared with Wordsworth and Southey. Among some of the characteristic ideologies of this school were the notion that: physical phenomena are transcendental signifiers rather than mere empirical or mechanical entities, reality is a subjectivised experience that supersedes mere sense perception and association, spirituality is distinctively characterised not only by being and self-definition, but most particularly a process of becoming, artistic creativity, as it were, is expressive, organic, and most often fragmentary and open-ended, and a constant quest for wholeness or unity, seen in the monistic attempt at transforming heterogeneity to homogeneity.<sup>12</sup>

The resurgence of Platonism and Neoplatonism accompanying the rise of Romanticism, implies or presupposes the experience of Neoplatonic principles on a new level of consciousness. The hermeneutic or phenomenological stance taken here, or, to put it differently, the premise of a psycho-dynamic interpretative approach, will examine the inward-oriented epistemology of Platonism and the Neoplatonic principle of absolute subjectivity as the direct apprehension of the One, which is the outcome of becoming, to show that Romanticism was not necessarily diametrically opposed to the rationalism of Augustanism or Enlightenment, but advanced positions which went beyond rationalism and empiricism. It should be acknowledged that rendering states of experience pertaining to the transcendental and spiritual in evocative, univocal and logical language is very difficult. In fact, discursive language becomes simply an approximation to translating experience dealing with the esoteric. But Coleridge tried to do this, and as to whether he succeeded or not is a question that is still widely open to debate.



We have posited the contention that the Romantic philosophy of the various supposed self-conscious processes was to place poetry as the pivotal bases of intuition and individuation. The self undoubtedly belonged to the cosmic consciousness within which is the collective, the one consciousness to which the individuated self is tributary. For Coleridge to have arrived at such a stage in his intellectual and philosophical development, it required not only his personally formulated ideas, but a vast reading of others' to which he was greatly exposed. The following section therefore seeks to examine some of these influences and Coleridge's critique on them for his own fervently held convictions.

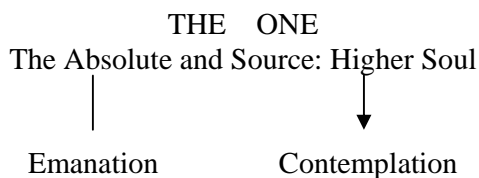
In the series of biographical letters that Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole pertaining to his childhood growth and subsequent development of his intellectual, philosophical and spiritual/transcendental thought patterns, one can discern certain distinctive characteristic traits that point to what Coleridge was to become. He states in one of the letters that he was exposed to Plotinus at the tender age of 15. In fact, his exposure to philosophy and metaphysics at an early age, determines and shapes his life-long struggle in the face of various and challenging dispositions he came across. And one of the most lasting of these was the conception of the relationship between man and nature. This preoccupied him in most of his life and even in the later Anglicanism of his Highgate days which his early convictions still rendered unorthodox.

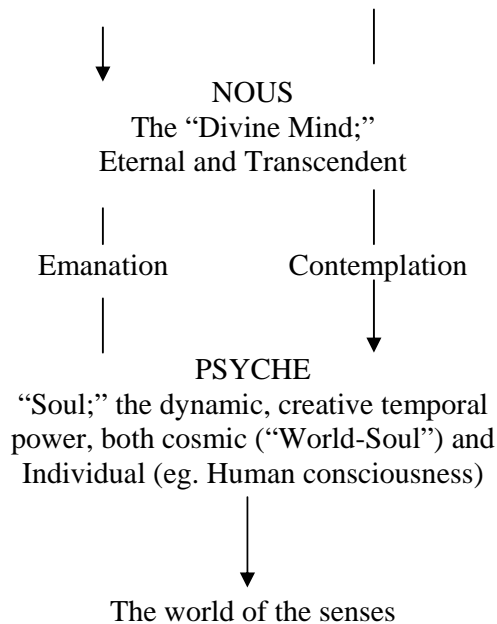
The negotiating interactions between mind, psyche and nature find expression in Plotinus's thought, whom we propose to take as a specific exemplification of the generalities of the Greek views discussed in the introductory part of this chapter. In the attempt to arrive at a contextual meaning of the imagination and reality in the Introduction, we talked about Plato's theory as he articulated an epistemological and

ontological bases of existence and knowledge. There is an affinity between him and Plotinus, though that is not the basic issue here.

Plotinus is acclaimed to be the founder of Neoplatonism. His cosmological and metaphysical theories encapsulated a complex spiritual network involving three hypostases: The One, the Intelligence, and the Soul. It is from the unity of the three, he asserts, that all existence emanates. This transcendental philosophy had a great impact on Coleridge's philosophical and spiritual development. Most of what Plotinus propounded and postulated is to be found in *The Enneads*, which was compiled and published by his student and disciple Porphyry. Coleridge read, translated and used this work in Chapter Twelve, "Requests and Premonitions" (pp. 232 – 294) in *Biographia*, where he discusses Plotinus's idea of intuition and the imaginative faculty, the One and divine contemplation (pp. 240 – 251).

Instead of contemplating the wonder of visible physical reality, Plotinus advocated the contemplation of the wonder of the invisible spiritual reality, which he saw as the cause and ultimate meaning behind physical reality. In fact, most of his doctrine was based on the soul, prefiguring phenomenology and hermeneutics as clues to understanding the operations and functions of the spirit. The soul, accordingly, constantly seeks to attain the unifying knowledge of the divinity or the logos, the one supreme or ordering principle. In other words, spirituality means the ascent from the lower sense-reality to a higher spiritual reality. The hypostases are therefore characterised by a twofold process. There is a downward process of emanation or "outflowing", and a corresponding upward process of return "inflowing" through contemplation. A graphical representation can be attempted as such:





Plotinus also specified that it is only through the non-discursive and intuitive faculty of the soul that the notion of the One could likely be understood, arguing that the only adequate description of the manifestation of a supreme principle is that which transcends all predication and rational or discursive understanding. Plotinus's view demonstrates a strand of the poetics of becoming, characteristic in Coleridge as it points to the consciousness of spiritual potential in the self, which seeks unity with a greater Self. It equally implicates a Gnostic temperament, which will be justified in Keats in Chapter Five.

Plotinus's system sees nature as an integral part of the principles of life processes and, therefore, related to the soul and its contemplation on its indivisible entity with the Higher Soul. Nature is thus part of the collective experience of the One. The soul is fragmentary in this contemplative process but again is an active unity. A scientific method can be used to explain his system. The Higher Soul is connected to the entire universe like a ray of light that is reflected on a prism, the single ray is fragmented and multicoloured into several rays, justifying the general participation of the One, given that they all emanate from one central source. In this vein, God is not

seen as a creator from outside, but the sum total of all the reality physical and spiritual of which we are part. The feeling of one with nature is part of this process.

With regard to knowledge, Plotinus's notion of knowledge is inextricably linked to his cosmological and metaphysical theories. His epistemological concerns can be summarised as thus: he proposes four categories, the first being sense knowledge (an obscure representation of truth), the second reason cognition (gives knowledge of the essence of things), the third intellectual cognition (gives knowledge of ourselves), and finally ecstasy (which consists in a supreme intuition of God, in which our natural knowledge ceases in the divine unconsciousness). The climax of all knowledge, he holds, consists in an intuitive and mystical union with the One; this is experienced by few and one may add that this union is not permanently definitive even if experienced because it is only after death perhaps that this unity could be permanent and eternal. Plotinus must have been aware of this, because like Plato he conceived the idea that permanent spiritual redemption could be achieved by the soul's final severing from the materiality of the body. In this sense again his philosophy encompasses the phenomenology of becoming.

The following are selected passages from *The Enneads*, which show some of the express thinking of Plotinus with regard to the rejection of the body and sense experience, the universe as a living being, experienced states of mystical union, soul as present in all things, and the unity in life :<sup>13</sup>

-Sense perception belongs to the sleeping soul, part of the soul immersed in body; and the true awakening is a rising up, not with the body, but from the body ... To rise up from very truth is altogether to depart from bodies. Corporeality is contrary to soul and essentially opposed to soul. [3. 6. 6]

Every participant partakes of the power of Being in its entity, while Being is unchanged and undivided. [4. 4.8]

-The universe is a single living being embracing all living beings within it, and possessing a single Soul that permeates all its parts to the degree of their participation in it. Every part of this sensible universe is fully participant in its material aspect, and respect of soul, in the degree to which it shares in the World Soul. A sympathy pervades this single universe, like a single living

creature, and the distant is near ... Like parts lie not in contact but separated, with other parts between, yet by their likeness they feel sympathy ... and in a living and unified being there is no part so remote as not to be near, through the very nature that binds the living unity in sympathy. [4. 4. 32]

-The process is like the unfolding of a seed, moving from simple origin to termination in the world of sense, the prior always remaining in its place, while begetting its successor from a store of indescribable power – power that must not halt with the higher realm ... but continue to expand until universe of things reaches the limits of its possibility, lavishing its vast resources on all its creatures, intolerant that any one should have no share in it. Nothing is debarred from participating in the Good, to the extent of its receptivity. [4. 8. 6]

-Often I have woken to myself out of the body, become detached from all else and entered into myself; and I have seen the beauty of surpassing greatness, and have felt assured that then especially I belonged to the higher reality, engaged in the noblest life and identified with the Divine. [4. 8.8]

-Nothing is detached or severed from its prior, so that the higher soul seems to extend as far as plants; and in a way it does so extend, because the life in plants belongs to it. Not that the soul is wholly within plants, but only to the extent that they are the lower limits of its advance, another level of existence created by its decline towards the worse. [5. 2. 1]

The various views stated here were eventually to enable Coleridge to formulate his theory of the imagination and reality alongside Schellingian and Spinozist thinking.

These views are not unsusceptible to criticism, but the centrality of the interdependence of the elements in the universe appears overwhelmingly evident. The attainment of this ideal is embedded within the dynamics of becoming, justified by the process of the soul's inflow. In line with his naturalistic monism, Coleridge expresses the unease that some make in criticism with regard to the mystics that he acknowledges.

In Chapter 12 of *Biographia I*, "Requests and Premonitions" (pp. 232 – 294), Coleridge expresses his indebtedness and obligations to these mystics, among whom is Plotinus, without being unaware of the problematic of his stance:

That the system is being converted to an irreligious PANTHEISM, I well know. The ETHICS OF SPINOZA, may, or may not, be an instance. But at no time could I believe, that *in itself* and *essentially* it is incompatible with religion, natural, or revealed: and now I am most thoroughly persuaded of the contrary. (p. 153)

This excerpt demonstrates that Coleridge sees Pantheism not necessarily as being in conflict with other forms of religious and spiritual consciousness, but rather as

a complementary, if not equal religion in its own right that has to be judged by its own tenets rather than on Christian or otherwise creeds. The relevance of the foregoing comments needs to be stressed. Though Plotinus never employed the expression 'becoming,' it is what is characteristic of his pantheist and monistic vision. Coleridge's indebtedness to Plotinus therefore encapsulates this ideal.

### **-COLERIDGE AND GERMAN IDEALISM AND ROMANTICISM: THE INFLUENCES: CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE**

We have already stressed that Coleridge's interaction with German Idealism and Romanticism will be simplified here for strategic reasons. The intention in this endeavour, it must be specified, is not to take a very complex issue lightly, for a single chapter cannot conveniently handle the matter or do adequate justice to it. Nevertheless, a number of studies have belaboured the subject most particularly on philosophical and theoretical grounds, and so it needs not to be overemphasised.<sup>14</sup> What is vitally important here is how Coleridge's poetry and prose passages can be used to situate some of these ideas. In fact, the fundamental question lies in how the discussion will help in the understanding of the poetics of becoming.

The underlying interconnections of philosophical and religious thought among the German Idealists and Coleridge's own position will first be examined before we proceed to Coleridge's theory of the imagination, symbol, reality, and how we can correspond these with the philosophy of becoming encapsulated in Schlegelian Romantic philosophy. The basic tenets of German transcendental philosophy, however diverse they might have appeared, wielded an enormous impact on Coleridge as they confirmed his struggle at deriving and articulating a metaphysics that placed the mind and soul as components of priority of his spiritual speculations that strove towards a constructivist and holistic dimension.

Looking at these influences from a strictly chronological standpoint may prove a laborious task, and as to who had the greatest impact on Coleridge, or through whom he had a greater access to German Idealism/Transcendentalism only complicates the whole problematic.<sup>15</sup> The suggestion here is that it would be better to see him in the broader context of German Transcendentalism, that is, the inclusive context where nature, science, religion and theology, and metaphysics all interplay. But the major influences can be seen as such – Kant, Fichte, Schelling/Spinoza (Spinoza is not a German philosopher but was strongly influential on Schelling), Schiller, Schlegel, Novalis and Hegel. And as earlier pointed out, the intention here is a general overview of the prevailing philosophical ideas prior, during or after the composition of Coleridge's major poems on nature, and how such ideas permeate these poems. To put it differently, it is a retrospective as well as an afterthought on the interconnection between poetry and philosophy. It is certain that our major reference *Biographia Literaria* is principally concerned with literature and art, whereby Coleridge extensively talks about the poet rather than the philosopher, though he connects the two.

Coleridge's visit to Germany in 1798 was a major breakthrough in the German-English Romantic connection. Coleridge had come to understand the clear nature of spirituality in human consciousness, and in order to apprehend the contemplation of its highest contents, it became necessary to understand the theory and working of the mind, which was misrepresented by the scientific culture of reason and empiricism that characterised the age of Enlightenment.

Kant's transcendental metaphysics, which Coleridge intensively read in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), impacted much on his own philosophical, religious and spiritual speculations. Kantian transcendentalism saw a possible interaction between mind and nature, but it

insisted on the subsequent superiority of the mind over nature. His theory of the productive and reproductive imagination and the sublime greatly impressed Coleridge. Kant argued that when we perceive nature it ignites something which is not subject to the rules of empirical understanding, indicating a consciousness that surpasses sense. Stressing the necessity of a metaphysical intuition and the sublime, since the substance of the thing-in-itself is not graspable by mere human reason, Kant holds that reality is perceived through the forces of repulsion and attraction, which work in space. He was not very concerned with the questions of spirit and matter, in fact, he dismissed the notion of duality. He held instead that spiritual power is not in the realm of nature, but outside it, though constantly influencing it. The attributes of sublimity given to nature, Kant accentuates, are an exclusive prerogative of the reflective awareness of mind. Kant sees this attribution as an error of the imagination. This is a point which as we shall see did not fit well into Coleridge's monistic system and the concept of becoming that finds expression in his poetry.

Kant's theory of intuitive transcendentalism and its connection with the question of the sublime, brings to mind certain English philosophical dispositions on the subject. For the purpose of comprehension George Berkeley and Edmund Burke will be discussed here, for they share a certain affinity with Kant on the issue that relates it to the Romantic sublime inherent in Coleridge's speculations. Berkeley saw vision as the language of the author of nature. His system accepts the relationship of elements in nature, but he persists on their apparent independence, arguing as well that nature's objects constitute a symbolic language that translates the governing principle of oneness, but oneness does not necessarily mean God, the creator. Berkeley is obviously echoing Kant's view that though the mind relates to nature through intuition or sublime experience it later assumes a superiority over nature. Though Coleridge admired Berkeley, he was to fall out with his theory, stressing its inadequacy.<sup>16</sup>



Edmund Burke's philosophy of the sublime is based on empirical grounds though related to questions of psychology. In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* ( 1756 - 1757), Burke's principal argument places the sublime as a situation that has to do with the crisis of consciousness and the production of emotional trauma, triggered by the overwhelming influence of external objects. To put it in other words, Burke is saying that man is overpowered by nature and art and the subsequent end product is terror, pain, awe and even despair. In this vein nature is principally apprehended as a delightful horror. Coleridge's scheme was not to adopt this position. Though his poetry sometimes unwittingly follows of Burke's ideology, he attributed a greater and more active and positive role to nature and its inextricably linked relationship with man. So the Romantic sublime as can be discerned in Coleridge is inclusive, that is, it negotiates between terror, pain or trauma and positive spirituality, focussing dominantly on the latter, given that sublimity is apprehended as leading to the elevation of spirit rather than its destruction.

The various positions that were held by the English philosophers as seen above can be very helpful in throwing light on the understanding of the concept vis-à-vis the Coleridge-Kant connection. Coleridge rejected the notion of the separability of mind and nature, seeing both as having a strong and mutually rewarding relationship. One thing that remains comprehensible is that, though Kant was to place the mind as superior than all else, there seems to be a justification of, to use Darmstadt's words, a "physico-theological"<sup>17</sup> proof of the existence of God in his system. Though he strongly acknowledged Kant whom he even called the founder of Critical Philosophy, Coleridge aired out his differences with his mentor. In an insightful reaction to the German philosopher he says:

In spite ... of his own declarations, I could never believe, it was possible for him to have meant more by his *Noumenon*, or THING IN ITSELF, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole *Plastic* power to the forms of the intellectual, leaving for the external course, for the *materiale* of our sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable. I entertain doubts likewise, whether in his own mind, he even laid *all* the stress, which he appears to do on moral postulates. (*Biographia* I, p. 155)

What is implicitly, if not expressly stated here is that, the external cannot be excluded in the process of transcendental or spiritual realisation, it must relate and negotiate, as it were, with the internal, mind, soul. Both are supposed to be constantly collaborative and this mutuality produces transcendental effects. One may equally say here that Coleridge seems to be engaged in or adopting a hermeneutic stance in this critique, given that he seems to show an understanding of Kant's mysticism and transcendentalism more than Kant himself. Otherwise said, his argument communicates the idea that he comprehends Kant more than Kant might have wanted to articulate his philosophy.

Johann G. Fichte was among the first thinkers to have carried forward the philosophical dispositions laid down by Kant. According to Coleridge's early views on the philosopher, he was to add the key-stone of the arch. Modelling his transcendentalism on Kant he elaborated a system which aimed at establishing the logical interdependence, and ultimately, the psychological identity of self and the world. Fichte came under charges of atheism because of the revolutionary attitude of his concepts, and Coleridge was eventually to fall out with him because his later thought did not fit well into the pattern of his Spinozist/monistic speculations. Coleridge dismissed the philosopher, complaining that he overbuilt his fundamental ideas "with heavy mass of mere notions, and psychological acts of arbitrary reflection" (p. 157). Coleridge's critique of the Fichtean metaphysics is a clear expression that, though he acknowledged influences, he did not assimilate or expound them

uncritically. This, one may argue, must not only have been to satisfy the prevailing metaphysical debate of the time, for it becomes increasingly clear that Coleridge must have had his own ingrained ideas. Elaborating his dissatisfaction with Fichte he says:

Thus his theory degenerated into a crude egoismus, a boastful and hyperstoic hostility to NATURE, as lifeless, godless, and altogether unholy: while his *religion* consisted in the assumption of mere ORDO ORDINAS, which we were permitted *exotericé* to call GOD; and his *ethics* in an ascetic, and almost monkish, mortification of the natural passions and desires. (*Biographia* I, pp. 159 – 160)

Schelling was another influential post-Kantian philosopher, whose philosophy found much common ground not only with Kant, but also on the Dutchman Spinoza (he lived in Amsterdam, but it is quite important to note that he came from a family of Portuguese Jews) who posited ideas that were almost similar to Plotinus's. But his philosophy of nature, of artistic identity, and his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), developed a new philosophy of knowledge, art, and a new interpretation of how the self is related to the world of nature. The use of Schellingian philosophy, it should be stressed here, is with regard to Schelling's early writings. The reason is that, in his long philosophical career Schelling's later thought and speculations registered variants that do not suit the purpose of the argument handled here. Coleridge embraced Schelling, seeing him as providing the answer and an advanced statement on the incomplete or inadequate system of Kant. Of all the German philosophical investigations, Schellingian philosophy deeply influences Coleridge's thought, most particularly his theory of the philosophical language of the imagination, polarity-thinking, and symbol.

It may be curious, however, to be reminded that Coleridge in *Biographia* I claims that he found in Schelling a co-incidence of thought, arguing that he had been brooding on the issue for long and found the German philosopher as providing a justification to this (*Biographia* I. p. 160 – 161). But knowing how complex Coleridge

is, this statement should not be taken uncritically, because, without wanting to belabour the charges of dishonesty on him, he translated much of Schelling's thought into his system without much display of the psychology of anti-thesis or the anxiety of influence. This notwithstanding, Coleridge was not Schelling, and there is much to justify the different views they had with regard to their systems, especially with regard to the question of subjectivity and objectivity.

Following Kant's argument, Schelling holds that the external world is simply an adjunct to the mind which is the most real. But he adds another dimension to this philosophy, seeing art as the way the mind could come to full awareness of itself. The relationship between art and the intuitive imagination, therefore, becomes central in Schelling's aesthetic and spiritual speculations. He argues that the aesthetic activity unites the ideal world of art and the real world of objects. In other words, art is an expression of the unity of the conscious and unconscious activity in the self.

Schelling's scheme proposes a kind of onto-theological monism through which knowledge can be achieved. He formulates the notion of a reciprocal concurrence of the self with nature, the subjective with the objective, the conscious with the unconscious. This formulation justifies the concept of polarity which permeates most of Coleridge's poetry and philosophical engagements. The self also becomes a pivotal concept in Schelling's philosophy on the production of art because, many factors take place in the shaping of the artist's identity. Transcendental philosophy, as it were, affirms the identity of conscious and unconscious activity of the self. The final goal of the various processes involved in artistic creativity is the harmony of the artist, encapsulated in the union of the self and nature. The most important issue to be understood here in Schelling's deduction of the art production is the development of the artist's new identity in objective reality.

This process in the production of the artist's work of art brings to mind, for instance, James Engell's assessment of Schelling's metaphysics. In *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (1981), he best describes the process as the unifying action of man's self-conscious and free intelligence:

Part of the philosophy, philosophy of art, tries to bind together the philosophies of nature and of the mind by seeing in the works of art, in their highest and best sense, a unity of man's self-conscious and free intelligence with nature's material and objective reality. Through creative imagination the mind affirms its own existence by joining its subjective impulses and work perceptions with the particulars of nature. The resulting work of art, or kunstprodukt, is itself real and objective, a token and a promise to man, it symbolizes the union of the mind's free willful consciousness with the independence and given nature of the cosmos. (pp. 301 – 302)

This process is further described by Engell as "the power to produce this unifying symbol of Einbildungskraft," the imagination. Engell says that Schelling presents a dialectic between man and nature that reconciles and fuses the transcendental intelligence of the artist with the material system of nature. The power of the imagination is the power of Schelling's cosmological realm of the creative production of art, which is the unconscious and unconscious realm of the mind. In fact, to Schelling, the ultimate actuality of artistic production usually results in the reconciliation or synthesis of opposite or contradictory forces by the imaginative faculty. So the system apprehends God and the imagination as dipolarising forces. Credit goes to Schelling for having formulated some of the initial bases on which art was to be seen as expressive and organic rather than what traditional theory held of it as mimetic or imitative. Again, he paved the way for the hermeneutico-phenomenological emphasis on theoretical and practical criticism, which Friedrich Schleiermacher was later to crystallise into a general philosophy of interpretation.

Coleridge, we have underscored, was very preoccupied with the questions of mind and nature, feeling and thought, and the objective and the subjective realms of knowledge. Most of what he disagreed with in Kantianism, found acceptable

modification in Schelling. No doubt he profusely uses Schelling, though his own distinctive stance shows that he relied more on the subjective rather than the objective goal of art or poetry as an approximation of self-expression. One can ascertain that in stressing the priority of place to the objective rather than the subjective, Schelling's transcendental philosophy paradoxically seems to be advocating an aesthetic poetics rather than that which gears towards a subjectivised spiritual consciousness. Besides, the Schellingian notion that art is the highest expression and synthesis of self does not fit well with the poetics of becoming. Coleridge's writing shows different states of consciousness and resist any uncritical idealist categorisations, that is, his texts show a balance of visionary and idealist enthusiasm, but express his anti-self-consciousness in his permanent struggle for the ideal. Coleridge will therefore be seen to have adopted an advanced aesthetic and transcendental philosophy from Schelling, given that his writing provides a better answer to the quest of what artistic texts are expressive of.

What undoubtedly attracted Coleridge very much, as we will see, is the intuitive faculty of the imagination and the transcendental philosophy of nature which place nature on grounds of organicism, corresponding with the lines on which the faculty of the imagination functions. He was, for instance, to see the universe as a cosmic web, created by God and held together by the cross-strands of attractive and repulsive forces. In his arguments in Chapter Twelve of *Biographia I*, "Requests and Premonitions," he uses Schelling to make statements that lead to his central definition of the imagination in the next chapter. For example on the concept of the reality of intuitive knowledge, "The ultimate ground of all reality specifically is a something ... by which the principle of being (*becoming in existentialist terms*: my emphasis) and of thinking (*knowing*: my emphasis) coincide" (p. 265). There is also the question of truth as mediate, that is, derived from other truths, and as original, that is, a subjective and intuitive feeling (pp. 264 – 269).

Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, better known by his pseudonym Novalis (1772 – 1801), is associated with the strong mystical strain in German literature and philosophy, and is little known to have had a connection with English Romanticism. But Coleridge knew and read his work, and was not indifferent to his metaphysical and transcendental philosophy.<sup>18</sup> It is acceptable to say that, most of what Novalis postulates seems to find expression in Coleridge's poetry, though this does not necessarily mean that Coleridge wrote with a Novalian consciousness. Novalis adopts a homeopathic tradition to explain his metaphysics of nature and human consciousness, stressing that contact with nature is a pharmaceutical principle, a poison and a healer. He sees illness as a positive prerequisite for wholeness, and the soul as the embodiment of the ambivalence of the pharmaceutical principle. He expresses a view which was later to preoccupy much of Coleridge's thought, that illness or affliction in general is vitally important for creativity and artistic production, and for the purification or rebirth of the spirit as well. This view also sides with Schlegel's conception of the world as eternally chaotic, fragmentary, and even incomprehensible, but which could have the possibility of order in every creative process in art or poetry, and in the general search for the absolute or transcendental reality. No doubt they both dominated the early German Romantic scene with the philosophy of fragmentation and irony,<sup>19</sup> and have greatly contributed to the theorising of the phenomenon of becoming.

David Farrell Kneel quotes Novalis's assertion in his work *Contagion, Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (1998) to express what Novalis calls the bisexuality of nature, which finds expression both in life and death: "Illnesses are the learning years of the art of life and the formation of the heart" (p. 69). Illness is, therefore, an integral part of individuation, and nature, even in its ugliness and decomposition, Novalis holds, is a higher home than religion, for without

matter there is no spirit. Death, he also postulates, is the only means through which definitive attainment of the Supreme Being can be possible. This again relates to Schlegel's speculative philosophy of becoming as the ultimate essence in existence, and it is also not unconnected with Jacobi's view that the Being of all being is God, or in more general terms transcendent reality, however it is perceived. One can modify Jacobi here by saying that we are partly being engaged in the process of becoming or joining the Being of all being.

These philosophical concepts extend into the underlying philosophical and spiritual orientation not only of Coleridge, but Keats as well. For, as we shall see later, Keats was to adopt a metaphysical speculation of life and death closely related to the concept of individuation as an alternative redemptive measure in opposition to Christian prescriptions. As concerns art and poetry, Novalis held that life was not something to be known, but a process of creation whereby what is created is always other than the power to create: "Poetry elevates each single thing through a particular combination with the rest of the whole ... Writing poetry is creating. Each work of literature must be a living individual." What is interesting here is the question of the part as constituent of the whole which permeates much of Coleridge's poetry. Most importantly, however, is the contention that writing poetry presupposes creating, and one may add discovering, justifying the self as becoming.

Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Hegel are two important German idealist philosophers whose hermeneutics and phenomenology throw light on the thrust of our discussion with regard to the Romantic concept of irony, fragmentation, and dialectic and becoming. These connect with the question of becoming that demonstrates the idealist and constructivist tendency that is decipherable in both Coleridge and Keats. The basic question to be examined here is Coleridge's relation to the two, and if at all he used their philosophy to establish his own speculative sphere, or whether the



affinities inherent in his thought and which correspond to theirs are a matter of coincidence or phenomenological criticism and interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

As one of the most important of the early German Romantic philosophers Friedrich Schlegel needs not to be much emphasised here. His metaphysical investigation included Socrates and neoplatonists like Spinoza, and his writings point to revolutionary changes that shaped much of Romantic speculations and modern theories in literary and philosophical criticism as well. His conceptualisation of fragmentation, chaos, and incomprehensibility engendered his poetics of the Romantic irony, which in his perspective negotiates between opposition and contradiction, but whose hermeneutic goal is geared towards the progressive attempt at harmonisation and comprehensibility. Becoming, as the ultimate vision and reality in his poetics, presupposes a continuous and evolving process of the self, or to put it in his own terms a continual self-creating process consisting in the interchange of opposites. His notion of the imagination as destructive, but whose destruction is positive for it is only through this that artistic creativity is fostered, obviously impacted and influenced Coleridge's definition of the secondary imagination as a willed act of perception that dissolves, dissipates, and diffuses in order to recreate and harmonise.

Schlegel holds that, like nature, the world of poetry is infinite and inexhaustible. His aesthetic theory, therefore, echoes most of what Coleridge was to develop in his *Biographia*. But what is very intriguing in Schlegelian thinking is what is now termed the Schlegelian paradox, or what he himself coined as the Philosophical Irony or the Critical Faculty, stressing a subtle modification, if not subversion of Socratic irony. Encapsulated in the *Fragments* and even in *On the Limits of Beauty*, this philosophy provides a kind of new model in thinking and artistic creativity which has to do both with a systematic and anti-systematic consciousness, "It is equally deadly for the mind to have a system and to have none," or again, "One can only

become a philosopher, but not be one. As soon as one believes he is a philosopher, he stops being one,” or with regard to language, is “the impossibility and necessity of complete communication.”

This unsystematic system, according to Schlegel, can be reconstructed, it, in fact, provides the paradigm of Romantic discourse. The imagination can provide a hermeneutic activity of interpreting and revealing the interconnection that lurk in the fragments and ironies. The self, faced with fragmentations or psychological conflicts, must engage in a process of poetic reflection, the outcome of which should be progressive even if not attaining a definite goal:

Nie wird der Geist, welcher die Origen der wahren muse kennt, auf dieser Bahn bis ans Ende dringen, oder wähen, daß er es erreicht: den nie kann er eine Sehnsucht stillen, die aus der Fülle der Befriedigungen selbst sich ewig von neuem erzeugt. („Gesprach über die Poesie,“ p. 473)

Never will the mind that knows the orgies of the true muse journey on this road to the very end, nor will he presume to have reached it; for never will he be able to quench a longing which is eternally regenerated out of the abundance of gratifications. (Quoted by Mellor, p. 8)

Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden: ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann. Sie kann durch keine Theorie erschöpft werden, und nur eine divinatorische Kritik dürfte es wagen, ihr Ideal charakterisieren zu wollen. („Athenaeum Fragmant 116,“ p. 39)

The Romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterise its ideal. (Quoted by Mellor, p. 16)

So the idea of Schlegel’s fragments, as Mellor rightly holds, refers to the absolute synthesis, but this should not be taken as the monistic identity sought for in certain articulations of the dialectic, but precisely the continual self-creating interchange of opposites. Though Coleridge’s philosophy and poetry have in common with Schlegel the regard for the metaphysical power of the imagination and the self-conscious attempt at reconciling discordant and conflicting principles, there seems to be a thin line that cuts between them, the idea of becoming which in Schlegel gives the

suggestion that one never dies nor is there any immortality. Coleridge's thought shows awareness of the limitations of the self, but the self is also imbued with the possibility of spiritual redemption after death.

To reformulate Schlegel's idea that becoming is eternal and perfection never attained would be that the upward and spiral movement of the soul presupposes possibility of attaining a definitive spiritual realm of the One. This can be justified by the soul's post-corporeal existence.

Coleridge did not find satisfaction with the Hegelian progressive and transcendental dialectics for it could mean an end to his philosophical curiosity, though it is evident that Hegel's theory of the logos must have interested his monistic philosophy of the constant struggle to attain the One. In other words, Hegelian dialectics is not a comfortable term to apply in Coleridgean criticism, especially with regard to his metaphysics of polarity or duality. That Hegel greatly contributed to phenomenology and hermeneutics as providing clues to understand consciousness as expressed in art or literature, is a point of no debate here. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which is one of his works that best describes his philosophical argument, sees the self as engaged in a process which end goal is full realisation. Thus, the theorisation of the dialectics as engendering the tendency whereby a thesis presupposes an antithesis and both fuse or synthesise for completion and absolute knowledge. This concept of the dialectics also finds expression in *Philosophy of History* (1812) and the *Science of Logic* (1812 – 1816). Though Derrida and other Deconstructionists like Tilottama Rajan have strongly challenged Hegelian dialectics, its enduring persistence shows that it cannot be dismissed in Western philosophical discourse. Hegelian dialectics throw light on the question of becoming from the perspective of antithetical progress. Though our thesis consists in the attainment of an ideal, it does not lay emphasis on this attainment, since no Romantic text can

demonstrably justify this. It centres on the processes that involve the quest for the ideal.

While the concept of attaining the absolute in Hegelian terms is not very clear as to whether the attaining of this absolute knowledge or truth presupposes a spiral and continuous or progressive movement of the self to the totality of Being, or final harmonisation with the supreme, it all the same suggests this ideal. This can therefore mean that, the reconciliation of opposites and contradictions is an unending self-journey towards the definitive realisation of Being, obviously after death. At this juncture, one can analyse the Coleridgean concept of the metaphysics of the imagination in terms of its struggle towards wholeness, or again as a prefiguration of transcendental and spiritual possibility rather than a complete achievement of wholeness.

The foregoing discussion on German Idealism and Romanticism has been to situate Coleridge's artistic and philosophical speculations. The variety of concepts discussed here all point to central issues on Coleridge's idealist and constructivist engagements. With regard to the imagination, for example, he borrows greatly from his German counterparts, even though he makes questionable claims at times concerning his personal right and even his originality to most of the ideas that he finds in them. However, it goes without doubt that his reconceptualisation and synthesis of these existing views, brought about a resounding and renovating outlook of the Romantic imagination and idealism, encapsulated in Chapters 13 and 14 of *Biographia Literaria*. Our arguments have also pointed out the references that help in the conceptualisation of the poetics of becoming in Coleridge.

## **-THE SEARCH FOR UNITY IN A HETEROGENEOUS UNIVERSE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF BECOMING**

Before Coleridge wrote his famous definition of the imagination in *Biographia Literaria*, there is evidence that he had been developing a steady philosophy that shows consciousness as involved in a spiral process of achieving reconciliation with the One. This demonstrates Coleridge's developing self in epistemological and ontological matters. His views on nature were not unconnected with this philosophical and spiritual pursuit. As early as 1795, that is three years before his journey to Germany, and about twenty years before he was to write *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge made a number of pronouncements on the imagination, symbol and nature, that are discernible in his letters, notebooks, and lectures, and which point to his growing idealism. Most of these statements were not unconnected with some of the nature poems that he wrote earlier than this date. For example in his *Lectures on Politics and Religion* (1795), particularly Lecture 1, "On Revealed Religion," Coleridge lashes charges of atheism on those who fail to see the spirituality inherent in nature, and who are blind to see the universe as constituting a whole. He asserts that:

This admirable and beautiful structure of things that carries irresistible Demonstration of intending Casuality, exalts our idea of the contriver – the Unity of the Design shews him to be the One. Thus the existence of Deity, and his Power and his Intelligence are manifested, and I could weep for the deadened and Petrified Heart of that man who could wander among the fields in Vernal Noon or Summer Evening and doubt his Benevolence! The Omnipotent has unfolded to us the Volume of the World, that there we may read the Transcripts of himself. The Earth or Air, the Meadow's purple stores, the Moon's mild radiance, or the Virgin's form Blooming with rosy smiles, we see portrayed the bright impressions of the eternal Mind ... Symbols are the visible signs of the inward Benevolence or Wisdom- to the pious man all Nature is thus beautiful because its very feature is the Symbol and all its parts the written language of infinite Goodness and powerful Intelligence. (p. 94)

This thought sounds Deist, but it is important to note that Coleridge was already developing into a mature mind and new alternative ways of thinking. This statement does not expressly convey the monistic speculation that occupied his entire life, but it

points to an eccentric stance that he was adopting in the face of organised and institutionalised religion. It is in this very year that Coleridge was to assert that:

The Almighty parent [the I AM] had given the imagination ... That stimulates to the attainment of real excellence, by the contemplation of splendid possibilities, that still revivifies the dying motives within us, and fixing our eyes on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other Alpine endlessness, still urges up the ascent [becoming] of Being, amusing the ruggedness of the road by the beauty and wonder of the ever-widening prospect ... we see our God everywhere - the Universe in the most literal sense is his written language. (pp. 338 – 339)

This is a very important statement on the question of spiritual possibility through the metaphysics of the imaginative faculty, Being here interpreted as the sum total or final act of becoming, justified in the upward move of ascending. The impression one can draw here is that contemplating nature leads to the elevation of spiritual and mystical union which engenders an apprehension of the One. It is this apprehension that points to the possibility of progressing to the One.

In a letter written to John Thelwall dated 14 October 1797, Coleridge expressed the following idea with regard to the wholeness and indivisibility of nature elements, which is reverberated in another to Sotheby, dated 10 September 1802:

My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great – something one and indivisible – and it is only in the faith of this that the rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty. (*Letters* 1, p. 349),

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, and he will know what it is who believes and feels that everything has a life of its own, and that we are all *ONE LIFE*. A poet's *Heart* and *Intellect* should be *combined, intimately* combined and *unified*, with the great appearances of Nature and not merely held in solution and loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal similies. (*Letters* II, p. 864)

Here again, Coleridge expresses a mystical or trance-like desire which is attainable only through the divine contemplation of nature. His pantheist and monistic thought is in the tradition of Plotinus or Spinoza, justifying a strong neo-platonic

metaphysics and prefiguring the bases of the theory of the secondary imagination. In all of his early and later views on the imagination, the question of symbol becomes increasingly unavoidable as it is seen to play a very vital role in the operative functions of the imagination. It is deemed important to talk about it, because it is inevitable in the discussion of the unity in nature that is made possible by the transcendental and spiritual ramifications of the imagination.

The concept of symbol can be seen from distinctive but interrelated perspectives, in fact, one can say that symbol is discussed in three different spheres of language. The first is the language of rhetoric which treats symbol as a figure of speech from a purely literary perspective. For example the sun symbolises light. The second is the language of psychology and anthropology where the meaning of symbols is to be traced in myth theories, archetypes in Jungian psychology for example. The third is the language of philosophy where the phenomenon of the symbol is treated as the relationship between the world and the poet. In this vein, one would think of the Romantic and idealist considerations, which place the symbol in the realm of metaphysics and visionary enthusiasm. It is here that we can situate Coleridge's use and application of the word. It is possible to find two ideas of the symbol in Romantic thought; the one that sees symbols as unattainable and transcendent revelations, and the other which sees them as self-evident presence of an artistic value embodied in physical form. Umberto Eco's *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1985) asks a very intriguing question in relation to the concept, "is the Romantic symbol the instance of an immanence or of a transcendence?" (p. 143).

An examination of some of Coleridge's views on the symbol may help in answering Eco's question, and also clarify the major perspectives from which he is interpreted in this endeavour. Two notebook entries can throw light on the issue:

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking ... I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever 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 Awakening 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. (*Notebooks II*, p. 2546)

This excerpt explicitly conveys the idea of what one can term the apocalypse of inner life, which is inextricably linked to the Divine Reality, or what he himself calls the Logos, Creator, or Evolver. This can also mean that in recognising and identifying nature's symbols, it becomes possible to get a revelation of the power and creativity of the Logos, God's word. Coleridge is in this instance aptly expressing the inward-oriented epistemology of Platonism. This concept of knowledge founded on the grounds of pre- and post-existence establishes that there is pre-constructed knowledge in every individual, the resources are within. So one has to pull from this well of resources from within the inner self. To do this in Romantic terms requires the sublime and metaphysical energy of the imagination.

In the second excerpt Coleridge posits a similar and perhaps an advanced statement on the concept:

All minds must think by some *Symbols* – the Strongest minds possess the most vivid Symbols in the Imagination – yet this ingenerates a *want, pothon, desiderium*, for vividness of *Symbol*: which is something that is *without*, that has the property of *Outness* can gratify even that not fully – for the utmost is only an approximation to the absolute *Union*, which the Soul sensible of its imperfection in itself, of its *Halfness*, yearns after. (*Notebooks III*, 3325)

In the quest for spiritual certitude, symbol in Romantic thought, which seems to give some mysterious insight into an unspeakable spiritual reality, given its connection with the searching soul, and therefore, like the imagination in which it operates, signals the possibility of becoming Being or the collective One. The intrinsic connection between the imagination and symbols shows that the imagination creates



and communicates through symbols so much so that they are “esemplastic” and contribute to the shaping and attunement with the One.

In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge strongly associates the imagination with symbol and philosophy. For example in Chapter 9 he says “An IDEA, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*” (p. 156). In *The Statesman’s Manual* symbol is connected with the idea of understanding, Coleridge seeing a symbol as a sign included in the idea which it represents, insisting once more on the question of the relation between the symbol and the notion of unity in multitude:

A symbol ... is characterised by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. It is characterised above all by the translucence of the Eternal through 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. (p. 30)

Coming back to Eco’s question as to whether the Romantic symbol is an instance of immanence or transcendence, one can say it operates within both. While immanence would presuppose the apprehension of the Logos, I AM or the One, transcendence on its path would imply both the metaphysical desire and capacity to ascent to divine immanence. To put it alternatively, immanence is transcendent absolute reality and transcendence is that spiritual strive to attain this transcendent reality.<sup>21</sup>

Like the symbol, another very pivotal concept necessary in the discussion of the Coleridgean imagination is the will. The question of will connects with self-consciousness, subjectivity and authorial intention.<sup>22</sup> As Coleridge himself demonstrates, the imagination at its different functional realms is not a mere imposition of a transcendent or teleological will on the poet without his own self-consciousness. In fact, the poet has to will himself, open up himself to, or to put it in

other words subject himself to his will, which in a mystical and metaphysical sense justifies both the enthusiasm and ability of transcendence to immanence.

So teleological choice cannot necessarily be a matter of chance or coincidence. That is, the poet is not simply acted upon by the spirit inherent in the imaginative experience. He self-consciously participates in the process. So subjectivity in the context of our discussion will have to do with the question of self-willed submission in the attempt at communing with the mystical reality of wholeness. When it happens that there is the metaphysical desire, but at the same time the awareness of the inability of self-consciously attaining it, this should not be interpreted negatively. So the poet's lamentation or expression of despair, due to certain factors, physical or psychological (illness, addiction, frustration from emotional dissatisfaction, spiritual paucity in the face of nature) does not mean the imagination has completely failed or cannot offer any further possibilities of redressing the problem. On the contrary, these are instances that far from demonstrating self-failure, self-paralysis, self-alienation, or self-inability, reiterate and point to the fertility of reflection and meditation embedded in despair and lamentation as pointers to the resolve to seek other possibilities rather than resignation or incapacity. So a poem that is interpreted in the sense of failure, is not an acceptable interpretation in the line of argument here, because the poem cannot be taken to say all about the problematic of self-processing.

With regard to Romantic lyricism, the self is usually the subject, making it difficult to completely dissociate the poet from his oeuvre. In relation to the lyrical I, therefore, the poet in most cases is his own subject matter in the creative process. Thus, what he writes is an approximated expression of his inner feelings in response to both outer and inner circumstances of his life and experiences. The question of authorial intention becomes justified in this context as poetic expression is to be seen

as an instance of self-examination, self-understanding, and self-struggle at grasping complexity and attaining wholeness.

From the philosophy of Platonism through Neoplatonism to Romantic discourse reality has always been interpreted in terms of its metaphysical and transcendental attributes rather than the mere rational and empiricist terms of the pure sciences. Reality, therefore, is apprehended as something far more beyond materialism or social, cultural, economic and historical circumstances now very common in New Historical discourse of Romanticism. It has been argued in the introductory part of this endeavour that phenomenal reality will be seen as complementary and not as opposing with the philosophical and spiritual implications of the imagination.

Though they were dominantly aversive to materiality, which imprisons the soul and impedes its upward rise to immanence, the Romantics did not discard it from their discourse. Instead, it was incorporated to mean providing a clue to an invisible but existent reality, greater than the rational or sensual perception of the world in empirical and discursive terms. As Wordsworth said, we do not only see nature with but most importantly through the eyes. Coleridge's poetry also translates the same issue, whereby nature is not described on rational or quantified terms as in most of eighteenth century empiricist culture. His pantheistic and monistic speculations undoubtedly show that ultimate reality is transcendent, it is immanence encapsulated in the universal One, or I AM or again the Logos towards and into which the human soul strives to fuse. Keats's poetry and philosophy of life as will be seen later also reverberates the same affinities with Coleridge. The imagination leads to an ultimate reality which is spiritual, Being. And the process of becoming indicates the transcendent enthusiasm, capacity and strive to attain this ultimate Being.

Coleridge's in one of his notebook entries analyses how the imagination and mind function with external nature, prefiguring participation in the reality of the life-giving force of the Logos:

... the mind ... then looking abroad into nature finds that in its own nature it has been fathoming nature, and that nature itself is but a greater mirror in which he beholds his own present and his own past being ... while he feels the necessity of that one great Being whose eternal reason is the ground and absolute condition of the ideas in the mind, and no less the grown and absolute cause of all the correspondent realities in nature. (*Notebooks II*, 2564)

This is an echo of the view that all things are seen in the divine One, the source of all emanation, bringing also to mind the question of the Coleridgean apprehension of Beauty<sup>23</sup> which is strongly associated with the imagination and reality. There is a correlation between beauty and harmony in Romantic metaphysics. This apprehension parallels the relationship between the self as both unity and synthesis of opposites, and simultaneously corresponds with the Neoplatonic equating of the One with Beauty respectively. In *Biographia Literaria II* Coleridge defines the Beautiful as the harmonising principle in nature which reflects the synthetic power of the imagination. His conceptualisation of the Beautiful sees it as

That in which the many, still seen as many, becomes One. Take a familiar instance ... the frost on a window-pane has by accident crystallised into a striking resemblance of a tree or a seaweed. With what pleasure we trace the parts, and their relations to each other and for the whole. (p. 232)

This consciousness of symmetrical patterns corresponds to Wordsworth's own stance about the issue. In Romantic phenomenology beauty can be seen as the ideal of unity in so far as it incorporates a teleological view of the imagination and the self, engaged in the process of attaining the supreme reality of the One.

From the above discussion, and in line with our earlier examination of both the Schlegelian and Mellorian notions of becoming, it becomes increasingly certain that reality in Romantic discourse supersedes materiality and points to transcendent spirituality and immanence. However, Schlegel's and Mellor's views necessitate

reconceptualisation and remodifications. To Schlegel the best of Romantic poetry is in the process of becoming and can never be perfected, while to Mellor the ultimate reality in Romantic metaphysics is becoming, that is, the process itself. In Coleridge as well as in Keats ultimate reality is not the process of becoming in itself but its subsequent outcome. Though ultimate or definite fulfilment is placed in the future, it is evident that there is a clear understanding or knowledge of what it is. It is the divine I AM from which we emanate and into which we shall fuse with totality after our post-corporeal existence.

Coleridge's definition of the dual but whole faculty of the imagination in Chapter 13 *Biographia Literaria* I, and his description of the poet in ideal perfection in Chapter 14 *Biographia Literaria* II, have come to be some of the finest statements of the visionary and metaphysical dimensions of the Romantic idealism. These statements point to his acuity and consistency of thought as seen from the systematic development and modified adoptions discussed above and, as it were, make a fine blend of poetry, philosophy, religion and spirituality. Both excerpts need a close examination in view of substantiating Coleridge's poetics of becoming. In the first excerpt Coleridge asserts his conviction:

The IMAGINATION then I consider either Primary, or Secondary. 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 art of Creation in the infinite I AM. The Secondary, I consider as a echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still 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 create, or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. (pp. 304 – 305)

This definition indicates Coleridge's self-consciousness of the imaginative faculty as engaged in processes, and therefore expressive of becoming as an act of

progressive construction and reconstruction of wholeness. The modes of operation of the imagination justify this. Perception from the primary imagination serves as a signpost and undergoes a kind of metamorphosis engendered by the secondary imagination. In this respect, there is no need of a dichotomy between the two phases. There is connection between the world perceived and the world conceived. In mentioning the conscious will, Coleridge is stressing the active engagement of the self in its idealising and unifying quest.

With regard to the second passage, Coleridge accentuates a strong sense of Romantic idealism, which evoke the conscious activity of the poet:

The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole of the soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each to each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power first put to action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul (*laxis effertur habenis*) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonises the natural and the artificial, still subordinates arts to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. ... Finally GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, Fancy its DRAPERY, MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is every where, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole. (pp. 15 – 18)

This statement goes not only to an aesthetic direction, but also to an ontological and practical direction. To put it differently, it evokes both the aesthetic and spiritual broodings of experience. No matter what negative criticism this idealisation of the imagination has received from Deconstruction as seen in the review of related literature, it is indicative of Romantic constructivism and points to the hermeneutic and phenomenological temperament of Romanticism. It is one of the most widely used

passages on the theoretical formulations of the idealism in Romantic visionary criticism. That the poet can achieve self-orientation and definition through the imagination may sound overly idealistic, and in associating the imagination with magic and at the same time with conscious will only goes to demonstrate the complexity of what Coleridge is trying to articulate. What one clearly understands here is the desire and capacity for transcendence and immanence, which should be apprehended in the poetics of becoming as a permanent struggle to achieve the pursued ideal. The whole process (becoming) that points towards wholeness or monism, which forms the base of his idealism, is founded on his views on symbol, organicism, polarity, duality, irony and becoming.

If Coleridge is said not to have attained the subjective ideal he describes in this excerpt, this does not mean he did not struggle to do so, for his self-consciousness and anti-self-consciousness point to both the difficulty and will to overcome the difficulty. In fact, to have conceived such a proposition about transcendental experience does not portray him as speaking with other philosophers' voices as Tilottama Rajan's deconstructive reading has pointed out, or describing an alien and unobtainable Other to his self as other deconstructionists like Jean-Pierre Mileur and David Hogsette expound. Though he is characteristically universal in his description, Coleridge is primarily grappling with a distinctive individual vision and must use the available resources of language to attempt to transcribe in logical and discursive terms what is generally non-discursive and metaphysical. Coleridge's pantheist and monistic idealism, his self-investigation with the passing of time and his poetics of relationships, all find an objective approximation with this statement.

From our general survey of how Coleridge came to conceive and conceptualise the imagination and the poet in ideal perfection, and its hermeneutic and phenomenological implications, there is the firm conviction that the realms of the

imagination and reality are an expression of the highest aesthetic, but most importantly the spiritual capacity to the living man. The mystical communion encapsulated in the imagination is not the establishment of a paradise on earth. On the contrary but very important, it is a foretaste of lasting spirituality. Visionary criticism should remodel its interpretative poetics and focus not on hyperbolic and uncritical elevations of Romantic idealism and its affiliated properties, but present it in terms clearly reflected in the Romantic texts.

Plotinus is said to have had four mystical experiences (one of which he expresses above) in all his life time. Coleridge describes it in his poetry as well as the other Romantics. Thus, the New Historicist sidelining of the visionary potential of the Romantics, or the Deconstructionist aversion or dismissal of the metaphysics and spirituality of the Romantics, all misconstrue the fundamental bases of Romantic thought and writing. Jean Mileur, as previously discussed, castigated Coleridge on the grounds that he describes the unidentified poet and not himself, and even expresses scepticism if any poet can possess the kind of imaginative energy that Coleridge describes. He, therefore, like most of his deconstructive counterparts, distances Coleridge's self-awareness of the spiritual reality that is experienced through the imagination, seeing the whole notion as a baseless speculation with no real justifiable metaphysical grounds. Brian Wilkie has altogether contested the theories of the imagination and ideal poet, asserting instead that the secondary imagination's power consists only in recognising nothing but overlays that superimpose on one another, are independent, and even at times highly contradictory. David Hogsette sees the imagination as an alien power that cannot be possessed by the poet, arguing that it remains an external and unobtainable other, and accuses Coleridge of engaged in ambiguous poetic metaphysics.



There is also the case of psychoanalytical readings which situates Coleridge dominantly within the interpretative matrix of guilt, anxiety, fear, self-destabilisation, self-split, and no possibilities for any therapeutic or remedial ends. Coleridge's creed in nature as well as all the attempts of individuation he greatly engaged in all through his life, continue to resist the above readings. He had fervent and lasting convictions in his poetic, metaphysical and spiritual speculations, indicating always that there was usually some way out, either aesthetic or spiritual, to problems encountered in life's experiences. In what follows we shall examine some selected poems to attempt a substantiation of the preceding arguments.

#### **-PRAXIS: POETRY, PHILOSOPHY, SPIRITUAL ECSTASY AND BECOMING**

The intention here is to attempt a critical interpreting of some major poems by Coleridge as substantiating pieces to the discussion of nature as interacting with the imagination in the realms of inspiration and spirituality, to justify his ontological and epistemological stance in the mainstream discussions above. Coleridge's early poems are fused with celestial elemental images, which as symbols suggest his conception of the progressive movement of the soul in the struggle to unify and harmonise with the One. The recurrent surfacing of images like the sun, moon, stars, orb and clouds permeates his major poetry and all generate discourse within the realm of the transcendental significations of symbols in imaginative and spiritual experience.

'Sonnet: To the Autumnal Moon' (1788), 'Life' (1789) 'To the Evening Star' (1790) 'An Effusion at Evening'(1793) and 'A Sunset' (1805) are among several scores of poems that have attracted little or no attention in any critical debate on Coleridge's poetry. In them, however, Coleridge expresses the question of radiance and other natural phenomena which are connected to his conception of the symbol and translucence, and therefore suggesting spiritual light and possibility. The moon and

stars find their counterparts in the sun and meteors, and are all symbolic as energy generating and artistically and spiritually inspiring. In 'Sonnet: To the Autumnal Moon' the poet is addressing himself to the moon:

Mild Splendour of the various-vested Night!  
Mother of wildly-working visions! hail!  
I watch thy gliding, while with watery light  
Thy weak eye glimmers through fleecy veil;  
And when thou lovest thy pale orb to shroud  
Behind the gathered blackness lost on high;  
And when thou dartest from the wind-rent cloud  
Thy placid lightening o'er the awaken'd sky.

Ah such is Hope! As changeful and as fair!  
Now dimly peering on the wistful sight;  
Now hid behind the dragon-wing'd Despair:  
But soon emerging in her radiant might  
She o'er the sorrow-clouded breast of Care  
Sails, like a meteor kindling in its flight.

This poem as well as its relation to the others, brings to mind a number of issues about Coleridge's entire poetry in connection with our central investigation of this chapter. The first two lines suggest nocturnal and diverse activities in the unity of nature, and the poet's observation of the moon's activity which, as it were, ignites his contemplative and meditative mind just as it performs its duty on the rest of nature. The moon seems to be apprehended by the poet as supreme, even though it does not surpass other elements of nature. It is the main symbol of his attention, and is connected to the other phenomena in nature. Its symbolism can be seen as the transcendent light whose appearance and disappearance indicate the process of the all-embracing nature of its operation. The second stanza points to Coleridge's oppositional thinking of hope and despair. Hope always disappears, but like the moon that the poet contemplates, has a radiant might that always resurfaces and engenders a positive and optimistic attitude to life. The interplay of hope and sadness, "sorrow-clouded breasts" points to the conviction of the formulation of Romantic irony and

becoming, where self-consciousness is in a constantly transformative process, and antithetical thinking provides renewed possibilities.

In 'To the Evening Star' Coleridge is once more preoccupied with a complementary component of the moon, the star:

O meek attendant of Sol's setting blaze,  
I hail, sweet star, thy chaste effulgent glow;  
On thee full oft with fixed eye I gaze  
Till I, methinks, all spirit seem to grow.  
(L. 1 – 4)

Here again Coleridge's reflection suggests the experience of the mystical union as he contemplates the beauty of the star. This imaginative vision of self-consciousness at the spiritual sphere has a lot in common with the series of canonical poems he was going to compose a few years afterwards, justifying the poetic texts as expressive of constructive progress.

In 'An Effusion at Evening' Coleridge seems to be showing an advanced position on the diversified but unifying activities in nature. Effusion is indicative of spontaneity and creativity which the poet matches with the imagination:

IMAGINATION, Mistress of my Love!  
Where shall my Eye thy elfin haunt  
Dost thou on yon rich Cloud thy pinions bright  
Embathe in amber-glowing Floods of Light?  
Or, wild of speed, pursue the track of Day  
In other worlds to hail the morning Ray?  
'Tis time to bid the faded shadowy Pleasures move  
On shadowy Memory's wings across the Soul of Love;  
And thine o'er *Winter's* icy plains to fling  
Each flower; that binds the breathing Locks of *Spring*,  
(L. 1 – 10)

The questioning attitude of the poet signals the image of the cloud which persists in the early as well as in the late poems. The question is why should Coleridge's insistence on the unity and importance of all of nature's creations specify certain symbols than others. A hermeneutic explanation of the cloud can help in the answering of the question. Clouds give great evidence of the numinous; the play of

light on clouds on a windy, sunny day or the gathering of darkness during a violent storm span the experience of the divine a range both beautiful and terrifying, alive and deadly. The cloud is, therefore, one of the most pliable of nature's materials to be engaged by the imagination. It allows the creation of endless forms, endless intent. Clouds engage us, they participate with us. By their very form they mimic the imagination in its protean quality, in its capacity for limitless changing forms. In Romantic thinking, clouds are air and water vapour, and therefore, the stuff of consciousness and different realms of imaginative experience to the Romantic mind. So the cloud as a symbol has to do with the philosophical and spiritual language of the imagination and its operating powers.

In 'Life' we come across some of the deep-seated bases of Coleridge's speculations of being and ascent to Being. The poem vividly captures Coleridge's spiritual hopes within the context of becoming. Here the poet expresses delight in the abundance of nature while hoping that after death he will full partake and consume of the universal One, I AM which he can get only momentarily or temporally:

As late I journey'd o'er the extensive plain  
Where native Otter sports his scanty stream,  
Musing in torpid woe a Sister's pain,  
The glorious prospect woke me from the dream.

At every step it widen'd to my sight-  
Wood, Meadow, verdent Hill, and dreary Steep,  
Following in quick succession of delight,-  
Till all-at once-did my eye ravish'd sweep!

May this (I cried) my course through Life portray!  
New senses of Wisdom may each step display,  
And Knowledge open as my days advance!  
Till what time Death shall pour the undarken'd ray,  
My eye shall dart thro' infinite expanse,  
And thought suspended lie in Rapture's blissful trance.

One can discern the notion of perception to spiritual awareness in this poem. The inter-penetration of nature and divinity leading to synchronicity and wholeness is

aply demonstrated and therefore represents early notions in poetry that were to correlate with the conceptualisation of the principles of the secondary imagination and the characteristic traits of the poet in ideal perfection. As previously pointed out, Coleridge was reliving the depth of his poetic life in his prose works, and the consistency he tried to maintain in the domain of the early and late phases of his life cannot be easily undermined.

The poem also echoes the Schlegelian notion that at the heart of reality the most characteristic nature is an overflowing and exhaustless vital energy. The contemplative mind and the subjective ascending of the soul find expression in the last stanza, where Coleridge translates his awareness that knowledge and wisdom are gained through a long laborious but optimistic strive in life. In seeking the undarkened ray of death, Coleridge seems to be intimating that there is much of life to get from death whose outcome will be the final reunion of the individual soul to the one Soul responsible for immanence and definite fusion. The immanental pantheism or monism of Coleridge can, therefore, be traced in this poem which title even signals the ontological and epistemological engagement and investigation of the poet.

For all the bulk of poems that Coleridge wrote, only a handful has been considered canonical and attracted criticism. 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), 'Reflections of Having Left a Place of Retirement' (1795), 'This Lime-Bower my Prison' (1797), 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1797), 'Frost at Midnight' (1798), 'The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem' (1798), 'Kubla Khan' (1798), and 'Dejection: An Ode' (1802), are among, if not the only canonical poems that Coleridge is recognised to have written. What is curious and interesting is that they are certainly not Christian poems even if they have elements that can allow them to be judged as such. For most of the critics who try to forge readings of Coleridge based on purely Christian or orthodox grounds, this distinctive aspect of Coleridge's is often ignored. Again, for the

visionary critics who recognise this ideal, they have dominantly misappropriated or misconstrued their readings by capitalising only on the aspects of being. That is, most criticism on the Romantic imagination seem to have focused on the states of being triggered by the imagination rather complementing it with philosophical issues or spiritual questions of life and death.

The above poems have been subject to diverse kinds of interpretative and critical discourse so much so that any attempt at reading Coleridge afresh undoubtedly leads to much anxiety as to whether it is not the same critical issues that are being resurfaced. A reconsideration of the poems as well as later ones will be focused on the main thrust of our argument, and in conjunction with the previously discussed ones.

‘The Eolian Harp’ reverberates some of the issues previously discussed in ‘To the Evening Star’ and ‘Life.’ The poem is one of Coleridge’s greatest poetical statements on his poetics and philosophy of nature, imagination, and spirituality. Written several years before he was to compose *Biographia Literaria*, the poem justifies Coleridge’s canonical prose definition of the primary and secondary imagination. It, therefore, clears any doubt as to whether what Coleridge wrote as prose could find any poetic justification from his early or late works. The poem is enlivened by spiritual excitement and strengthened by metaphysical metaphor. The mysterious core of the poem is said to lie behind the English philosopher Ralph Cudworth, whose *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1743) is said to have been borrowed from the Bristol Library by Coleridge, who thoroughly read it before the composition of the poem. Despite this, philosophers like of Plotinus, Spinoza and Schelling who come to mind when reading the poem. But most importantly the core of the poem certainly remains Coleridgean, because what he describes is not mere speculation or a literary or artistic demonstration of some philosophical speculation or disposition. It is first of all a felt experience and therefore the poet’s unique self-

consciousness and expression that moves in line with his philosophy of the imagination. Another matter needs scrutiny at this juncture. That no matter the number of alterations that Coleridge made on this poem between 1795 - 1817, probably to suit certain circumstances, the poem's central message of an alternative religious or spiritual and redemptive vision to life has endured.

The important critical question to be raised here is how the poem justifies the notion of becoming embedded in Schlegelian Romantic philosophy and Coleridge's cosmic vision encapsulated in his immanental pantheism and monism. Three symbols attract our attention, the breeze,<sup>24</sup> harp and music. For all the other events or possibilities discussed all relate to these, justifying the engagement and participation of each in the poet's apprehension of the totality of the cosmic realm. Coleridge is addressing himself to his future wife Sara, and the poem ends with her supposed indirect intervention to his unorthodox spirituality. Many have taken this as a justification for the fact that the poem is purely orthodox, expressing Coleridge's conventional views on love in Christian religion. Therefore, the main stream of the argument, such a position holds, is mainstream Christianity. The argument even goes further that Coleridge's pantheist and monistic thoughts expressed in the poem are a mere speculation from which the poet quickly recoils because of the implied reproach of the object of his love.<sup>25</sup>

Coleridge in 'The Eolian Harp' combines the presence of the lute, wind and harp with the rest of the congregation of nature to express the underlying harmony that is symbolised by the music. The melody of the music does not appeal only to the sensuous ears, but to the soul of the poet as well, pointing to the spiritual significance that characterise the circumstance. The monistic vision of the poet is first expressed when he says:

O the one life within us and abroad,

Which melts all motion and becomes its soul,  
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light  
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where –  
Methinks, it should have been impossible  
Not to love all things in a world so filled;  
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air  
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

(L. 26 – 33)

This mystical and visionary expression of the imagination is undoubtedly not a biblical position on the concept of man's spirituality, but as a religious and spiritual awareness in its own right, it is not necessarily antagonistic to Christianity even if it virtually has nothing in common with Christianity. The melodious notes indicate something far more interfused, the oneness and harmony engendered by the immanent spiritual force. The depth of feeling here does not mean the experience of the one is a definite end, but rather a visionary moment of what promises to be positive in his redemptive speculation. The manifestation of the outer to inner meditation and reflection is further enhanced by the hypothetical question that Coleridge asks:

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

(L. 44 – 48)

This rhetorical question of the monistic interdependence of the All in God (All in this case a proper noun obviously because of Coleridge's apprehension that nature implies equality, each element operating in conjunction to the principle of harmonisation) does not suggest a probability. On the contrary, it is a strategic style used by Coleridge to confirm the possibility in vision of such an experience. The poem thus becomes a spiritual expression of what is, which can be momentarily felt, and possibly felt as definitive when becoming leads to Being. Coleridge's idealism in this poem cannot be said to be exaggerated or out of proportion. This idealist or transcendental awareness of self is certainly not the attainment of absolute knowledge from a Hegelian



perspective. The text demonstrates, in terms of the poetics of becoming, an engaging enthusiasm and will focusing on and struggling towards achieving an ideal. We once more reiterate that the text is not a finite statement on the self, as the self shows no indication of stasis.

Coleridge pursues his speculative engagements on the question of nature as poetically and artistically inspiring, and as philosophically and spiritually enriching in 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison.' The seeming paradoxical nature of the poem is captured in the first stanza, where the lyrical I gives the impression of being entrapped and unable to enjoy the bliss of nature, expressed by the sense of loss of feelings and beauties. The structure of the poem suggests the creative process in terms of a transition of the awareness of the poet's incapacitated self to an eventual self-consciousness of the richness of imaginative, mystical, and spiritual experience.

In the second stanza of the poem Coleridge informs of the mystical communion he has always had in nature through the wish that his visiting friends from the stifling and spiritually deprived town, especially Charles Lamb, should experience. So Lamb will experience:

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

(L. 38 – 43)

This excerpt shows that what Coleridge is talking about is in retrospect, a retrospect of what has become part of his mystical and metaphysical experiences, which promise a subsequent and finite union with God, the Logos and ultimate reality. Coleridge no doubt experiences the same spiritual bliss which he has just described above:

A delight

Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad  
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,  
This little lime-tree bower, have I not marked  
Much that has soothed me. Pale beneath the blaze  
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched  
Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see  
The shadow of the leaf and stem above  
Dappling its sunshine!....

(L. 44 – 51)

From the quotation the prison becomes useful and is positively apprehended as a space and time for meditation and spiritual reflection. Coleridge in this instance is more or less signifying the characteristic traits of the poet in ideal perfection, implying not only himself, but any other poet or person who possesses imaginative vision and can exploit it. The poet, through the conscious will embedded in the imagination, is able to transform his sense of disability to a positive outlook, recalling the view that it is not only important to have spiritual enthusiasm in nature, but also to have the will and capacity for the wholeness of imaginative and visionary bliss. This is a very important aspect that runs through Coleridge's entire life, justifying his antithetical but progressive stance in life. This point is vividly made clear when a little further Coleridge makes known that the richness of life can only be realised amidst despair, frustration, and the capacity to take them more as breakthroughs rather than breakdowns, whereby the imagination is not to be seen as failure but a conscious and temporal limitation that becomes a springboard of its very artistic, philosophical and transcendental energy:

Henceforth I shall know  
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;  
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,  
No waste so vacant, but may well employ  
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart  
Awake to Love and Beauty! And sometimes  
'Tis well to bereft of promised good,  
That we may lift the Soul, and contemplate  
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.

(L. 60 – 67)

Here Coleridge does not present us only with the magnificence of nature, but most importantly echoes the Schlegelian notion of the incomprehensibility of nature, an incomprehensibility that engenders reflexive thought that makes it possible to construct something constructive. In fact, to put it alternatively, in what turns out to be a very rich and insightful philosophical and spiritual commentary, Coleridge shows demonstration of his oppositional thinking, saying that it is a rich experience to suffer from despair and spiritual destitute because this gives room to meditate and reflect on the possibilities of life. This point, which will be seen later, is an apt statement by Coleridge on his self-consciousness of the subtlety and complexity of nature and experience as a whole which is conducive for wise and pure thoughts.

There are two particular symbols that necessitate a close examination within the cosmic speculations of Coleridge. These are the symbols of the rook and the orb:

When the last rook  
Beat its straight path along the dusky air  
Homewards, I blest it! Deeming, its black wing  
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)  
Had crossed the mighty orb's dilated glory,  
(L. 68 – 72)

These symbols within the operating context of the spiritual and anticipatory capacity of the imagination, are an apt translation of the Romantic connotation to the word. The philosophical implications of the word, which dominantly see it as the interaction of nature and the mind which leads to spiritual awareness, shows the same ideal in this poem. That is, the flight of the bird into the mighty orb's<sup>26</sup> dilated glory is a spiritual instance of the soul's inward flight to its source of emanation. Both, therefore, become transcendental symbols of divine reality, consolidating the cosmic vision of the poet and justifying the fervent conviction that these are a translation of visible signs of divine language and presence.

‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’ as diversely read and interpreted as it is, has not met with any definitive, exhaustive or satisfactory critical evaluation. In the midst of the controversy that surrounds the poem, it is undoubtedly clear that the recognition attached to it as a canonical poem places it dominantly within the periphery of Coleridge’s immanent pantheism and monism. The Christian Hermeneutics, Monists, Structuralists, Archetypalists, Psychoanalysts, New Historicists, and Deconstructionists have all postulated different and varied interpretations to the poem based on their various philosophical and theoretical considerations (see Chapter One).

In his appreciation of the poem James Reeves has made an evaluation which is deemed valuable for the discussion of the thrust of our argument. According to Reeves:

The astonishing and inexplicable thing about Coleridge’s poetry is that he should have written his master piece so early, that he should have experienced life so profoundly at a subconscious level before he proved the experience behind the poem in his own life. For there is evidence that during the period of its composition he was at his happiest. Almost the whole of the rest of his life was spent in discovering and undergoing the agony of spirit he had, so movingly pre-experienced, as it were, in imagination.<sup>27</sup>

This insightful evaluation relates to the antithetical nature or polarity thinking that characterised Coleridge’s imaginative experience and the concepts he discussed in relation with this word. Though Reeves implies that this poem was a prefiguring of Coleridge’s life, which to an extent is also suggesting that Coleridge wrote his best poems in a particular period after which he was less creatively productive, it is, however, convincing to think that in the whole span of his literary and philosophical life he always made statements or wrote poems that point to the same concept. That is, the agony of spirit recurrent in works later than ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ is always complemented with a positive imaginative and spiritual outlook to life.

That the poem is an expression of the Schlegelian notion of incomprehensibility, seen in the complex web of different strands of issues that are raised in its contents, is not in doubt. That there is conscious attempt by the poet at finding some constructive sense of order that points to the absolute, justifies his idealist and constructivist engagement. His central message unquestionably points to his pantheistic and monistic vision, coupled with the notion of self-will and imaginative opening and response to the spiritual and divine presence in nature. Coleridge's inclusion of the Gloss, for example, was in line with a conscious attempt to make the poem clear and comprehensible. If the poem, therefore, ends without a satisfactory solution it is not deprived of this idea of searching amidst the ever complex and subtle variants of nature and human experience commonly characteristic of the philosophy of becoming. The imagination in this sense is seen as constantly engaged in its organising principle, justifying the fact that Coleridge's referring to the poem as a work of pure imagination meant precisely what he was to discuss subsequently in his prose and other poems.

#### **-THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISPOSITIONS OF IRONY, FRAGMENTATION AND COMPLEXITY**

The central concern in this section is an evaluation of the consistency of Coleridge's thought amidst the supposed ironic, contradictory and fragmentary nature of his life and poetry. In this vein, an examination of the two different views (Romantic and Postmodern) that are attributed to the notion of fragmentation and complexity will be discussed, after which Coleridge's poetry will be used to substantiate the Romantic position that is adopted here in relation to the main thrust of this thesis. We must stress here that the question of irony, fragmentation and contradiction, are vitally enriching strands of Romantic discourse that Romantic visionary critics have not sufficiently or

appropriately grappled with in their conceptualisations of idealist theories. More specifically, Coleridge's works have not been considered from a positive dimension with regard to the categories. Yet, it is undoubtedly evident that irony, fragmentation, and contradiction clearly define the poetics of becoming as a constructive progression in Coleridge's idealism.

Two distinctive but interconnecte issues are actually at stake here. There has been a kind of myth about the two lives of Coleridge, the one taken for the creative, visionary and unorthodox spiritual life of the poet, dating till 1802, and the other his recourse to the conservative Christian theology of Anglicanism till the end of his life. This distinction is also related to the question of the psycho-dynamics involving the division between his childhood, youth and old age, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The second issue runs through his entire poetry and has to do specifically with the different interpreting and apprehending of Romantic texts in relation to the question of the levels of expression and levels of content, which explains the battle that has been going on between Romantic critics and Deconstructionists. The move here is to dismantle such readings and argue for the self as a systematic construction in different time axes.

In his very canonical work *Coleridge as a Religious Thinker* (1961), James B. Bougler discusses the supposed two Coleridges, providing or re-emphasising the trend that has seen his poetry as such. He asserts that the Coleridge prior to 1802 was the poet who believed in the religion of the imagination, and that after that period his pantheistic and cosmic vision collapsed leading to spiritual isolation and alienation with nature: "The communion of man and Nature which had been so central to the early poetry broke apart completely in his Christian thinking, living a wide chasm between spirit and nature" (p. 206).

To Bougler Coleridge indulged in higher reason or religious reason, his later poetry being interpreted as his vision of a revitalised Christianity, completely void of his early enthusiasm. Bougler, therefore, sees Christianity as a summing up of Coleridge's final epistemological position which embraces the dichotomous scholastic logic of orthodoxy (p. 196), and which, accordingly, never quite compensated for the previous strong spiritual consciousness of the One. Bougler does not refuse Coleridge's visionary gleam, but thinks that he lost this ideal in later life. As already seen in the first chapter such held views need a thorough re-evaluation.

Not long after the composition of 'Dejection: An Ode,' which has usually been misconstrued as a preamble to his failure to uphold the energetic and unifying principle of the imagination, Coleridge wrote a letter to Wedgwood, dated January 14 1803. The contents of this letter justifies Coleridge's conviction that there is always the possibility of imaginative revival leading to the spirit of the Logos. On this occasion Coleridge is writing about his experiences among the mountains:

In simple earnestness, I never find myself alone, within the embracement of rocks and hills, a traveller up the Alpine road, but my spirit careers, dives, and eddies, like a leaf in autumn; a wild activity of thought, imaginations, feelings, and impulses of motion rises up from within me: a sort of *bottom-wind*, that blows to no point of a compass, comes from I know not whence but agitates the whole of me ... I do not think it that my bodily pains could eat out the love of joy, that is so substantially part of me, toward hills and rocks and steep waters. (*Letters II*, p. 916)

This excerpt points to the continuous reverence and exaltation for nature as foreshadowed in the ending lines of the "Dejection Ode", which arouses excitement and incites thought. It brings back to mind Coleridge's antithetical philosophy, as he expresses the view that the wholeness of life can only be meaningfully apprehended by an inclusive attitude, that is, the acceptance of life's torments, trials and tribulations, while using them resourcefully for reflection and contemplation. Again a comparison of 'Pain' (1790), 'Melancholy: A Fragment' (1794) and 'The Pains of Sleep' (1803),

which are centred on the same sense of feeling, shows that even during the visionary period he consciously incorporated the notion of pain, suffering, and despair as constituting the mainstream of life's experiences. These poems still carry an optimism rather than endless lamentation and resignation, and connect with moments of imaginative bliss and spiritual hope as captured in a poems like 'Ode to Tranquillity' (1801) and 'Lines on Breeze and Hope' (1802).

Coleridge's consistency with, and the superiority of place that he gives nature in connection with creativity, metaphysical and spiritual enthusiasm, can further be discernible in a later poem 'Nature' composed in 1820. This poem, little known in practical criticism on Coleridge, is not considered canonical, whereas it is a demonstration of Coleridge's poetics of becoming:

It may indeed be phantasy, when I  
Essay to draw from all created things  
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;  
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie  
Lessons of love and earnest piety.  
So let it be; and if the wide world rings  
In mock of this belief, it brings  
Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.  
So I will build my alter in the fields,  
And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,  
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields  
Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,  
Thee only God! And thou shalt not despise  
Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.

It is certainly interesting to remark that without the date of this poem's composition, it will instantly be attributed to a Coleridgean piece of the 1780s and 1790s, and treated as expressive of his pantheist and monistic temperament characteristic of these years. The fervent conviction of imaginative faith in nature in the poem is expressed in very strong and uncompromising terms, justifying the blissful state in which the poem must have been composed, and also indicating that Coleridge's religious and spiritual eccentricity had not abandoned him. Yet it is a



poem that dates from 1820, three years after the publication of *Biographia Literaria*. This strongly subverts the dichotomy that is said to cut across the life of Coleridge. Far from depicting Coleridge as having failed in his idealist enthusiasm at old age as some visionary critics tend to argue, or regarding the text as expressive of self-subversion or self-dislocation as deconstructionist poetics contend, this poem is an affirmation of the one self in Coleridge. In fact, the inspirational, mystical and spiritual impulse remained in Coleridge all through his life. Adversity does not overshadow or destroy Coleridge's metaphysical and transcendental longing.

This text resists Schelling's theory of art as the finite expression and fusion, because it demonstrates Coleridge's poetics of becoming as the progressive and constructive antithetical process in the self. In this vein, the poem's content can be used to formulate a new dimension with which both Romantic visionary criticism and Deconstruction must grapple. This new dimension grapples with the notion of deferral, which in the context of this discussion points to a constructive hermeneutics.

Metaphorically speaking, the strings of the harp in him might have been slackened because of obvious psycho-physical disabilities, yet they are not broken as explicitly expressed in the poem. What is important to be taken into account is the idea of the self as a transforming process. As it were, the self is essentially capable of being other than any fixed essence. This justifies the ironic nature of life and the best mode of existence to the Romantics. The real irony is that any fixed, bounded determined or created self must at once signal its fragility, destruction and de-creation. That is, fixity destroys irony and therefore distorts the ongoing processes of self. Coleridge must have understood this notion well, and his work implicitly or explicitly expresses it.

His philosophical as well as spiritual apprehension of the imagination in his lectures on Shakespeare 1811, his 1828 letter to Lady Beaumont, both used as preambles to this chapter, show an adamant sense of commitment to his creed. The

consistency, life-long, as it were, convincingly points to Coleridge's avowed hopes. Recent accounts of his life show that he did not die as an embittered man, he died with the sense of achievement or an apprehension that he had struggled variously to achieve, particularly in his idealist and constructivist stance.<sup>28</sup> As what one can call an exteriorised interiority to briefly summarise his metaphysical and spiritual speculations, he might have had his soul regain its divine source and ultimate reality.

The second phase of the argument with regard to irony, fragmentation and complexity, takes an almost completely different perspective, though not without subtle affinities with the previous discussion. The Romantic and Postmodern views of these concepts are diametrically opposed and irreconcilable. While the Romantics look at them from a philosophical and spiritual dimension, the Deconstructionists interpret them from a purely logical, univocal, linguistic and rhetorical perspective, or to put it alternatively from a technical standpoint.

In the previous chapter, it has been stated with substantial evidence that New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Deconstruction are flourishing in Romantic studies. If these three have a reconciling position, it is based on their distrust of any positive and constructive aspect of individuation and of the self as subject in Romantic poetry and prose. In fact, it would appear, as already reiterated in several portions of this chapter, that among the three Deconstruction assumes an extreme position with regard to irony, fragmentation and complexity. It can be conveniently and arguably said that it is trying to impose what one can call an imperialistic critical and theoretical attitude on Romanticism, which may overshadow the very essence of Romantic philosophy on art, creativity, and spirituality.

The paradigm of irony and fragmentation in Postmodernism or Deconstruction evaluates and interprets the terms following the interpretative framework already established by New Criticism and Structuralism. It looks at irony from its commonly

used context as a rhetorical strategy involving the saying of something but intending the opposite. In other words, Deconstruction seems to lay its emphasis on irony from within the context of figure of speech, emphasising aporias and even unreadability or undecideability, to use de Man's expressions. Fragmentation on its part is seen in terms of technical or structural incompleteness, and therefore as suspending meaning or even averting the very meaning that is attempted to be structured or constructed. Again, it may in psycho-dynamic terms delineate the apprehension of self-destabilisation, self-division, self-contradiction, and self-fragmentation and dissolution.

Within its most characteristic feature of suspicion, scepticism and questioning Deconstruction has come dominantly to see fragmentation, irony and contradiction as apt expressions of the breakdown or impossibility of any attempted communicative act of meaning embedded in language. Coleridge's poems like 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' 'Christabel,' 'Kubla Khan,' 'Dejection: An Ode,' and a host of others have been widely read and interpreted on deconstructive grounds. His theory and philosophy of the imagination has equally be subject to Deconstruction. The main issue has been to discredit, subvert or even dismiss any creative, artistic, visionary, philosophical and spiritual potentials in the poems that has placed them as distinctive self-textualising Romantic texts.<sup>29</sup> In the same vein, Deconstruction does not consider any theoretical or critical perspective as useful in reading and interpreting. Thus apart from its own poetics, every other reading and interpretative context is considered false. Reiterating the constructivist positions here, irony and fragmentation form the core of the Romantic poetics of becoming and the notion of constructive deferral.

With regard to our present discussion, these concepts are seen from the perspective of German Romantic philosophy encapsulated in Friedrich Schlegel's thought. Peter Zima has rightly pointed out the disparity that exists between the

Romantic and Deconstructionist standpoints. In *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002) he has observed that the idealism of Schlegelian Irony or Philosophical Irony is alien to the exponents of Deconstruction with regard to nature, art and poetry, and that their cult of spirituality is also irreconcilable with the poetics of Deconstruction (p. 11). Besides, Zima's discussion of what is postmodern clearly shows the rift that separates Romantic thinking from Deconstructive discourse, therefore acknowledging the distinctness of Romantic philosophy. As a radicalised form of Modernity, Postmodernism is the positive embracing of the fragmentary and incomprehensible nature of art and life (p. 201). This position is not acceptable by idealist and constructivist critics, and obviously was not the creative intention of the Romantics.

The preoccupation here is that even if Coleridge's poetry provides grounds for deconstructive discourse, he certainly did not write with a deconstructive frame of mind. The philosophical dispositions of his engagements are seen to fit appropriately in the idealist and constructivist rather than the sceptical, or pure linguistic and empirical discourse. The technically unfinished poems have at least a psychological or philosophical satisfaction that underlie them. Again the seeming contradiction and irresolution of thought indicates the richness of experience with possibility of using breakdowns as springboards or as breakthroughs from a hermeneutic and phenomenological perspective. The fragmentation and incompleteness strongly associated with Romantic irony become more affiliated to transcendental and spiritual speculations rather than mere rhetorical discourse. Romantic irony may not necessarily eliminate all contradictions but emphasises an open-ended tendency that gives room for constructive possibility, it is an antithetical condition of possibility. Romantic texts undoubtedly point to a certain direction of consciousness. Coleridge's views of the imagination clearly recognises the antithetical stance of creative and visionary experience amidst complexity and incomprehensibility. This explains why he is very

concerned with polarity thinking, and insists on the will and the struggle to unify and subsequently attain the ultimate reality, the Logos.<sup>30</sup>

We will examine three poems to justify some of the above claims. These are 'Kubla Khan,' 'To Matilda Betham: From a Stranger,' and 'Dejection: A Letter'/'Dejection: An Ode.' As far as the so-called two major phases of Coleridge's life are concerned, Deconstructionists strongly adhere to the conviction that the second phase was a marked deconstruction of what had hitherto been Coleridge's intense mystical and cosmic vision. So his later poetry does not attract much attention since it appears to be a foregone conclusion.

That 'Kubla Khan' is a quintessential Romantic poem, concerned with the process of creating poetry, the role of the imagination and its affiliation with the mystical and spiritual, is accurate. That Postmodernism or Deconstruction discredits or even dismisses this ideal is very problematic, considering what the essential Romantic canons on irony and fragmentation were. From a technical perspective it is structurally incomplete, therefore, fragmentary, justified by the subtitle, 'A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment'. In fact, Coleridge's prefatory remarks situate the poem "rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed *poetic* merits." This is not a statement to be taken uncritically as an apologetic or self-subverting or self-undoing judgement of the poem. Contrary to Coleridge's stance, the poem is one of the greatest Romantic statements on the complexity of the creative process. The intriguing issue is that the poetic merit of the text lies not only in its contents, but points to future aesthetic creations. So the philological and philosophical implications of the poem can demonstrate the Romantic poetics of becoming. One can see here an exemplification of Coleridge's consciousness of the Socratic irony on which Schlegel modelled the Romantic or Philosophical irony that is seen to permeate the poem. The main question wrestles with why we posit this contention. The answer is fundamentally important,

because it maps the context in which the persuasion on the poetics of becoming is endorsed and examined. It is irony that necessitates self-consciousness, anti-self-consciousness and progress. 'Kubla Khan' aptly justifies this conceptualisation in terms of the self-constructive process that characterises its inspiration and contents. It, therefore, is a positive aesthetic and spiritual impasse.

From a hermeneutic and phenomenological standpoint this fragmentary and open-ended nature of the poem, which is strongly connected with irony and paradox, presupposes a complexity and subtlety of argument that goes beyond the rhetorical figures or literary devices already discussed. An enormous energy infuses the poem, leading to what can be described as an ecstatic quality, not necessarily as an aroused experience by the critical reader, but detected from the poem and, therefore, a justification of Coleridge's self-textualisation. This means that natural and sublime imagery permeates the poem and its overall contents relate to some of the pre and post conceptualisations by Coleridge on the creative and redemptive power of the imagination.

For a better analysis of this poem with regard to the poetics of becoming, we propose radical antithetical critical readings from Romantic visionary criticism and Deconstruction. These will then provide an antithetical or contrastive context for the new line of argument proposed here. Two insightful partitioning models come in handy when discussing the surface and deep structures of the poem. Rolf Breuer, an idealist critic, has noted in "Coleridge's Concept of Imagination - With an Interpretation of 'Kubla Khan'" (1980), that both the first and second stanzas of the poem (L. 1 – 11 and 12 – 36) can form a substratum for the poem's structural analysis since they thematically belong together. The third stanza constitutes the second part. According to Breuer's scheme, part one describes the landscape, the first stanza being the more static description of the garden and the second stanza being the more

dynamic description of the river, while part two consists of the accompanying visions and reflections of the lyrical I. Breuer calls these two parts level and metalevel, stressing that they show the poem as having an extremely incomplete structural design, necessitating a kind of synthesis in a Hegelian sense (pp. 61 – 62).

The second structuring model is proposed by the Deconstructionist David Hogsette. In “Eclipsed by the Pleasure Dome: Poetic Failure in Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’” (1997), Hogsette’s concern with the creative realm places emphasis on the figure of Khan, the sacred river Alph, and the fountain, which to him prefigure and/or illustrate Coleridge’s phenomenological model of fancy, the primary imagination and the secondary imagination. Hogsette argues that Khan produces an enchanting paradise, a pleasure dome which is clearly an Edenic realm infused with (masculine) virility (‘walls and towers’) and seething with sensuality (blossoming incense-bearing trees and soft hills enfolding spots of greenery) and sexual potency (‘fertile ground’ through which runs ‘sinuous rills’). This, he stresses from his deconstructionist poetics, has misled readers into thinking that the core content of the poem deals with the creative imagination and aesthetic enthusiasm. This is a typical critical situation which M. H. Abrams’s strong anti-Deconstruction stance has referred to as *construing and deconstructing*. Hogsette can deconstruct Coleridge’s Romantic idealism only through constructing and affirming it. In what turns out to be a criticism of scepticism Hogsette asserts the poem’s failure, arguing that the imaginative and visionary potential that Coleridge seeks is an unobtainable Other from the poet’s self.<sup>31</sup> Thus the text is seen from the second reading strategy proposed in Derridean Deconstruction as non-communicative of any move towards an ideal, since it is self-deconstructive in its metaphysics of presence.

With regard to the question of the Hegelian dialectic that Breuer proposes above, he is of the conviction that it is the consequent result of what he calls the

paradoxical approach that best suits the interpretative context of the poem. His remarks as to whether the poem attains a deep structural unity are worth critically examining, because they throw light on the thrust of our argument. It must have occurred to Coleridge, Breuer holds, that the fragmentary nature of his abandoned 'Kubla Khan' would be the ideal symbol of its perfection. He further argues that the poem has two distinctive features:

On the surface a fragment, in its deep structure complete. In this contradiction, the poem is a symbol of the split of life into thinking and being. Its dialogic construction, its fragmentary nature, the lack of a keystone, all suggest the spirit from which it arose – the dialectical spirit of the interaction between part and whole. (p. 64)

It is obvious that Breuer adopts the Hegelian position he advances, seeing the poem, therefore, as a unified totality. In this context, the text is interpreted as a permanent closure without any further possibility of opening. Reuven Tsur's critical conclusion in *The Road to 'Kubla Khan: A Cognitive Approach* (1987) also values the poem on similar lines to Breuer, advancing the view point that the poem "deals with the irruption of the irrational and of chaos into our rational and ordered world, with a force that is unprecedented in lyric poetry" (p. 95). This kind of interpretation is very characteristic of visionary critics who see most poems as finished entities of self-portrayal. Breuer's and Tsur's interpretative stance is too idealistic, leaving the impression of complete transcendence. Such idealist readings, which see texts as delineating a totality of self, greatly problematise visionary criticism and necessitate re-evaluation. The question of synthesis from a Hegelian perspective that Breuer proposes is rather puzzling and even enigmatic if we assert that Coleridge subsequently wrote several other poems and prose works, demonstrating his usual paradoxical and antithetical thinking. The radical or extremist position advanced on deconstructive grounds only complicates a comprehensive reading and interpretation of Romantic aesthetics and spirituality. Even if 'Kubla Khan' demonstrates the



complexity of critical insight in reading and interpretative processes, enacting deconstructive gestures, it sounds misapprehending to argue that it intentionally explicates Deconstruction. To summarise the argument, while Romantic visionary criticism has often uncritically treated the poem as a quintessential Romantic poem, Deconstruction's extremist position accepts this view only to demonstrate that it is an exemplary piece that delineates the poetics of Deconstruction and therefore is radically subversive to its premised idealism. We therefore, though still adopting a visionary stance, pursue a plausible middle path in the debate, the poetics of becoming.

'Kubla Khan' is an apt exemplification of the antithetical or polarity thinking that strongly characterises Coleridge's notion of the imagination, and, therefore, throws light on the question of becoming – the constant self-transforming process that leads to ultimate reality. Breuer's paradoxical approach could be justifiable as long as the poem is not seen as structurally unified but open-ended. The poem's open-ending engenders the concept of process, therefore, becoming. It is not a demonstration of the limitations of the imagination, it is an expression of the fullness of imaginative experience however momentary or brief. 'Kubla Khan' is an instance of Coleridge's anti-self-consciousness. That is, he is aware not only of imaginative bliss but also the challenges posed to it.

The first two stanzas show Coleridge's exploration of his creative and artistic potential. The sacred river (depicting a continuing and transforming life process), the bright gardens with sinuous rills (delineating fertility), the measureless caverns, the sunless sea, the lifeless sea (suggesting conscious and unconscious processes), the fertile ground, the ceaseless turmoil seething, the pleasure dome, the fountain and caves (depicting a paradisaic realm), and the prophesying of war by ancestral voices, all associate with and capture Coleridge's vast conception of life. They mark both the

signs of chaos, incomprehensibility, but at the same time, order, possibility in transformation and transcendence to spirituality.

Stanza One places emphasis on Kubla Khan and gives the impression that the poet is merely recounting what he seems not to be part of. But as we will realise, the subject matter of the poem is not the historical figure of Kubla Khan, but the poet himself, engaged in a self-reflexive and self-investigative activity, the result being the written poem and the possibility of subsequently composing others.

The last stanza as famous as it is needs citing for convenience sake:

A damsel with a dulcimer  
In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid,  
And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora.  
Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight t'would win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise

(L. 37 – 54)

This last stanza points to the question of self-referentiality, which necessitates our understanding of becoming as an intrinsic quality in Coleridge's poetry. Coleridge's sudden change of emphasis from Kubla Khan to the personal pronouns "I" and "me" shows the intensity of his self-involvement in the creative process. This shift of emphasis validates his self-consciousness of imaginative energy that is deferred, but not a lost ideal. Systematically, we have, "In a vision once I saw: .../Could I revive within me .../ I would build that dome in the air." "Vision" and Mount Abora represent the ideal that is sought for, and "revive within me" suggests a potential that he already

possesses. The reawakening or reactivation of his aesthetic and spiritual potentials will place him in a like manner as Kubla Khan not only to create more poems but also to affirm these potentials for subsequent use. So we can conveniently talk of a deferral of creative inspiration and aesthetic enthusiasm and not of imaginative paucity. The seeming loss of imaginative strength is ironically a resolve to continue in the direction of aesthetic and spiritual achievement. 'Kubla Khan' is certainly not the last and greatest poem that Coleridge composed. It is better to describe it as a transitory poem.

Coleridge can hardly be said to be lamenting imaginative failure in these lines. On the contrary, he is grappling with desire for further inspiration and imaginative exuberance. Denying him the ideal of becoming and the possibility of transcendence and eventual paradisaic communion may sound misjudging and unfair. Seeing the poem as an expression of a psychically distorted personality obviously signals the wrong inspiration and intention behind the poem's composition. Refusing the poem any theoretical and conceptual bases only wrongly help in distancing it from its aesthetic, linguistic and philosophical context. Using Breuer's partitioning model, the two parts of the poem undoubtedly suggest a missing/absent synthesising passage, justifying the open-endedness and, therefore, providing grounds for self-questioning, self-seeking for a final principle, a self-quest for certitude in the ongoing processes in experience. The poem is paradoxical because it succeeds when it seems to fail, because it is simultaneously itself and its mirror image.

'To Matilda Betham: From a Stranger' is one of Coleridge's poems that attract little critical awareness. The interest in the poem lies in some of the Schlegelian and Coleridgean apprehension of the incomprehensibility in nature in conjunction with the workings of the imagination. The excerpt requires close critical interpretation and follows thus:

Poetic feelings, like the stretching boughs

Of mighty oaks, pay homage to the gales,  
Toss in the strong winds, drive before the gust,  
Themselves one giddy storm of fluttering leaves;  
Yet, all the while self-limited, remain  
Equally near the fixed and solid trunk  
Of Truth and Nature in the howling storm,  
As in the calm that stills the aspen grove.  
(L. 34 – 41)

Coleridge's brooding over poetic feelings in the context of storm and strong wind points interestingly to the issue of synchronicity and reconciliation of discordant and opposing elements in nature. The ironic and paradoxical stance here is that there is an organising order in rage and turmoil. The last four lines of the excerpt powerfully capture the awareness of self-limitation but with the desire to remain near the source, probably imaginative and spiritual strength in the corresponding reality of the One "the fixed solid trunk/Of Truth and Nature in the howling storm." This is a reiteration of the notion of organicity, which shows the dynamic nature of self as constantly shifting, but depicting a centrality of focus.

The two dejection poems also delineate the dynamics of Romantic or philosophical irony and justify the aesthetics of becoming. Both poems convey thematic issues that find expression in poems composed before or after their own composition, therefore questioning or even dismissing claims that see them as transitional pieces to Coleridge's orthodox Christian life. That these poems express unhappiness either in terms of domestic despair and agony or imaginative failure to respond to nature, is no longer a contested issue. His sense of remorse as a result of his awareness of poetic and imaginative inability are only a firm statement of the possibility of resolution and restoration, and a reaffirmation of self-reflective and corrective will. The poems, therefore, become great utterances of the paradox and irony in the Romantic mind. The placing of the poems, especially 'Dejection: An Ode,' as part of canonical creative achievement cannot evade the fact that they are

great poems whose subject matter curiously is about the inability to write good poetry because of reasons already stated.

To be treated in greater detail in subsequent chapters it is, nevertheless, necessary to remark that these poems and the slight emphasis of what they treat, point to what Keats was to term negative capability, which he denied to Coleridge. That is, though infused with a sense of emotional, imaginative and spiritual torment and paucity, they are an advanced statement of Coleridge's constructive thinking, highly characterised by openness and empathy. They end unresolved, but with the possibility of resolution and rebirth, substantiating the fact the self is in the process of becoming and not yet achieving final transcendent fixity. If artistic creativity and aesthetic vision is attributed to the imagination as it is undoubtedly with Coleridge, then the imagination is to be apprehended in the poems as fully engaged in the process of self-unfolding with all its characteristic features of the polarities of life and nature.

As it were, therefore, Coleridge has not lost faith in the imaginative possibility or nature. His consciousness can find parallel in any other existent religious and spiritual creed. His faith is rather deepened as he is resolved to hope rather than resign to adverse and frustrating moments of his life. Far from being instances of self-disillusion, self-disability, self-deconstruction, they are hermeneutically rooted expressions of self-confrontation, self-assurance and continuity towards a desired goal. To put it alternatively, the self-textualising aspect of poetry, therefore, far from being an ideal or a finite portrayal of the self, is a partial but constant self-seeking and questing for a certain ideal, in this case the life-long search for fusion with the One.

To recapitulate this chapter, it has been an attempt to understand the complexity and subtle implications of the relation between nature and the different operational contexts of becoming. The chapter has examined the various notions concerning the philosophical and spiritual ramifications of nature from the early Greek

through the Renaissance, Enlightenment to the Romantic era. This has helped in the understanding of Coleridge's understanding and use of natural phenomena in his quest for aesthetic and spiritual vision and reality.

The critical evaluation of certain German and English philosophers puts Coleridge within the mainstream of German idealism and Romanticism, and how he tried to model English Romanticism in connection with them. This has proven vitally important, because it shows how much Coleridge was influenced and the extent to which he adopts his own distinctive position vis à vis these influences. His struggle at uniqueness amidst these influences lends credence to the conviction that Coleridge had an innate and fervent conviction which found expression in existing views all which he tried to incorporate to suit his stance.

Exploring his letters, notebooks, sermons, lectures and prose works, engenders the complex task of tracing Coleridge's consistent philosophical, metaphysical and spiritual enthusiasm and capacity. These letters and the others mentioned above, which are to be considered as important primary resources in their own right rather than mere complementary pieces to Coleridge's poetry, show a strong combination of his views throughout life. His theory of the imagination, which implicates will, symbol and intention, is very important in the understanding of his immanent pantheism and monism which has been argued formed his vision of a redemptive life, embedded in the unorthodox medium of becoming characterised by a constant self-search for the organising principle of life, for the re-diffusion into the Logos. The realms of the imagination and reality, seen from the perspectives of aesthetic as well as metaphysical and spiritual perspectives, show the immense contribution of Coleridge to Romantic and Postromantic thought. But most importantly, they justify his personal and inner search for the most convincing epistemological and ontological outlook of life and experience.

The irony, fragmentation and apparent contradiction inherent in Coleridge's works and life, place them as unfinished instances of self-portrayal and self-textualising processes, therefore justifying the hermeneutic and phenomenological interpretation that the paradoxical and antithetical understanding of the self does not delineate it as a fixed entity, but unfolding in the process of becoming which is not the ultimate reality in itself, but the necessary medium through which the greater reality of the One, I AM or Logos is attained.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is generally held that Coleridge's early mysticism in nature ends in 1802, with 'Dejection: An Ode' being among the last poems in which can be discerned his imaginative failure in nature, and failure in his general idealistic and constructivist philosophy of the imagination. This notion may be misrepresenting or inappropriate. As it will be seen later, this early thought still permeates some of his later poems and letters. Besides, he wrote *Biographia Literaria* (1817) years after this so-called elapse of his poetic and visionary spirit. The contents of this prose work still greatly reverberates the mind of the visionary poems. The question which remains to be thoroughly investigated is whether Coleridge's reversion to Christianity was actually genuine, or it was just in line with his attempts at financial security, or perhaps still, a public strategy to calm public opinion that might have been uncompromising with or hostile to his unorthodox religious character as was the case with most of the Romantics. For instance in a letter to John Thelwall, dated 10 October 1797 Coleridge expresses the desire to take up a job as a Unitarian Minister for purely financial reasons, arguing that he considers this less of an evil than starving his family. He later condemned Pantheism, but nonetheless tried to work out a theological system that showed some affinities to his early thoughts. In Chapter One, under "The Dynamics of Spirit," we have seen Owen Barfield's position in his essay "What Coleridge Thought" (1972), which points to the fact that Coleridge's uniqueness was betrayed by his attempts at reconciling or looking for a common ground with orthodox Christian faith. One can add here that the attempt to run away from himself was paradoxically a self-justification of how much he was attached to his early unorthodox thoughts. Ronald Wendling, in *Coleridge's Progress to Christianity: Experience and Authority in Religious Faith* (1996), also analyses the differences that Coleridge's supposed Christianity had from the mainstream theology that underlie it. James Cutsinger (1983), Robert Barth (1989), Douglas Kenning (1998), and Martin Priestman (1999) have aired out similar views though with different emphases, (see Chapter One).

<sup>2</sup> Excerpted from Emile Brehier's *Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century*, 1967. P. 15. Further references here will be made under the title *Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century*.

<sup>3</sup> *Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ferelon, the French philosopher, described with precision the scope and nature of the Deist movement, "The great vogue of the free thinkers of our time is not to follow the system of Spinoza. They credit themselves with acknowledging God as the Creator whose wisdom is evident in his works; but,

according to them, God would be neither good nor wise if he had given man a free will – that is, the power to sin, to turn away from his final goal, to reverse the order and be forever lost... By adhering to a system that eliminates any real freedom, they divest themselves of any merit, blame, or hell; they admire God without fearing him, and they live without remorse, swayed one way and then another by passions,” *Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> This article is excerpted from Maureen Roberts *The Diamond Path: Individuation as Soul-making in Romanticism and the works of Keats* (1998). For direct access to the article, see Jung Circle. Other very important works of the same theme by the author are, “‘Ethereal Chemicals:’ Alchemy and the Romantic Imagination,” (1997) *Romanticism on the Net* 5, <http://www.jungcircle.com/robertm5.html> and “The Axial Shamanic Self: Cross-connecting Spirit and Soul in Shamanism, Art and Life,” (1998) <http://www.jungcircle.com/self.html> Related studies on the subject include Ross Woodman, “Shaman, Poet, Failed Initiate: Reflections on Romanticism and Jungian Psychology” (1980), and Elémire Zolla, “The Poet as Myth-Maker and Shaman” (1986).

<sup>6</sup> American Romanticism and Transcendentalism owe much to English Romanticism. Representative writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman articulated most of what had characterised the philosophical and dissenting religious atmosphere in England. Emerson visited England and was guest to Coleridge and Wordsworth, who had a great literary and intellectual influence on him. Like Coleridge, he preached as a Unitarian Minister, lectured widely and had a characteristic eloquence. His works, “Nature,” (1836), “Divinity School Address” (1838), “Self-Reliance”(1841), and “The Over-Soul” (1841), carry a lot of Wordsworthian and particularly Coleridgean influence. He too was to abandon any form of organised religion, which he condemned and accused of concentrating on economic and historical preferences rather than the essential religious and spiritual needs of the individual that could be strongly expressed in personal potential through the process of individuation.

<sup>7</sup> William Blake, *Letters*. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. (1980), p. 9. In *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* Blake associates the child with nature and spiritual and divine consciousness, stressing that any wholesomeness of self must entail a constant attempt to reconcile the innocence, high visionary and spiritual potential of childhood with the experience and corrupt vision of adulthood. Only such a move at blending can ensure a stability and unity in the personality.

<sup>8</sup> Godwin insisted on the visionary aspect of the imagination if one were to enjoy and apprehend the invisible but existing beauty in things. In *The Pantheon: Or Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome*, he advocated the already discussed Greek sensibility and wrote that, “The human mind does not have a landscape without life and without soul; we are delighted to talk to the objects around us, and to feel as if they understood and sympathised with us: we create by the power of fancy, a human form and a human voice in those scenes, which to a man of literal understanding may appear dead or lifeless.” This excerpt is extracted from John Barnard’s *John Keats* (1989), p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> The persistent characteristic feature in criticism that has segmented the lives of both Wordsworth and Coleridge with regard to their early and late works, is becoming problematic. That the poets were visionary and idealistic in youth and then became conservative and orthodox in old age is a contention that needs careful re-evaluation. Coleridge’s case will be examined here and in Chapter Three.

<sup>10</sup> Though it is the same Coleridge who wrote his epitaph styling himself a poet, it is undeniable that philosophy permeates all his writings. So the expression best describes him.

<sup>11</sup> Coleridge was acquainted with much of eighteenth century essays, paintings and poems on picturesque beauty and qualified notions of the sublime. The qualified terms meant observing and describing nature with a rational emphasis. The meditative and contemplative aspects of such descriptions had not found expression, or if at all, not with the renovating metaphysical and spiritual emphasis of the Romantics. Like most of the Romantics, Coleridge was to add this dimension to it, attributing, as it were, this metaphysical and spiritual character. This is an important aspect when discussing Coleridge’s pantheism and even British philosophy, which had and perhaps is still very rationalistic rather than idealist. Anne Mellor’s “Coleridge’s ‘This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison’ and the Categories of English Landscape,” *Critical Essays* (1994, pp. 124 - 139), lists a number works which describe nature from a quantitative perspective; William Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picaresque Beauty and Essay on Picaresque Beauty* (1792), Sir Uvedale Price, *Essay on the Picaresque* (1794), William Brooks, *Mounts Bay, Cornwall* (1795). Coleridge’s poetry and philosophy of nature



gives a metaphysical quality that is absent in these works. One should note also that Coleridge read much of William Collins, Thomas Gray, and James Thomson who have always been classified as pre-Romantic poets.

<sup>12</sup> The struggle of reconciling the self with the outer world is not unconnected to the myth of Narcissism. Initially delineating a process of self-absorption and arrogance, it is now appropriated by modern depth psychology to characterise personal traits and pathologies originating in early psychic development. As a theoretical interest in the implications of psyche's narcissistic desire, it began as the Romantic's speculations on subjectivity, and lofty attempts to unite conceptually and artistically, the spirit of the psyche with that which is other or, external, the case of this investigation being nature. Narcissism is inter-implicated with solipsism whose interest in inwardness and self-hood has more philosophical grounds rather than a psychoanalytical perspective. For further reading on the subject see Harold Bloom, "Internalisation of Quest-Romance" (1970), Geoffrey Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness" (1970), Charles J. Rzepka, *The Self as Mind* (1986), Stephen Bygrave, *Coleridge and the Self: Romantic Egotism* (1986), Jeffrey Adams and Eric William (Eds.) *Mimetic Desire: Essays on Narcissism in German Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism* (1995); (Richard Critchfield's review of this work can be found in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. Vol. 96 (1997), pp. 423 – 425) and Eric Yu's "Romantic Alienation Reconsidered" (1999).

<sup>13</sup> For further reading the following sources can be consulted: Edward Moore, "Plotinus" and "Neoplatonism," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/p/plotinus/htm> and <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/n/neoplato.htm> respectively, 2001. Also see Sawicki Marianne, "Edmund Husserl" (1859 – 1938), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/h/husserl.htm> 2001, and Paul Harrison, "A History of Pantheism and Scientific Pantheism" (1997).

<sup>14</sup> The following are some sources which illuminatingly handle some of the subtleties concerning German idealist philosophy in connection with Coleridge's thought: G. N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism: A Study in the History of Philosophy with Unpublished Material from Coleridge's Manuscripts* (1969), Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), particularly the introductory section, "Coleridge and Philosophical Originality" (pp. Xxiii – xi), and Chapter One "The Problem of Coleridge's Plagiarism" (pp. 1 – 52), Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (1980), Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (1985), Frederick Burwick, "Coleridge, Schlegel, and Animal Magnetism," *English and German Romanticism: Cross-Currents and Controversies* (1985), Julie Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism. Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (1994), particularly Chapter Two, "Coleridge's German Revolution: Schiller's *Wallenstein*" (pp. 63 – 93), Mary Anne Perkins, *Coleridge's Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle* (1994), Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (1997), Erna Oesch, "The Symbolic Absolute: Friedrich Schelling's Idea of Knowledge and its Impact on Romantic Hermeneutics" (1998), Hans Werner Breunig, "Some Considerations Concerning the Influence of German Idealism on S. T. Coleridge" (1998), Simon Malpas, "In What Sense "Communitas"?" Kantian Aesthetics and Romantic Ideology" (2000), and David Farrell Kneale, *Contagion Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (1998), *Coleridge, Schiller and Aesthetic Education* (2000).

<sup>15</sup> For example in a letter written to Thomas Poole dated 20 November 1798, Coleridge indicates that he was quite aware of Kant before going to Göttingen. He claims to have found himself among outright Kantians, "All are Kantians who I have met with" (*Letters I*, P. 444). There is no doubt that Kant held his attention for some time, but as to whether this was lasting can be determined largely by his critique on Kant or the affinities that literary or philosophical discourse discern between them. Raimonda Modiano holds that Kant, Schelling and Steffens had the greatest impact on Coleridge. Hans Werner Breunig in the article above is of the conviction that it is Kant and not Schelling who implanted a strong mark on Coleridge (p. 196). Coleridge translated Schiller's *Wallenstein*, and there is still controversy as to whether he attended Schiller's lectures while he was in Germany. Julie Carlson, however, in the chapter of her work stated above, thinks that Schiller is the key figure or main channel of Coleridge's entry and immersion in German idealism. The real answer to the main questions here would largely depend on the specific context in which Coleridge is viewed and interpreted.

<sup>16</sup> Coleridge's criticism of Berkeley as having failed to provide an abiding place for his philosophy is recorded in his 1804 notebook entry (*Coleridge's Notebooks I*, p. 1842), and can be found in Thomas McFarland's *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1869) pp. 158 – 159, 300 – 303.

<sup>17</sup> Expression quoted by Hans Werner Breunig, “The Influence of German Idealism on S. T. Coleridge,” p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, David Farrell Kneel’s *Contagion, Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (1998), pp. 35 – 70. There is no complete and available copy of his work in English, but his basic ideas share an affinity with most of his German counterparts, especially on the concept of nature and self. He however adds a dimension to his analyses that introduces the question of nature, poetry, imagination and psychopathology. It is important to add here that Novalis’s influence was felt greatly in American Transcendentalism/Romanticism than might have been the case in England. He is also very common in French philosophical circles.

<sup>19</sup> Romantic fragmentation, irony, and contradiction, however diverse they might have been in Romantic thinking, were founded on a philosophy that was dominantly idealistic and constructivist rather than empirical and deconstructive. Modern and postmodern literary criticism, especially Deconstruction which we have seen in the previous chapter as resisting any visionary or metaphysical construction of concept or self, takes the notion to fit into its philosophy of irony, ambivalence, and aporias, and within the context of resistance to theory or method as clues to interpreting and analysing, and arriving at meaningful conclusions on literary texts. Within this context, one can understand their poetics, but in trying to apply it to Romantic thinking without giving due allowance to the different philosophical dispositions that underlie it, may degenerate to what one may call the poetics of philosophical or theoretical imperialism. While one, for example, can connect the fragmentation of Eliot or Pound with Romantic fragmentation, they are written and represent two eras with different literary and as well as historical and philosophical considerations.

<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive reading of Schlegel and Hegel in connection with English Romanticism see, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (1974), Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (1980), particularly Chapter One, “The Paradigm of Romantic Irony,” pp. 3 – 30, Elémire Zolla, “The Poet as Myth-Maker and Shaman,” (1986), Peter L. Thorslev, JR, “Dialectic and its Legacy” (1989) John Beer, “Fragmentations and Ironies,” (1995), Tilottama Rajan, “Phenomenology and Romantic Theory,” (1995), *Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology* (1995), and Peter Zima, *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002), particularly “Kant, Hegel and Derrida: The (Non-)Conceptual Beautiful,” pp. 2 – 8, and “Friedrich Schlegel’s Romanticism: Deconstruction Avant la Lettre,” pp. 8 - 12. The last three authors apply the metaphysics of Schlegel and Hegel within the context of their poetics of Deconstruction. Peter Zima, nevertheless, concedes to the Romantic thinking of the Schlegels, stressing that their basic tenets are irreconcilable with the poetics of Deconstruction even if one to find certain affinities between them and Deconstruction (p. 11). Most of the excerpts of Schlegel here are drawn from Mellor’s work, where she discusses works such as *Dialogue on Poetry, On Incomprehensibility, On the Limits of the Beautiful, Lyceum or Critical Fragments*, and *Athenaeum Fragments*. In this regard acknowledgement and indebtedness go to her.

<sup>21</sup> In connection with the question of symbol Paul Tillich in his *Theology of Culture* (1959), had expressed the view that every symbol opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate ... But in order to do this, he stressed, something else must be opened up – namely levels of the soul, levels of our interior reality. And these levels must correspond to the levels in exterior reality which are opened up by a symbol. He, therefore, saw symbol as two-edged, which opens up reality and opens up the soul. Peter Berek in “Interpretation, Allegory, and Allegories” (1975) discusses symbolism as a literary resource based on a metaphysical assumption: the assumption that there exists an order of being inaccessible to the analytical mind and inexpressible in discursive logical language. He asserts that for the symbolist the imagination is the synecdoche for the transcendent. Both positions, like the one we have adopted, point to an aspect of symbol discourse that goes beyond its mere aesthetic denotations.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Cooke offers one of the most interesting comments on the question of will. In *The Romantic Will* (1978) Cooke sees will as a complex phenomenon of thought and behaviour in connection with the act of being, and examines the concept from a number of perspectives. He discusses the philosophical implications of the concept, evaluating the ideas of philosophers like of Schiller, Jakob Boehme, and Schopenhauer. He then enunciates the term in relation to English Romantic poetry, seeing each of the poets as manifesting the multivariate connotations attributed to it. For example he sees Byron’s use of will as expressing the spirit of Romantic self-assertion variously categorised as lawless, headlong and defiant; the Byronic Hero, for instance. With regard to Coleridge’s use of will, Cooke interprets it as an

expression both of self-conscious acts, and as pointing to the autonomous powers of the will without the poet's consciousness.

With regard to the question of subjectivity and authorial intention, the question of will comes again to the fore. A number of studies have investigated the ramifications and slippery nature of these concepts. We have for example Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (1994) and "Poets Who Revise, Poets Who Don't, and Critics Who Should (Issues of Authorship Seen in the Works of Keats and Coleridge)" (1996), Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (1996), Andrea Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity 1774 – 1830* (1996), Theresa Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (1997) and Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Postromantic Writing* (1997). Andrea Henderson, for example, sees the concept of subjectivity as being characterised by several representations rather than just the notion that it has to do with the visionary quality of the poets' self-will in the mystical experience of the imagination. There are different types of subjectivity ranging from cultural, gender to religious variants. Stillinger proposes a pluralistic editorial policy, arguing from a deconstructive standpoint that all the revised texts of Coleridge give independent and even unrelated readings. His emphasis stresses the shift from the self as subject to language as subject. Leader investigates the question of Romantic self-hood and revision, proposing an antithesis to Stillinger's stance. Favouring a monolithic editorial perspective, he insists that revised editions of poems do not alter the original meaning or inspiration behind them. He strongly advocates authorial intention, though he uncritically sees the aversion to editing as the maintenance of an unflawed identity and integrity (p. 115). He concludes with a paradoxical tone, that while it is hard to conceive of a writer more realistic with regard to the difficulties of achieving a coherent self, it is also difficult to imagine a writer who strove so tenaciously to produce such an entity (p. 163). Clark, on his part, associates the theory of inspiration in Romantic discourse with the imagination, arguing that the crisis of subjectivity may point to a deconstructionist tendency, but is principally concerned with the question of a self-seeking solution for the harmonisation of the individual in face of complexities.

<sup>23</sup> A characteristic trait in Coleridge's poetic and prose writings is the attribution of upper case letters to certain words or the italicising of them. With regard to the former, one may suspect the influence on Coleridge of German language which capitalises all nouns. But such distinctions apply to the specificity and emphasis with which he used terms. Beauty/Beautiful as well as many we have already come across show that the meaning attributed to the terms goes beyond the normal understanding that daily language gives them.

<sup>24</sup> For a further reading on the Romantic and visionary implications of the breeze in English Romantic poetry see M. H. Abrams' insightful *The Corresponding Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (1984), particularly Chapter Two, "The Corresponding Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor" pp. 25 – 43.

<sup>25</sup> Coleridge's seems to lend credence himself to the position that insists that he is Christian because he refers to his mind as unregenerate, and his philosophy as vain, giving the impression that he belongs to the family of Christ. This is not to be taken uncritically because the main trend or core of his philosophy clearly shows that the last stanza of the poem points to a circumstantial reaction, very common in Coleridge rather than the deep and self-convincing mysticism and spirituality inherent in his thought.

<sup>26</sup> The orb is a circle encompassing the light of the sun and signifies the Romantic affiliation of light with translucence and spirituality. This symbol which is very recurrent in Coleridge also finds expression in Keats's poetry, particularly in 'Endymion' where the orb will be examined as a symbol of the spark of divinity that one can discover in themselves as a consequent result of spiritual individuation. The rook can be connected with the image of the phoenix, which has come to symbolise burning without being consumed. The philosophical and spiritual implication of this is that Coleridge is conscious of it as representative of the notion of continuity which must be characterised by a mixture of despair, frustration, limitation, but at the same time reflective, meditative and spiritual fertility of the mind.

<sup>27</sup> Excerpted from Reeves' introduction of his edition of selected poems of Coleridge, 1971, p. xxxiv.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Holmes's well documented accounts of Coleridge's life in *Coleridge: Early Visions* (1989) and *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (1999), give an objective picture of Coleridge's last days. In the latter work the biographer/critic relays the former in a continued effort to clarify certain misconstrued and misleading portions of the poet's life. He provides substantial and very convincing information on the last hours of Coleridge, insisting that he died in serenity and expressed no regret about his lifelong search for the uniting principle of life. Though Coleridge had made arrangements for his post-corporeal

life, and even wrote his own epitaph indicating that he was a Christian poet, he increasingly talked about his deep seated convictions on nature, creativity, and spirituality as expressed in his major poetry.

<sup>29</sup> For a recapitulation on the issue see Chapter One, particularly “Subverting Visionary Romanticism: (De)Construction.”

<sup>30</sup> This notion is not unconnected with Schlegel’s position on fragmentation, incomprehensibility and the attempt at order and wholeness. Schlegel expressed the view that Romantic irony can extend both irony and poetry to include all life and perception: “There are unavoidable situations and relationships that one can tolerate only by transforming them by some courageous act of will and seeing them as pure poetry. It follows that all cultivated people should be capable of being poets if they have to be; and from this we can deduce equally well that man is by nature a poet, and that there is a natural poetry, or vice versa.” Coleridge’s hermeneutics on the poet in ideal perfection presupposes any person in general who has both the enthusiasm and capacity for transcendence and spirituality. The reconciliation of disagreeables and opposites to recreate confirm the strand of thought that is common to the Romantic paradoxical philosophy.

<sup>31</sup> Hogsette’s arguments bring to mind two renowned critics, Anne Mellor and Thomas McFarland, who in previous criticism have shared related concerns with the question of imaginative achievement. In her discussion of ‘Kubla Khan’ in *English Romantic Irony* (1980), Mellor holds that the poem offers hermeneutic readings that show the imagination as unifying principle, but the very unity is undermined by the disruptive forces of self-doubt, mortality, and rationality seen most clearly in the melancholy and poetic longing in the final stanza. To Mellor, Coleridge leaves the antithetical positions unreconciled, the result being an ironic duality characteristic of Romantic irony (pp. 155 – 159). We need not overemphasise our critique on Mellor’s position, which does not provide any further clues to understanding the philosophical implications of her stance that becoming is the ultimate reality. It should again be reminded that she refuses to attribute this notion in Coleridge, her reason being reflected in McFarland’s arguments. McFarland on his path recognises the issue of fragmentation. In *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (1981) he terms fragmentation “diasparaction” (p. 4), arguing that fragmentation is not an accidental component in Romanticism, but a constitutive part of its core contents. Chapter Five of his work, “A Complex Dialogue: Coleridge’s Doctrine of Polarity and its European Contexts” grapples with McFarland’s intimation that Coleridge always placed his system in the future, given the ironic and fragmentary nature of his letters, notebooks, poems, lectures, talks and prose works. But he warns that oppositional thinking does not imply a transcendent resolution (p. 339). With specific regard to ‘Kubla Khan,’ he inclines to a psychological reading, positing the premise that Coleridge was an emotionally unstable poet who undermined and disclaimed his poem by writing the preface so as to avoid the psychological pain of negative criticism (pp. 104 – 36, 225). So if the poem makes any statement or has any interpretative value about Coleridge, it is a veiled expression of his disturbed, guilt-ridden and neurotic life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PSYCHOLOGICAL RETROSPECTION AND INTROSPECTION: THE SELF IN TIME

And when  
Our trance had left us, oft have we, by aid  
Of the impression which it left behind,  
Looked inward on ourselves, and learned, perhaps,  
Something of what we are. Nor in those hours  
Did we destroy  
The original impression of delight,  
But by such high retrospect it was recalled  
To yet a second and a second life,  
While in this excitation of the mind  
A vivid pulse of sentiment and thought  
Beat palpably within us, all shades  
Of consciousness were ours.

(William Wordsworth)

Exister c'est donc être son présent, mais  
C'est aussi être son passé et ses souvenirs.

(Georges Poulet: *Etudes sur le Temps Humain*)

The main concern of this chapter is a critical re-evaluation of the dynamics of personality in Coleridge with regard to the dynamics of becoming, the focus being the question of the developing and transforming self from childhood through youth to adulthood. Central to this chapter, therefore, is the operational capacity of the imagination with regard to memory, recollection, mysticism and transcendence. This is a domain in Coleridge's writings that has not attracted the depth of analyses that are characteristic of the readings and interpretations of Wordsworthian or Blakean texts. Coleridge's work evinces the same concern as Wordsworth and Blake. The quest for wholeness here is captured by the awareness of the seeming disunity of self, apprehended as a breach that stands between childhood and adulthood. Coleridge's intuitive power provides a basis for the bridging of the self and the engendering of hope, whereby a more mature and philosophical outlook of life is apprehended. This chapter will debunk and reconstruct the myth which has constantly seen

Coleridge's life as characterised by two phases, the one involving his visionary potential, and the other depicting the failing or futile nature of this ideal. The argument as indicated will be that Coleridge demonstrates a consistency of the self's struggle towards harmony despite difficulties. The question of becoming therefore places an entirely new emphasis in reading his texts as delineating his self not as irreparably split but as a conscious construct amidst difficulties through time.

The concept and theorisation of childhood is a canonical theme in Romantic poetry. The intriguing question has always been centred around the critical implications of this theme. Most of the Romantics grappled with the issue, but Blake and especially Wordsworth and Coleridge stand distinct in having explored the dynamics of the transforming self, their subject matter seen as a self-textualising, which is engaged in a process that points towards its own resolution, its reaffirmation of the possibility to restore lost visionary and spiritual gleam. Following the concept of becoming, self-assurance and unity is not possible without the creation of a context that gives meaning and significance to past experiences. Coleridge must have understood that any attempt at sidelining the past or trying to run away from its realities would only lead to self-deception and unresolved conflict. The interpretative context in this chapter, therefore, sees the self from a hermeneutic and phenomenological position as a dynamic rather than a fixed entity. Self-consciousness becomes a situation where memory plays a therapeutic role in the attempt and struggle at self-healing, Coleridge strongly believing that innate knowledge is intuitively holistic.

Though there is substantial evidence in his poetry and other writings to evince his struggle at self-synthesis as a goal in becoming, it remains curious and even disturbing that many of Coleridge's poems have not attracted much careful critical examination on the issue, and where this has been the case, it has often been characterised by a negative hermeneutic and phenomenological context, usually within the interpretative sphere of psychoanalysis. This approach has constantly problematised Coleridge's stance, refusing any positive

apprehension of the dynamics of the self as a questing process for wholeness of personality, largely interpreting him as expressing unresolved mental conflicts. As we will see, only 'Frost at Midnight' and to an extent 'Dejection: An Ode' have been singled out and widely discussed with regard to the dynamics of self in time. This chapter resists this reductive attitude and extends the corpus to reaffirm an ideal that most critics have unfairly denied him. New Historicism excludes the psychology of self in its cultural and historical preferences, interpreting Coleridge only from within the larger ideological context of his work rather than his individuation. It treats individualism not from a visionary viewpoint, but rather from within the context of economics and trade, whereby the individual as subject is for the specific purpose of the commercialisation of individual property, in this context written works.

Deconstruction has also on its part resisted the concept of the self as subject in poetry, arguing from the premise that there is nothing possibly apprehensible in Coleridge with regard to the ideal of self-construction in poetic or prose texts. Yet Coleridge's poetry and philosophy lend ample credence to the fact that he achieved a good degree of success in his struggle not only to reconcile his self with nature, but equally to come to terms with the two major phases of his life and to unify them, however difficult a task this proved to be. This success does not mean that the poems that illustrate it portray a completely harmonised personality. On the contrary, the poems fall within the limelight of prefiguring the certainty of subsequent self-unity, which can be appropriated with the philosophy of becoming. It should be recalled that the few visionary critics who have discussed the matter, have always misinterpreted the question of self-seeking for harmony, considering some of Coleridge's poems as a great achievement of his aspiration, that is, portraying the self as having attained complete harmony, and treating others as a futility to achieve this visionary ideal. In this vein, they ascertain the claims of deconstructionist critics who strongly hold that Coleridge's later poetry is a deconstruction of his idealist philosophy in his early poetry. Our contention is that memory and recollection engender aesthetic creativity, and transcendental and spiritual

assurance. Both operate and temporally restore the poet with a sense of renewed hope rather than the sense of the completeness of totality of achievement.

In what follows, we are going to discuss the concept of the myth of childhood in Romantic poetry, beginning with a retrospective overview of the notion in pre-Romantic times. Next will be a critical examination of the dominantly Freudian psychoanalytical bases of Coleridge's embattled psychic life, which seems to be the most flourishing interpretation of his life and poetry, and which is highly connected with the poetics of Deconstruction, and finally textual analyses involving Coleridge's self-written life; the poetics of objective self-mirroring and investigation, sublimation in the Other with regard to memory and poético-therapeutic experience, all these within the interpretative context of the philosophy of the dynamics of becoming. We are also going to attempt a brief critical perspective on Coleridge's narcissistic self and character. These are the major concerns of the chapter, which do not exclude other inextricably linked issues like influences on Coleridge, for example, David Hartley, Plato and a host of others.

### **THE MYTH OF CHILDHOOD IN ENGLISH ROMANTICISM: ROMANTICISING CHILDHOOD**

The question of childhood is an issue of immense scope and complexity, involving multi-layered meanings and conceptualisations. Only within a specified context can a possible understanding of the term be arrived at. Given the complex and subtle interweaving of social, cultural, religious and philosophical paradigms, the different discourses of childhood prove to be incredibly difficult. Yet it is an established conviction that it is an important and very intricate phase of the developmental stages, both psychic and somatic of the human personality. The claim here is not an exhaustive investigation into a field where much has been done. But it is necessary to make a retrospect to situate the context of treating Coleridge's texts.



Plato saw and analysed childhood from within the perspective of his epistemological and ontological concerns with pre- and post-existence. He saw the child as a deep well or source from which knowledge had to be drawn. So his philosophy of recollection posits an argument according to which the child grows to discover its inborn or ingrained qualities and potentials during the knowledge-acquiring process. His accounts of the theory of the soul is a combination of philosophy and myth. Like Socrates, he expounded the immortality of the soul, arguing that the soul is believed to have existed before its reunion with the body. This is certainly a philosophical position that carries some Plotinian strain, especially with regard to the transcendental and spiritual notion of emanation. This theory was in complete contrast to the materialistic Atomists who were championed by Aristotle. Plato's theory of ideas and its application to the acquisition of knowledge, presupposes the doctrine of pre-existence, a position justifying the soul's pre-natal intuition. What is important to gather in the general argument here is that Plato and later Neo-Platonists consider knowledge and the development of consciousness as principally concerned with recollection, with memory being a very pivotal aspect of the process.<sup>1</sup>

The views of Plato were rejected by eighteenth-century philosophers like John Locke, whose empirical and strongly held rational views about children were in conformity with the austerity of the church. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in fact, saw the child as half-articulate and empty, as a miniature human being that had to be nurtured and, trained under very stringent circumstances if any good was expected of it at all. Locke's idea of the *tabula rasa* formed the basic model on which childhood theories of education were to be formulated, with other thinkers like Thomas Hobbes basing their arguments on the same rational and empirical lines.

With the advent of and even during the Industrial Revolution the curriculum of most British schools was a kind of dehumanising machinery that reduced children almost to animals. But within this very era, no doubt, there were already advocates of children's rights

as will be examined later. During the Industrial Revolution it became normal to use children as factory workers. The educational system which was to continue into the second half of the nineteenth century and even after as can be seen in Charles Dickens's works did nothing but drill children to be fit for factory work.

With regard to children's literature most works were based on a rigid puritanical instruction. Prior to what has come to be known as the Wordsworthian era, basically the First Generation phase of the Romantic period, there had been literature for children. In the seventeenth century, for example, the Puritan Minister James Janeway (1636 – 1674) wrote the famous *A Token for Children* (1671 – 1672), and in the following century Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748) came up with *The Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1720), followed by the Presbyterian Anna Letitia Aikin (Mrs. Barbauld) (1743 – 1825) with *Devotional Pieces* (1775), *Lessons for Children* (1778), and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781).<sup>2</sup>

To understand these works is to understand the religious and social environment from which they sprang. Based on the Calvinistic tradition with its doctrine of election and original sin, all these writers held radical views that saw the child as born in a sinful state and therefore needing to be imbued with religious knowledge. In line with his Puritan theology Watts was committed to the austere religious education of children and structured songs from childhood to youth, and composed prayers that would keep the children in a permanent spiritual state. He saw verse as the best way to engender and foster memory and recollection, as a sound base of morality, giving thought a divine turn and raising meditation. In fact, his mission was for the catechising of children.

Very interesting in the works of these authors also was the parallel that they drew between nature and God's grandeur. The songs and hymns are fused with natural imagery. Watts, for example, in Song No 2 'Praise for Creation and Providence' (*Divine Songs*) and Song No 3 'The Rose' (*Moral Songs*), underscored the significance of God in His creation and advised children to delight in nature. Barbauld's Hymns 4, 5, and 11 use natural imagery

as a focus for awareness and celebration of God. Children were to see the Creator in the visible appearance of the world. This kind of edenic atmosphere was to keep them spiritually alert in the purity of natural landscape. Nature, it must be said, was not regarded in a spiritual light, that is, in the pantheist and monistic light in which some of the Romantics were to perceive it. The vital message behind natural scenery was the creator God. So far, the status of the child was that of a mere receptor, its consciousness being determined by the religious and spiritual circumstances of its birth and upbringing. With the advent of Romanticism a great revolution was to happen, triggering a completely new outlook on the notion of childhood and its antecedents.

The Romantics, particularly Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, were to a great extent on the hitherto suppressed Platonian and Neo-Platonist side of the debate. The church-oriented and socially based concept of the child was altered, not in the sense that the child was not considered in religious and/or spiritual issues, but that it was conceived to be born with spiritual potentials, and was therefore an example of an ideal spiritual life. The child became a source of artistic inspiration and creativity, and also a measure of transcendental and spiritual possibility. In fact, the child was idealised as a symbol of purity, innocence and holiness, it was individualised with a recognised distinctive voice of its own.

As early as 1762 Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778), very much associated with Romanticism, wrote the revolutionary work entitled *Emile, or On Education* in which he strongly challenged existing and prevalent notions of the child and its place in the social set up. Its influential impact was based on the reversal of the orthodox concept of man born as a sinner. On the contrary he claimed that children are born “naturally good,” pointing to the society as responsible for the deprivation of these qualities in its austere method of children conception and treatment. Rousseau was a source of inspiration to most early Romantics. In an important letter that he wrote Malesherbes, another contemporary French philosopher, in the very year of the publication of *Emile* Rousseau articulated what has come to be very

important about Romantic ironic thinking and its connection with this endeavour. This is cited in Emile Bréhier's *The History of Philosophy* (1967):

If all my dreams had been realised, I would still have been dissatisfied; I would have imagined, desired, dreamed, desired again. I found within me an inexplicable void which nothing could have filled, a certain aspiration after another source of enjoyment which I had not yet envisioned but which I sensed to be indispensable. Well! That itself was sheer delight, for through me surged a strong emotion and an enticing sadness which I could not have wished to miss. .... My heart confined within the limits of beings, found them too narrow; I was suffocating in the universe and longed to leap into infinity. (p. 175)

This excerpt points to the prefiguring of the antithetical nature of Romantic thought, justifying the premise of the philosophy of becoming since the self is never seen as a fixed entity but as a continuous and transforming process with an envisaged goal of final fusion through transcendence. Coleridge's case, whether with his life-long broodings over nature or the dynamics of the personality in the context of the developing individual, convincingly affiliates with Rousseau's idea. The cult of childhood was seen from two distinctive but inextricably correlated points, the observation of children on the one hand, and the lives of the poets as children. The Wordsworthian dictum "The child is father of the man" brought in a new wave of philosophical and even metaphysical emphasis which reversed the thought of the previous writers. The child became the moral and spiritual basis for the life of the poet whose complete personality would not do without this phase of his existence.

William Blake saw himself as a social reformer, and in line with this dedicated a significant part of his poetry to this theme of childhood. Writing against the dehumanising and spiritless nature of the Industrial Revolution, Blake advocated the rights of children who were victims of capitalism. Child labour and exploitation was common in the utilitarian and capitalistic atmosphere of the time, and the church very hypocritically only helped to justify the vicious treatment of children since it did nothing about it. Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* treat a wide range of issues, the most important which saw the child in Christ-like glory, and his philosophy of a complete man was based on a reconciliation of innocence

and experience whose result was a higher state of consciousness. Blake was also to infuse natural imagery in his poetry, in which he made comparisons between children and the beauty embodied in nature, and to an extent spiritualised nature.

Wordsworth has rightly been called the poet of childhood, because among the Romantics he was the one to have laid the greatest emphasis and explored the theme from a variety of perspectives, aesthetic, philosophical, psychological and spiritual. Though it is curious enough that he did not write for a children's audience, he is reputed to best represent childhood literature not only during his era but after. Perhaps this is because he was not interested in real children, but only in childhood as a symbol. This position is rather delicate and will largely depend on the interpretative context of his writings. The romanticising of childhood preoccupied the greatest part of his poetry which can be seen in his observation of his children, other children and most importantly his recollection of his own childhood. With regard to the relation of nature, the child and man, he posited a new philosophy which saw all these components as spiritual and interrelated entities in the sphere of the associative and synthesising powers of the imagination, a view that was certainly unorthodox to any existing theological view of the time.

In a poem like 'We are Seven' we see the power of observation, affection and understanding of Wordsworth of the distinctiveness of the child whose deep spiritual consciousness almost baffles him. To understand the context of the poem, the lyrical I begins with a question:

--A simple child,  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death?

Wordsworth then presents his encounter with the eight year old girl. The girl's answer to his question on how many children make up its family shows the girl's intuitive spirituality. Though two of the seven children are dead, the girl persistently holds that they are seven even

if the souls of the departed two are in heaven, “‘T was throwing words away; for still/The little maid would have her will,/And say, ‘Nay, we are seven!’” What is important here is not the question as to whether the context is real or it is a symbolic instance that Wordsworth deploys to communicate the concept of childhood. That the little child is conscious of immortality shows the ingrained spiritual quality at its birth. In ‘Michael’ and ‘Anecdote for Father’ one can interpret Wordsworth’s express sympathy with the natural love of parents for their children, which may not be unconnected with his own status as a father. In ‘My Heart leaps Up’ or alternatively called ‘The Rainbow,’ ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ and *The Prelude* we see the poet objectively or subjectively grappling with his own childhood and what it means for him as a man. These poems undoubtedly evince the notion of becoming as Wordsworth is very conscious of the self as a progressive entity. For instance in the “Immortality Ode” he says:

Our birth is but a sleep and forgetting:  
 The soul that rises with us, our life’s star,  
     Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
     And cometh from afar:  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 And not in utter nakedness.  
    (L. 56 – 64)

His point of reference is no doubt the Neo-Platonist philosophy of pre- and post-existence clearly encapsulated in the title of the former poem and characteristic of the contents of the latter. They are an instance of self-mirroring and self-textualisation, the poet being his own subject matter and concern for investigation.

All these poems point to the psychological and spiritual investigations of the phases of his childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. The concept of self-textualising, however, does not suppose that a complete resolution for the quest of self-unification and self-redemption is achieved. It points to the unquestionable fact that the self is dynamic and constantly subject to various kinds of changes. In other words, the portrayal of the self is not a final statement

about its quest and achievement for harmony, but a desire to have a certain degree of self-certainty while conscious of it as organic and unstable.

The poems depict a new way of consciousness, portraying the poet as a source of inspiration, the notion of the self as subject taking priority of place. Nature forcefully comes in as it is the base for the poet's self-consciousness, pointing to a major shift from the parent or church as principal determinants towards education and knowledge to physical landscape and elemental imagery such as the sun, the moon and the stars. The psychology of recollective memory and retrospection and introspection becomes pivotal as it engenders an associative process of the imagination that occasions a kind of self-dialectics resulting in self-discovery, self-unification and self-redemption, the desired goal of the poet.

Coleridge, as we will see in detail later, pursued Wordsworthian lines, or shared almost the same affinities with him, showing his psychological and philosophical apprehension of the distinctive phases of life. 'Frost at Midnight' portrays him not only as an observer of children (in this instance his own child), but as a mediator on his life in connection with that of his son. The indeterminate child in 'To an Infant Child' also captures and conveys the same concern. His anxieties, fears and hopes point to the idealised and romanticised perfection expected of the child, who is being brought up under circumstances that would foster his moral and spiritual potentials. An 'Answer to a Child's Question' also indicates the deep concern of parents for their children. In 'Sonnet: To the River Otter,' 'Youth and Age,' 'Dejection: An Ode,' and 'Phantom or Fact' the poet is basically his subject matter. He is grappling with questions of life and immortality, the question of polarity, in this case the seeming irreconcilable division between childhood and adulthood. The main issue becomes the poet's deep engagement and speculations in a meditative and self-reflective process whose intended result is psycho-therapeutic and completeness of being.

The Romantics therefore found in childhood not only an inspiring and creative force, but a strong philosophical and spiritual ground for the construction and justification of their

epistemological and ontological investigations. The constant recourse to childhood memories was because they fervently believed it was a vitally uncontaminated phase that could not be discarded from life and regarded as unimportant in the construct of the total man. In line with Georges Poulet's statement above that the past and its memories are an inevitable part of human existence, and the assimilation of Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideals, the Romantics were kin in handling the issue seriously because it touched directly on the fabrics of their lives. The psychological retreat into the world of stored memories was not an escapist measure from the pressures of old age, but a way, whether symbolic or actual, of coming to terms with the unavoidable dynamics of the transforming self.

Memory and recollection provide a space and time, a context within and from which the poets could apprehend the subtle and enigmatic nature of personality growth. Also, the shift from a phenomenal to spiritual nature points to the creative and spiritual effect nature processed on their minds, an effect that left an indelible mark in their lives that they never hesitated to express fear and anxiety on realising that it could be a lost ideal in old age. It is this aspect of the expression of the anxieties, fears, and frustrations of the awareness of a lost ideal, and the various attempts to come to terms with them and seek solutions to them that primarily holds the interest of the argument of this chapter.

### **THE PSYCHOANALYTICAL BASES OF COLERIDGE'S EMBATTLED PSYCHIC LIFE AND THE POETICS OF DECONSTRUCTION: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In Chapter One under "The Psychological Periphery of Self" and "Subverting Visionary Romanticism: (De)Construction," we discussed from a broad perspective some of the various positions which psychoanalytical readings and interpretations of Coleridge have produced, and the resistance to theory and conceptual construction posited by Deconstructionists respectively. The present discussion of our investigation here is particularly directed to the question of the dynamics of the self with regard to childhood, youth, old adulthood and old



age. The intention is to situate Coleridge within an objective frame work in which his struggles with the different phases of his life can be re-evaluated from the existing and dominantly negative hermeneutics and phenomenology that has preoccupied Freudian-based critics and their deconstructionist counterparts.

We noticed in Chapter One that there hardly exists an essay or work that has given a positive outlook to Coleridge's poetry with reference to the dynamics of personality in terms of his struggle to articulate and come to terms with the problems involving the childhood, youth, adult, and old age phases of his psychological and physical life. In fact, most critics have denied him the analyses that they offer to his contemporaries like Blake and Wordsworth. Rather and unfortunately, too, much has been centred on the myth of his nightmares, frustrations, guilt, fear, depression, which are all interpreted as resulting from the circumstances of his childhood, with this childhood seen as having contributed nothing in terms of a psycho-therapy to his mental problems at old age. The word myth is important in the discourse here because it would appear Coleridge's psycho-somatic problems have been analysed out of proportions, quite often with misrepresented emphases that these problems have been or are being accepted and further expounded uncritically. This myth must be rewritten through a deconstructive reconstruction to portray an acceptable and realistic self in Coleridge. The foregoing comments point to one central issue, particularly pertaining to psychoanalysis. Freudian psychoanalysis largely pursued as theoretical framework in extant readings is problematically limited to theories on mental conflicts and defence mechanisms. This chapter will take recourse to Freud's theory of artistic creativity and writing which necessitates an appropriate and convincing interpretative context to Coleridge's work.

When one closely examines the interpretative views posited by such critics like John Beres, Tilottama Rajan, Anne Mellor, Kathleen Wheeler, Brian Wilkie, Jean Mileur, Thomas McFarland, Martin Wallen, Charles Rzepka, David Miall, Paul Magnuson, Ronald Wendling, and Jennifer Ford, it becomes certainly clear that Coleridge's reputation has to do more with

an engagement in a poetics of life that was aimed at expressing the unresolved problems of his life without any effort whatsoever, or if at all failed efforts to seek solutions to them. Their hermeneutic and phenomenological treatment of Coleridge leaves many questions and unsatisfied answers upon whose re-evaluation a much more appropriate portrait of the poet can be attained. In fact, Coleridge is presented as a pathetic psychiatric and even hysterical patient.

On the other hand, a reading of the works, commentaries and essays of critics and editors like James Reeves, Kathleen Coburn, Reeve Parker, M. H Abrams, Vogler, Allan Grant, Morton Paley, Richard Holmes, and even Coleridge's own poetic and epistolary confessions, does not necessarily refuse the positions of the opposing camp, but tries to see the issue from a more comprehensible and compromising manner, not because of the necessity for sympathy, but because Coleridge made his problems an instance of creativity and self-investigation, which cannot remain unappreciated especially with regard to what characterised the core of his life. It would be worthwhile to recapitulate some of the already discussed positions in a previous chapter in addition to other related concerns, the intention being to provide a framework that would shape the arguments to be raised here. A brief account of Freud's dream and wish theories will also necessitate our understanding of the issue and help in the conceptualisation on the poetics of becoming.

Freud's psychoanalytic method clearly relates to the various studies that have been carried on Coleridge, because most of what he advocated as constituting the basic critical and interpretative context of art and creativity is strongly related to childhood memories and recollections. Many of the critics have used Freud variously to substantiate their claims concerning Coleridge's embattled psychological life. Though they use different strands of Freudian psychoanalysis to capitalise on the mental conflicts that raged Coleridge, connecting these with early childhood fantasies, and also asserting that these conflicts haunted Coleridge all through his life without him solving the problems, there is a centrality in their approach.

This centrality is justified by their subversive attitude to a hermeneutic and phenomenological criticism on Coleridge, which tries to understand the exactitude of the poet's self-conscious growth.

Basically Freud's theory asserts that long after childhood we still bear the blessings and burdens of infantile wishes and fears that repeatedly affect our current state of being. Wishes and memories, Freud holds, are basically a psychological phenomenon and are an imagined restoration of a prior condition or relationship. In "Creative Writers and Day Dreaming" (1907) Freud defined the wish as follows:

The wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future ... Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on a thread of the wish that runs through them ... A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of old memory.<sup>3</sup>

Reinstating his conviction in his conclusion on wishes, following the analysis of one of his famous case studies, the story of "Dora," Freud says: "For the wish which creates the dream always springs from the period of childhood; and it is continually trying to summon childhood back to reality and to correct the present day by the measure of childhood."<sup>4</sup> What one understands here is that childhood is an inextricable part in the growing process of human life and consciousness, for it is the basic thread that connects the rest of the phases of life. Freud insisted that most hysterical problems and even artistic creativity were a consequent result of repressed childhood wishes that seek to resurface in a later part of life.

With regard to the concept of artistic creativity, Freud tries to answer two basic questions, the one dealing with the source on which the creative writer bases their material, and the other with how much effect that material has on the reader. The answers to these questions are all encapsulated in "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," which we can summarise as follows: writers are egoistic and the fundamental source of the creativity is

themselves, that is, the writer's self. Freud therefore sees literature as principally autobiographical, whereby the creative process is characterised by conscious self-expression. The writer is seen as a borderline neurotic, with literary and imaginative activity providing him with the release that prevents him from becoming neurotic or hysterical. Creativity thus becomes a substitute for neurotic symptoms and pathologies. Writing is a form of confession, with Freud contending that this kind of confession is similar to that which a neurotic makes to a psychiatrist.

Literature is therefore highly therapeutic both for the writer and the reader. Freud specifies that in literature we vicariously live out our own wishes, potentials, dangers and problems. The structure of literature is like the structure of dreams, the creative imagination operating according to the same principles that shape dream images. Freud asserts that the operative mechanisms in the texture of literature should be inclusive of condensation, displacement, composite images, spatial logic, lack of systematic connections, and lack of causality.

Freud, therefore, stands clearly as the pace-setter for the application of child-related strands of experience to Coleridge's childhood longings. But from the above summary his concepts do not deny the writer a positive interpretative context. In conformity, the act of writing has a positive rather than a negative psychological effect on the writer or artist. We saw John Beres's assertion that the basic symbolism of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is Coleridge's psyche that was characterised by an oral fixation resulting from a repressed conflict between love and hatred for his mother. Coleridge, the critic further contends, did not permit these hostile feelings for his mother to surface in his conscious mind. Most of the repressed bitterness found an outlet only through the symbolism of his poetry. Ronald Wendling takes a similar argument, expressing the conviction that Coleridge's recourse to metaphysics was a result of his traumatic sense of loss experienced in childhood.

Anne Mellor's treatment of the Romantic notion of irony and becoming denies Coleridge any positive outlook, seeing him rather than a poet who was plagued by guilt, despair and psychological turbulence, and therefore having no right to Schlegelian enthusiasm. Her views are not unconnected with those of McFarland who sees Coleridge as a neurotic and hysterical poet who had no sense of self-security. Kathleen Wheeler recognises Coleridge's attempts at using childhood memories as a storehouse that will provide him with artistic inspiration and spiritual possibility, but contends, for instance, that the image of frost in 'Frost at Midnight' seems to convey just the opposite of Coleridge's longings since it gives more interpretative space for stasis and passivity rather than dynamic and positive change. Jean-Pierre Mileur has also capitalised on the chilling effect of the frost symbol, seeing it in the line of Wheeler as an ambiguous expression of inactivity and passivity or creativity. In fact, Mileur favours the former position. Still in line with the question of childhood, Mileur's distrust for the potentials of the imagination which he claims is a quality Coleridge attributes to no real person, only goes to lend more credence to his conviction that transcendence as a result of memory and recollection is an impossibility since the imagination is not a realistic component in any human faculty.

Brian Wilkie's notion of overlays and super-impositions completely averts the question of self-unity and self-understanding. The primary imagination, the secondary imagination and the poet in ideal perfection are, according to the critic, to be taken with suspicion and distrust. He sees no relating or unifying or fusing possibility between childhood and adulthood, and challenges the notion of a higher consciousness in Coleridge as fake or unrealistic. Rzepka's treatment of Wordsworth, Keats and Coleridge accepts the possible reunification of a divided self in both Wordsworth and Keats. Coleridge, he argues, never achieved a sense of self-certainty. So just like Anne Mellor, Rzepka denies the poet any positive hermeneutic and phenomenological context of interpretation on the question.

Miall and Rajan on their part contend that Coleridge tried to transfer his problems on others, an attitude which, the critics hold, played less to his favour in trying to solve his psycho-somatic problems. Miall's analysis of 'Frost at Midnight' places it within the context of fear, guilt, and despair; as anticipating ultimate terror and eternal suffering. Referring to the positive way Wordsworth handled matters of childhood and adulthood, Miall curiously and even unfortunately asserts that Coleridge's poem lacks any "explicit connections of adulthood with childhood modes of thought". Rajan's interest lies both in psychoanalysis and Deconstruction, where she uses the psychological phenomenon of transference, the displacement of one's unresolved conflicts, dependencies, and aggressions onto a substitute subject, to argue the vicarious aspects of Coleridge's traumatised psyche. This leaves the poet with no sense of the problem being resolved, since the attempt is simply to displace which does not justify any act of trying to run away from the despairing realities of the poet's self.

Magnuson altogether dismisses the question of a private meditation of an isolated consciousness in 'Frost at Midnight,' elaborating rather that the poem's interpretative context is traceable in public discourse. His emphasis is therefore historical circumstances that seem to inform the poem. And New Historicism as we have seen is strongly aversive to the poetics of personality or individual consciousness in Romanticism. Wallen in "Coleridge's Scrofulous Dejection" (2000) comes in with the curious conviction that Coleridge tried to conceal his illness by therapeutically seeking solutions in public rhetoric and literature (p. 555). One wonders how possible it is to conceal the very problems for which a therapy is sought.

We do not need to belabour deconstructionist strands here. In Chapter One under "Subverting Visionary Romanticism: (De)Construction" we have already discussed the poetics of Deconstruction, pointing out that its arguments against method and meaning, against the logocentric concept of metaphysics and spirituality, against the notion of a possible psychological construction of the self as textually evident, all foreshadow the reading and interpretative context of the different strands of Coleridge's engagements and

speculations. With its questioning of the self as subject and the dismissal of the notion of intentionalism, Deconstruction reads Coleridge textually as self-deconstructed poet, resisting the possibility of self-unity or self-harmony. Being suspicious of or entirely not accepting what Schleiermacher calls transcendental signifiers in the hermeneutic and phenomenological context of interpretation, Deconstruction capitalises on the text to show that it averts any logical, methodological or structural patterning of meaning. The major debate here which favours the psychological possibility of self-redemption and also of conscious intention from a hermeneutic and phenomenological viewpoint is not acceptable in deconstructivist discourse. The question of constructive deferral, which we have already mentioned in Chapter Two, will also be very alien to Deconstruction's expounding of deferral.

From the above discussion the conclusion one can draw is that Coleridge's poetry is largely seen not as his conscious struggles to come to terms with the inner and outer wrangling of himself, not as a self-seeking therapy, but as an enactment of a psychically distorted life, as an expression of a deep-seated maladjustment to quote James Reeves. It would appear from these positions that of all the Romantics Coleridge seems to have had the worst calamities which he spent his entire life articulating. In fact, it undoubtedly appears he was the most traumatised and damaged child in English Romantic history.

This extraordinary hermeneutics of subversion about Coleridge's troubles points only to the negative psychological reading of his poems. This situation necessitates a rehabilitation of Coleridge's psychological, aesthetic and spiritual struggles, because much has been said of him than he perhaps ever uttered poetically or otherwise. When one looks at the entire bulk of Coleridge's writings, the poems, the letters, the notebooks, the prose works, all grappling with varied interests in life and then compares it with the life portrayed above, there certainly would be the suspicion that something is wrong somewhere in the delineation of the poet. Again, when one objectively evaluates Coleridge's own honesty in airing out the problems of

his life, there would be the consensus that his self-critical attitude, his self-questioning and self-investigating engagement need to be impressively credited.

It is amid all the dominantly negative criticism that Coleridge's creative productivity paradoxically endured. That is, it is during these very years that Coleridge is put under merciless psychological scrutiny, portrayed as being in untold agony and despair, that he continued to write, even if 'not good poetry,' then other philosophical and theological pieces that are worth critical study. All these engagements do not show an entirely destitute mind, even if a psychically disturbed one. These engagements, it should be added, offer scarcely any convincing, tangible and grounding critical space that they were an escapist measure sought out by Coleridge. And as we will see, judging him only on the merits of his poetry gives only an unbalanced and unfair assessment of his achievement.

The fundamental question posed here is: why has theoretical and practical criticism with regard to psychological interests refused Coleridge what it attributes to his contemporaries? What makes Coleridge's psycho-somatic life so problematic that his works are treated as having simply confirmed his troubles rather seeing his use of art and poetry as a therapeutic measure to solving or coming to terms with them? All these questions are intended to refresh or broaden the debate.

### **COLERIDGE'S SELF-WRITTEN LIFE: POETIC AND EPISTOLARY SELF-MIRRORING AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF BECOMING**

The main concern of this section as indicated in its title is to re-examine and reassess some of Coleridge's letters and poems within the psychological domain of retrospection and introspection so as to determine the extent to which he can be hermeneutically and phenomenological read and interpreted as consciously struggling amidst his physical and psychic torments to come to terms with himself and provide a therapeutic solution to these torments. This aspect of self-mirroring will be analysed alongside the question of becoming,



which is critically interpreted as delineating a process of organic transformation of the self with the hope of achieving a finality of synthesis, which is always deferred but embedded in the future rather than considered a finished act through creative productivity. In other words, time will be seen as an indication and expression of the self as evolutionary and transformative.

In his recent book entitled *The Romantic Subject in Autobiography: Rousseau and Goethe* (2000) Eugene Stelzig treats the question of self-written lives in the two philosophers. Stelzig defines Romantic autobiography in connection with Freudian psycho-analysis as:

A type of confessional narrative of the self in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that, as a retrospective account and introspection of how the writer's identity and personality were formed, artfully merges reality and imagination, the historiography and the poetic poles of narrative .... or what Goethe calls the 'poetry' and 'truth' of life. (p. 8)

This definition provides one of the keys to the understanding of the question of the poetics of intentionality as a major strand in Romantic discourse of self-portraying, which is not unconnected with the notion of self-conscious will embedded in the faculty of the imagination. The question of retrospection and introspection as a psychological means of self-understanding and portrayal is what attracts our attention in Stelzig's definition, given that it points to the possibility of the construct of identity and personality. In his discussion in a previous book *All Shades of Consciousness: Wordsworth's Poetry and the Self in Time* (1975), he had grappled with the same issues, pointing out that the passage of time is a chief structural element of poetry, engendering the development of personal and artistic growth, and most importantly the quest of identity. Asserting that Wordsworth delicately explores the mystery of time through meditation and personal recollection, Stelzig makes an assessment which may also find ample substantiation in Coleridge's case:

We may discover the abiding modernity and relevance of Wordsworth's poetry, for it approaches human consciousness and the spectacle of life from an essentially evolutionary and organic point of view. In this respect it is like the best romantic poetry in England and continental Europe, which was so much on the frontier of new developments, and which has left its imprint on subsequent expressions of intellectual energy. (p. 17)

We certainly are not concerned with the validity that lies in Stelzig's claims that Wordsworth's poetry is like the best in Europe. What is important is the issue of time-consciousness and the organic standpoint with which it is apprehended, since organicity in this context presupposes process which ties in with our application of becoming.<sup>5</sup>

Mark Storey, Berys Gaut, Paisley Livingston and Patrick Maynard have posited similar ideas concerning the notion of the poet's attempts at self-expression, self-seeking and the quest for identity. In *The Problem of Poetry in the Romantic Period* (2000) Storey takes up the strand of discussion earlier examined in Chapter Two with regard to such critics like Charles Rzepka and Andrea Henderson, who grapple with the problem of the self as subject and the intentionality of the poet in his poetic engagements and speculations. Storey's work, which is not necessarily concerned with a structured theoretical framework, favours the intersections between the interpretability of poetic texts and the lives of the poets. He concentrates "much more centrally on the nature of the poet, and how each poet struggles with a definition of poetry that involves a definition of the self as the poet, and how this struggle manifests itself in the poetry (p. ix).

So the struggle with the concept of poetic identity becomes the central focus of his analysis. He goes on to elaborate the case of Coleridge on the premise that the poet was not only concerned with a lifelong struggle of finding a style, but was also obsessed with constant self-questioning in the agonising ordeals of his life (p. 30); he was also caught between his revolutionary youth and conservative principles at old age, between the belief of the power of the imagination and the failure of the imagination, and between his belief in the divine and creative power of the poet and his belief in the monotheistic God of Christianity (p. 36).

Storey's critical statements rely much on philosophical discourse which is not the central concern of his work. However, his insistence on reading the poetic text as self-expression and self-search favours the extent to which Romantic poetry can justify interpretative shifts from object to subject, or to put it differently the self as subject matter in the creative process.

In the Introduction of *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (2003), Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston discuss the issues and perspectives involved in artistic creation with close attention to the war that has been raging between exponents of intentionalism and anti-intentionalist critics (pp. 1 – 32). They strongly favour a re-evaluation of the term creativity, which New Criticism, Formalism and Deconstruction have abandoned as lacking any good basis for theoretical, aesthetic and critical interpretation. The theory of intention presupposes the construct of an art work as a product of the artist's conscious actions. In other words, seeing art as paradigm of creative making, as intentionality, the critics hold that intentions figure in the making of an art work (pp. 2 – 6). They discuss the various strands of the applicability of the word with regard to "implied," "postulated," "constructed," and "hypothesised or imagined intentions" (p. 7).

The creative process therefore engenders a psychological and aesthetic context in which the poet is self-conscious of his material which is dominantly his own experiences and response to them (p. 15). Among the variety of essays in the collection, Patrick Maynard's "Drawing as Drawn: An Approach to Creation in Art" (pp. 53 - 88) stands as one of the outspoken proponents of artistic intention.<sup>6</sup> Berys's Gaut's essay "Creative Imagination" (pp. 148 – 173) links the imagination to creativity, and sees the creative process as an interpretative construct. This echoes the Coleridgean attachment of imagination with creativity as a conscious and willed act by the poet, imagination as an organising and synthetic principle in self-conscious acts of articulation and expression. These arguments bring in another dimension of psychoanalysis, that of Carl Gustav Jung. Some of Jung's

theories can complement Freud's and enlighten the debate on the interpretation based on the artistic and psycho-spiritual character of Coleridge.

Jung's three-dimensional segmentation of the human psyche, the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious, helps in the understanding of the dynamics of memory, retrospection and introspection. Of the three components the second appears to be that which suits the context of our argument. To Jung the personal unconscious involves both memories that are easily brought to mind and those that have been suppressed for some specific reason. Coleridge's case justifies this definition, though it has met with dissatisfaction and hostility in criticism. Still in connection with his dynamics of the psyche Jung proposes three important and intricately related principles, the principle of opposites, the principle of equivalence, and the principle of entrophy.

The first principle, Jung holds, deals with the awareness that life can appropriately function only by the understanding and acceptance of opposites, arguing that opposites are the source of psychic energy. This energy generating notion finds empirical justification in physics, where the concept of polarity explains that like charges repel and unlike charges attract. The second principle is related to the question of inferiority or superiority complex. The central behavioural pattern here deals with the acceptance of both even if suppressed rather than pretension to favour either of the opposites. The third principle involves the process of rising above the opposites, of seeing both sides of who we are in old age. Jung calls this transcendence. One can arguably say that Coleridgean psychology parallels and finds an acceptable systemisation in Jungian psychoanalysis. Coleridge's theory of the imagination implicates the three principles discussed above, and if we carefully apply his theorisation to the practical instances of his life we find a close affinity with this domain of Jungian psychoanalysis. Coleridge was very preoccupied with antithetical thinking that we have seen in Chapter Two. His problems provided him with energy and vitality to live on, to seek for diverse ways of coming to terms with these problems, to transcend opposites. Besides, from

the Jungian sense of the word Coleridge never showed signs of suffering from a complex, because he faced his problems sincerely, however difficult a task this must have been.

The preceding discussion is to situate Coleridge within the context of a self-conscious enactment of his life both through poetry or his letters. When Coleridge sought to define the imagination, making reference to the reconciliation and synthesis of opposite and discordant experiences he was not unaware of life's bitter tides, to quote Keats. In fact, the basic issue here relates to his theorisation on polarity, where polar logic involves reconciling opposing poles of the same entity. Childhood and adulthood become the contextual paradigm of the polarity logic here. And Coleridge's conscious attempts through art to work out a stability of personality should be greatly appreciated more than even how much he managed to achieve this goal or ideal.

It may be right to say that Coleridge's poetry and letters demonstrate the fact that nobody was critical of him more than himself. His sense of self-criticism and self-reproach is balanced so much so that one really wonders why many psychoanalytical critics tend to deprive him of positive analysis as in the case with Wordsworth. Though the destinations of Coleridge's letters were largely diverse, there are two important correspondences of Coleridge, which help in portraying his epistolary self-consciousness in connection with the experiences of his life. These are Thomas Poole and Thomas Allsop. With the former, Coleridge had a great acquaintance, and on his request wrote him five important biographical letters, dating between February 1797 and February 1798. The main psychological contents of these letters will be discussed here. To the latter, yet another friend in his old age, the poet wrote a series of true confessions about the most traumatic recordings in his memory. It is indisputable and also irrefutable that the contents of these letters find poetic expression in his verses, a justification of the fact that he was engaged in a process whose end expectation was not mere enacting troubles, but also the desire of achieving something through this.<sup>7</sup> The question of transference cannot be appropriately applied in this circumstance. Rather, we can

attribute this notion to yet another psychological phenomenon, repetitive compulsion, defined as the desire to relive traumatic events and experiences through dreams, or storytelling or even in everyday life, as a way of dealing and coming to terms with that trauma.

In the first biographical letter that Coleridge wrote Thomas Poole he tried to present an objective self-portrait. In fact, he welcomed the idea of writing about his life and gave a reasonable justification for this:

It will renew and deepen *my* reflections on the past: and it will perhaps make you behold with no unforgiving or impatient eye those weaknesses and defects in my character, which so many untoward circumstances have concurred to plant there. (*Letters I*, p. 302)

This intended desire to trace his life as far as his memory could stretch shows openness rather than the concealment of guilt, fear and anxiety. In the third letter he continues with the recounting of certain circumstances that characterised his childhood. He received much love and adoration from both his mother and his father. His brother Frank had a great love-hate relationship towards him, because he was petted and privileged by his parents. And because of Frank's resentment he became "fretful," "timorous," "intimidated and tormented." This resulted to isolation and solitude whose consequence was his refuge into books of diverse intellectual and academic interests. Coleridge claims in this very letter that he suffered from traumas caused by visions and dreams that were occasioned by his readings. This letter cannot justify Coleridge's agonising ordeals with regard to his drug addiction, marital and emotional frustration, or even the failing genial spirit of the imagination.

With regard to his school life, he talks of the sloth, vanity, and contempt he had for all those who despised his talents and potentials. He was undoubtedly a bright person in school and the early manifestation of his eccentricity caused him much trouble, because he was always engaged in his own separate and secluded world. All this evidence does not certainly give tangible grounds to qualify Coleridge in the light of the aforementioned criticism on him.

In the fourth letter Coleridge narrates how he ran away from home because of a brawl with Frank. He slept away from home, causing so much worry and anxiety to his parents. It is in this same letter that he discusses his early apprehensions of the unity of the one, how it started developing to lead to his subsequent pantheistic and monistic speculations.

In his letter to Thomas Allsop dated 8 October 1822 (p. 249) Coleridge was to continue to be frank in the handling of his problems. Here he makes Allsop see how time tries to corrode the mirth of life. Coleridge lists the four most traumatic reminiscences of his life; the vision of a Happy Home sunk forever, with the impossibility to hope for domestic happiness under the name of a husband (an example of a good poetic expression in the verse letter 'Dejection: A Letter' and 'Dejection: A Ode'); the shattering circumstances of the sour relationship with Wordsworth; the deep darkness left within himself as a consequent result of unrealistic and tempestuous love for Sara Hutchinson (see first point and the ASRA poems); and his greatest anxieties and fears about his son Hartley, his very hope for a regenerate childhood ('Frost at Midnight' and 'The Pang More Sharp Than All. An Allegory').

Though it is the last point that dominantly attracts much attention in this phase of our investigation, the others are not unconnected, since they deal with the eroding effects of time and self-conscious attempts at solutions. What sounds interesting about these confessions is that Coleridge did not simply articulate them and ended there. He struggled to seek solutions and to come to terms with those he had to accept as a common calamity experienced by all humanity. His poetry and notebooks, as earlier said, do not hide any of these facts.

As Kathleen Coburn has rightly claimed in her study of Coleridge *The Self-Conscious Imagination* (1974), he lived his life by trying to accept and solve its variety of problems. Coburn discusses the antithetical senses of the expression self-conscious; *self-conscious* as being realistically accurate about one's identity, and *self-conscious (anti-self-consciousness: my emphasis)* as being anything but clear, in fact painfully in doubt (p. 1). She contends that

both combine to form the “self-conscious imagination,” and are highly applicable to Coleridge. Coburn’s conclusion is worth some critical commentary, for she holds that:

A study of the notebooks demonstrates that all his life wrestled to conquer the applicability of the second meaning to himself, and to achieve the victory represented by the first, i.e., to make the transition from the fear and trembling of self-doubt and incompleteness, from all those dreadful excuses and apologies of the letters, to emotional freedom, steadiness, and wholeness of vision...He is meditating on his experiences in the very act of experiencing.(pp. 1 – 2, 3)

Though Coburn’s criticism carries the typical strand of visionary poetics (she is uncritical about the notion of the steadiness and wholeness of vision), and limits her study of the notebooks, and obviously misappropriates the letters as “dreadful apologies and excuses,” her comments match with a broader survey of Coleridge’ life and writings. Instead of taking the notebooks to stand as masterpieces of Coleridge’s ameliorative engagements with his problems, supposedly expressed in the poems and letters, it sounds more appropriate to treat every related aspect of his writing as an equal and contributing factor in the general psychodynamics of his life. Psycho-therapeutic thought in Coleridge does not find expression only in the notebooks. Coleridge engages it in the cross current of his entire writings.

The notion of the passage of time and its effects on the psychology of the personality with regard to psycho-dynamics of childhood, youth and old age find poetic expression in pieces like ‘A Wish,’ ‘Sonnet to the River Otter,’ ‘Youth and Age,’ and ‘Phantom or Fact A Dialogue in Verse.’ As seen in the introductory part of this subsection, these poems fall under those which deal with the direct aspects of self-mirroring and portraying. They are not classified in the list of the so-called canonical poems of Coleridge, but as we shall see, they generate complex critical debate as their “superior” counterparts. That is, Coleridge is immediately concerned with his life without the intervention of an explicit or implied Other, which will form the basis of the discussion of the final part of this chapter.



'A Wish' was written when Coleridge was just twenty years of age, therefore a youth. The poem clearly demonstrates Coleridge's awareness of the inseparability of the different phases of growth and consciousness, and points to the self as continuously transforming with the possibility of eventually transcending all odds to final unification, which would subsequently lead to harmony with the greater Self, or source:

Lo! Through the dusky silence of the groves,  
Thro' vales irriguous, and thro' green retreats,  
With languid murmur creeps the placid stream  
    And works its secret way.  
Awhile meand'ring round its native fields  
It rolls the playful wave and winds its flight:  
The downward flowing with awaken'd speed  
    Embosoms in the Deep!  
Thus thro' its silent tenor may my Life  
Smooth its meek stream by sordid wealth unclogg'd,  
Alike unconscious of forensic storms,  
    And Glory's blood-stain'd palm!

And when dark Age shall close Life's little day,  
Sate of sport, and weary of its toils,  
E'en thus may slumberous Death my decent limbs  
    Compose with icy hands!

Coleridge's takes the stream to be a symbol, a more philosophical rather than a rhetorical and textual symbol that should represent the thread that runs through the different phases of his life, that is, from childhood till when he faces death. It is therefore a repository of process and becoming, given that in the lines that follow we can clearly liken the stream to the self as process rather than fixity. The stream "works its secret way" as it is the case with the "secret ministry of the frost" in 'Frost at Midnight.' Memory, association, imagination and self-healing are suggested here, justifying the hermeneutic interpretation that the source of the stream just like the source of life (childhood) should flow and broaden consciousness so that at old age, and in the face of death there should not be much regret or sense of remorse. The title of the poem is very psychological and suggestive of the psycho-dynamics therein. The wish, ignited by the recollective potential of the imagination, is an anticipating instance of a phase still to come, with the poet hoping that when this time approaches, his past should

correlate with his present to assure him of a harmonious state of being. The stream therefore becomes a kind of psychological mirroring of the poet's life, an instance for the possibility of self-reflection and creative self-textualisation.

'Sonnet: To the River Otter' conveys yet another related strand of the argument on becoming, ushering the question of the self-consciousness of the passing of time as Coleridge contemplates the river as a pattern of the flow of life. Again, the recollective memory is associated with the present for the enhancing of a future rather than the introspective desire to remain in the world of childhood. Coleridge is obviously aware that a retreat to the world of childhood without a conscious use of it as a therapeutic resource for the present and as a measure for the future will only point to illusions. It is worth citing the entire sonnet for reasons of textual substantiation:

Dear native brook! Wild streamlet of the West!  
How many various-fated years have past,  
What happy, and what mournful hours, since last  
I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast,  
Numbering its light leaps! Yet so deep imprest  
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 grey,  
And bedded sand that, veined with various dyes,  
Gleamed through thy bright transparence! On my way,  
Visions of childhood! Oft have ye beguiled  
Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs:  
Ah! That once more I were a careless child.

This poem is infused with philosophical and spiritual issues, which existing criticism has not analysed, or if at all partially and even less appropriately. The streamlet or river provides a psychological space and time for the poet's self-reflective engagement. The poem suggests an exuberance in childhood rather than a remorse; at least the re-creative capacity of the imagination records good rather than painful memories, justifying the poet's desire to unify his past life with the present one. This, however, does not mean that Coleridge is evading traumatising moments of the past. The immediate context of the poem suggests that

he is taken by sweet memories because they are certainly what his presence by the river occasions. So Coleridge is expressing the sense of a spiritual metamorphosis that engenders the reconciliation of the junctions of his life.

The wish to be a careless child engages an interpretative context, which reads beyond the seeming simplicity of the poem's language and rendition. All the wishes and reminiscences of childhood are an elliptical instance of the search for self-certainty and spirituality. They suggest and bring to mind what Schleiermacher's hermeneutics rightly styles transcendental signifiers, which are very pivotal in the interpretative context of hermeneutics and phenomenology.

The philosophy behind the poem correlates with Wordsworth's romanticising of the River Derwent in *The Prelude* or the River Wye in 'Tintern Abbey,' all grappling with recollection and artistic rendition. Productive self-consciousness becomes the main issue that ties together both poets, given that there is even a mutuality of co-operation between them with regard to the issue. Albert Wlecke rightly points this out in *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (1973), where he makes a statement in comparison of the two poets in connection to consciousness and the sublime:

Consciousness becomes vividly aware of itself as an indefinitely dynamic agent, as possessing an intentionality in pursuit of an intended object which infinitely recedes from adequate comprehension. Sublime consciousness for Coleridge reveals itself to be, in the last analysis, sublime self-consciousness, and those ideas he designates as sublime are in fact ideas that throw the mind back toward an awareness of its own indefinite activity. (p. 82)

Coleridge, far from lamenting a lost ideal, is on the contrary trying to reassert and reaffirm its place within the immediate space of fresh consciousness, of fresh memory since he cannot escape but turn to it for creative and spiritual inspiration. The written texts in line with Wlecke's comments are not definite expression of self-realisation since it is a continuous process.

Becoming becomes embedded in the desire for a holistic self-construct and unification, which hermeneutically signals possibility for transcendence. The characteristic feature of struggling to bring the divided to a unified self shows a kind of constantly polarised psycho-dynamics. That is, there is a constant alteration of division, unison and division again, suggesting the inappropriateness of centring on the Hegelian dialectical conclusion of synthesis, unless it is at the final transcendental realm. This, however, is not the direction and dimension of our argument.

Though this manifestation of alteration persists, for age brings in many physical disabilities and other problems that do not remain unconnected with the mind, hope for self-unification prevails, and lamentation for its absence does not mean the complete impossibility for its achievement. 'Youth and Age' throws more light on this argument. The poem presents Coleridge's antithetical psychological thought pattern, showing his sense of lamentation for the remote bliss of childhood and youth, which only memory can restore to make him therapeutically alleviate his pains. The notion of self-mirroring is noticeable as recollective memory functions as a platform for his meditation of what characterised past bliss, but still embedded in the store house of the imagination's recapitulative potentials. Coleridge's consciousness of contrast hermeneutically suggest transcendence, and the resolution to bind both youth and old age to the totality of personality. The expository phase of the poem sets its psychological context and self-mirroring and delineation:

Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,  
Where Hope clung feeding, like a bee –  
Both were mine! Life went maying  
With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,  
When I was young!  
(L. 1 – 5)

This is an expression of the recollective and associative memory at work, the imagination's capacity at tapping into the past, as igniting creative and artistic impulse,

situating the poet in the blissful communion with nature that communicates a sense of psychological harmony characteristic of childhood. Yet Coleridge goes on to express the fact that time has made these childhood sensibilities seemingly remote, “the change ‘twixt Now and Then! .../This body does me grievous wrong.” From every indication the lamentation is triggered by bodily pains rather than imaginative and spiritual destitution, though this affects the psychological patterns of his life.

Old age, Coleridge holds, seems to remind him that “Youth’s no longer here.” But in what follows Coleridge’s sense of the inseparability of the two phases is made resoundingly clear:

O Youth! For years so many and sweet,  
‘Tis known, that Thou and I were one,  
I’ll think it but a fond conceit –  
It cannot be, that Thou art gone!  
Thy whisper-bell hath not yet toll’d: -  
And thou wert aye a masker bold!  
What strange disguise hast now put on,  
To make believe, that Thou are gone?  
I see these locks in silvery slips,  
This drooping gait, this altered size:  
But springtide blossoms on thy lips,  
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes!  
Life is but thought: so think I will  
That Youth and I are house-mate still.  
(L. 25 – 38)

Coleridge is conscious of one very pivotal thing; that youth and old age are not antagonistic but mutually inclusive, justifying the conviction of his polarity logic that it is possible for the self to attain unification through antithetical thinking. Coleridge does not apprehend himself to be two distinct and unconnected entities. On the contrary, he is simply affirming the high probability of self-synthesis. A number of facts stated in the above excerpt demonstrate this conviction; it is a conceit to think that youth is not a constitutive part of the entire psychological network of the personality. Seeing life as basically a thought presupposes that we make and shape it according to our psychological and spiritual conceptions of it.

Consciousness is a determinant, and we are not only subject to it, but we help in its construction. In Coleridge's case, youth and old age are house-mates, one unavoidably needing the other for complete functioning. At a psychoanalytical level Coleridge sees youth as a mirror of his yearning for a completeness of being and the subsequent transcendence into Being. Hope is seen as a trademark in Coleridge's hermeneutics, in which absence we only grieve at old age, finding it impossible to ameliorate the various problems that are engendered by time's passing.

The philosophical notion of becoming can find justification here with the application of hope, a prefiguring of a definitive fusion of self which is connected with the question of subsequent harmony with its source of emanation the greater Self. To put it alternately in more nature-philosophical terms, the beauty of a flower is deprived and destroyed by the fruit it bears. But the fruit presupposes the possibility of the renewal of life. In psychological terms, Youth becomes the flower and the seed needed for rebirth in old age.

In 'Visionary Hope' Coleridge unequivocally says it is a "Sad lot, to have no Hope!" The impersonal 'he' in the poem can be taken to be a veiled portrait of Coleridge himself. It is amid sighs, restlessness, sickness, and miserable feelings, occasioned by old age that we can find hope, "Hope should give/Such strength that he would bless his pain and life." We are reminded of a similar philosophy expressed in Wordsworth's immortality ode, which is an express example of the influence and confluence that was characteristic between the two poets:

Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death,  
In the years that bring the philosophic mind.

(L. 182 – 191)

This same thought finds expression in a notebook entry in which Coleridge said:

Youth beholds Happiness gleaming in the prospect ... Age in the retrospect. It is the happiness of Age to look back on the Happiness of Youth; and instead of Hopes <we> seek our enjoyment in the recollections of Hope.... In Youth, our Happiness is Hope: in Age, The Recollection of the Hopes of Youth. What else can there be? (*Notebooks* IV, 4632)

Wordsworth's lines show the complexity of the transforming self in time and indicate a considerable poetics of becoming that Coleridge consciously enacts within the context of hope. The self cannot be said to be degenerate or in a process of progressive regression. The past provides strength and soothing thoughts that paradoxically but justly spring from suffering. Wordsworth's phenomenology of a philosophic mind is his attempt at articulating the capacity of positive self-continuity. Coleridge's passage also evokes the visionary concept of looking back not with remorse but with a renewed sense of self-growth and achievement. Imaginative reflection therefore points not to an irreconcilable dichotomised self, but a self with a systematic and dynamic progress. At no moment do we conveniently see the self as characterised by fixity or stasis. It is hermeneutically and phenomenologically becoming.

'Phantom or Fact. A Dialogue in Verse' gives yet another vivid picture of the psychology of self-mirroring and self-textualising. The subject of the poem is Coleridge's meeting with his younger self. The question of self-questioning, of sincere self-scrutiny and examination is the core of the poem's contents. A self-dramatised dialogue only points to the key facts of Coleridge's life; that he x-rayed himself better than most of the psychoanalysts of suspicion have done. Coleridge talks about the vision he has about the visitation of his younger self, "A lovely form there sate beside my bed,/And such a feeding calm its presence shed,/A tender love so pure from earthly leaven," who looks so disavowingly on him.

What he engages in this poem is an intermixture of psychological and metaphysical meditation and reflection. Coleridge says, "'Twas my own spirit newly come from

heaven,/Wooring its gentle way into my soul,!" suggesting a psychological and spiritual transcendence into the bliss of youth. Coleridge calls this encounter a tale, "This tale's a fragment from the life of dreams;/But say, that years matur'd the silent strife,/ And 'tis a record from the dream of life." Coleridge is introducing a complex psychoanalytical, if not philosophical phenomenon here, "the life of dreams," and "the dream of life." Is he saying or suggesting that we live a life characteristic of dreams, that is, we are all typical dreamers on life's stage, or that we live conscious lives but must revert time and again to dreams so as to understand the deeper undercurrents of life.

Whatever the case may be, Coleridge drives home the notion that we all have dreams which can help in the structural modification and continuity of our psychological and spiritual existence. The lovely form is the part of his early self which now acts as a mirror for him to question the essence of his existence. Coleridge wrote this poem in 1830, four years before his death. It is certainly not characteristic of conservative and orthodox sentiments that have been much attributed to him. The basic issue here moves in line with the concept of individuation, whereby he relies on the evidence of his own experiences to quest for psychological wholeness and spiritual certainty.

Richard Holmes's biography *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (1999), which is a continuation of an earlier one called *Coleridge: Early Visions* (1989), largely favours a careful investigation on Coleridge's life that has led to the positive change of certain negative notions of its myth, and captures the last days of Coleridge, days during which he preoccupied himself with the memories of his childhood, his early philosophical and spiritual convictions, rather than with the so called conservative stance that is claimed to have eaten deep into his later life. Holmes quotes an excerpt from Coleridge's *Table Talk* to justify the premise that, while conscious of impending death he could still firmly hold his life as one, and not as a psychologically disintegrated being:



I am dying, but without expectation of a speedy release. Is it not strange that very recently by-gone images, and scenes of early life, have stolen into my mind, like breezes blown from the spice-islands of Youth and Hope – those twin realities of this phantom world! I do not add Love – for what is Love but Youth and Hope embracing, and so seen as *one*? I say realities; for reality is a thing of degrees (p. 560)

Holmes also goes further by presenting a testimony of Coleridge's dying words to Dr. Green, in whose presence Coleridge died; that his mind was clear and "quite unclouded." These are instances that may quite be qualified as trivial, but if the life and speculations of Coleridge are worth studying then instances of this sort rather stand as psycho-analytical elements to determine the frame of mind in which Coleridge died. He certainly did not die as a remorseful man. He did not annihilate all the troubles of his life, but his sense of serenity can be a pointer of a life, diversely lived but constructively and systematically apprehended. To reiterate the argument at this juncture, Coleridge's poetics of becoming blend with his visionary aesthetics of poetry as dealing with organicist and dynamic processes, in this case his psychological and Romantic reflection and transcription of the self in time.

### **THE PSYCHO-DYNAMICS OF SELF-DEFINITION AND SELF-RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH AN OTHER**

We have previously been discussing the question of self-mirroring in Coleridge with the central focus on his own internal debates with regard to the question of self-reconciliation. These internal debates have been considered as self-reflective. What follows is yet another inextricably connected strand of the argument, whereby the poet's investigation on his self presupposes the explicit or implied presence of an Other. The Other as object is intricately intertwined with the self-reflective and meditative engagement of the self. The self, therefore, remains as subject and its contemplation or engagement with the Other, usually present/absent but characteristically passive, is for the greater understanding of the psycho-dynamics within the poet. Coleridge himself was conscious of this therapeutic method and even commented on it. In the same notebook (*Notebook IV*) entry cited above he said:

To make the Object one with us, we must become one with the Object – ergo, an Object. – Ergo: the Object must be itself a Subject – partially, a favourite dog – principally, a friend; wholly, God – the Friend – God is Love – i.e an Object that is absolutely Subject.....

Coleridge felt that the internal landscape at old age, characteristic of an apparently distorted psychological and spiritual wasteland, self-doubt, depression or incipient despair, could seek rediscovery and reclamation and reconstruction from the other through his own self-analysis. This is a characteristic feature of the conversational poems, but it should be convincingly said that this does not presuppose the negative context of transference since the centrality of the investigations focuses still on the questioning self. But again, as we will soon see, the question of seeking self-solace from others could engender a positive reaction from the object as well. This is the typical situation between Coleridge and his children, especially Hartley.

A number of critics have variously discussed this aspect of Coleridge's self-mirroring and portrayal. Reeve Parker, Tilottama Rajan, Kathleen Wheeler, Stephen Bygrave, Charles Rzepka, Morton Paley and Richard Holmes have premised different contentions as to the relevance of this psycho-analytical process. What is common in the interpretative stance adopted by these critics with the exception of Paley and Holmes, is that they focus only on one poem 'Frost at Midnight,' this perhaps being a justification of the long-continued myth (a myth that Morton Paley has tried to debunk in *Coleridge's Later Poetry*, 1996) that Coleridge wrote just a handful of poems that are worth critical attention. One or two poems cannot be reductively used to discuss and draw an appropriate conclusion on the question of the self in Coleridge. This gives allowance for and necessitates a broadened and modified dimension.

Charles Rzepka in *The Self as Mind* has interestingly commented on the question of the dilemma of trying to re-establish and understand the self through mirroring with the Other, seeing it from a broader perspective rather than just Coleridge:

The Romantic's quest for self-knowledge, then can best be understood as the quest for an intimate yet authoritative audience: to use Keats's words, it is the search for a proper "greeting of spirit" from another or others so as to realise an ideal, interiorised self-image that the poet fears the world will otherwise deny or deface. The dark underside of this anxious investment of power in the Other to bring the self into being is the poet's feeling that he has to a great extent lost control over the self made manifest in any social situation, and that the Other possesses as great a power to rob him of himself, to distort or misinterpret or paralyse the true self, as to bring it to life. (p. 27)

What is of immediate interest in Rzepka's assertion is the question of self-seeking through the other for the achieving of what he calls "an ideal, interiorised self-image." As to Rzepka's reasons for the poet doing this, that is, seeking an authoritative audience in this quest for self-knowledge, Coleridge's case squarely fits in, since his poetry and other writings substantiate the fact that he was trying to make himself understood through writing.

Artistic creativity becomes not only a channel for the expression of the self, but equally provides a therapeutic effect to the poet. Paley has called this feature Coleridge's "strategy of recuperation," in other words, the way "Coleridge makes his sense of loss a source of lyric expression, turning what he experiences as a personal weakness into poetic strength" (p. 77). To Paley the strength and energy of his embattled life's experiences are aestheticised, and the poems become more than the desolating productions of a wasted soul.

The act of telling one's problems is usually in line with seeking solace and solutions. In art it is not just a simple matter of aestheticising, but equally philosophising and psycho-spiritualising, justifying the creative and spiritual implications of the imagination. For example Coleridge's intention to publish *Biographia Literaria* was in connection with his desire and attempt at delineating different aspects of his life, philosophical, spiritual, aesthetic, and psychological. This is a view that has been taken up by Vogler's "Coleridge's Book of Moonlight" (1989), where he contends that Coleridge's express dejection did not mean he was finished at all for he "performs a self-constituting act" through *Biographia Literaria* (p. 26). Holmes's *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* also comments on the issue of self-mirroring through

the Other, looking at it from a wider perspective, and particularly focussing on Coleridge's circle of friends and what they meant to his life (p. 503).

Though criticism has capitalised only on 'Frost at Midnight,' the issue here runs almost through his entire poetry, that is, the notion finds expression in poems that were written before and after 'Frost at Midnight.' We have the examples of poems like, 'To an Infant,' 'Sonnet: On Receiving a Letter Informing me of the Birth of a Son,' 'Sonnet: Composed on a Journey Homeward; the Author Having received Intelligence of the birth of a son,' 'Sonnet: To a Friend who asked how I felt when the Nurse first presented my Infant to me,' 'The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem,' 'Dejection: A Letter,' 'Dejection: An Ode,' 'Answer to a Child's Question,' 'To William Wordsworth,' and 'The Pang More Sharp than All: An Allegory.' All these poems convey different states of sensibility which centrally point to the same question in 'Frost at Midnight,' justifying the premise that Coleridge was all through his life preoccupied with the question of his developing self in relation to his past, rekindled in the present by the presence of his own offspring.

In 'To an Infant' we see Coleridge's manifest interest in children as a source of self-reflection and scrutiny for the parent and/or adult. The child in this poem is not clearly presented as an offspring of Coleridge, though our interpretative context may take it as such, or as a symbol which the poet uses to articulate what his meditative consciousness is preoccupied with. The first verse of the poem seems to point to the former assertion that it may be the poet's own biological child, "Ah! Cease thy tears and sobs, my little life!." The child in this context seems to be a symbolic representation of Coleridge himself, and therefore a mirror of his life. What is central is that the child represents the Other, and Coleridge's broodings are not to be taken as shifting emphasis from himself to the child. On the contrary the child appears to be a psychological mirror in which he questions his own self, for as Coleridge himself says, "How yon sweet Child my Bosom's grief beguiles/With soul-

subduing Eloquence of smiles!/Ah lovely Babe! in thee myself I scan.”<sup>8</sup> But again, Coleridge also wishes a prosperous moral and spiritual life to the child.

Coleridge sets the scene of our understanding of his own concern by drawing attention to some of the most common characteristic features of the child, its meekness, innocence and instinctive way of learning. To him the baby is wise though untaught. Connecting it with his own life Coleridge says, “Man’s Miniature! Thou mak’st me sigh -/A Babe art thou – such a Thing am I” and then again, “O thou that rearest with celestial aim/The future Seraph in my mortal frame.” The poem ends with Coleridge’s apprehension of the child and infancy as a meek nurse of the soul. What is very interesting in our hermeneutic concern here is the fact that the subject matter is actually Coleridge, the child as it were a symbol of his own wishes for a regenerate childhood. The imagination is not only aesthetically functioning, but psychologically re-organising the seemingly split entity of the poet’s self into an instance of self-certainty and hope.

The three sonnets above carry the debate further, and prefigure what Coleridge was to re-echo in ‘Frost at Midnight’ and ‘The Pang More Sharp than All.’ Characteristic of the poems is the occasion of the birth of a son, but the poems point to very important psychological aspects of child upbringing and expectations in parents. There are hardly parents who remain indifferent to the fears, anxieties and worries about their children. Relationships therefore surpass mere biological or genetic affiliations to highly psychological variants. It is within this psychological variant that we can get the exact tone of Coleridge’s preoccupation with himself as mirrored by the child that occasions the poems.

The information of the birth of his child does not only bring joy, but pushes Coleridge into a self-reflective situation, or an inward-turned meditation. He talks about tears that roll down his eyes and also prayers that he makes for the celestial guidance of the child. This is to be taken as a veiled expression of his own self-redeeming engagement as well, as an express desire for his own salvation and return to the spirituality of childhood. He is therefore not

romanticising only his childhood but that of the child as well. The second sonnet also carries the same theme of fear and anxiety, all triggered by Coleridge's own recollective memory of his own state of childhood. The third sonnet culminates the centrality of the argument and is worth citing:

Charles! My slow heart was only sad, when first  
I scann'd that face of feeble infancy:  
For dimly on my thoughtful spirit burst  
All I had been, and all my child might be!  
But when I saw it on its mother's arm,  
And hanging at her bosom (she the while  
Bent over its features with a tearful smile)  
Then I was thrill'd and melted, and most warm  
Impress'd a father's kiss: and all beguil'd  
Of dark remembrance and presageful fear,  
I seem'd to see an angel-form appear –  
'Twas even thine, beloved woman mild!  
So for the mother's sake the child was dear,  
And dearer was the mother for the child.

There are three Others involved in this sonnet, Charles Lamb, Sara Coleridge and the child. Yet the most central Other on whom he focuses with regard to the question of mirroring is the child. The child mirrors his own past and engages him in a typical hermeneutic and phenomenological meditation that explains his ontological apprehension of the circumstance. All the interest expressed with regard to the angelic form of the child as comparable to his mother's are just a psychological justification to remain convinced and hopeful that the child will be a regenerate form of the poet's own childhood, and in this case a much more better situation than the experiences of his own childhood.

'Frost at Midnight' (1798) will be critically examined alongside 'The Pang More Sharp than All' and Hartley Coleridge's prefatory poem in his unique collection of poems published a year before the death of his father in 1833. These three poems constitute a triangle and contribute greatly to our understanding of the question of the Other and the self-mirroring of Coleridge. 'Frost at Midnight' can be said to be an expository piece, while 'The Pang More

Sharp than All' can pass for an antithesis to the former. The third poem written by Hartley Coleridge to his father will fit in the interpretative context as a response to the father's lifelong worries about him. This time the Other will not be seen as a voiceless voice to quote Stephen Bygrave, but as an articulating voice that is highly conscious of the intricate relation between a father and his hopes for the betterment of his child.

'Frost at Midnight' has generated a veritable amount of critical comment. Yet a re-examination of the poem within our psychological context will point to a number of unsatisfying strands of argument that have been attributed to the poem. The basic question here comes again as to what is the role of the Other and to what effect does it have on Coleridge's meditation and self-portrait in this poem. How does it connect with the issue of the operation of the imagination and the philosophy of becoming.

Reeve Parker contends that the secret ministry of the frost is informed with a sacramental meaning, and asserts that Coleridge's "quest for an adequate symbology in the natural world" was the focus of much of his religious and aesthetic philosophy which in the case of the poem is displaced onto the child whom he calls Coleridge's companionable form, using Coleridge's own terminology. Tilottama Rajan's contention places the poem within the sphere of alienation and equivocation. She argues that Coleridge is engaged in imaginative illusion, stressing the inauthenticity and emptiness of imaginative disposition. Her deconstructive reading sees Coleridge as having projected himself onto another being as a consequent result of self-doubt. The question of vicariousness, which is her understanding of projection, becomes a devastating self-indictment, and artistic creativity a dialogue of illusion and deconstruction.

Kathleen Wheeler is much concerned with the self-watching mind, placing greater emphasis on the surrounding environment rather than the child which is the immediate and central cause to his introspection and retrospection. Her commentary on the question of the poem's offering a reading of the journey of life from youth to age, is a subcategory of her

general treatment of the poem with Coleridge's pantheistic and monistic enthusiasm. Stephen Bygrave interestingly adopts the antithesis of Rajan's deconstructive criticism, contending that the turning to the child in 'Frost at Midnight' is not a vicarious fulfilment, but a turning towards a fulfilment which is necessarily potential (p. 129). Bygrave goes further to make an assertion which we will critically re-evaluate within our own context of the poem's psycho-dynamics:

Coleridge remembers himself as a "Presageful" child, the bells of his local church as "Most like articulate sounds of things to come," but the childhood's memory's significance is displaced not onto the present of the poem but onto the future, and not, therefore, onto the adult but onto the sleeping child incapable of "articulate sounds." (p. 133)

Bygrave limits his emphasis only on the Other, that is, the child. The adult seems to have no greater value in his critical context.

Mileur's negative hermeneutic interpretation in the guise of Deconstruction has focussed on failure and passivity, which he associates with the frost and stasis. Visionary criticism has considered the poem a great Romantic piece of the achievement and unity of self in Coleridge's poetic self-expression.

Our re-examining of the poem in relation to the two others as earlier stated will show a more intricate nature of Coleridge's preoccupation with Hartley than extant criticism has been able to do.<sup>9</sup> The frost is a great symbol that surpasses the qualities of stasis and passivity that has been attributed to it by such critics like Mileur, Wheeler and Miall, who associate it with the word "still".

From a creative and psycho-spiritual point of view the performing ministry of the frost takes a grander hermeneutic meaning. Frost presupposes the presence of snow, which has a conservative potential. It can, therefore, be a symbolic space for storage, that is, a kind of memory space for recapitulation and recollection as engendered by the child in this case. Winter that comes with snow is part of the cycle of seasons. In Romantic terms and with



regard to the concept of irony, each season is generative, is a spring not only for aesthetic creativity but also for meditation and reflection. In this regard the seasonal setting of the poem announces as well as ends its theme of necessary death and regenerative possibility from a psychological perspective. The Other, represented by the child, excites Coleridge's self-seeking meditation, and for this to occur he has to take recourse to his past. This retrospective and introspective engagement situates him as the pivotal subject in the poem's contents, because he is doubly portraying himself and the child by wishing it potentials in the future. There are three instances where Coleridge uses the word "still", in lines 16, 40, and 41.

The effect to which it is employed largely depends on the context of interpretation. As Christopher Miller has rightly said, the word remains a term of contrastive persistence. As an adjective it means motionless, quiet and constant (the preferred meaning of the above cited critics), and as an adverb it carries the sense of persistence, ongoing and continuity. In the poem frost is very far from signifying death, and the textual as well as philosophical use of snow points to Coleridge's sense of the word as an adverb, justifying a philosophical interpretation of becoming rather than fixity or stagnation, "Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing. .../A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,/For still I hope to see the stranger's face."

The great question of mirroring, transference, displacement or vicariousness is captured in the poem's third stanza:

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,  
Full 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

(L. 44 – 53)

These lines evoke the fact that as a father who has the right to see the growth of his child, Coleridge enjoys in the anticipated bliss of his inarticulate child. So while his focus is the child the immediate psychological impact is his own self-meditation. In this context, Rajan's supposed deconstructive analysis of Coleridge's self as transference and vicariousness could paradoxically turn to be a favourable critical measure to ascertain Coleridge's right to the Other as primarily a re-construction and re-orientation of his self. Besides, coming back to Bygrave's assertion, it would be considered to be partially correct rather than a final statement. His notion of displaced significance projected into the future and the child as well, is unsatisfactory since it gives the impression of not being focussed on Coleridge in the poem's atmosphere. To revise Bygrave then, one would say Coleridge sees his own rebirth and regeneration in his child, so it is a psychological issue of both displacement and return. To put it alternatively, it is a mutually rewarding act embedded in the sense of becoming for both father and son. Coleridge echoes the notion of the richness of each season with his hope in the child whose future success will mean success for him as father. The inarticulate nature of the child is simply an instance of its growth, again justifying the fact that the general meaning lies in becoming and dynamic change

Coleridge's later poem 'The Pang More Sharp than All: An Allegory' not only echoes his previous concern in the frost poem and even the afore-discussed sonnets, but makes an advanced statement on the issue of the Other as greatly impacting his life. The poem delineates the extent to which Coleridge was serious about his fears, anxieties and hope for Hartley. The sense of bitterness inscribed in the poem is triggered by the supposed disappearance of the son. We have seen the contents of the letter to Allsop in which Coleridge expresses his confessions about the turning tides in his life. In the case of this poem it is certainly not his unfulfilled love for Sara Hutchinson that enrages him, it is not his poetic or philosophical shortcomings, nor is it his addiction to opium. It is interestingly his own biological and perhaps genetic existence, his son, not the inarticulate child of the previous

poem, but presently a youth. Coleridge's engagement here signals that his early enthusiasm and hopes have not been achieved.

Hartley was to become a very eccentric person, perhaps more than his father. This takes us to the subtitle of the poem, and to the question regarding why Coleridge chose allegory. Hartley could be interpreted as an allegory of Coleridge with the "circuitious paths" of his life similar to that of the father. He abandoned his parents and Coleridge made vain efforts to keep him conscious that he was a caring and loving father. In the first three stanzas of the poem Coleridge exposes the painful situation of the son's going away, recalling all what he had seen the child to represent and how this appears to be a lost ideal. The last two stanzas hold the core meaning of the poem. In his characteristic self-conscious and anti-self-conscious manner Coleridge articulates the impact on him:

Ah! he is gone, and yet will not depart! –  
Is with me still, yet I from him exiled!  
For still there lives within my heart  
The magic image of the magic Child,  
Which there he made up-grow by his strong art.  
As in that crystal orb – wise Merlin' s feat, -  
The wondrous 'World of Glass,' wherein inisled  
All long'd-for things their beings did repeat; -  
And there he left it, like a Sylph beguiled,  
To live and yearn and languish incomplete!  
(L. 34 – 43)

The excerpt points to a number of important issues. The exclamation signs, the word "still" that recurs again and its connection with yet, the world of glass, all throw light on the highly paradoxical stance that Coleridge adopts, and to an extent the psychology of mirroring. The exclamation signs can be interpreted as an express statement of disbelief that his son has fled for good, while "still" and "yet" tie in with becoming and hope, which as Coleridge says in the next stanza, cannot be betrayed by the sense of frustration that he has. The image of glass draws attention to a fragmented part of an earlier manuscript version of the poem which reverberates the first line of the excerpt above:

‘---- into my Heart  
The magic Child as in a magic glass  
Transfused, and ah! he *left* within my Heart  
A loving Image and a counterpart.

*(Poems, p. 457)*

The Other here, represented by the child, has become not only a mirror for his inward contemplation, but an entire part of Coleridge’s consciousness, never to leave or separate from him. This keeps him psychologically optimistic even if the pang is his “woeful hap to feel.” Coleridge clings to childhood because of its regenerative importance for the assurance of a psychological sense of completeness or the approach to completeness.

In 1833 Coleridge was not only surprised, but happy to find Hartley’s unique collection of poems which was dedicated to him. The prefatory poem in this collection is an ample exemplification of Coleridge’s life-long engagement to see his children achieve their lives, thereby justifying his attempt to completely live his own life. The very Child in the frost and pang poems was now articulating, as a subject himself and his father his object. The sonnet reads:

Father, and Bard revered! To whom I owe,  
Whate’er it be, my little art of numbers,  
Thou, in thy night-watch o’er my cradled slumbers  
Didst meditate the verse that lives to show,  
(And long shall live, when all alike are low)  
Thy prayer how ardent, and thy hope how strong,  
That I should learn of Nature’s self the song,  
The lore which none but Nature’s pupils know.  
The prayer was heard: I “wander’d like a breeze,”  
By mountain brooks and solitary meres,  
And gather’d there the shapes and phantasies  
Which, mixt with passions of my sadder years,  
Compose this book, If good therein be,  
That good, my sire, I dedicate to thee.

This poem shows Hartley’s consciousness of the good intentions of his father. As an Other, and after having read his father’s poem, his response to his father points to the satisfying attitude of a child. This justifies the previously discussed view that mirroring is not

a mere act of transference or displaced significance or vicariousness. It is also a return from the other as exemplified in Hartley's case. The self in time becomes an engaging struggle for self-reconciliation with the self as well as the Other.

A fundamental question as to what the Other gains comes to mind at this juncture of our analysis. Is Hartley's attitude to be interpreted as a simple submission to conventions? Is he just trying to please his father, or does his action bear an importance on him as well? That is, does he use his father as an Other to seek a psychological comfort as well? These questions, however complex they are, point to one important issue. Hartley's dedication shows his conscious awareness of his father's devotion to his life. He comes to recognise this despite his eccentricity. This may justify the psychological view that he tries, to an extent, to clear and satisfy his own conscience with regard to what he has hitherto been before composing the poem. Coleridge did not stay long after Hartley's publication, but it is undeniable that what Hartley did was a welcome relief to him.

'The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem' has hardly attracted any critical and interpretative commentary on the question of childhood, let alone the phenomenon of our present discussion. There is no doubt that within the interpretative context of conversation, the bird has been taken as an inspiring instance of Coleridge's meditative and reflective speculations concerning nature, which it represents. So the central focus has always been that of the bird and the relationships of Coleridge; Lamb, Dorothy, Wordsworth, and even Southey.

Stephen Bygrave, for instance, stresses the psychological matrix of the displacement of significance and recognises only the Maid and the Wordsworths in his analysis of the poem in *Coleridge and the Self* (1986: 130, 133). Yet Coleridge makes an interesting connection between his contemplation on the bird and his child, his interest in the child strongly connected with his desire to have it find peace which will intend be peace of himself as father to the child. The question of the child as a mirror can therefore fit in the context of the poem's

psychological interpretation. Coleridge's introduction of the child within the centrality of the bird's warblings seems abrupt and unexpected, but carries the strain of the poem's last lines, which affiliates it with 'Frost at Midnight.' His preoccupation with his child is a preoccupation with himself, is hope of his child finding bliss in nature. In fact, Coleridge recounts the therapeutic effect that nature produces on the child and ends by saying that:

It is a father's tale: But if that Heaven

Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up  
Familiar with these songs, that with the night  
He may associate joy  
(L. 106 – 110)

We are certainly reminded of Coleridge's night traumas when he expects his child to associate night with joy. We see his engagement as a conscientious father, struggling not only to come to terms with himself, but expressing his anxiety and fears for the child's growth into maturity and a complete man. It is a joy for any parent to see their child achieve more than they did. Children remind parents that they (parents) are alive and therefore their biological existence as parents is justified. Coleridge's handling and articulating of this ideal merits appreciation.

The question of the Other as a mirror on Coleridge's childhood broodings is subtly complex in 'Dejection: A Letter' and 'Dejection: An Ode.' Both are a complex interweaving of sensibilities in connection with love and the philosophical undercurrents of the psychological gradation of time. The first poem has been dominantly read and interpreted as Coleridge's dramatisation of his hopeless dreams of concretising his tempestuous love for Sara Hutchinson. Coleridge did not intend to have this published, perhaps justifying its epistolary nature. The second poem becomes a revised edition of the former, with the intention of publishing, and a shift to a more personal stance which does not entirely evade the centrality of the former. But what is interesting with 'Dejection: An Ode' is the fact that it

has been paralleled with 'Frost at Midnight' as poetic expressions of Coleridge's recuperative attempts to restore unity in himself.

The theme of childhood and the question of the Other is seen to be complicated because Coleridge dedicates the poem to another mature and adult person like himself, though the centrality of the psycho-dynamics of self in time prevails. The interpretative context here will consider the Lady, as it were, as symbolically representing an Other that directly relates to childhood sensibility. Coleridge is lamenting the loss of imaginative potential, encapsulated in his expression of aesthetic and spiritual deprivation. This connects with his childhood yearnings and visionary gleam in nature rather than with the loss of or the impossibility of consuming love. Coleridge's paradoxical presentation of his state of despair and agony clearly represents his antithetical thinking, which connects with the phases of his psychological evolution since childhood:

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear  
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,  
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,  
In word, or sigh, or tear –  
(L. 21 – 24)

Coleridge goes further in his expression of the lost imaginative ideal in nature saying that, "I see them all so excellently fair,/I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!" We do not need to belabour Coleridge's understanding of feeling and thought at this instance. The central stanzas of the poem with relation of our discussion are the sixth and eighth stanzas. In the sixth stanza Coleridge takes the reader down memory lane:

There was a time when, though my path was rough,  
This joy within me dallied with distress,  
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff  
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:  
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,  
And fruit and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.  
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:  
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;  
But oh! Each visitation  
Suspends what nature gave me at birth,

My shaping spirit of Imagination.  
(L. 76 – 86)

These lines echo the failure of “genial spirits” inscribed in the third stanza. Two important words capture our attention, failure and suspension. These words do not expressly state but imply that there is still possibility of regeneration rather than definite aesthetic, psychological and spiritual stasis. This hope for regenerative growth is captured in the last stanza, “May this storm be but a mountain-birth.” This has a resonance with the poetics of becoming discussed in the previous chapter with reference to ‘Kubla Khan,’ which explains the paradox of the limitations of creative and visionary enthusiasm and the possibility of renewed and more complex imaginative and aesthetic and spiritual strength. Associating this poem with paradoxical or antithetical thinking is justifiable, given that Coleridge laments a lost ideal but which in the very act of the creative process is paradoxically regained, resulting to a poem of a great and canonical significance. The poem is a great instance of aesthetic and spiritual possibility and continuity. One can say that it is through the act of envisioning that one understands the greatness of the human consciousness. Regeneration here connects with the thread of childhood and points to the imaginative reworking of memory for the enhancement and engendering of self-understanding, harmony and redemption. So the poem is far from being what the Romantic visionary critic M. H Abrams styles as Coleridge’s despairing farewell to health, happiness, and poetic creativity. We do not need to emphasise that Coleridge lived for thirty-two more years after the composition of this poem. And during this period he showed proof that the storm could always give room for further aesthetic creativity and spiritual reassurance.



## **-THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF NARCISSISM: A CHARACTERISTIC TRAIT IN COLERIDGE?**

Narcissism is a psychological phenomenon that has a multitude of meanings in psychopathological and psychoanalytic discourse that cannot be exhaustively treated in this endeavour.<sup>10</sup> The centrality of the various strands of discourse pertaining to the word is the self, and all these diverging views aim at conceptualising the phenomenon. The issue here is to briefly examine some of these meanings, in view of arguing where Coleridge's narcissistic tendencies can be situated with regard to the above phase of the discussion concerning his self and an Other in the interpretative context of becoming. Among the various meanings attached to the word are the following:

Narcissism can be defined as a self-defeating, or a failed attempt to solve an unresolved problem. The narcissist is seen to deem his/her self as barely existing, and what even exists is considered worthless. This definition primarily focuses on the notion of an irretrievably depleted self. There is also the question of self-inflation. This brings in the problematic of the other. The narcissist takes recourse in turning and contemplating on others to assure the constant inflation of his/her depleted or shrunk self. In most cases, this is characterised by a negative attitude on the Other in which the assertive self seeks to find justification, the impression clearly being that the problem is far from being actually solved. In other words, the narcissist psychologically attempts to protect his injured or invulnerable self rather than solving the injury. In his recent publication *Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited* (2003), Sam Vaknin elaborates other characteristic traits of the term. He portrays the narcissist as one needing excessive admiration and adulation, as one having the feeling of being unique and special, of lacking empathy and of being envious of others, but who at the same time do not want their self-image to be impinged.

The above discussion may give the impression that narcissism is a psychic problem that is incurable. The self is handled here on psychiatric bases as suffering from stasis or

degeneration. This does not favour the contention of the self as systematically transforming. There are, however, a number of psychologists and psychoanalysts who have examined it on positive grounds. In “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1914) Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis, for instance, had identified it as a problem, but insisted that narcissism is a pivotal stage in personality development, offering the possibility of self-growth, self-reconstruction and self-achievement. Freud’s position ties well with the idea of becoming which strongly resists readings of the self in Coleridge as overwhelmed with inflation, blockage and deterioration.

Mailto Majo’s insightful essay entitled “A Psychology of the Self: What is the Self?” throws more light on the question of narcissism and the Other. Contending that self-psychology is a phenomenon that is multiplistic, cohesive, paradoxical, and consisting in constant evolution of perspectives, he elaborately discusses the views of a number of psychologists, the most important of whom is Heinz Kohut. Majo uses much of Kohut’s ideas to model and develop his own arguments. To him, it is in the self psychological approach, that the chief goal of therapy becomes the understanding of the subjective self as the central structure of psychological health and maturity. He sees the self as containing three intersecting domains; the domain of “me” as “I” experience the world, the domain of “you” as you are experienced, and “us” as we interact.

The self, Majo contends, is always in a state of becoming, of emerging out of the past and entering a future into which it can project itself. He discusses Kohut’s notion of the bipolar self in *The Restoration of the Self* (1977) to enhance his argument on the interior-exterior dichotomy of the self and the Other. Kohut’s models his analysis of the self on two primary time axes, one superficial and the other deep. The superficial axis represents the ability of the person to intellectually take the historical stance: to recognise himself in his recalled past and to project himself into an imagined future. With regard to the deeper axis we

must recognise that throughout our self-history, we are one and the same person. Without this deeper sense, our ability to take a historical stance and connect our self to past and future tense would be lost.

These ideas connect with the hermeneutic psychology of Paul Ricoeur, who sees the self as characteristic of a coherent history, as a phenomenal character in the continuity of experience, in which the notion of the other plays a very important role. Majo asserts that the issue of the interaction between the “I” and its reflection on the “Other,” is what characterises self psychology as a structured experience. The “Other” becomes an extension of the interior self, portraying a healthy narcissistic state.

With these brief notions on narcissism, one can trace the extent to which Coleridge’s psychology can be argued in the domain. That is, how the question of the self as dynamically developing and transforming towards a desired goal can be connected with the hypothesis of the synthesising potential of the imagination and the hermeneutics of becoming. In this case, the poems are once more a dynamic expression above their written presentations, pointing to the problematic of reducing interpretation only to what finds expression in printed texts. If Coleridge’s recourse to the Other is to be considered as narcissistic, then his narcissistic traits have a positive and healthy nature. The complexity of the notion of polarity in this vein is worth examining. The nature of polarity in Coleridge here will be seen to be dual. First, there is the awareness of an apparently divided or depleted self that needs reconciliation and harmony. Second, there is the Other as a reference context which is inextricably connected to the inner self as it struggles to re-define, re-constitute and re-construct itself. His aestheticising of his problems, therefore, points to how art can play a vital role in the understanding and redressing of the self on almost similar lines like scientific formulations on the issue that are based on psychopathology.

We have shown above that the question of the Other is not an expression of the self’s inability to redress its problems, nor is it a demonstration of self-defeat or ultimate futility. On

the contrary, it is for the purpose of self-construction, self-orientation and self-affirmation. Coleridge's psychological struggles are therefore imbedded in anti-anxiety, anti-depression, and anti-narcissism (that is, any unhealthy aspect about it). The self in his poetry and other related writings is seen not as a dichotomous division that is unbridgeable. It is depicted as a phenomenon that is revealed through process, through becoming, characterised by positive/negative alterations, but pointing to one centrality. We once more strongly affirm that the self is in a permanent state of construction amidst a hermeneutically positive adversity, irony, paradox and contradiction. And as we have pointed out, the central focus is not actually whether the desired ideal of self-unity and redemption is achieved. It is whether the question of the self as process, transformation and becoming is justified in Coleridge's texts.

The question of inner perception and an Other as referential context does not show him as neurotic or hysteric as John Beres or Anne Mellor or Thomas McFarland would have it. That Coleridge acknowledged his problems and did not try to pretend or run away from them, is an indication that he should be psychologically read and interpreted from a positive hermeneutico-phenomenological grounds.

This chapter has all along tried to rehabilitate the psycho-dynamics of Coleridge's life and aesthetic engagements with regard to the psychological development of the self. Under the general background of negative and suspicious treatment of the poet's psychological life and its aesthetic expression, Coleridge is not to be seen as damaged or unregenerate as most critics have done so within the interpretative and critical matrix of psychoanalysis and to an extent Deconstruction. Besides, most of extant criticism by Romantic visionary critics has interpreted Coleridge's early and late poetry, accepting that he suffered from a split and irreconcilable self. In this vein, his early poems have been interpreted as an achievement of his visionary gleam and self-harmony, while his later poems are seen to express a failure of his early idealism and split self. A careful re-examination of Coleridge's poems has shown that he stood face to face with the psycho-somatic problems of his life and did not attempt to

evade or hide any psychological reality that characterised his experiences. His philosophy of hope justifies the infusion into the discourse of the notion of becoming, whereby he is conscious of the alternating changes that time causes to the developing self, but which self has a central goal.

In conformity with his theory of synthesis and harmony, the question of the two or three major phases that preoccupied his life and poetry, as well as other sources which express his self-textualising, it becomes convincingly clear that Coleridge understood life as a highly psychological activity, and art as a highly interrelated component in the struggle of the self to attain unification, knowledge and the totality of spirituality. We have looked at his self-expression from two highly related categories; his internal meditation in relation to the imaginative capacity of retrospection and introspection, that is, the psychological process of using memory as a capacitating measure for self-certainty. Self-mirroring in the first instance therefore corresponds with his inward turn into the regenerative function of memory.

The second aspect continues the line of argument of the former, but this time laying emphasis not only on the poet but also the passive or active intervention of the Other, in most cases his own child. Here Coleridge is still consistent with his own life though he presents an advanced dimension on the issue because he expects his own child to have more than he was able to have. This has pointed to the passing of time not only in the consciousness of Coleridge, but also his own child that shows an awareness that justifies the earlier act of the father. The brief discussion of the psychoanalytic phenomenology of narcissism and how it relates to the hermeneutics of the Other, shows that this psychopathological phenomenon is very healthy and positive in Coleridge. He is not suffering from self-possession or self-love, and appropriately uses his psychological agony productively, trying, as it were, not only to aesthetically express it, but also to seek solutions to it, either psychological or philosophical, in the process of expression. Most importantly, his poetic and poetic texts are not to be seen as

expressing the totality of his developing self, but as pointers that help in the general outlook of his life.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Plato's conceptualisation of the question of the soul's immortality is not without its difficulties. Following the Pythagorean philosophy of transmigration he adopted another strand of argument that shows the soul as entangled in a cycle. That is, the souls of certain dead people, he asserted, returned into other forms of nature, wild animals in particular like foxes, wolves, tigers, as a sign of punishment for the bad deeds. It should be suggested here that this aspect of the soul's immortality must have been used by Plato for the purpose of his ethical system, which was aimed at giving an acceptable way in which society could operate. The commonly held Platonic view still remains in vogue, that in which the soul reunites with the world soul after death. Wordsworth and Coleridge were to be strongly interested in this view as they tried to formulate their poetics of the dynamics of the human personality, its development, death and afterlife.

<sup>2</sup> The works of Janeway, Watts and Mrs. Barbauld can be found online at the following websites: [http://www.calvaryroadbaptist.org.TokenIndex-James\\_janeway.htm](http://www.calvaryroadbaptist.org.TokenIndex-James_janeway.htm), <http://www.ccel.org.watts/divsongs/divsongs.txt>, and <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barbauld/hymns-in-prose.html>. Another contemporary writer Sara Trimmer published her *Fabulous Histories* (1786), later titled *The History of the Robins*. Like Barbauld, she blends Christian piety with nature worship. Many works have been written with diverse perspectives and emphases on children and childhood some of which include J.H Plumb, *The New World of Children in Eighteenth Century England* (1975), Llyod De Mause (Ed.) *The History of Childhood* (1976), Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children – Parent: Child Relationships 1500 – 1900* (1983), Rosemary O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships 1500 – 1900* (1994), I. K Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern English Society* (1994), and Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Excerpted from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. James Strachey et al., 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1954 – 1974), 9: 147 – 148, 151. Hereafter cited as SE. Other illuminating aspects of Freud's psychoanalytical method that are connected with readings of Coleridge can be found in essays or books from the same collection. Some of these include *Totem and Taboo* (1913) Vol. 13, pp. 85 – 86, 88, and "The Uncanny" (1919), Vol. 17, pp. 240 – 241. For further reading see also John Bowlby, from *Attachment*, Vol. 1 of *Attachment and Loss* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1974), pp. 204 – 205, 206 – 207, and *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, Vol. 3 of *Attachment and Loss* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1980), pp. 312, 315 – 316. Bowlby discusses the psychological effects of bereavement in children with the principal focus being the children's responses to the death of a parent. Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' has been categorised under such a reading, the contention being that the actual source of his anxiety expressed in the poem is connected with the death of his father, whom he lost while very young. With reference to Jung's psychoanalysis discussed a little further, Frieda Fordham's *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Penguin Putman Book, 1966) can be consulted.

<sup>4</sup> From "Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905), SE 7: 3 – 123.

<sup>5</sup> In the evolutionary stages of his intellectual, philosophical, metaphysical growth Coleridge was strongly indebted to David Hartley's psychology of the association, an indebtedness which significantly saw the naming of his son after Hartley. Hartley's theory of knowledge encapsulated in *Observations on Man, His Fame, His Duty and his Expectations* (1749) was empirical, optimistic and religious, but found later by Coleridge to be mechanical since the mind was still conceived as a passive instrument of

perception, being acted upon rather than acting. Coleridge was to fall out with Hartley, shifting to German Idealism and Romanticism which provided new ideas to suit his organic and dynamic views to things.

<sup>6</sup> We can recall the New Critical aversive attitude to the question of personality, of authorial intention, of issues pertaining to feelings, emotions, spirit, excitement which are all considered uncritical terms in any interpretative context. Two of the greatest exponents of this critical school, W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, wrote the famous essay "The Affective Fallacy" (1949), which proposed an interpretative approach that had to exclude all the kinds of undesirable features stated above. This position is greatly embraced and favoured by Deconstruction which in a like manner dismisses and discards any such notions as intentions, beauty, truth and spirit. It would not be wrong to call Deconstruction a New New Criticism in this line of theoretical and practical convergence.

<sup>7</sup> The five biographical letters written to Thomas Poole date as follows; February 6 1797 (pp. 302 – 303), March 1797 (pp. 310 – 312), October 9 1797 (pp. 346 – 348), October 16 1797 (pp. 352 – 355), and February 19 1798 (pp. 387 – 389). And the most important one to Thomas Allsop dates October 8 1822.

<sup>8</sup> This is excerpted from the manuscript version of the poem in Ernest Hartley Coleridge's edition of *Coleridge: Poetical Works* (1912 [1966]), p. 91, which shows slight differences to the published one. Both versions convey the same thematic concern, the meditative and self-articulation of the poet in relation to an inspiring other.

<sup>9</sup> The name Hartley reminds us about a very psychological aspect of Coleridge with regard to child naming. The naming of all his children has a great significance as it throws more light on the understanding of the anxieties, fears, and hopes for his children. His attribution of Hartley, Berkeley, Derwent and Sara to his four children is very significant as these names refer to unquestionable influences in his philosophical development. Even if Coleridge was to eventually fall out with Hartley and Berkeley because he saw their philosophy as limiting to his spiritual and aesthetic pursuits, he never failed to acknowledge them. By the time he named his children after them he was obviously under the spell of their influence and hoped that his own offspring would achieve equally high recognition as the philosophers.

<sup>10</sup> There are a number of studies that have elaborated on the psychology of narcissism. Some include, G. Atwood and R. Stolorow, *Structures of Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology* (1984), Richard Chessick, *Psychology of the Self and the Treatment of Narcissism* (1985), Nathan Schwartz-Salant, *Narcissism and Character Transformation: The Psychology of Narcissistic Character Disorders* (1986), Sheldon Bach, *Narcissistic States and the Therapeutic Process* (1986), Mario Jacoby, *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of Self in Jung and Kohut* (1990), and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (1992).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### KEATS'S NATURE-CONSCIOUSNESS AND MYTHOPOETIC EXPERIENCE: SELF-SEEKING FOR AESTHETIC IDENTITY

What though I am not wealthy in the dower  
Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know  
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow  
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts  
Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts  
Out the dark mysteries of human souls  
To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls  
A vast idea before me, and I glean  
Therefrom my liberty; thence to I've seen  
The end and aim of Poesy. 'Tis clear  
As anything most true; as that the year  
Is made of the four seasons – manifest  
As a large cross, some old cathedral's crest,  
Lifted to the white clouds.

(Keats, 'Sleep and Poetry' L. 84 – 97)

The noble Heart that harbours virtuous thought,  
And is with Child of glorious great intent,  
Can never rest, until it forth have brought  
Th' eternal Brood of Glory excellent –

(Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queen*, 1. V. 1 – 4.)

### KEAT'S NATURE-CONSCIOUSNESS: A UTILISED AND REDUCED OR A UNIVERSAL FORCE?

As indicated in the title, this chapter deals with two major issues in Keats's poetry, nature-consciousness and mythopoetic experience. Both play a central role in the understanding of the aesthetic ramifications of his theory of the imagination, with the philosophy of becoming largely seen in his apprehension of poetic maturity as an evolving process rather than a completely accomplished task. Writing to Fanny Brawne in February 1820, Keats said, "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me – nothing to make my friends proud of my memory – but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd" (*Selected letters*, p. 422). Another instance is the self-chosen inscription on Keats's tomb, which states "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." These are some of the comments that the proponents of Deconstruction cannot identify with



Keats's idealism, and will principally capitalise on to substantiate their contention that Keats's ironic and self-contradictory character makes him a Deconstructionist. The argument here is that these remarks, within the context of becoming, should not be taken to represent Keats's ironic and paradoxical consciousness in the strict rhetorical implications of the words, nor his contradictory stance in life. They positively point to the fact that he was conscious of poetic expression as an aesthetic process rather than a final achievement. By 1820, he had no doubt written mature poetry, but his sense of aesthetic vision was not satisfactory. Nature and myth play a vital role in the understanding of his aesthetic ambitions and achievements.

With regard to the first perspective, the major question is, to what end does Keats use nature in his aesthetic and philosophical expression and speculations? In Chapter Two, we have elaborately discussed the notion of nature in Coleridge, connecting it not only with aesthetic creation, but most importantly with his philosophical and spiritual speculations encapsulated in his theory and philosophy of the imagination. Nature is apprehended by Coleridge from a pantheistic and monistic dimension as a universal force which sheds light on man's spirituality. Becoming was seen as a constructive deferral of spiritual idealism, the argument being that the visionary experiences encapsulated in texts is an indicator of supra-textual readings and therefore not closures but dynamic open-endedness.

Though there are a number of characteristic features in Keats's poetry which affiliate with Coleridge, his nature consciousness will be seen to take a slightly different turn. Keats's poetry and prose show proof of certain monistic traits common in Coleridge, justifying the assertion that he can be discussed within the mainstream of Wordsworth and Coleridge, even if he does not handle the matter in a like manner. He equally sees nature from an organicist view point. Yet, his nature-poetry, as we shall see, does not place priority on the visionary and transcendental and, therefore, the

dominant spiritual dimension of nature is not like that of his elderly colleague, for it tends to reduce nature primarily within the confines of his aesthetic quest rather than brooding over it as a universal force.

Keats saw the secret of creative genius as an exquisitely purged sympathy with nature. Apprehending nature and aesthetic creativity as an ever-increasing and progressive moment of life that was shaping itself, Keats infused most of his poetry with this apprehension. Equally evident in his epistolary self-consciousness, were important philosophical remarks on the imagination that connect with nature, and point to the thread of thought of his elder colleagues as indicated above. An examination of poems like 'Sleep and Poetry,' 'I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill,' 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket,' 'Ode on a Nightingale,' 'Bright Star, I would I were Steadfast as thou art,' *Endymion*, 'Epistle to Dear Reynolds,' and 'Ode to Autumn,' all exemplify Keats's self-conscious use of nature imagery into the fabric of his aesthetic and to an extent his spiritual ambitions.

In 'Sleep and Poetry' Keats's basic interest has to do with the mapping of his artistic ambition, which entails a gradual and spiral movement towards aesthetic vision and excellence. One of the developmental phases in this progression has to do with nature. Nature therefore undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in his poetics of becoming a self-portrayed artist. Keats begins the poem with a series of rhetorical questions, relating nature to his philosophical and psycho-aesthetic apprehension of sleep. As the poem's title indicates, sleep and poetry are highly intertwined, sleep seen here as a psycho-aesthetic state which generates and enhances creative productivity. Keats no doubt adulates nature's beauty and grandeur. Nature serves as a kind of nativity, a muse or a springboard to the poet's artistic quest, whereby he shows the consciousness that he has to pass through the realms of Flora and Pan, which represent nature-poetry, before continuing to more complex levels of awareness and creativity

(‘Sleep and Poetry’ L. 101 –120). Flora and Pan here refer to Keats’s mediation of artistic creativity and Greek mythology, which will be the substance of the second section of this chapter. Though Keats’s scheme considers nature not as nobler as the other phases of this development, he does not undermine nature, for nature imagery recurs and serves an important thematic purpose in most of his poetry.

‘I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill’ was written in the same year as ‘Sleep and Poetry,’ and once more echoes Keats’s concern for nature. The poem is fused with nature images over which the poet is contemplating not only on aesthetic but spiritual vision:

I gazed awhile, and felt as light, and free  
As though the fanning wings of Mercury  
Had played upon my heels: I was light-hearted,  
And many pleasures to my vision started;  
(L. 23 – 26)

This excerpt suggests an experience with a mystical and sublime aspect, what he even later qualifies as a natural sermon (L. 71). The inspiring component of nature is noted with the rhetorical question that the poet asks, “For what has made the sage or poet write/But the fair paradise of Nature’s light?” (L. 125 – 126). Keats goes further to describe the healing power of nature, showing that nature is not merely concerned with the aesthetic act of writing poetry, but could serve a medical purpose to whoever is open and receptive to it:

The breezes were ethereal, and pure,  
And crept through half closed lattices to cure  
The languid sick; it cool’d their fever’d sleep,  
And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.  
Soon they awoke cleared eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,  
Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting:  
(L. 221 – 226)

The Romantic symbol of the breeze and its impact on the creative imagination, common in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, is here evoked. One also notices that Keats is obviously expressing sensitivity to the way air affects bodily health. It

therefore connects with pathology, which Keats had studied in his medical training, and points to the therapeutic or pharmaceutical importance of nature to the body and soul. This is not just a Coleridgean connection, but a post-Novalian philosophy. Novalis, as we earlier saw in Chapter Two, was very preoccupied with the pharmaceutical operations of nature in human life, a celebration of both the psychic and somatic nature of man. In fact, Keats's broodings over nature actually point to a number of concerns that are intricately related to his study of medical sciences and his philosophy of the imagination. The nature of the Romantic imagination here is its aesthetic implications and how it connects inextricably with his progressive philosophy of life. The concern here is not unrelated to Keats's imaginative view of art, expressed in a letter to George and Thomas Keats, dated December 21 1817, "The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth" (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 370). Keats's notion of beauty and truth is highly inclusive. That is, it blends all life's experiences or apprehensions, negative or positive, into a holistic vision. Art and nature, therefore, are seen as therapeutic in function.

Keats's views on nature are not to be found only in his poetry but also his letters. In his letter to Benjamin Bailey (1817), he is preoccupied with the question of fellowship with divine essence which he reverberates in *Endymion*. Writing to Tom (1818), he associates nature with poetic expression. In other letters to George and Thomas Keats (1817), he talks of the negative capability of the poet that calls for a synaesthetic and empathic vision in life, to Reynolds (1818), he asserts the conviction that all departments of knowledge are to be seen as excellence and calculated towards a great whole, to John Taylor (1818), he outlines certain axioms of poetry among which is the notion that if poetry comes not naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had

better not come at all. All these connect the imagination with nature-consciousness and demonstrate his re-affirmation of a Plotinist or Spinozist monism.

In the letter to Tom, more specifically, Keats's description of the Scottish landscape is vital in the understanding of the importance he attributed to the subject:

What astonish me more than anything is the tone, the colouring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; if I may say so, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The spaces, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. I shall learn poetry here and henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavour of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows. (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 402)

What one can discern here about Keats's strong sense of perception and imaginative intensity is that nature's material does not contribute only to the aesthetic composition of poetry, but poetry that has a deep apprehension of life seen in its relation to spirit and soul. One sees the apprehension of ekphrasis, as the observation of the scenery urges the search for an appropriate language for utterance. So the letter sheds light on the epistemological and ontological implications of Keats's nature-consciousness.

In 'Ode to a Nightingale,' one can discern the consciousness of the use of nature, symbolised in the bird and its melodious song, not only for poetic composition, but also for advancing philosophical and even spiritual speculations. Both bird and song represent natural beauty, the poetic expression of the non-verbal song signalling the harmony of nature. Apart from the ecstasy that the bird's song generates, the unseen but vivid pictorial description of the surrounding landscape adds to the bliss and serenity of the atmosphere:

I cannot see what flower are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the bough,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in heavens;

And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of lies on summer eves.  
(Stanza V, L. 41 – 50)

These lines express the splendour of spring while foreshadowing the approach of summer, which will have its own store of nature beauty and luxury. As earlier said, nature here seems to be a springboard for intense speculations in the face of the impermanence and mutability of life which strongly preoccupies the poet. To put it in other words, the song seems to engender a phenomenological process of self-transformation or a psychological or spiritual metamorphosis that enhances a deep desire for the eternal and unalterable through death. Yet the poet submits to a stoical fortitude, apparently emphasising the material and sensuous realm of existence rather than the struggle to maintaining a permanent and idealistic state. This has often been problematised as imaginative failure, or as a characteristic Keatsian trademark of ambivalence between reality and imaginative illusion. As to why this happens as exemplified in the last stanza of the poem, is a philosophical and spiritual disposition that will be discussed in detail in a later chapter in which it will be connected with the poetics of becoming.

Though greatly infused with natural description, two important extracts from *Endymion* can best illustrate Keats's ontological perception and understanding of nature:

Wherein lies Happiness? In that which beck  
Our ready minds to fellow divine;  
A fellowship with divine essence, till we shine  
Full alchymized and free of space. Behold  
The clear Religion of Heaven - ...  
(*Endymion* I. 777 – 781)

.....

at the tip top,  
There hangs by unseen film, an orb'd drop  
Of light, and that is love: Its influence,

Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,  
At which we start and fret; till in the end,  
Melting into its radiance, we blend,  
Mingle, and so become a part of it ...  
(*Endymion* I. 805 – 811)

These quotes bear a close affinity with Coleridge's Neoplatonist views and therefore connect a common thread of thought between the two poets. The first lines may be rightly read as Keats's affirmation of his belief in Platonic or transcendental reality, given that they express in like manner the workings of the imagination as an associative and spiritual faculty. Divine fellowship with essence will be suggested as partaking in all life processes and principles in nature. Essence can be interpreted here to stand for the Logos, or transcendent reality in which all fuse in momentary imaginative experiences or in the final outcome of becoming, Being.

Keats uses chemical theory to advance an aesthetic and philosophical disposition. Alchemy has to do with the chemical process of transformation from a base to a higher substance. His use of ethereal existence in the excerpt letter above also strengthens his scientific analogies to matters of art, aesthetics, philosophy and spirituality. Keats apprehends artistic creativity to work on this same principle. So his allusions to science are not to be seen from empirical terms, but on imaginative, aesthetic and spiritual terms. To put it in other words, sense impressions are imaginatively concentrated and distilled. This leads to more higher forms, ethereal forms and finally to divine fellowship, suggesting the universal principle of harmonisation with the divine source.

The second excerpt also gives an insight into what Keats seemed to have been propagating in his nature-mystic thought. It aptly justifies the struggle at wholeness and unity exemplified with the verbs melting, blending, mingling, and becoming. All of these verbs are dynamic verbs, suggesting a conscious awareness of process and the active interaction between psyche and nature. These words all relate to Coleridge's

definition of the secondary imagination and the poet in ideal perfection, where we find counterparts such as partake, synthesise, diffuse, dissipates, and dissolve which share the same characteristic features discussed above. The basic premise of the imagination as inspiration and at the same time a base for epistemological and ontological investigation, therefore, becomes justified. Reality, as it were, is sanctioned by the philosophical injunction of becoming, since life is seen as a continuous process rather than a static or an end product. To put it differently, a certain goal is perceived which cannot be interpreted from the poems as achieved but rather than as an anticipated end. The next chapter will throw more light on this question.

The poem that Keats wrote that has attracted much attention with regard to nature is 'To Autumn.' However, the controversy surrounding it is a result of the different theoretical and critical perspectives that are employed to read and interpret it. The historicists see it as a veiled expression of Keats's revolutionary ideals, and, therefore, a kind of poetic-historical treatise. Nicholas Roe's *Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997), and particularly "John Keat's 'Green World: Politics, Nature and the Poems'" (2000), offer a good example of such a historical reading. Roe's approach, for example, has explored nature imagery, not in terms of artistic, aesthetic or spiritual longings, but in terms of Keats's socio-political consciousness of England, whereby nature (in connection with the glorification of Greek Flora and Pan) is seen as a symbolic representation of the ideas of liberty, peace, and freedom.

The structuralists see it as a culminating expression of artistic vision and maturity, arguing that the ripeness expressed in it is an explicit or implicit translation of aesthetic achievement and grandeur. Helen Vendler's *The Odes of John Keats* (1981) insightfully handles this argument, contending that the poem is a structural culmination of the other odes in terms of ideological as well as aesthetic vision. Keats is seen to have attained full poetic vision here. The Deconstructionists read and



interpret the poem as an exemplification of self/text-deconstruction by Keats, pressing home the contention that any possible pattern of meaning is destroyed by the text of the poem itself. So the poem subverts and undermines its very own intention of communicating thought/meaning, however perceived. This critical judgement can be found in Susan Wolfson's *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (1987) and James O'Rourke's *Keats's Odes and Contemporary Criticism* (1998).

Romantic visionary criticism has analysed the poem from within its interpretative matrix from principally two angles, either on the grounds of archetypal criticism with regard to the cyclical pattern of the seasons therein implied, or from a monistic perspective dealing with the unification and wholeness of nature. What is certain is that the poem can be seen as expressing Keats's organicist conception of life and poetic expression as process, which correlates with the latter visionary view stated above. Yet, we must argue that the philosophical and spiritual implications or dispositions of the poem can be interpreted with regard to the question of becoming rather than the view that it represents Keats's full imaginative vision and achievement as the Romantic visionary critics or structuralists would expound. This interpretation is connected with the philosophical speculations that run through 'The Human Seasons' and the sonnet 'After dark vapours have oppress'd our plains.' They all complement the seasons with meditation and contemplation on life and death. 'The Human Seasons,' for instance, reads thus:

Four seasons fill the measure of the year;  
There are four seasons in the mind of man:  
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear  
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:  
He has his Summer, when luxuriously  
Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves  
To ruminare and by such dreaming nigh  
His nearest unto heaven: quiet coves  
His soul has its Autumn, when his wings

He furlth close; contented so to look  
On mist in idleness – to let fair things  
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.  
He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,  
Or else he would forgo his mortal nature.

This poem's intricate relating of the seasons with the different phases of human life which culminates with death, clearly implicates Keats's concern in 'To Autumn.' So another argument on the Autumn poem can contend to see it as a subtle imaginative and philosophical rendition of Keats's premonition about death, a death into life. His philosophy of death in connection with the question of becoming will be discussed in the next chapter. Suffice here to say that he compounds natural phenomenon with death, which to him is a welcome relief rather than a negative moment of existence, since he undoubtedly believes in a blissful post-corporeal existence. To put it differently, Keats is attempting to de-centre the traditional notion of the cycle of the seasons to which particular characteristic features have been ascribed. Not only is Autumn a season of ripeness and fruitfulness. All the other seasons can philosophically or metaphorically serve the same capacity of one another. That is, they can be artistically inspiring while engendering deep philosophical and spiritual matters of life and death, each season can be spring as well as death.

'On the Grasshopper and Cricket' and 'Bright Star, would I were stedfast as thou art' are two of Keats's sonnets that necessitate critical investigation with reference to the present debate on nature. In the former poem, Keats advances statements that go beyond the deceptive simplicity of the poem's title:

The poetry of earth is never dead:  
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;  
That is the Grasshopper's – he takes the lead  
In Summer's luxury, - he has never done  
With his delights; for when tired out with fun  
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant heed.  
The poetry of earth is ceasing never.

On a lone winter evening, when the frost  
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills  
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,  
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,  
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

The poet's assertion that the poetry of earth cannot be exhausted, is a reverberation of the Spinozist idea that we cannot have enough of the great treasures of nature. Poetic composition can be inspired by any season, given the apprehension that any season can be a generative and creative spring. This recurrent thematic issue, already mentioned above, takes a seemingly simplistic dimension in this poem. The grasshopper and cricket are nature's elements that signal and convey different time axes in terms of the changing seasons. In comparison to the nightingale poem, one sees the blend of aesthetics and nature, and at the same time an insight to philosophical and spiritual dispositions.

The latter poem is concerned with an elemental image, the star. The star engenders the atmosphere that characterises the poem's meditative and contemplative mode. The poet's desire to be as steadfast as the star is obviously a consequence of his willingness to get away from "time's bitter tides". This is not because of any illusory or escapist tendency, but because he anticipates a realm of existence that surpasses pain and despair. At this juncture, we want here to address and emphasise the question of the poem's inspiration by the natural phenomenon, the luminous star. Keats here clearly utilises and reduces nature to his distinctive aesthetic and philosophical ambitions. He does not seem to treat it as a universal force as Coleridge persistently does in his pantheistic and monistic engagements. But his recourse to nature points strongly to his consciousness of process, given his understanding of it as constituting the path that leads to a more mature aesthetic vision and spiritual speculation in life.

The foregoing analyses have pointed to nature consciousness in Keats's poetic practices. Existing critical readings have not paid much attention to this phenomenon

in Keats, and the present arguments cannot claim to have attempted an exhaustive view on the matter. Though Keats's poetry indicates the difficulties of tracing a clear line between aestheticism and spirituality, the arguments here are more inclined to aestheticism rather than philosophy and spirituality, given that Keats consciously uses nature to satisfy the former end though this poetry gives allowance to the interpretation of the latter. The question of the true essence of his spiritual engagements will be treated in detail in Chapter Five. He undoubtedly utilises and reduces nature. Yet, one can argue that his nature poetry does not only limit itself only to an individualised train. There are certainly strands of pantheistic and monistic readings in his work, pointing to the shared affinities between him and the mainstream philosophical and spiritual thought of the likes of Coleridge and Wordsworth. This is an issue that is open to further critical debate. The suggestion here would be that a more in-depth and exhaustive study of Keats and nature can be the subject of another research endeavour. It would then be possible to know from a broader perspective if he persistently handles the subject with the subtle complexity with which the First Generation Romantic poets did, given that his nature poetry is not mere aesthetics.

From the preceding comments, a number of interesting issues pertaining to aesthetics and spirituality emerge that necessitate careful examination and reaffirmation of the contention that both Coleridge and Keats share important affinities. It is established that Coleridge's aesthetic as well as idealist philosophy points to a universalist tendency. Yet there is a strong individualistic imperative as well, which is evident in Chapters Two and Three. This is where both poets neatly tie with one another, that is, the psychology of individuation as the highest expression or delineation of the transforming self. The argument is that Keats's reductionist use of nature, even though largely discussed here in view of establishing his poetics of becoming as aesthetic finality, corresponds with Coleridge's primacy of self in the

universalism of his pantheistic and monistic philosophy. Besides, Keats's aesthetic speculations in poems like 'Sleep and Poetry,' 'I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill' and 'The Fall of Hyperion' demonstrate certain not unimportant strands of similarities with Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' at the levels of aestheticism and spirituality and becoming. As 'Kubla Khan' depicts the antithetical nature of aesthetic and spiritual enthusiasm, vision and continuity, so do Keats's poems, which delineate his self-consciousness of his shortcomings but resolve to use these as aesthetic and spiritual breakthroughs in his constructive quest.

### **KEATS'S MYTHOPOETIC CONSCIOUSNESS: AESTHETIC VISION OR SPIRITUAL SPECULATION?**

The main contention of this section wrestles with the question of Keats's aesthetic quest with regard to his self-conscious and reflective use of classical Greek mythology and mythography. Keats's poetry delineates his life-long engagement in achieving poetic expression and identity, and much seems to have been said in this domain. Yet, there seems to be a misappropriation of the notion of myth and mythography in his poetry. Myth, no doubt, is inextricably intertwined with religion and the explanations concerning man's spirituality. For Keats, it is primarily for imaginative exuberance and the maturing of the poetic soul, and is, therefore, connected with the creative and the aesthetic function of the imagination and becoming.

Much is still to be done on Keats's recourse to myth as a source of artistic creativity and aesthetic speculations. Considering our investigation on extant literature in Chapter One, Keats's poetry has dominantly been read to represent a kind of alternative religious and spiritual medium of redemption and salvation different from mainstream Christian orthodoxy, with a great emphasis on the fact that he failed to achieve this religious ideal. We cannot deny instances or interpretative contexts that

drive home the use of myth as the dominant determinant to religious and spiritual engagements and speculations, but this is not the issue of the debate here even if it were intricately related to it. Though it is certain that Keats's poetry makes a lot of references to Greek gods and goddesses, this is to be treated within the interpretative context of the traditional notion of the poetic muse, which is modernised by Keats, and not really on genuine religious or spiritual worship, for as we shall see in the subsequent chapter, Keats shows proof of a deeper religious and spiritual engagement more than his supposed worshipping and reverence for classical Greek deities. So if our contention makes reference to these deities, it will be exclusively for the reasons of poetic self-expression and aesthetics and not the search for religious and spiritual certainty.

That Keats was highly self-conscious of his ambition to make a name in English letters should not be misconstrued or misrepresented with his ironic and paradoxical statements of having written little to make a name in posterity. His theorisation of the imagination, coupled with other related issues, all lend credence to his philosophical and aesthetic potentials, which dismiss the generally held view or myth that he was the less educated or learned of the Romantics. In a letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated October 27 1818, he re-affirmed his purpose in life in connection with poetic vision:

I am ambitious of doing the world some good: If I should be spared that may be the work of maturer years – in the interval I will assay to reach as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conception I have of poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is that I may not lose interest in human affairs - that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 419)

Keats was obviously prepared to sacrifice all his energy to achieve this end. He was no doubt the most Greek of the Romantics, but he recreated and re-oriented most his material to suit his aesthetic ambition, therefore surpassing the supposed re-enactment

of Greek myths and legends, or a mere description of Greek visual arts. Within the interpretative context of his poetry, it becomes appropriate to use the term allegory, with some of the poems under context giving room for a hermeneutic and phenomenological reading of them as a veiled experience of the various rites of passage he experienced to achieve his aesthetic ideal or to get close to achieving it, or in other words, the rituals that involve the becoming of a poet with a distinctive voice. His hope not to lose interest in human affairs shows the complex nature of his aestheticism, which entails not merely art for art's sake, but an aestheticism which sees artistic expression and progress as inextricably linked with human experience.

Commonly defined as a description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance, and also regarded as generalisations about human conduct, allegory operates within different related contexts. A number of Keats's poems are emblematic, demonstrating his allegorism. His myth-consciousness points to the question of suggestive resemblance, as it can be seen to be a statement on his developing aesthetic self, emphasising a shift from a general to a particularised context. In Keats's poetry, as already mentioned, it seems difficult to extricate aesthetics from spirituality because they tend to overlap in several occasions. The first part of the chapter shows this complex problematic, but there is a clear line that cuts across them however related and intertwined they are. So the striving to attain poetic and aesthetic vision may not necessarily mean the attainment of spiritual vision.

The question of classical Greek consciousness brings to mind another myth, that of Keats's class origins and low level of education, and most importantly Keats's own self-created myth. That Keats did not study Greek classics in their original language, an issue which according to the intellectual standards of his era was considered grossly ludicrous, did not prevent him from using translated classical material perhaps more than any of his contemporaries. The fundamental question is

whether it is actually Greek consciousness, historical, religious, spiritual or even cultural, that Keats is trying to fuse with English poetry, or if there is something more special and particular than these perspectives. The reading and interpreting of selected poems here is intended to point to the assertion that there is a vast strain of difference and innovation in Keats's handling of classical material, which evokes his quest for aesthetic identity through his revisionist and reconstructive attitude adopted towards it.

### **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The critical and paradigmatic concern that will be applied here is what Harold Bloom's intertextual dynamics calls the psychology of antithesis, apprehended as a resulting consequence of anxiety and influence. Bloom's psychoanalytic approach affirms the philosophy of revisionism and intentionality as he proposes that a poet's aesthetic ambition is a self-conscious attempt to differentiate and perhaps completely deviate from the influence of a previous poet or work which wields an influence on the younger poet's own goal. Keats used not only written or recounted stories of ancient Greek culture, but the visual arts of this era were also a great inspiring source to his poetic achievement and philosophical speculations. And though the question of precursor, that is, the actual authors (poetic father) of his myth sources is blurred or intriguingly problematic, there is the possibility of using Bloom's interpretative matrix within Keats's contexts.

It would be appropriate to briefly examine Bloom's theory, the intention being to situate the extent of its applicability to Keatsian aesthetics. As already pointed out, Bloom's theory recognises the self-consciousness and intention of the poet in the creative process, which is dominantly revisionary and reconstructive. His ideas run through several of his publications, the most important of which is *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973).<sup>1</sup> Bloom's psycho-criticism sees new poems as



basically originating from old ones, and explains this process as primarily the struggle of the younger poet against an old master even if not consciously known by the poet.<sup>2</sup> Asserting that only strong poets are able to overcome influence and anxiety, Bloom posits the argument that the ephebe<sup>3</sup> must clear imaginative space for himself through a creative misreading of the influencing poet or poetic father. It is only through this, he holds, that the younger poet's voice can be heard, and his identity recognised.

Bloom's (re)constructivist and antithetical theory is therefore engendering a cognitive approach, strongly informed by intertextuality and influence, and characterised by an interweaving of aesthetic, thematic, philosophical or other features between or among literary works. He proposes six revisionary ratios that variously characterise the creative process of the younger poet who, as his own subject matter or otherwise, is in quest for a distinctive aesthetic voice. These are Clinamen, Tessera, Kenosis, Daemonisation, Askesis, and Apophrades.

The first stage is what Bloom refers to as the formation reaction, a strategic position adopted by the younger poet in the bid to curve his own stance in the composition process. It is the poetic misreading or misprision proper, a swerve away from the precursor; a corrective moment in the later poem, with all the implications of an innovation in the new poetic composition, indicative of the turn taken by the young poet. Tessera has to do with completion and antithesis, the main word here being reconstitution, that is, a reconstitution of the poetic father's work to suit the new pursuits of the emerging poet. The renunciation of the aesthetics and poetics of the precursor constitutes the third stage which Bloom holds to function as a defence mechanism. In actual terms it engenders the psychological and artistic move toward discontinuity with the precursor.

The fourth stage or the Counter-Sublime is an achievement of a new sublime through the young poet's own daemonisation. The ephebe taps into the daemonic

power that informed the precursor poet, and hence the ephebe is inspired by a power supposedly superior to the precursor. In this process, Bloom stresses, the uniqueness or originality of the precursor is explained away, or the ephebe succeeds through the belief that he has tapped into a source equal to or greater than the precursor.

The fifth and the sixth stages of poetic revisionism grapple with the movement of self-purgation and the return of the dead respectively. The final goal of these stages is to psychologically and artistically stand up to the precursor without the anxiety of influence, or to put it differently, these stages consist in eclipsing and cleansing the influence of the poetic father, the final result being the consciousness of an achieved new identity, though not without the non-disturbing presence of the poetic father.

The sixth stage particularly needs some further commentary. The question of the return of the dead tackles the complexity of the ever insistent presence of the precursor. In what follows, the younger poet is burdened by his own solipsism, and so he makes the conscious effort of holding his poem open to that of the precursor. But the fact that the later strong poet consciously engages the work of the precursor, rather than is helplessly influenced by it, shows his strength, and even creates the uncanny effect that he seems to have written the precursor's work, rather than vice versa. The imposition of the young poet is undoubtedly not unconnected with the psychological notion of individuation. The individuating factors in the works to be analysed here justify Keats's own distinctive poetic voice.

The applicability of Bloomian psycho-criticism on Keats's poetry with particular regard to the adopted line of argument in this chapter is very complex and intriguing but not impossible. (Bloom dominantly discusses Spencer, Shakespeare, Dante and Milton, and not Greek mythology, or if at all not from the perspective taken here). Analysing Keats chronologically or systematically as proposed by the steps Bloom expounds, is not absolutely necessary as for applying in a general manner this

revisionist theory. In fact, our analysis can liken Keats's case to what one may call the imagination as engaged in a constructive deconstruction of classical material, or to put it in more appropriate terms, the aesthetic quality of the imagination as an inspiring and reconstructive or reconstitutive faculty.

The critical and interpretative context of Keats's poetry also brings in the crucial question of textual translation, consisting in the transformation of a text into another text. This is also highly interconnected with textual paraphrasing, the process whereby the paraphrasing of a text being a kind of textual paraphrase or rephrasing even if the prototext and paratext are composed with the same code. This question of translation, which will be reviewed later, contributes to the complex nature of Keats's myth material, involving the interweaving of translation from one language to the other, and the same-code textual paraphrasing that is induced by revisionist inclinations.

Revisionism presupposes self-conscious intention, justifying the view that intentionality is a defining feature of aesthetic communication. We have already seen the views of certain critics on the this question. We have, for example, discussed Charles Rzepka's *The Self as Mind* (1986), Andrea Henderson's *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity 1774 – 1830* (1996), Zachary Leader's *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (1996), Timothy Clark's *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (1997), Mark Storey's *Poetry in the Romantic Period* (2000), and *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* edited by Berys Grant and Paisley Livingston (2003). In the previous chapter, the issue of intention and poetic expression as the attempt at self-examination and self-definition was examined with regard to the psycho-dynamics of the development of personality from childhood to old age. The preoccupying issue here in connection with that is not exclusive of the self, but takes a different dimension

altogether. Keats's poetry shows a consciousness of process and development in terms of poetic and aesthetic maturity, the becoming of a poet. While this involves the self, it is not in the same psychoanalytic dimension as the processes of development discussed in Coleridge.

As we have indicated above, Keats's aesthetics offers a complex outlook. Not having read the original Greek versions of the legends and myths he uses, and not having any specific precursor in mind (the problematic exception of Homer will subsequently be discussed), he engages with the translated versions of these, and at the same time he is paraphrasing the translations with the same code but with a twist to suit his own aesthetic goals. As we shall see later, *Endymion*, 'Lamia' and the Hyperion poems, for example, are not drawn from the original copies but from Keats's sources of the translated texts, and can therefore be seen as metatexts, resulting from the translation process. Besides, there is also the constant referencing to various aspects of Greek culture, tapped obviously from its myths, but not structurally rendered as in the case of the above stated poems. This is the case with poems like 'Sleep and Poetry,' 'I Stood Tip-toe,' 'Ode to Apollo,' 'Ode to Maia,' and the major odes. All these are expressive of a deep sense of classical Greek consciousness, of undoubtedly important elements in Keats that suggest his kinship with some of the important representations of the Hellenic world, but within the specific matrix of an individual aesthetic quest that points to his own poetic strength and insight.

It should be noted that while Keats might have adopted a revisionist attitude to extant literary material, the question of revision of his own poetic texts is an important issue that generates debate. 'Hyperion,' for instance, generally considered a revision of 'The Fall of Hyperion,' can also be judged to be an independent poem in its own right. Jack Stillinger has carefully handled the question of Keats revisionism in *The Texts of Keats's Poems* (1974), "Keats's Extempore Effusions and the Question of

Intentionality” (1992), and “Poets Who Revise, Poets Who Don’t, and Critics Who Should (Issues on Authorship Seen in the Works of Keats and Coleridge)” (1996). In the second essay, for example, he points out that if at all Keats effected revisions on certain poems, they were largely on the lexical level rather than on the conceptual or ideological level. Here, Stillinger refers to Woodhouse’s citation of Keats’s comments with regard to the intentionality and imaginative response to artistic creation:

My judgement is active while I am actually writing as my imagination. In fact, all my faculties are strongly excited, and in their full play. And shall I afterwards, when my imagination is idle, and the heat in which I wrote is gone off, sit down coldly to criticise when in possession of only one faculty, what I have written almost inspired? (p. 311)

Keats’s statement shows that spontaneity and process to him was characterised by consciously trying his hands on new poems rather than revising written ones. In this vein, his remodelling, reorienting, reconceptualising and transforming attitude is best suited within the use of extant literature rather than his previously written poems.

The rest of this chapter will therefore be structured as follows: the reception of myth in English Romanticism with specific references to Greek mythology and mythography. We will pay particular attention to Keats’s sources of myth and mythography. The second preoccupation will be the analysis of selected poems as an expression of Keats’s myth-revitalising and myth-making poetics with focus on the appropriation of the poetics of becoming. This will take into consideration the question of allegory, which will see some of the myths and myth-related issues as an aestheticised form of the poet’s artistic intention and individuation. The last issue of the chapter will centre around the notion of ekphrasis and poetic choices as a contributing factor in Keats’s aestheticism. The focus here will be his employment of Greek visual arts as strongly engaging the creative imagination within his poetic ambitions. In all, the creative process is going to be critically examined within the philosophy of becoming, as a spiral and continuous shift from one progressive point to

the other, since Keats considered his poems as experimental rather than a completion of his aesthetic vision.

Keats's theory of the imagination in relation to artistic creativity and development will also be treated in conjunction with the letters which bear testimony to his theorisation. These letters, some of which have already been mentioned above, are to be taken as individual literary pieces in their own right rather than just mere points for the substantiation or compliments of Keats's poetry. It could sound technically inaccurate or incorrect to call Keats's letters works of art or literature. But these letters were not incidental. When read without the consciousness of an addressee or addressed, they contain fine passages of thought, and stir aesthetic and philosophical issues. It is true that they contain heterogeneous material, and it is normal to find contradictions in them, but on a whole, they show a constructive mind. They therefore give a better insight to the poet's mind. A very crucial aspect is that Keats never intended the letters to be published, so they can be seen as his private and most intimate engagement with his family and friends. The substance in these letters, when compared with poems he consciously wrote for publication, shows a certain structurally conceptual and consistent thought. They therefore justify the contention that they are a self-conscious exposition of his aesthetic and spiritual positions.

#### **THE RECEPTION OF CLASSICAL GREEK MYTH IN ENGLISH ROMANTICISM: THE RECONCEPTUALISATION AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF MYTHOLOGY AND MYTHOGRAPHY**

The relationship between myth and literature has been a very complex, subtle and intriguing issue, given that myth can be categorised as an intrinsic part of literature. Yet it is at the same time considered to be a model with which literature can be theorised and interpreted, for it has influenced numerous literary theorists and critics in this domain. The question that remains intriguing and complex is whether myth

actually is literature, whether it is an aesthetic creation. Our concern here will basically be to connect it with aesthetic creativity in English Romanticism and specifically Keats's poetry.

Myth has largely been associated with religious and spiritual hermeneutics, and the sources of its inspiration have quite often been affiliated with transcendence and divinity. The exploration of mythographers and myth critics like Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph Campbell, Maureen Roberts and Leslie Fiedler need not be overemphasised here.<sup>4</sup> They have studied various dimensions of the mythical consciousness in relation to literature as well as in comparative religion. While they recognise the aesthetic value of myths, their central focus is the question of hermeneutic and phenomenological interpretation of the deity and transcendental reality through myth, of discovering layers of psycho-spiritual meaning embedded within different facets of religious consciousness and so forth. It is largely in this same avenue that most critics have tended to read Keats's entire poetry that relates to his employment of myth.

In his very interesting work entitled *Greek Art* (2000), Mark D. Fullerton discusses the various contexts of the uses of mythology in the modern literary world. The appeal of Greek art, he conjectures, lies in its unique capacity for displaying both the need for permanence and the inevitability of change; from this quality it derives its normative role as a paradigm for later reviewers. He asserts that the history of Greek art today can be seen to lie in a series of paradoxes:

Greek art is idealist at the same time that it is concerned with the variability of human experience. It is conservative and primarily religious in function while its forms and subjects are constantly developing and expanding. It serves as a model for emulation at the same time that it is constantly recreated and reinterpreted by succeeding generations. (p. 10)

This excerpt gives a clue to the understanding of the employment of classical Greek consciousness within Romanticism. Writers like Shelley, Byron, Keats and Hunt are clear examples. They appropriate a massive conceptual power and a richly varied

suggestiveness of the critical and interpretative spectrum of myth. This statement also throws specific light on the critical perspectives that have examined Keats's poetry in the domain of classical Greek mythology and visual arts, particularly on the question of religious function. But in the hands of Keats it becomes an appropriate component in his quest for aesthetic self-definition and identity rather than religious or spiritual broodings.

Myth can, therefore, be seen as part of literature, as an aesthetic creation, but which also offers imaginative space for further creative possibilities, justifying the debate of its use in relation to self-consciousness and individual distinction. This recalls Bloom's assertion that the strength of any poem lies in the number of poems that it has managed to exclude. This statement, together with Fullerton's conviction of constant recreation and reinterpretation, can be contextualised in Keats in varying degrees. It also answers Paul Ricoeur's appropriation of the hermeneutics of faith which advocates the personal, distinctive, eccentric and unique characteristic traits of an author in the hermeneutic and phenomenological interpretative process.

The reception of myth, particularly Greek myth in the Romantic period, brought in a new but related dimension to the debate on its impact on the human mind with regard to art and aesthetics. From Hunt to Byron, Shelley, and others we discover the varying ways with which myths and legends are used for ideological, philosophical and aesthetic orientation. While the First Generation Romantics might have used myth or made references to it in their works, the central focus here will be the Second Generation poets to which Keats belonged. The reason for this is that they stand closer to Greek myth-culture than their elderly counterparts, who mostly dealt with Christian mythology.

Anthony John Harding's *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* (1995) looks at the question of myth from a broader perspective rather than limiting it to



classical Greek myth-consciousness. Harding talks about the interpretative and appropriative strategy the writer employs when incorporating myth into a literary work, therefore recognising and justifying aspects of transformation and reinterpretation. Harding is dominantly a New Historicist in his arguments, contending that myth operates as a vehicle of ideology and cannot be considered beyond ideological analysis. He dedicates a major bulk of his work to Coleridge and Wordsworth, whom he interprets largely within the context of Christian mythology. He leaves out Blake and Byron, treats Shelley's investment of myth with ideological import through revision, transformation, and conflict, and briefly and unsatisfactorily talks about Keats. For the reasons of space limitations we will discuss specifically, but also briefly the trio Byron, Shelley and Keats to see how they used Greek-consciousness in the shaping of their own aesthetic goals.

The insistence on and reliance of Greek classical literature as important to the philosophical and aesthetic convictions during the Romantic period, marks one of the most interesting features of literary creativity during the era of the Second Generation poets. Both myth and the visual culture of ancient Greece,<sup>5</sup> and to an extent some of their Roman counterparts, became en vogue as poets looked up to such extant material for their artistic, philosophical, and socio-political ambitions. This was championed by the current ambitious magazine of the time that sought to rehabilitate English literature, *The Annals of Fine Art*. The sculptures and architectural ornaments from the Pantheon were shipped to England and displayed in the British Museum under the supervision of Thomas Bruce (Lord Elgin). These visual art treasures also served as principal sources of inspiration. Though Keats, for example, was to title his poem after Elgin, the principal issue behind the poem's contents relates to ancient Greece sculpture and his artistic quest rather than Elgin the man himself.<sup>6</sup>

Byron's use of classical material is discernible among a number of his poems, for instance in *Don Juan*, which is considered as an imaginative emulation of Homer. In fact, the poem has been interestingly styled the Spanish *Odyssey* as Byron transposes Homer's narrative within a new imaginative context, allowing interpretative possibility for his distinctiveness and uniqueness in aesthetic voice and identity. In *Byron and Joyce through Homer: 'Don Juan' and 'Ulysses'* (1981), Hermione de Almeida has rightly pointed out that Byron's work shares a lot of affinities with Homer's *Odyssey*, but Byron, she contends, shows a radical novelty in his work, justifying his independence from the very work he is trying to emulate (pp. 3 – 4).

Marius Byron Raizis takes on the same argument, advancing de Almeida's stance with the conviction that Byron introduces elements of parody and subversion in his imaginative reworking of Homer. In summing up his arguments in "Romantic Readings of Homer" (1998), he holds that Byron did not read Homer as source material for poetic tales. He is of the view point that Byron read Homer's code of epic signs correctly and emulated it selectively. In his creativity, Byron therefore imaginatively and originally expanded and updated a glorious literary tradition without a trace of slavish dependence (p. 59). All these readings fall in alignment with our theoretical and practical considerations of this chapter. Homer is seen here to stand as the poetic father or precursor of Byron, who succeeds to swerve away from the bard's influence and creates imaginative and artistic space for his own eccentric poetic voice and identity. The same applies to Shelley.

Shelley is supposed to have read Greek classical literature in its original Greek language, he also translated the Homeric *Hymns*, for example, *Hymn to Hermes* and *Hymn to Mercury*. His employment of myth also makes an interesting reading in Romantic studies. A good number of readings of Shelley will certainly affiliate his artistic and socio-political consciousness with his Promethean spirit of defiance and

eccentricity, a characteristic trademark which runs through the most important poems he composed. Poems like *Queen Mab*, 'Mont Blanc,' and 'Prometheus Unbound' all justify not only his radical social and political stance, but also significantly point to his aestheticising efforts to achieve poetic grandeur. Like Byron and Keats, as we shall see, Shelley is self-conscious of the handling of classical material to map his own independent imaginative and creative productivity.<sup>7</sup>

We have underscored the conviction that Keats's relation with classical myth was an interesting and intriguing one. His friendship with Charles Cowden Clarke, Haydon, Reynolds, Hunt, Hazlitt, and Bailey all point to the complexity of his interest in mythology and ancient visual arts. It will be important to discuss his sources of myth, and recapitulate some of the various interpretative measures that have been applied to his use of myth. The only physical interaction with classical Greece is, of course, the marbles and Grecian vases that were brought to the British Museum. Though almost in ruins, they represented a first hand example of what Haydon considered to have been the handiwork of the famous Greek sculptor Phidias.

Keats's sources were diverse but enriching in his aesthetic quest. In fact, his first poem that carries the trademark of Homeric influence owed its composition to the translation of George Chapman. He had also read Alexander Pope's translation of Homer, but did not find the imaginative space or allowance to create his own poetry, since Pope's translation was a typical classical piece itself, delineating the characteristic poetic features of Neo-Classicism or the Age of Enlightenment, not very much in line with Keats's taste. The reiteration at this point is that the issue of a precursor becomes very complex and even enigmatic as Keats is reacting not directly to the original of Homer's work, but has to choose between two or several translated versions of the same author. This points to an intricate interweaving of the original author, the translators, and the young poet's own personal choices for the expression

of his aesthetic particularity and individuation. These are strands of arguments, it should be noted, that have not found convincing expression in extant literature on Keats's Hellenic consciousness. Myth gave room for Hellenic revival but with deeper undercurrents for Keats, as shown above, with reference to both interest and access to material.

Apart from the copy of Chapman's translation (*The Whole Works of Homer, Prince of Poets* 1616) that Cowden Clarke gave Keats, there are other sources from which he is supposed to have tapped material for his poetic composition. Some include Lampière's *Classical Dictionary*, Spence's *Polymetis*, Drayton's *The Man in the Moone* (1606), and William Godwin's *The Pantheon: or Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome* (1806). Keats's indebtedness to Homer is not simply a matter of admiring the poetic acuity of the Greek poet, but also, and if not most importantly, as a gateway into the treasures of classical Greek consciousness. His poems 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and 'To Homer' expressly justify this assertion. But the particularity of the argument here is more inclined to how he used his knowledge of various ancient Greek deities and some of the stories of their lives to map out his poetic goals, development and quest for maturity.

Keats's poetry is profuse with a vast array of deities such as Psyche, Autumn, Melancholy, Apollo, Hyperion, Oceanus, Maia, Cupid, Pan, Neptune, Moneta, Mnemosyne, Venus, Sleep, Diana, Hope, Fame and Bacchus. What immediately strikes the reading and interpretative mind on mentioning deities like these will obviously be the hermeneutic and phenomenological question of religion and spirituality. In Keats's case it is more a question of the maturity of the poetic soul rather than his quest for immortality, or his alternative turn to a religious and redemptive vision, more satisfying than the constrictions imposed by orthodox Christianity. To put it in other words, Keats's concerns with these is his desire for a

poetic muse, for an aesthetic possibility in the centrality of his creative imagination, and also for a deeper undercurrent of life and experience.

That Keats was conscious of the various twists that he made on existing Greek romances or myths is aptly justifiable. In the preface to *Endymion*, for example, he said that he hoped he had not dulled the quality of the original myth, implying therefore that he was consciously using it in a reconceptualised and reorienting context. In fact, his composition of the poem shows a distinctively fresh assimilation. Not only does he make alterations on the core content of the myth, but he equally introduces the mythological couples Venus and Adonis and Alpheus and Arethusa (Book II) as parallels to Endymion, and manipulates the myth of Glaucus (BOOK III) as well, to suit the contents and context of his creativity. This intersection of other myths into the centrality of his aestheticism are consequently far from being mere passages of unconscious digression and distraction. Keats was also self-conscious that he was not simply retelling a story in its original form, but most importantly, trying his imaginative and creative potentials however immature they might have been. A careful reading of the poem can justifiably discuss the question of allegory, whereby Endymion's adventures in connection with the other mythical heroes that are interwoven into the story, are an express or implied statement of Keats's quest for aesthetic maturity as announced in 'Sleep and Poetry,' discernible in 'I Stood Tip-Toe,' the odes, the letter on the mansion of life with different and successive chambers, and also encapsulated in a more advanced stance in 'Hyperion' and 'The Fall of Hyperion.'

With regard to the visual arts, the principal person behind Keats's interest was Haydon, who introduced him to the Elgin marbles in the British Museum. These held him spellbound and sparked his creative imagination, resulting in the composition of both 'To Haydon, with a Sonnet Written on Seeing the Elgin Marbles' and 'On Seeing

the Elgin Marbles.’ All these contributed greatly in the enriching of his developing philosophy of poetry and the imagination. ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ also connects with the ekphrastic nature of Keats’s poetry with regard to ancient Greek manual arts. His Grecian consciousness, intimately ignited by the vases he actually saw or imaginatively created, points to his use of Hellenic consciousness in enlivening Romantic poetry, and the aesthetic debate that paved the direction of his own poetic ambition and achievement.

Most of Keats’s letters, it is established, are statements on his philosophy of life and aesthetics. His idea of the axioms of poetry, poetic identity and the character of the poet, all point to the philosophy of becoming, that is, to the spiral development he self-consciously experienced, and are best practically substantiated with the poems that are concerned with his use of ancient classical Greek literature. For instance his letter concerned with his philosophy of the stages of life, the Mansion with many Apartments, connects with his imaginative and aesthetic growth, captured in the poems mentioned above, particularly in the case of ‘Sleep and Poetry,’ and the Hyperion poems.

In our examination of some extant literature in Chapter One on Keats’s recourse to myth, we noticed that two major critical schools of thought have engaged various theoretical and practical poetics on the poet. Under “The Dynamics of Spirit” and “Historicising Romanticism,” the religious and spiritual, and the historical and cultural context of his poetry were respectively viewed. It is worthwhile to make a synopsis of some of these views to situate the focal point of our discussion in this chapter.

In conformity with their resistance to the question of personality and the self as subject in the creative process, the New Historicists dominantly see Keats as using myth in re-enacting history or reflecting the socio-political and economic

circumstances during Romanticism. Or again, there are strands of arguments strongly interconnected with New Historicism that have placed the question of mythical consciousness as Keats's re-enactment of certain prevailing cultural and gender issues of his age, the issue of the anthropological paradigm of patriarchy centring the arguments. The hermeneutics of faith or suspicion and scepticism (in this case those critics who have attempted a hermeneutic and phenomenological reading of Keats based on his supposed religious and spiritual convictions or speculations with regard to myth) have contextualised it either within paganism and atheism or agnosticism, or within a new religious and spiritual vision, whereby he is seen to have registered success or failure.

Some New Historicists like Jerome McGann, Nicholas Roe, Richard Cronin and Jeffrey Cox recognise the evaluative worth of Keats's aesthetic ambition, but they centralise their focus on the political mind and consciousness of Keats rather than on his transformation and re-orientation of myth for this aesthetic ambition. Their main contention is that Keats's poetry can only be read and interpreted out of the context of his supposed individualistic poetics and philosophy. The imagination is seen as such not from the dominant Romantic aesthetic or visionary standpoint, but principally as a historical imagination.

In line with the ideological poetics of the critics stated above, we have seen that historicists like Stuart Perry and Marilyn Butler also interpret Keats's Hyperion poems with regard to historical change, progress and transformation. A. Phinney sees Keats's recourse to classical visual arts as simply a mystical repetition of an ideological illusion. The same argument is taken up by Theresa Kelley and Gillen Wood, who also contend that Keats yearns for an irrecoverably lost past, and so his poetry of the description of the visual art of the past only shocks and reminds him of ruins and his unavoidable mortality. Daniel Watkins and Froma Zeithin take on anthropological and

cultural aspects of Keats's ekphrasis that show parallels with existing counterparts of the Romantic era. Keats is therefore re-inscribing a reality that has characterised not only historical, but also cultural consciousness.

It should also be recalled that within the context of Historicism, mention is made of the Romantics' recourse to myth as a replacement of the unsatisfactory and disillusioned constrictions of Christianity at the time. But apart from seeing this as a historical phenomenon the critics do not offer any plausible analysis of the poems. Cox and Roe are good examples. Roe's work on the culture of dissent uses an apt religious terminology, but he goes no further in talking about religious dissent and non-conformist tendencies. Instead, he uses this terminology in the socio-political sphere.

With regard to the dynamics of self, Keats's myth-consciousness has been largely seen as pertaining to religiosity and spirituality. Evert has contended that classical Greek mythology provides Keats with a spiritual taproot, which he uses to accentuate his religious being. Helen Vendler's treatment of 'Ode to Psyche' takes the same line of argument as Evert, her conviction being that the sacrificial and liturgical nature of the poem justifies Keats's groping for spiritual salvation. Peter Vassallo has treated 'The Fall of Hyperion' as an express statement on Keats's spiritual progress and transformation. He goes as far as claiming that Keats achieves his redemptive vision, problematising once more the poetics of Romantic visionary criticism. John Barnard, Robert Ryan and Christoph Bode also concentrate their analyses of Keats on the spiritual realm, with particular references to the relationship between love and spirituality that find expression in a poem like *Endymion*. They, therefore, try to debunk the notion of Keats's sensuousness and eroticism that has been seen to be limited only to corporeality.

Among the critics who recognise Keats's use of classical Greek myth as a source of his spiritualising speculation, but who refuse him any sense of achievement



or struggle for achievement, are Sunday Uche, Douglas Kenning and Martin Priestman. Kenning has interpreted Keats's myth consciousness from a sceptical point of view. For instance he reads 'The Fall of Hyperion' as a poem that subverts and undermines Keats's aesthetic or spiritual ambitions. Contending that the poem deals with hopelessness and impossibility, Kenning concludes that it is an expression of revelatory failure both in aesthetics and spirituality.

Kenning's view is related to a previous work by Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (1994). Bennett wrestles with the question of narratology, and his contention is focused on the disruptive forces of Keats's work. He argues that the centrality of Keats's poetry is the figure of solecism, which deals principally with the distortion of the lexical and the structural components of poetry (p. 2). In his discussion of 'Hyperion' and 'The Fall of Hyperion,' Bennett stresses that they are a sustained negation of verbosity and structural perambulations, predicting an irredeemably constrained and halted narrative. Bennett sees the move from the former to the latter poem as essentially one from a monolithic immobility to the quicksands of narrational disjunction (p. 155). This view, which denies the possibility of seeing the poem as revealing poetic maturity and achievement, is parallel to Kenning's contention that there is no aesthetic revelation in the poems. From the perspectives of these critics it seems totally impossible to read a constructive attempt at vision. Our argument resists this contention and critically looks at the poems as systematic constructs within the literary, linguistic and philosophical context of their composition.

Priestman makes the argument on the religious grounds that Keats as well as the other Romantics were non-conformist and strongly opposed to the clerical stance of the Christian church of his time. But he goes on to treat poems like *Endymion* and 'Hyperion' not only as express justifications of Keats's agnosticism but also his

paganism and atheism. Uche's treatment of sexual and erotic perversity in *Endymion* and 'Ode to Psyche,' also sees Keats as a professed erotic worshipper and atheist.

From the above recapitulation of readings on Keats's recourse to myth, we have noticed that no careful study has been dedicated to the question of his poetics or aesthetics as distinctively different from spirituality and history. This provides allowance for new or modified readings and interpretations. The only exception is the insightful and inspiring work of Dorothy van Ghent entitled *Keats: The Myth of the Hero* (1983) (earlier published as an essay, "Keats's Myth of the Hero," *Keats – Shelley Journal*, III, 1954. 7 – 25). Her probing of the biographical towards the heroic mode, defines Keats as engaged in progress and intellection. She touches the question of aesthetic quest in Keats with regard to his recourse to myth, yet, heavily centres her arguments on the quest for spirituality. Ghent sees the Apollonian theme as the underlying principle in Keats's poetry – the struggle of the Dionysian character (compact of unreconciled opposites) to become Apollonian (balanced) through a process of dying into life. She sees Keat's poetry as a ritual externalisation, on familiar archetypal patterns, of those human instincts that produced the very mythology upon which Keats drew. The problematic in her study, therefore, is that the purely aesthetic quality of Keats's poetry seems to be an appendix to his spiritual quest, embedded in his myth-consciousness. In line with the Bloomian theoretical and practical interpretative measure, Keats has been evaluated with regard to Spencer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante.<sup>8</sup> In what follows we are going to attempt a reading of Keats's mythological consciousness as dominantly a self-conscious ambition for poetic and aesthetic identity.

## **KEATS'S MYTH-REVITALISING AND MYTH-MAKING: TOWARDS ACHIEVING AESTHETIC INDENTITY AND THE POETICS OF BECOMING**

This first phase of textual analyses of Keats's classical myth consciousness will principally focus on the poems that show his reaction to the influences of various Greek deities or heroes as he tries to map his own distinctive creative stance. The question of aesthetic vision embedded in the imagination and becoming will be discussed from a different perspective. In the previous two chapters the phenomenology of becoming was principally discussed within the framework of the psycho-spiritual implications of Coleridge's poetry. As previously discussed, the question of the creative potential generated by imaginative potentials, and the notion of becoming is seen here in terms of aesthetic process and continuity.

In a previous section, the question of intentionality has also been critically examined, and following the above elaboration of Bloom's psycho-criticism as the interpretative paradigm of our discussion, the issue of individuation as revisionist becomes very pressing. In what follows, the study of the of poems such as 'Sleep and Poetry,' 'I Stood Tip – Toe Upon a Little Hill,' 'Ode to Apollo,' 'God of the Golden Bow,' 'Mother of Hermes! and still youthful Maia,' 'Lamia,' *Endymion*, the odes, particularly 'Ode to Psyche,' 'Hyperion: A Fragment,' 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream,' will throw more light on the discussion. These poems point to Keats's mythological orientation, they provide him with a mode of utterance, they enhance his search for poetic excellence and intellectual aptitude. According to Keats, the Greek world attested the pre-eminence of truth and beauty which form the basis of his aesthetics. Thus, Keats is going to be treated as (the portrait of) the poet/artist as a reader of myth and a maker of his self-portrait and own myth.

The question of the recognition of Homer, Chapman and Pope as having wielded an influence on Keats is very complex with regard to the present discussion. Keats never read Homer directly, but he praises him. He read Pope's and Chapman's

translations, and gathered classical material from other sources as well. The translated copies he read were therefore characteristic not of a typical Homeric strain, but contained the modifications that suited the literary taste of Chapman and Pope.<sup>9</sup> Poems like 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and 'To Homer' give an overview of the complexity of the question of influence. But what is certain is that Keats works out his own poetics from these sources, Pope, Chapman and Lampière acting as media of his principal access to Hellenic consciousness encapsulated principally in Homer, to whom homage is paid in the latter poem.

The poem on Chapman already points to two key factors in Keats's mythopoetic aesthetics. It shows Keats's declared intention to write poetry, and his obsession with Apollo who is recurrent in his poems and inextricably connected with his aesthetic quest. With regard to the Bloomian psycho-criticism as interpretative paradigm, Keats does not really re-write Homer per se, nor does he structurally re-enact Pope or Chapman, but reconstructs the translations of the two English poets as well as other sources at his disposal, to suit his aim in connection with the Homeric or otherwise expression. So one can say that the poems become intriguingly un-Greek in theme and form due to the twists and reconceptualisations that show clear shifts from their originality.

Hellen Vendler's structural treatment of Keats's odes sees the poet as engaged in authorial choices in the weaving of the odes into one unified structure of aesthetic vision. She uses Stravinsky's assertion to foster her argument. This assertion, when used in the context of the present discourse, will throw light on the creative process in Keats's mytho-aesthetic development:

Step by step, link by link, it will be granted to him to discover the work. It is this chain of discoveries, as well as each individual discovery, that gives rise to the emotion ... which invariably follow closely the phases of the creative process. All creation presupposes at its origin a sort of appetite that is brought on by the foretaste of discovery. This foretaste of discovery act accompanies

the intuitive grasp of an unknown entity already possessed but not yet intelligible, an entity that will not take a definite shape except by the action of a constantly vigilant technique. (p. 296)

This statement clearly indicates the intention and processes involved in artistic creation. Keats's myth consciousness delineates this apprehension, for his poetic development shows his constant re-modelling and re-conceptualisation of myth from a simplistic towards a mature and sophisticated level of expression.

'Ode to Apollo,' 'Ode to Sorrow,' 'Hymn to Pan,' and 'Ode to Maia' all have a characteristic feature of mythological allusions, which are highly connected with Keats's quest for poetic expression and excellence. Keats's concerns in these odes find a broadened scope in the longer poems, an indication and justification to the fact that he consciously and progressively interweaves everything in view of achieving his goal. Apollo in Greek mythology is connected with astronomy, medicine, poetry, music, (re)generation and creativity. So to Keats, this powerful Hellenic symbol is an igniting force to the imagination's aesthetic and creative potential. The ode is therefore a statement on poetic progress and intellectual quest rather than a meditative and introspective engagement on spiritual exuberance. But if at all it points to the meditative and spiritual, then Keats centres more on himself rather than looking upon the deity as an other. The three other poems are mythological re-creations and fresh assimilations as well. Their theme will be elaborately discussed in 'Sleep and Poetry' and 'I Stood Tip-Toe,' two canonical poems concerning Keats's early aesthetic development.

In these poems, Keats self-consciously maps out his poetic and aesthetic ambitions. In fact, they serve as a poetics or a literary manifesto or a prelude to the achievement of a poetic soul. The question of muse and inspiration and the successive stages of poetic development are myth-oriented, pointing to the inextricability of Hellenic consciousness and artistic productivity even in modern times. Sleep is a

Greek goddess and Keats's connecting it with his psycho-aesthetic ambition is no accident. The allusions to other Hellenic deities in the poem are no coincidence either. Keats states his progress from an embryonic to a sophisticated level of poetic expression. The substance of poetry is not mere aesthetics as some critics have it. Keats does not compose from abstractions or unexplained phenomena. Poetic maturity connects with his changing philosophical outlook to life, and as we have said, the separability between aestheticism and spirituality can be clearly worked out when discussing his mythopoetic inclinations.

'Sleep and Poetry' shows that Keats's ambitious plan can be divided into four parts; part one is an assertion, capturing from a psychological perspective the inspiring and creative nature of sleep, part two an aspiration, pointing to the desire to write great poetry, part three a discovery, that is, what the real substance of poetic and aesthetic expression should be, and part four a continuing quest, a progressive move encapsulated in the notion of becoming rather than the consciousness of full accomplishment. Keats associates his yearning for poetic achievement with Apollo:

O Poesy! For thee I grasp my pen  
That am not yet a glorious denizen  
Of thy wide heaven; yet, to my ardent prayer,  
Yield from thy sanctuary some clear air,  
Smoothed for intoxication by the breath  
Of flowering bays, that I may die a death  
Of luxury, and my young spirit follow  
The morning sun-beams to the great Apollo,  
Like a fresh sacrifice; ...

(L. 53 - 61)

From a hermeneutic and phenomenological standpoint, Keats's apprehension of death in this instance lies in a psycho-intellectual metamorphosis rather than in the normal sense of the word. It is an initiation rite. He is looking forward to achieving greatness, and his death into life here, associated with the symbol of Apollo, is a kind of aesthetic ritual or rite of passage for the birth of a fresh poetic soul. In this instance, Apollo is

not only a muse, but as a sun god he also represents (re)generation and intellectual maturity. This is an enrichment of the imagination's creative and productive potential to the searching poetic soul.

Keats continues his myth allusion when he describes the successive stages he aspires to pass through to achieve his goal. The mythological reference this time is Flora and Pan. The realm of Flora and Pan aesthetically fits the first stage of the process. Pan in Greek mythology is symbolic of a form of thinking, a symbol of ultimate mystery of life, a source of endless investigation and discovery. To Keats, this foundational stage, therefore, determines the success of his creative imagination. The relationship between the next stage that Keats proposes (the agonies and strife of the human heart) and myth consciousness, will find apt expression and exemplification in the Hyperion poems.

Keats's introduction of the second stage connects it with yet another strain of Greek mythological consciousness, the charioteer. At face level, the charioteer is not expressly identified. In fact, he is presented as visionary, but is roving from one place to the other, and Keats associates it with the search for something, not actually specified but related to writing and creativity:

Most awfully intent  
The driver of those steeds is forward bent,  
And seems to listen: O that I might know  
All that he writes with such a hurrying glow.  
The visions are all fled – the car is fled  
Into the light of heaven, and in their stead  
A sense of real things comes doubly strong,  
And, like a muddy stream, would bear along  
My soul to nothingness: but I will strive  
Against all doubtings, and will keep alive  
The thought of that same chariot, and the strange  
Journey it went.

(L. 151 - 161)

Keats immediately goes on to pose a series of rhetorical questions to show his convictions and affirmation of imaginative faith in connection with his aesthetic

intentions (L. 162 - 177), captured in the above lines. This idea is further re-iterated in L. 290 – 297, which serve as an epigraph to this chapter. In this instance, Keats expresses the feeble nature of his mind, but asserts that he has a vision which is that of reaching the summit of poetry. Just after this, Keats goes on to compare himself with the mythical Dedalus when he makes reference to his “Dedalian wings” (L. 303). It becomes clear that his quest motive in this poem shows very high hopes and ambition, analogous to Dedalus’s search for ultimate knowledge of which he is obviously conscious. This is a modern aesthetic construct that finds expression in twentieth-century literary expression, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, for instance. One can even go as far as saying that Keats is involved in a Promethean poetic quest. So Keats is a charioteer and his intended journey is embedded in his quest for knowledge and aesthetic grandeur, but obviously with a varying degree from Dedalus’s disastrous fate in the original myth.

‘I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill’ reverberates some of the concerns discussed above. It therefore recaptures the issue of poetic growth and maturity in connection with myth consciousness. It continues Keats’s intention to have an unfettered scope and resist influence in his bid to the making and becoming of a great poet. The poem makes an advanced statement on the infusion of myth in aesthetic expression, foreshadowing a more complex handling of the matter. Not only is reference made to Pan (L. 158 – 162), but other Hellenic deities like Mercury [Mercury is the Roman version of the Greek god Hermes] (L. 24), Apollo (L. 50, 218), Psyche (L. 141 – 150), and mythical heroes like Endymion and Cynthia (L. 191 – 204), who are later treated in independent poems. Keats also associates the questing poet with the myth of Narcissus (L. 63- 80). The question one would certainly ask here is, what implication this allusion might have with regard to poetic creativity. Keats’s implication of Narcissus goes beyond the issue or myth of self-love/possession and



admiration, and touches on the psycho-dynamics of self-mirroring in artistic creativity. In this sense the poet becomes his own observer and critic in the creative process. The title of the poem suggests the struggle to attain a summit, not unconnected with the aesthetic ambitions of reaching Olympian heights.

The poem also opens with the aesthetics of Pan as an unavoidable stage in poetic development, and the rest of the poet's broodings on poetry strongly connects with his mythological allusions. The poem ends with the rhetorical question as to whether a poet has been born, "Was there a poet born? – But now no more,/My wand'ring spirit must no further soar," (L. 241 – 242). If the answer is affirmative, the question of being born presupposes the nativity stage of poetic ambition towards a desired and advanced vision. From the last line, one may be compelled to think that Keats actually means to restrain the ambitious potential of his poetic imagination. Yet, it is a subtle expression to get along, a renewed hope rather than a renunciation. So like the mythical Dedalus, he continues the quest, a continuity that is discernible in the subsequent poems. The poem therefore explains a foretaste and optimism of his soaring and searching imagination.

The issue of poetic gradation in the two poems discussed above also finds expression in Keats's epistolary self-consciousness. Writing to John Hamilton Reynolds on May 3 1818, Keats put into prosaic form what he had hitherto captured in the poems, and which are a characteristic feature in subsequent ones, all connected with the debate on myth as aesthetics and philosophy. In fact, he seems to be working out a theory on aesthetics, with a move at conceptualising what it means and takes to attain not only artistic vision, but also the depths of knowledge. In this letter Keats stratifies the various stages of knowledge acquisition that strongly relate with his artistic creativity:

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me – The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think – We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle – within us – we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects of this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man – of convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression – whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open – but all dark – all leading to dark passages – We see not the balance between good and evil. We are in a Mist – We are now in that state - We feel the 'burden of the Mystery.' (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 397)

As already stated, this is an epistolary or prosaic articulation of the ideas that are expressed in 'Sleep and Poetry' and to an extent 'I Stood Tip-toe.' The passages of life and different thought patterns to Keats presuppose poetic maturity as well, given that he apprehends aestheticism and speculations of life as inextricably interconnected. As the human goes through the successive phases of life, so too does the poet with a vision of struggling to attain poetic maturity. This growth is enhanced by the imaginative potential which in itself is a gradually changing and expansive faculty. Though Keats does not explicitly or implicitly make reference to myth consciousness, it goes logically that what he states here aptly fits in the way he uses myth to portray the growth of the imaginative and artistic potential of the poet. The culminating effect of these processes, the burden of the mystery, shows the influence of a Wordsworthian philosophy, finely expressed in 'Tintern Abbey' and appropriately worked out in the Hyperion poems which are inextricably linked to Keats's aesthetic and philosophical development. One can convincingly say, therefore, that a better understanding of these processes is exemplified by Keats's myth-revitalising and myth-making, for it is through myth that he brilliantly maps a systematic structure of aesthetic and

philosophical progression. In this vein, the letters on “Negative Capability” and the “Vale of Soul Making”, all interrelate with the focal point of our discourse.

Complex and complicated, *Endymion* is the longest poem that Keats wrote. It is yet another apt exemplification of Keats’s revisionist manipulation of mythical material. The epic is alluded to in ‘I Stood Tip-toe’ (L. 191 - 204), and has inspired a vast array of critical and interpretative concerns. Unlike ‘Sleep and Poetry’ and ‘I Stood Tip-toe,’ where aspects of myth consciousness permeate and foster the psychology of the imagination and its processes, *Endymion* is actually an epic romance of Greek origin. It is a step toward poetic apprenticeship, a move toward a conceptual and architectonic maturity, discerned from the successive stages of the poem’s development that correspond with the poetic imagination’s growth.

As a test of his imaginative potential, the poem is one of Keats’s aesthetic rituals that culminates with the Hyperion poems. His revisionist and antithetical handling of the material, his self-criticism about the poem’s composition, his reaction to the bitter criticism that the poem’s publication generated, all point to how and what choices he makes to suit his individuating desires vis-à-vis the original texture of the story. He therefore carefully relates the story to his growing imaginative and creative capabilities, lending credence to the view that he is not simply re-narrating an existing story, but demonstrating his myth-revitalising faculty, fully engaged in the process of the artist’s conscious awareness of his art as creative growth. The poem therefore has an allegorical significance.

A number of important factors point to Keats’s revisionist attitude and aesthetic optimism in the poem. The poem’s “Preface” is a powerful statement that credits Keats’s humility and objective sense of self-criticism. He is conscious of his infirmities and limits, but is resolved to publish his poem, a mark of his arduous

apprenticeship and resolve to better himself rather than renounce his ambitions. Keats asserts that:

What manner I mean, will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished. The first two books, and indeed the last two, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press. ... The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy, but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages. ... I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more before I bid it farewell. (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 60)

This preface indicates Keats's awareness of process as announced in 'Sleep' and the letter on a Mansion with apartments. Progress and continuity are unavoidable measures to attaining his goals. His shortcomings are therefore a boost to his determination to forge ahead. The consciousness of a "feverish attempt" brings to mind the first version of the preface, which Keats himself titled as *Rejected Preface to Endymion* (*John Keats*, pp. 347 – 348). Here he similarly talked of the poem as "a poor prologue to what, if I live, I humbly hope to do" (p. 348). We have already shown in an earlier part that Keats re-orientates the myth of Endymion and the parallel stories therein, especially in its deeper structure. His anxiety of not having dulled the brightness of Greek myth is a subtle expression of having consciously done so, and therefore a justification of an antithetical stance. So the poem is characteristic of a deferral, or a reconstruction and advancement of the aesthetic self.

Keats's revisionist choices are not unconnected with important letters he wrote concerning the poem. Three of these letters particularly attract attention. These are the letters addressed to John Taylor February 27 1818 (*John Keats*, p. 397), to Fanny Keats August 19 1818 (excerpted from *Selected Letters*, ed. Grant Scot 2002, p. 188),<sup>10</sup> and to James Augustus Hessey October 8 1818 (*John Keats*, p. 418). In the first

letter, Keats briefly narrates the myth to his sister. His version, as we shall see, is an inversion of the central story in the original story. In the second letter, he tells Taylor that the poem is a move towards self-edification in aesthetic expression. In his letter to Hesse he begins with his reaction to the bitter criticism on the poem, meted on him by *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly*. This criticism holds a very vital place in the discussion. Its being directed towards Keats is an indication that as an author, his creativity has deviated from its Greek myth source. Being the critical target therefore presupposes the poem as entirely his and not a question of a poetic father. The adventures of Endymion are not different from the difficult pilgrimage that Keats undertakes to attain poetic vision, thus justifying the view that the poem can pass for an allegory of Keats's aestheticised life. Keats's response only goes to point to his deterministic ambition:

It is as good as I had the power to make – by myself – Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, & with that view ask advice, & trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble – I will write independently<sup>11</sup> – I have written independently *without judgment* – I may write independently & *with judgment* hereafter – The Genius of poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation and watchfulness – That which is creative must create itself. In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks, than if had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea & comfortable advice – I was never afraid of failure; for I will sooner fail than not be among the greatest. (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 418)

We need not overemphasise what Keats is aiming at when analysed with regard to most of what he has already said. All this cumulative weight of evidence points to the fact that Keats was self-consciously engaged in his quest, for he becomes a new and self-made hero in his myth-making. He echoes and re-affirms his stance in face of whatever adverse position is taken against him, and gives enough interpretative allowance that sees his poem as a poetic writing of himself, or to put it differently, as a psychodrama of self-imaging in development.

With regard to the various changes and modifications that Keats effects in the myth of Endymion, Christoph Bode attracts our attention. His insightful and inspiring essay “Keats as a Reader of Myth: *Endymion* (1998), carefully treats this aspect, which he rightly calls Keats’s mythological method (p. 46), though his emphasis is not on Keats’s aesthetic ambition. Bode sees the poem rather as a neo-platonic allegory of love, contending that the centre piece of the myth is the union between the mortal and immortal. However, he is careful to note that the reading and interpreting of the poem with regard to the different strands of allegorical meaning largely depend on the critic’s concerns.

Bode discusses the variations of the myth to show how Keats selects his own preferences out of its original substance.<sup>12</sup> What is important is that Keats changes the narrative, exchanging the roles of Endymion and Cynthia. Endymion falls in love with the moon goddess and undertakes an adventure to consolidate this love. Bode posits the argument that:

So Keats makes love-sick Endymion an active seeker, who, alienated from the happiness of his Arcadian kingdom (Book I), searches for his love in the earth (Book II), in the sea (Book III) and in heaven (Book IV), driven by his desire, meeting with countless obstacles and delays, until he is finally (and strangely) re-united with his beloved. (p. 44)

Bode goes further to argue that the parallel myths of Venus and Adonis and Alpheus and Arethusa (Book II), and Glaucus (Book III), are intricately interwoven to foster the quest of ideal love and immortality. The strong point in Bode’s argument is that Endymion becomes the main protagonist in the quest for immortal love (this will have a relevance in Chapter Six). His notion of allegory (Bode points to some of the controversy that surrounds the question of allegory and literature, but holds that its reading is possible in several perspectives in the poem), it should be noted, does not connect Keats with Endymion’s quest, nor does it implicate Keats’s aestheticism. It is more based on a general statement about the attaining of true love, everything

incarnated in Endymion. His assertion in this perspective, which he connects with Greek mythology is vital and worth citing:

Whenever mythological beings, gods and goddesses in particular, appear in poetical texts, an allegorical understanding of them is never far-fetched. Just as the Greek gods themselves are personifications of powers, forces and abstract ideas, so their actions and interactions in an epic poem can easily be read as an allegorical representation of general dynamic processes. (p. 51)

Seeing *Endymion* as no exception, the critic stresses that the mythical hero [Endymion] is the artist, the poet. He ends here, maintaining his central thesis that all this relates to the question of ideal beauty and love. This notwithstanding, his work offers a clue to the pressing question of whether allegory is an appropriate interpretative matrix to the poem, or whether the idea of quest is a symbolic representation of poetic growth without necessarily seeing it from the spectrum of the poet. Bode's view on the allegorical nature of the poem brings to mind Theresa M. Kelley's seminal work *Reinventing Allegory* (1997). Kelley discusses the survival of allegory within the context of modernity, which tends to be aversive to it. She conjectures that the conflicting Otherness that exists between modernity and the poetics of allegory which modernity sees as traditional and outmoded, is because the philosophical model of modernity is empirical, rational and favours plain speech (pp. 2, 5, 14, 251).

There are exceptions to this view about the substance of modern poetry, for instance Eliot's later poems. In her view allegory still has a vital critical and interpretative role to play in literature. With regard to Romanticism, Kelley contends that allegory is crucial to "the crisis of representation scholars have identified with the Romantic era" (p. 132). Though she situates her analyses in a New Historicist perspective, elaborating the problematic between allegoric and historical representation (p. 170 – 171), her work argues for the non-reinvention of allegory, but using it still as an interpretative measure.

Keats's comments about this poem, as we have seen above, obviously allow for an allegorical reading, the poem serving in this case as a quest for aesthetic soul or ideal. In this vein, it is Keats's personal allegory, his own psycho-drama, his pilgrimage towards achieving poetic fame or aesthetic perfection. This justifies the psychology of antithesis as he misreads the original version of the poem, creating imaginative space for his individuation and move towards aesthetic self-discovery and originality.

In the beginning of the poem, Keats makes comments about creative processes, which invoke his conscious will in working out an excellent piece. These comments largely connect with his already declared intention in the previous poems, and conform to his prose. Before he proceeds to narrating his story, he engages his reader in a complex and intriguing situation, whereby one can be compelled to believe that Endymion eventually is an extended metaphor of his [Keats's] own self. He will attempt his work

Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth  
Of noble natures, of gloomy days,  
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways  
Made for our searching eyes: yes, in spite of all,  
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall  
From our dark spirit.

(Book I, L. 8 - 13)

This is an echo of the rites of passage already mentioned in other instances, and substantiates the conviction that the poet is undergoing an experimenting process. He is imaginatively (re)creating rather than merely telling an existing story as it is. A little further he states that:

Many and many a verse [lines] I hope to write,  
Before the daisies, vermeil rimm'd and white,  
Hide in deep herbage; and ere yet the bees  
Hum about gloves of clover and sweet peas,  
I must be near the middle of my story.  
O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,  
See it half-finsh'd: but let Autumn bold,



With universal tinge of sober gold,  
Be all about me when I make an end.  
And now at once, adventuresome, I send  
My herald thought into the wilderness:  
There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress  
My uncertain path with green, that I may speed  
Easily onward, thorough flowers and weed.

(Book I, L.49 - 62)

The implications of these lines are telling. The use of the personal pronoun “I” cannot be said to stand for an abstraction nor can it be said to impersonalise Keats. On the contrary, it unveils him, making certain the aesthetic and philosophical experience he goes through in the creative process. He maturely and confidently comes back to this in ‘The Fall of Hyperion,’ showing that he is his own subject matter in the creative process. Though he says he is uncertain about his path, his resolution not to turn back concretises his quest ambition. His allusion to autumn and the underlying notion of ripeness and maturity, is a non-coincidental anticipation of his major concern in the poem that was to have the title. We are once more implicated with becoming, as the poem systematically forestalls the idea of greater aesthetic exploits. Apart from the reference to Autumn, the narrative anticipates ‘Ode on Melancholy’ (Book II, L. 868, Book IV, L. 173 – 181, L. 513 - 562), ‘Hyperion’ and ‘The Fall of Hyperion’ (Book II, L. 994), and ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ (Book III, L. 32), all of which are imbued with myth-consciousness and its connection with the poet’s quest for aesthetic expression and identity.

The form and content of *Endymion* show its structural patterning, both surface and deep. The four books of the narrative are therefore a systematic progression towards a desired goal. They attest Keats’s transforming imaginative insight, ever-evolving and therefore provisional. The question of allegory takes on a two-dimensional quality. First there is the problematic of the muse, and second the Endymion/Keats equation or approximation. With regard to the former, Keats is more

inclined towards the moon goddess rather than Apollo. He is all the same conscious of the fact that the moon goddess is sister to Apollo whom he constantly makes references to, that is, to Apollo. She therefore is connected with creativity as well. We don't need to explain why, given the subject matter of the story. So Cynthia can be taken to be an Apollonian image or an allegorical representation of Apollo in the poem, as she is the main representation of inspiration and experience. In his adulation of Moon he says:

Yes, in my boyhood, every joy and pain  
By thee were fashion'd to the self-same end;  
And as I grew in years, still didst thou blend  
With all my ardours: thou wast the deep glen –  
Thou wast the mountain-top – the sage's pen –  
The poet's harp – the voice of friends – the sun;  
Thou wast the river – thou wast glory won;  
Thou wast my clarion's blast – thou wast my steed –  
My goblet full of wine – my topmost deed: -  
(Book III, L. 160 - 168)

As far as the former position is concerned, we can say that Endymion is an allegorical representation of Keats, with the notion of the soul's pilgrimage dominantly focused on the aesthetic implication of its experiences.

The four successive allegorical stages, reflective of Keats's apprehension of the growth of human life, can therefore be interpreted as such: Book I introduces the first trance-like state on the Arcadian hillside. Here, Endymion's enraptured gaze falls on the moon. This connects with the suggestion that the poet gets a glimpse of the ultimate goal for aesthetic endeavour, the burden of the mystery. Book II, set in the underworld, represents the pilgrimage of the poetic soul under the full dominion of sensuous beauty. It engenders a state of poetic development towards a higher plane of deeper experience, a justification of the generative force of the imagination. The marriage of the poetic soul and sensuous beauty (Book II, L. 901 – 909), implicates new vision, new insight, new power.

The third book introduces the oceanic conception of experience and how it enriches aesthetic experience, the successive stage here being the sea. Endymion is progressing in his adventurous quest and undoubtedly meets with obstacles which, though he laments them, he uses as a breakthrough rather than a breakdown in his continued wanderings. The issue of friendship and sympathy, related to the myth of Glaucus, implicates poetic inclusiveness of lived experiences. Book IV is a further leap, towards another higher level, where poetic insight is gained through an unfolding awareness of beauty and truth. A strand of subjectivity is suggested here. Endymion must submit, must open up to attain vision, which he finally has. The poem, however, does not end with Keats's apprehension of totality of vision from an aesthetic view point. This means that its climax is a phase in itself as a poem and not a translation of full aesthetic experience and vision. Certain questions remain. Can one say, for example, that Keats's interweaving of Cynthia, the Indian Maiden, Phoebe and the moon goddess is a veiled exemplification of his philosophy of negative capability? Can Endymion's attained vision be compared to Keats's theoretical conception of the imagination as compared to Adam's dream and its reality?

What remains clear is that Keats antithetical re-writing of the myth points to how he intricately connects the psycho-creative processes of his art to myth-consciousness. This aesthetic sophistication, which he gradually develops in his poetry is an added and insightful measure in reading his works. Though basically a romance, it is undoubtedly clear that through it, Keats directs and shapes his growing imaginative potential.

'Ode to Psyche' has been variously interpreted. But what has constantly attracted criticism about the poem is its erotic implications, and its function as a medium of Keats's redemptive speculation. In this vein he has been read as a worshipper of ancient Greek deities.<sup>13</sup> The poem's Greek origin is obviously accepted,

often with the understanding that it is a Keatsian re-enactment of the myth of Eros or the Cupid-Psyche myth, both in his quest for love and spiritual certainty. Keats is not as concerned with the re-narrating of the myth as he is concerned with how he uses it for his defining principles of poetic expression and identity. This poem, alongside the other odes, bears testimony to Keats's conscious attempt at myth-revitalising and myth-making. Psyche, Melancholy, Indolence and Autumn relate with the Hellenic revival in Keats's aesthetics. These deities or abstract symbols all carry mythical qualities and provide creative energy. The fundamental question is, how does he use them for his artistic end? Our argument here focuses particularly on 'Ode to Psyche,' the intention being to de-centre or deconstruct the poem from its original Greek conception, to demonstrate that it construes the acquisition of poetic power and identity.

What characterises the poem is a fertility cult that is aimed at enriching and maturing imaginative capability, for it suggests a pattern of progressive refinement. The poem therefore carries a characteristic feature of Keatsian intensity. The question of quest that involves the soul is aesthetic and not for spiritual exuberance. It no doubt suggests spirituality, but Psyche is far from being the poet's principal object of spiritual reverence. As a remarkable expansion of the central myth in 'I Stood Tip-toe' and *Endymion*, where it is echoed, 'Ode to Psyche' is Keats's metaphor for the modern poet. Myth is extrapolated into thought, to quote Stuart Sperry, and the centrality in the poem in this context lies in the aesthetic sphere.

Though John Barnard interprets the poem principally from its erotic and spiritual dimension, he has rightly pointed out that, although it relies on classical myth for its subject, the ode "is an attempt by the self-conscious modern imagination to create its own myth" (p. 102). Psyche is an Olympian muse, she signifies the soul, and is often being associated with the butterfly, which signifies metamorphosis. The last

two stanzas of the poem show the subtle complexity of the interweaving of aesthetics and the question of divine worship. In the last but one stanza, for instance, Keats's speaker makes his vows:

O brightest! Though too late for antique vows,  
    Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,  
When holy where the haunted forest boughs,  
    Holy the air, the water, and the fire;  
Yet even in these days so far retir'd  
    From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,  
    Fluttering among the faint Olympians,  
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd.  
So let me be thy choir, and make a moan  
    Upon the midnight hours;  
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet  
    From swung censer teeming;  
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heart  
    Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

(L. 36 – 49)

These lines have been cited so many times, and when compared with the last stanza, give the impression of a new-found religion for the poet. The supplicating tendency here and the religious vocabulary that impregnates the atmosphere can be taken to represent the quest for aesthetic vision, the satiation of the imagination's potentialities. When he goes further to say, "Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane/In some untrodden region of my mind, .../A rosy sanctuary will I dress..." (L. 50 – 51, 59), one cannot help but think that the lines provide more evidence to the so-called spiritualising effect. Yet one can forcefully argue that the crux of the matter here is the religion of poetry and aesthetics. It points to the imaginative and conceptualising activity of the artist. So the liturgical and sacrificial implications should not be seen from the strictly theological or orthodox perspective.

Keats is concerned with another rite of passage of the poetic soul, a gradual deepening and maturing of thought, and needs the permanent recollective capacity of the past, a mythical past, to assure his continued move towards achieving his goal. So the "untrodden region of my mind" may rightly suppose what he is still to experience

in his quest, and suggests the yet to be comprehended vast idea that flashes in front of him in 'Sleep and Poetry,' or yet to be explored chambers that he mentions in the gradation that he had mapped out in the letter on Mansion and apartments.

The Hyperion poems are an appropriate choice of myth that mark the open-ended stage or the never-ending processes of Keats's maturing imaginative powers. Though not written in the same year, both poems strongly interrelate and, alongside 'To Autumn,' culminate the longitudinal aesthetic growth of Keats throughout his life. The titles of the poems, 'Hyperion: A Fragment' and 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream,' have influenced the critical and interpretative engagements that have characterised their reading. We have already seen how New Criticism, Structuralism, New Historicism, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics, and Deconstruction approach the poems. More particularly, the extant interpretation of the poem with regard to Bloom's psycho-criticism is not entirely satisfactory, given that it has been centred dominantly, if not entirely, on the question of authorship, in which case it is not even the author of the Greek version of the story but translators on whom he supposedly modelled the work of another work (the original Greek version) in the bid to create his own work.

Most critics using the paradigm of the psychology of influence and antithesis have usually read Keats in terms of exemplifying Miltonic or Dantean aesthetics in the respective poems. In this wise, Milton and Dante appear to be the veiled poetic fathers of Keats. But Keats did not re-write *Paradise Lost* nor did he re-create *Divine Comedy* or more specifically 'Purgatorio.' His modelling of the poems on Milton and Dante respectively does not satisfactorily answer the question of how Greek classical mythology permeates and contributes to his search for imaginative strength, maturity and identity. For instance Walter Jackson Bate's *The Burden of the Past* (1970), *John Keats* (1979), particularly "Hyperion and a New Level of Writing," Harold Bloom's

*The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), Jonathan Bate's "Keats's Two Hyperions and the Question of Milton" (1992), and Balachandra Rajan's "The Two Hyperions: Compositions and Decompositions" (1995) have discussed the problematic of influence. W J Bate recognises Miltonic influence but his contention rests on the fact that Shakespeare's influence overshadows the former's. J Bate holds that the poems can be seen in terms of epic, poetic diction, form, and style.

In this vein, the poems are characteristic of *medias res*, a Titanic battle in heaven, the fall of a divinity, and the rise of a new god. 'The Fall of Hyperion' is seen as a revolution and shift from Miltonic influence or absorption. Bloom and Rajan interpret along similar lines. While such a stance is acceptable, the problematic remains persistent. 'Hyperion' shows an emulation of Milton rather than an anxiety and antithesis. 'The Fall of Hyperion' shows repression and antithesis to Milton, yet again demonstrates an emulation of Dante. So the issue of influence and antithesis from a strict Bloomian sense requires a review and further argument.

The Greek consciousness that is undoubtedly the basic substance of both poems can solve the problematic, because we are seeing influence, anxiety and antithesis not from a strict aesthetic and formalist point of view as most critics have done. The core contents of the poems go beyond emulating or resisting Milton and Dante, and implicate Keats's meticulous handling in the myth of thematic issues that throw more light on his aesthetic ambitions. Taking the second poem to be a remodelling of the first shows a number of issues that have been at the base of his myth consciousness and self-conscious artistic development and maturity.

His reconceptualisation of 'Hyperion' (a more general recounting of the Greek myth with its clear undercurrents of the birth of the god of poetry Apollo) in 'The Fall of Hyperion' (an interweaving of the myth and a self-consciously personalised version with its implications of Keats as central focus) demonstrates that he is actually more

interested in the myth rather than how he uses the mentioned authors to map his aesthetics. To put it differently, Keats, as usual, is engaged in a constructive deconstruction of extant literature. Therefore, his supposed swerving away from Milton is subtly and intriguingly an actual deconstruction of the myth contents in 'Hyperion' into a reconstructed myth that implicates him in the creative process. The fact that he makes himself the centrepiece of 'The Fall of Hyperion' shows his deviation from Dantean influence, since he is concerned with his poetic growth and maturity rather than looking for spiritual certainty with regard to Dante's catholic positions.

The Hyperion poems link up with *Endymion* and are basically concerned with the growth of Apollo to poethood, blending aesthetics and philosophy, growth and maturity, presupposing understanding and accepting adverse changes in life. The story deals with the supersession of the earlier Greek gods, the Titans, by the later Olympian gods. <sup>14</sup>Dealing with change and progress or evolution, the poems are therefore an advanced statement of Keats's own awareness of the changes that he as a poet has to go through to understand the true substance not only of poetry but life as a whole. So issues like the poetic soul and the burden of the mystery, the creative potential of melancholy and despair (otherwise known as theodicy), the agonising rite of passage and poetic ritual, all finely expressed in the poems, connect with the circumstances of Keats's own life to point to the inextricability of myth and his aesthetics.

'Hyperion' points to a number of key issues that relate to the idea of change and the anticipation of a new order. It involves the dying-into-life philosophy that permeates most of Keats's aesthetics and thought, and therefore justifies the conviction that his choice of the myth could not have been incidental. An examination of some of the central passages is important to substantiate the symbolic significance of the myth for Keats's aesthetic and life philosophy. The poem begins with an atmosphere of ruin,



and the various speeches that ensue testify the inevitability of change and continuity, to a rebirth of a vitalising force. Thea, Saturn, Hyperion, Coeus, Enceladus, Oceanus, Clymene, Apollo and Mnemosyne substantiate this contention.

Thea's lamentations ('Hyperion' Book I, L. 52 – 71, L. 150 - 153) on the ruined and apparently lifeless Saturn who has fallen from grace, introduces the atmosphere under which the myth evolves. Her agony revives Saturn and brings him to self-consciousness, but it is inevitable that change must be the consequent end result of the fall of the Titans. Saturn's awareness and resolve to regain his fallen realms demonstrate the deep sense of despair and suffering in losing them ('Hyperion' Book I, L. 95 - 134, L. 141 - 145, Book II, L. 129 - 166). Hyperion, who is the only surviving Titan, also shows proof of the inevitability of change and new order. Though conscious of his survival, the fall of Saturn does not seem to favour his permanent consolidation of power. His speech to the fallen Titans is aimed more at restoring Saturn to his lost realms rather than to live on as the most superior deity. The most important speeches on the inevitability of suffering and agony and change and new order are uttered by Oceanus, Clymene and Enceladus.

Oceanus's response to Saturn's speech, imploring the council of fallen Titans to suggest ways of restoring their lost realm, shows an important strain in Keats's philosophy of life and aesthetics, and foreshadows how he personalises this apprehension in 'Fall.' Oceanus, who controls the seas and can be taken to be a symbolic representation of the totality of conscious and unconscious processes, proposes to bring proof

How ye, perforce, must be content to stoop:  
And in the proof much comfort will I give,  
If ye will take that comfort in its truth.  
We fall by course of Nature's law, not force  
Of thunder, or of Jove, Great Saturn, thou  
Hast sifted well the atom-universe;  
But for this reason, that thou art a king,

And only blind from share supremacy,  
One avenue was shaded from your eyes,  
Through which I wander'd to eternal truth.  
And first, as thou wast not the first of powers,  
So art thou not the last; it cannot be:  
Thou art not the beginning nor the end.  
From chaos and parental darkness came  
Light, the first fruit of that intestinal broil,  
That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends  
Was ripening in itself.

.....  
Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain'  
O folly! For to bear all naked truths,  
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,  
That is the top of sovereignty. Mark well!

.....  
So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,  
A power more strong in beauty, born of us  
And fated to excel us, as we pass  
In glory that old Darkness: nor are we  
Thereby more conquer'd, than by us the rule  
Of shapeless Chaos.

.....  
Receive the truth and let it be your balm.

(‘Hyperion’ Book II, L. 178 – 194, L. 202 – 205, L. 211 – 217, L. 243)

Thus accepting the reality of the situation is a very pivotal aspect in the process of living. Change effected by suffering and agony is an inevitable truth that matures the intellect and renders life's realities clearer. Oceanus, having overcome his own calamity and accepting the new order, achieves in himself a greater wisdom rather than struggling to alter the wind of change, the fate that they (the Titans) have been born into. In fact, the last lines of the excerpt testify that the fresh perfection is born out of the Titans. So they are not completely conquered. Rather, they are transformed into a new reality and it is acceptance of this that will heal them. Nothing is actually lost, nothing seems to be created in the strict sense of the word. All is simply transformed. Clymene's relay of Oceanus's speech is again an amplification of the former's. She reiterates ('Hyperion' Book II, L. 252 - 299) the necessity of change as a process of growth and transformation, involving "bitter tides." She also talks of her vision concerning the next of kin to Apollo. Apollo is the new hero, the new and unalterable

order. So nothing must remain of the Titans, the cycle must be complete, and so Hyperion must give way as all the other Titans for the fresh perfection to be born.

Book III basically deals with Apollo's ordeal as he goes through a rite of passage with Mnemosyne, the mother of the gods, to achieve godhead. Apollo, in his wanderings, encounters the goddess's "supreme shape," who tells him:

Thou hast dream'd of me; and awaking up  
Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side,  
Whose strings touch'd by thy fingers, all the vast  
Unwearied ear of the whole universe  
Listen'd in pain and pleasure at the birth  
Of such new tuneful wonder. Is't not strange  
That thou shouldst weep, so gifted? Tell me, youth,  
What sorrow thou canst feel;

.....  
Show thy heart's secret to an ancient Power  
Who hath forsaken old and sacred thrones  
For prophecies of thee, and for the sake  
Of loveliness new born.

(‘Hyperion’ Book III, L. 62 – 69, L. 76 - 79)

This excerpt indicates strands of Keats's epistemological and ontological concerns. For instance his conviction that the imagination can be compared to Adam's dream is inextricably connected with Mnemosyne's speech about Apollo's dream. This association affiliates with the question of creation, and in this case the creation of the new god, father of all poetry and aesthetics, and more superior than the fallen Hyperion. Though the newly born of a new era, Apollo already seeks the existing secrets of knowledge and wisdom. And to do so he adopts an approach that points to a certain supremacy in his divinity, since he is self-conscious of suffering and despair in life, "I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,/Until a melancholy numbs my limbs" (‘Hyperion’ Book III, L. 88 - 89). The climax of the ritual is when Apollo declares that by looking into Mnemosyne's face:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.  
Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,  
Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,  
Creations and destroyings, all at once

Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,  
And deify me, as if some blithe wine  
Or bright elixir I had drunk,  
And so become immortal.

(‘Hyperion’ Book III, L. 113 - 120)

There is an indication of a new godhead who embodies all the vast array of different experiences in life. It reverberates similar issues raised in ‘Ode on Melancholy’ and ‘A Song of Opposites,’ which all grapple with an imaginative reflection of complexity and intensity of human experience. The poem ends with Apollo’s dying into life. Though the poem does not technically and structurally end, just as it begins in *medias res*, it is certain that Apollo becomes the replacement of the fallen Titans and assumes qualities that go beyond that of Hyperion. If Keats were to leave the poem and never come back to re-write it, it obviously would have been distanced from his life’s engagements in aesthetics and philosophy. His revising the poem in the course of which he boldly makes himself the new godhead, is an indisputable fact that he was using this story to write about his life and the formation of a poet, to aptly substantiate his conviction of the creativity and antithetical nature of the imagination. As we have already argued, his revisionist attitude here therefore goes far beyond his discontent with Miltonic influence, and points to his attempt at creating a new artistic space, whereby the poet’s identity can be discerned.

‘The Fall of Hyperion’ has a characteristic feature that lends credence to a psycho-biography perspective in the critical outlook of Keats’s poetry and epistolary consciousness. Keats persistently uses personal pronouns “I,” “me” and “my,” consciously identifying himself in the creative process. He impersonates Apollo’s ordeal which subtly becomes his, he is the principal hero, and the mythical figures therein present are suggestive of symbolic representations of Keats’s states of mind or the various experiences he went through to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life as represented in the myth. The poem’s subtitle “A Dream” throws light on the

question of creative writing and dreaming. Dreams are creative and generative and Keats's title does not evade the Apollonian dream/reality vision or trance-like processes in the previous poem that leads to his status as a supreme muse for poets. Here it is Keats who is principally concerned, associating creativity with dreaming, and goes through the psychic processes that lead to aesthetic vision.

Keats begins by appealing to posterity to determine if his creation is that of a simple dreamer or that of a true poet: "Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse/Be poet's or Fanatic's will be known/When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave" ('The Fall' Canto I, L. 16 – 18). The relevance of this is that he tries to fore-stone an appropriate psychological and critical context for the reader to judge for themselves, and also subtly aims at poetic immortality. In his dream vision or trance, he becomes the wanderer in search of knowledge, and like Apollo in the previous poem, he must follow the ritual to poethood.

The poet/hero has to undergo his test in the presence of the "High Prophetess," who makes him understand that to drink deep of the true essence of knowledge, wisdom and immortality he has to mount the altar or remain at its feet and simply die and be forgotten ('The Fall' Canto I, L. 107 – 117). The consequent result of the experience is a trance-like experience that the quester goes through, dying, as it were, into life because of his determination to transcend the limits of simple joys of life. His inquiring spirit leads the goddess to explain to him why he has been privileged to have access to mystical vision:

None can usurp this height,' return'd the shade,  
'But those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest.  
All else who find a heaven in the world,  
Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,  
If by chance into this fane they come,  
Rot on the pavement where thou rotted'st half.' –  
(*'The Fall' Canto I, L. 147 – 153*)

We need not overemphasise the implications of this excerpt with regard to Keats's developing thought as discerned through the previous poems and examined letters. Moneta tries to mark the clear distinction between the visionary potential of the poet and the mind-wandering dreamer to situate where the hero finds himself. Because of his sense of determination not only to gain knowledge but also to understand the source of human misery, the poet/hero receives a telling answer from the deity:

'Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?  
The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it.'

(*'The Fall'* Canto I, L. 199 – 202)

The poet's immediate reaction in associating the voice of Moneta with Apollo is not unconnected to the apprehension of Apollo's emergence as the new god. The flow of the poet's consciousness is registered at various levels with modified intensity. One of the central passages in this poem is the revelation of Moneta with the parting of her veils. This revelation is part of the complex in understanding Keats's ritual in myth consciousness as an ascending measure to his vision:

The saw I a wan face,  
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd  
By an immortal sickness which kills not;  
It works a constant change, which happy death  
Can put no end to; deathward progressing  
To no death was that visage; it had pass'd

.....  
But for the eyes I should have fled away.  
They held me back, with a benignant light,  
Soft mitigated by divinest lids  
Half closed, and visionless entire they seem'd  
Of all external things...

.....  
So at the view of sad Moneta's brow,  
I ached to see what things the hollow brain  
Behind enwombed: what high tragedy  
In the dark secret Chambers of her skull  
Was acting, that could give so dread a stress...

(‘The Fall’ Canto I, L. 256 – 261, L. 264 – 268, L. 275 – 279)

It is after this experience that Moneta recounts the story of the fallen Titans and the temporary survival of Hyperion, whose subsequent fall gives way to (re)birth. This (re)birth, that of Apollo, is in real essence Keats’s own advance to poetic grandeur. The transforming processes in Keats’s psyche delineate the development of consciousness and the creative imagination. The poem therefore becomes another intense aesthetic and imaginative experience whereby the dreamer becomes a great poet.

Structuralism’s and Formalism’s dissatisfaction with ‘Hyperion’ because of its technical incompleteness cannot refuse the desire for aesthetic vision in Keats. Both poems, from an aesthetic perspective, resist the analyses of Douglas Kenning and Andrew Bennett who see the poems as imaginative and poetic destitution that offers no aesthetic revelation nor possibility, and as a narrative subversion and failure respectively. Myth consciousness serves as major key in Keats’s quest, and the manner with which he succeeds to combine this with his poetry and alongside the experiences of his life, entail much credit to his brief career. Keats succeeds in creating his own myth, a myth not only of the aesthetic hero, but also the essence of life and its endeavours. The closure of the myth is his death, the myth ends with it, though is presently susceptible to further investigation.

### **MYTHOLOGY AND EKPHRASIS: VISUAL ARTS AND POETIC CHOICES**

Keats’s sensuousness and materialism has always been celebrated, for many critics have seen him as one of, if not the greatest, materialist or mundane in the Romantic period. Greg Kucich has rightly commented that the increasingly urgent search for ways to evaluate Keatsian poetic formulations within materialist frames constitutes

one of the strongest challenges for Keats critics. His appeal for the physical has often lead to a limited or dominantly one-dimensional apprehension of his philosophy of beauty, truth and the imagination to the secular, sensual and erotic. This section seeks to examine Keats's myth consciousness in relation to the material (in this case, visual) arts as an igniting poetic force, that is, the relationship between visual culture and its aesthetic and philosophical impact on Romantic poetry. We have already mentioned the fact that Keats's access to original Greek classical art was through the visual arts of the Hellenic era which found their way to England. The basic question here with regard to ekphrastic poetry is, how does Greek visual culture affect Keats's groping sense of aesthetic grandeur.? In other words, what accounts for the choices he makes, and what effects have these on his aestheticism? The aesthetic phenomenon of ekphrasis will serve as a critical measure in the investigation here. Ekphrasis is not a new term in literature, let alone Romantic poetry and particularly Keats's. The issue here is not a detailed study of the concept.<sup>15</sup> As already indicated in a previous part of this chapter, the interest here lies in its connection with Keats's mythopoetic consciousness, and how it defines and appropriates his aestheticism and philosophy of life.

Ekphrasis relates to poetry as a speaking or articulating representation, and painting, sculpture, and scenery as a mute poetry or unseen poetry or the unwritten other. It can be defined as the verbal description of visual representation. Ekphrastic poetry is therefore poetry that takes its inspiration from visual or imagined art and in turn gives life and vitality to it. What is intriguing but interesting here is how contemplative and creative minds respond to other creative minds, or in certain cases, how a creative mind responds to its own creation. In this vein, the creative and regenerative potential of the imagination seeks to establish a psycho-aesthetic relationship between the word and the object. The relationship between the poet or



aesthetician and the observed phenomena shows the complexity of interaction with regard to space and time. The poet is not only an interpreter, but a creator out of what is being perceived and interpreted, since his work chains the line of interpreting. The line of interpreting here connects with the original creator of the art work, who must have had their own idea behind its creation different from the poet. This evokes a circle or chain of interpreting, consisting of the original artist, the poet, and the reader of the poem vis-à-vis the art object and the poem. The Bloomian psycho-criticism of intertextuality intriguingly goes further to interdisciplinary levels, involving text and image and the temporal and the spatial. Romantic landscape and nature poetry demonstrates strains of ekphrasis, whereby poetic musing upon the visual aspects of nature leads to other realms of apprehension other than the initial description. Our concern with Keats, however, is ancient Greek art, represented by the sculptures and other related visual art objects that Lord Elgin brought and the British Museum and were championed by Haydon.

As mentioned earlier, the introduction of ancient Greek art and literature to the British public had a great impact on Romantic thought and aesthetics. We will not go into any details here, given the very limited treatment of ekphrasis from a strict Keatsian perspective. Besides, the issue at stake is not an in-depth study of any poem under consideration, but how Greek visual art inspired Keats to have written poetry and made statements that have continued to baffle, if not pose as an enigma to language, literary theory and criticism. A comparative or contrastive study of a poem like 'On a Lock of Milton's Hair' with 'To Haydon: On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,' 'On First Seeing the Elgin Marble,' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' shows the depth with which Keats's attachment to Greek culture enriched his aestheticism. The first poem, which of course has no connection with Greece but with ekphrasis all the same, is no

match to the other three, and the reasons may quite be obvious since Keats's aesthetic growth owes much to his revisionist handling of extant Greek art.

The second and third poems are a spontaneous imaginative and highly philosophical response to the influence that the marbles wield on the poet. The ruins remind him of the inevitability of the passing of time, connecting with the major issues raised in the poems discussed above. The third poem must have been Keats's own imaginative creation, given that there is actually no representative urn of the poem's description among the art objects Keats saw, or that there is no agreed source of the poem's inspiration in terms of the particular vase that inspired it. But what is certain is that the description of the urn shows strong affinities with issues and scenes presented in *Endymion*, for instance. The procession, the lovers, the anticipated ritual and sacrifice, can be said to have connections with the themes of the *Endymion*. Also, the apprehension of the enriching nature of suffering and the apparently corroding effect of time, cannot be said to be unconnected with the question of time and change in the Hyperion poems, and also interestingly with philosophy of becoming which seems to be the core ideology behind the poem's contents. Yet, the basic question remains as to what purpose does sculpture and vases serve to an onlooker, and in which frame of mind did the Greek art objects put Keats that lead to his outlook of life not only from the material and mundane perspective, but also from the purely divine and existentialist imagination, from a mystical and transcendental realm.

In all, this chapter has tried to grapple with an aspect of becoming, focusing on Keats's aesthetics with regard to his perception and translation of nature, and his mythopoetic consciousness. His nature poetry could be said to be reductive in so far as the major contention of this chapter is concerned, that is, seeing it as constitutive in the embryonic stage in the development and achievement of poetic grandeur. For his

entire nature poetry delineates strands of interpretation that lend credence to a shared metaphysical and monistic vision with the likes of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Keats's Greek myth-consciousness sheds light on his myth-revitalising and myth-making potentials. The basic argument has been concerned with the aesthetics of regeneration, creativity and becoming. At no moment did Keats show signs of having attained his poetic vision. But his interweaving of myth into his poetic and philosophical consciousness appropriates a steady development that he was going through before his death, forming the substance of his own self-made myth. This aestheticism is strongly connected with the spiritual aspects of his life, given that the next chapter will focus on the question of Gnosis, which implicates spiritual and divine awareness. The myth that Keats bequeaths to posterity is not actually Greek, whether verbal, visual or written. It is the myth of the search for an identity as a poet with a distinctive personality and voice. It is the myth of his aestheticised life, or to put in differently, the myth of the poet in the quest of becoming an aesthetic and philosophical hero. The myth lives on and will certainly be subject to further considerations and conceptualisations.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Two other important works of Bloom, which are related to his theories of influence and anxiety are *A Map of Misreading* (1975) and *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (1976). They discuss Bloom's cognitive approach, encapsulated in the psychological impact of earlier writers on younger ones and how the younger ones struggle through the process of individuation to seek a distinctive and recognised voice from the precursor.

<sup>2</sup> In his discussion of Bloom's theory, "Harold Bloom: Influences and Misreading," pp. 151 – 166 in *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002), Peter Zima has appropriately termed the question of the unconsciousness of the younger poet of any specific author as a telepathic communication in literary production that exists between the two. As Bloom himself holds, the basic importance in interpreting lies in the use of the existing work and not primarily the author. In reacting to the work therefore presupposes responding to an author, either known or unknown.

<sup>3</sup> Ephebe is the classical Greek name given to the poet. In Athens particularly, the ephebe was regarded as the citizen of poetry and his precursor often considered as a psychological agon.

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on the impact of myth on literary theory and criticism see for example, Joseph Campbell, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and *The Transformation of Myth Through Time* (1994), Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (1968), G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* (1970), Eric Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature* (1981), Mary Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (1990), and Thomas Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (1991).

<sup>5</sup> The basic classic sources for myths include, Hesiod, *Theogony*, Homer, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* and *Homeric Hymns*, Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, *Oresteia* (Agamemnon, Choephoroe, Eumenides), Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone*, Euripides, *Hippolytus*, *Bacchae*, *Medea*, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, *Ars Amatoria*, Vergil, *Aeneid*. There are many other sources, some of which will be discussed when treating Keats's poems.

<sup>6</sup> For further reading in connection with the valuing of classical Greek literature within an innovative and re-orientating context of English Romanticism see important past critics like Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (1957 [1949]), and Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* (1963 [1937]).

<sup>7</sup> For further readings in Shelleyan studies see, Marilyn Butler, "Myth and Mythmaking in the Shelley Circle" (1982), Sandra Coats, "Shelley and the Promethean Myth" (1983), John Jay Barker, "Myth, Subjectivity, and the Problem of Historical Time in Shelley's 'Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills'" (1989), and Usha Bande, "Rebellion, Reform, and Regeneration in Shelley's Poetry" (1994).

<sup>8</sup> A number of readings have situated Keats's work in the domain of influence and anxiety. These have always led to the question as to who the precursor(s) of a particular poem was. We have the examples of Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (1963), Cynthia Chase, "'Viewless Wings,': Intertextual Interpretation of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'" (1985), Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (1986), Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (1991), Ralph Pite, *The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry* (1994), Rudolf Stühnel, "Keats's On First Looking on Chapman's Homer" (1998), and Michael Hanke, "Keats Reading Spenser" (1998). Chase, for instance, carries forward Bloom's assertion that Milton is the principal source and haunting spirit behind the ode's composition. She adds the aspects of syntactic and sonic motivations in the poem, justifying Keats's revisionist stance in the end of her argument. Her point of reference is *Paradise Lost*. Bate takes the issue of intertextuality to more complex and intriguing terms. He recognises the multiplicity of sources in the poem, but strongly contends that Shakespeare is the pivotal force behind the poem's creativity. His reference points are *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, though he demonstrates that Keats comes out of the influence with an integrity and distinctive poetic and aesthetic voice of his own. The other readings also substantiate Keats's revisionist tendencies in face of previous poets who wield an influence on him.

<sup>9</sup> It is clear that both Keats and Cowden Clarke had read Pope's Homer before Chapman's. Keats was to prefer Chapman's because he found it to conform with his Romantic taste as opposed to the highly classicist translation of Pope. This notwithstanding, Keats's aversion to Pope did not leave him completely indifferent to his translation. What is important to note here is the distinction between texts of the same author, that is, Homer's work is rendered and reconceptualised in different time axis of literary tradition.

<sup>10</sup> The different editions of Keats's letters have different editorial preferences. While some give the full contents of the letters, some of which carried poems, others select only those portions they think have a important bearing on Keats's poetic and philosophical ideas. Elizabeth Cooke's edition does not include poems, nor certain prose sections. For instance the portion of Keats's narrative to his younger sister, but it at least shows proof that Keats mentions the poem. Grant's recent edition carries the poems and considerable portions of the letters.

<sup>11</sup> All the underlined sections are effected for the purposes of interpreting. They are important portions that throw light on Keats's psychology of antithesis as discussed in Bloom. The second underlined statement is suggestive of the poet as a maker of his own portrait. The poetic imagination is an observer of its creative making, the consequent end product being not only the aesthetic work, but the making of the creator as well. The last underlined words are a direct reference to Keats's hitherto expressed idea that one has to move from nature poetry to nobler and complex adventures. This indication only justifies the fact that Keats's aesthetic development is a highly conscious and systematically structured one.

<sup>12</sup> The myth has influenced literary productivity and finds expression in works that Keats is supposed to have read or consulted. Bode claims that the sources of Keats's version are Horne Tooke's *Pantheon* and Lampierè's *Classical Dictionary*. He also suggests that Keats might have had supplementary material from Thomas Drayton's *The Man in the Moone* (1606) (though it could perhaps be appropriate to suggest 'Endymion and Phoebe' rather than the former) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Keats's version of the myth to his sister does not reveal his antithetical intention, but the line of this version is what the basic substance of the myth is all about. Bode recounts the same story line before proceeding to show how Keats transforms it to suit his own aims (pp. 43 – 44, 46 – 47). One version of the myth holds that the moon goddess Cynthia, passionately fell in love with Endymion (a handsome Arcadian shepherd), lulled him to eternal sleep and could enjoy his beauty at will. Another version holds that Endymion (god of youth and fertility) was the son of Zeus and a nymph. He was loved by the goddess Aphrodite. He was granted his wish to remain young for ever by Zeus, who immortalised him in eternal sleep.

<sup>13</sup> In Chapter One, we have underscored this question, arguing that Keats shows proof of the imagination as a spiritual and divine faculty, but his spirituality goes beyond the redemptive measure of worshipping to a more inner-self speculation that constitutes the main contention of Chapter Five.

<sup>14</sup> Hesiod's *Theogony* gives the origin of the Titans. The Titans, originally twelve, were the off-springs of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaea (Earth). They were six brothers, Oceanus, Coeus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, and Cronus, and six sisters, Thea, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne/Moneta, Phoebe and Tethys. The Titans rebelled against Zeus, were defeated and imprisoned in the underworld, giving way to the post-revolutionary establishment of a new order, the Olympic pantheon under Zeus. What is important in the treatment of the poems is the particularity of Apollo, who throughout Keats's myth-referencing, takes a central place in connection with poetry and aesthetics and philosophy.

<sup>15</sup> There has been an increasing interest in the study of the relationship between the visual and the written word. Ekphrasis, that has come to represent the concept, shows the subtleties of the various responses that the written word has engendered from visual culture, and points to the enriching and mutually shared relationship between the two. An impressive number of works are available for further reading on the subject. We have, A. Kebidi Vagra, "Criteria for Describing Word and Image Relations" (1989), Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990), Peter Cannon-Brookes, *The Painted Word: British History Painting* (1991), Murray Krieger, "Appendix: 'Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or Laokoon Revisted'" (1992), W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other" (1994), Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760 – 1830* (2001), and Wolfgang Funk, "The Poem as Mirror: Reflections on the Relation of Poetry and the Visual Arts in John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and W. H. Auden's *The Shield of Achilles*" (2002). We have already discussed certain historical, social and anthropological positions on Keats in relation to his ekphrastic poetry.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### KEATS AND THE Gnostic TRADITION: INNER SELF-SEARCHING AND BECOMING

I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabric of their lives. (Leo Tolstoy)

Religion is never a finished product, packaged and delivered, and passed intact from generation to generation. There are some in every religious tradition who think of their religion that way, insisting it is all contained in the sacred texts, doctrines, and rituals they themselves know and cherish. But even the most modest journey through history proves them wrong. Our religious traditions are dynamic not static, changing not fixed, more like rivers than monuments. The history of religion is an ongoing process. (Diana L. Eck)

“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,/The proper study of mankind is man.” This is a memorable and often quoted excerpt (Epistle II, L. 1 – 2) from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1732 – 1744). Pope’s expounding of the limitations of human pursuits and knowledge to themselves, “The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)/Is not to act or think beyond mankind;” (Epistle I, L. 189 – 190), was in line with the characteristic features of the Age of Enlightenment, rational and empirical, as it were, in its epistemological concerns. In fact, Pope, with a characteristic Deist thinking, was pointing to an apparently unbridgeable dichotomy between God and man (very common in Christianity as well), man depending on the free will, grace or providence of an estranged God:

Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;  
Wait the great teacher Death; and God adore.  
What future bliss, he gives not thee to know,  
But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.  
Hope springs eternal in the human breast:  
Man never is, but always to be blest:  
The soul, uneasy and confin’d from home,  
Rests and expatiates in life to come.

(*An Essay on Man*. Epistle I, L. 91 – 98)

Yet with regard to the revolutionary processes in man’s religious and metaphysical yearnings, the very substance of this idea (“Know then thyself”), which

has roots in classical philosophy, where it features in maxims like ‘Nosce te ipsum,’ has been the bedrock of many spiritual and mystical speculations that tend to break Enlightenment’s barriers and transcend to levels of experience not common to discursive and rhetorical language, and which, even though they can be taken as important in their own right, seem to threaten the hegemony of Western empiricism and Christendom as well. Taking into consideration the anti-philosophical and anti-metaphysical stance of Deconstruction, it is certainly clear that the following discussion on idealism and becoming on Keats is strongly resisted by deconstructionist poetics. But the question of idealism and the poetics of becoming adopted here with regard to Romantic visionary criticism, is not uncritical to certain established views of this criticism.

This chapter grapples with the issue of the reconceptualisation and recontextualisation of the above ideas from a Keatsian perspective. Keats’s transcendent idealist system will be seen to fall within a pattern that already exists, and so he cannot be called or referred to as a dupe of illusion as some critics have it, for as Emile Durkheim says, every individual feeling corresponds to a group of believers. This, however, does not mean that individual experience can be said to be representative of a collective consciousness. Rather, the group would stand as a symbolic representation of a unified vision, but with characteristically distinguishing individual perspectives to attain the vision.

The question of becoming will be examined from a perspective that goes beyond the aestheticism that is discussed in the previous chapter. In this wise, the hermeneutics and phenomenology of becoming will be seen as evading the requisites of rhetorical and discursive language, and instead relate to issues with spiritual and non or meta-rational implications. In fact, the issue of becoming will be seen as Keats’s understanding of the self as engaged in the metaphysical and spiritual struggle

through knowledge (Gnosis) to know the source of spiritual existence, and finally to join the realm of Fullness or Pleroma (similar to Godhead; to be discussed later) of which the spiritual self is part. We shall once more re-affirm our revision or reconceptualisation of Anne Mellor's Schlegelian-based theoretical conception of becoming (ongoing process) as the "ultimate reality" in Romantic irony. This, therefore, implies that spiritual reality does not only involve a felt phenomenon, but most importantly an envisaged goal, given the apprehension of a post-corporeal existence, characterised by fullness of Being. Keats understood and struggled to expound that to know ourselves presupposes knowing our source, which hermeneutically and ontologically implies that we are part of the source during and after earthly life.

The rehabilitation of Keats's religious and spiritual consciousness is therefore the chapter's main focus that will provide a context for the construction of the arguments on becoming. The often misconstrued and inappropriate notion of Keats's life has reductively interpreted him as obsessed with sensuality and eroticism, as having the most secular and materialist imagination in Romanticism, and the label of agnosticism or even paganism and atheism that have been attributed to him with regard to his employment of classical Greek mythology and visual arts in his quest for aesthetic excellence and maturity, are wrong signals that necessitate a careful investigation and re-evaluation. Besides, we have, in the previous chapter, attested to the fact that even the positive hermeneutic and phenomenological reading that has argued for his ontological speculations, his religiosity and spirituality with regard to Greek myth, is a limited view and therefore a problematic misapprehension of his spiritual vision.

Under "The Dynamics of Spirit" in Chapter One of this endeavour, we examined certain views expounded on Keats's philosophical and spiritual character,



beginning with Hoxie Neale Fairchild's assertion that no authentic religious or spiritual attitude finds expression in Keats's poetry. Glenn Everett reiterates this view, also contending that Keats possessed no religious belief. To Jack Stillinger, Keats is an agnostic and abuser of the Christian faith, because he questions and overtly challenges its tenets. Paul de Man's fine statement on Keats, though in the wake of his deconstructive reading of his work, conjectures that Keats lived almost always oriented towards the future. We can appropriate de Man's view with a constructive understanding of becoming. Anne Mellor recognises Keats's apocalyptic poetry which she says has been nuanced and dismissed, but her conclusions remain unsatisfactory. She discusses Keats's Romantic irony in terms of his imagination having taught him the limitations of his powers, and sees the open-ended nature of his poems as becoming which is the ultimate reality. Sunday Uche and Martin Priestman see Keats's works as an expression of an avowed religious infidelity and atheism. Robert Ryan recognises atheism during the Romantic period as a logical extension of Protestantism, though he adds that the thoroughgoing scepticism of the Romantic movement was more a part of the Romantic Reformation – namely, its Protestant heritage of doubt attendant on faith. Ryan holds that Shelley and Keats repudiated Christianity as incorrigibly dishonest and pernicious, adopting as their goal the spiritual and moral rehabilitation of their society, a revelation that presupposed an alteration in the national consciousness.

Douglas Kenning is of the conviction that Keats, like Coleridge, failed to free teleology from the bondage of Christianity. Dismissing any aesthetic or spiritual revelation in Keats's poems, and reading his philosophical expression in the important letters on knowledge and spirituality (for instance the letters on the Mansion with many chambers and the Vale of Soul-making) as feeble and unconvincing, Kenning intimates that "Keats completely lacked the mind and temperament for any analytic

thought. His mind flowed with intermittent power and frequent turbulence, but across a wide plain, not a deep channel.” His spiritual speculations therefore convey no assurance or certainty in post-existence.

That Keats completely lacked the mind for analytic thought, is certainly not true. The previous chapter obviously dismisses this view, since it strongly argues that Keats’s aestheticism involves knowledge acquisition through individuation. And as we shall see, Keats showed remarkable development not only in epistemological matters, but also ontological speculations, with the question of spirituality assuming a very pivotal position. Kenning, unfortunately, does not elaborate how Christian theology guarantees the certainty of post-existence so as to demonstrate its supposed superiority over the system proposed by the poet. In line with Kenning’s convictions, Gillen D’Arcy Wood’s analysis of the visual sees Keats’s urn poem as leading to no divinity or spirituality.

The term Gnosis or Gnosticism is not new in Romantic criticism. Emery Clark’s *William Blake: The Book of Urizen* (1966) sees Gnosticism as the central contributing factor to the spiritual essence in Blake’s work. Peter Sorensen’s *William Blake’s Recreation of Gnostic Myth: Resolving the Apparent Incongruities* (1995) takes a broader perspective on the subject. Kenning uses the word casually when discussing the Romantic imagination. Paul Davies’s criticism of Romantic eco-poetry employs the term “gnosiology,” though he does not include Keats’s poetry, but demonstrates that Coleridge had characteristic features that indicated Gnostic attitudes.

The only study that has paid attention to Gnosticism with regard to Keats’s poetry, and in connection with the direction that this study takes is Maureen Roberts. She attempts a good description of the term, but her analysis of Keats’s poetry is too complex to follow, and her conclusion is almost antithetical to her contention. As we shall later see, not only does she force her arguments on almost all of Keats’s

important poems, she also reverts to what Dorothy van Ghent's *The Myth of the Hero* propagates. That is, a recourse to Greek mythology, with which she appropriates the complex interaction between the Dionysian and Apollonian polarities in the move to unity as characteristically Gnostic in Keats. But her work, all the same, has considerable strength and is very inspiring with regard to the hermeneutic outlook of Keats's spiritual broodings.

The issue here is to treat his prose (his epistolary self-consciousness) and poetry not in the context of agnosticism or atheism or paganism, but from within the more convenient and positive context of Gnosticism. His poetry and epistolary self-consciousness strongly substantiate how he used the experiences of his life, his developing sense of self-knowledge, to advance a philosophical and spiritual position, not in alignment with the prevalent Christian orthodoxy and theology of his era, and which shares many characteristic features and patterns of the philosophical, psychological and spiritual implications of Gnosticism, which hermeneutically and phenomenologically appropriates innate knowledge as intuitively holistic, and redemption as the self's transcendence of the polarities or extremes of life.

To reiterate the argument, Keats's philosophy of the imagination as a mystical and transcendental faculty, his phenomenological and ontological understanding of sleep, dream, suffering and death, particularly encapsulated in his letters but also finely expressed in his poetry, appropriately connect with the concept of irony and becoming that paves the way to a realm of reality that is graspable principally in non-rational language and communication. In Chapter Two this notion was discussed within the interpretative spectrum of Coleridge's pantheistic and monistic vision which argues for the possibility of the soul to reunite with the Logos or the One from which it emanates, since it is a constantly felt mystical and sublime experience. Coleridge demonstrates that spiritual potential is embedded within the self, which seeks fusion

with the principle of all things, the greater Self. We also pointed to aspects of Keats's poetry which find a close affinity with Coleridgean speculations in the previous chapter, which dominantly treats the concept of becoming in terms of aesthetic processes and the quest for a poetic voice and identity. In Chapter Three, the question is addressed with regard to how the self in time struggles as its own mirror and critical guide, and as mirrored by an Other, to attain synthesis, unification and understanding.

The question of spiritual and transcendental longing in this chapter proposes to make an advanced statement on the applicability of certain Gnostic patterns in Keats's poetry, his Gnosticism being a consequent result of his acceptance of the antithetical experiences of his life, which schooled not only his aesthetic acuity, but most importantly, gave him the spiritual allowance to seek a more self-satisfying redemptive vision. Keats uses aesthetic vision as a way to go far beyond the limits of aestheticism, delving into matters not only of epistemology, but most particularly the ontological self or sense of Being, apprehending that individual life and identity correspond to a trans-historical essence. This justifies the hitherto held position in Chapter Four that while aestheticism can be seen to intertwine with spirituality, there is the possibility of drawing a distinctive mark between the two. It was also argued, as indicated above, that limiting Keats's spiritual consciousness to the worship of Greek classical deities, deprives us of an in-depth understanding of the deeper undercurrents of his broodings on the self and inner capacity for metaphysical and transcendental awareness.

The rest of the chapter will be structured as follows: towards a definition, or more conveniently an understanding of Gnosticism as a mystical clue to self-knowledge, self-realisation/discovery and self-redemption; a contrastive view of Western Christian orthodoxy and Eastern mystical traditions, the central focus being the paradox of the West to argue that Keats's supposed spiritual Otherness would be readily understood and appreciated by Eastern inclined spirituality rather than the

hostility of Christianity; Keats's Gnostic scheme and inner search for a new path leading to prophetic self-elevation; Keats's philosophy of death and its Gnostic implications and finally a critical examination of the question as to whether Keats's Gnosticism is a realistic medium or a mere poetic-philosophical speculation within the context of the Romantic and philosophical irony.

### **TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING: GNOSTICISM AS A MYSTICAL CLUE TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-REDEMPTION**

Gnosticism is a philosophical-spiritual concept that is difficult to define or categorise, given the plurality of apprehensions ascribed it. It becomes appropriate, however, to talk about certain inherent characteristic features rather than attempting a generally agreed and satisfying definition, since the divergence of Gnostic theories resists a nucleus of stable doctrine. Yet, it is undoubted that Gnosticism is aversive not only to phenomena pertaining to rationalism and empiricism, but also to the foundations of Christian theology and orthodoxy. In this vein, it pertains to idealism, and questions and challenges Christianity which seems to favour rationality in its theology rather than emphasising the ideal or mystical in the strict sense of the word, or which places a limitation on the intrinsic spiritual capacity of the individual which is repressed. In fact, its notion of the so-called inborn fall and sinful nature of man (which it appropriates with the word ignorance, that has to be overcome through gnosis) and the redemptive capacity of man in his search for immortality (which is a displacement and an inversion of the tenets prescribed by Christianity), has made it to be seen as a heretic or an eccentric and aberrant branch of Christianity.

The cradle of Gnosticism is not easy to be situated in pre- or during or post-Christian times, but it is generally considered Western, has a very vast bulk of literature and strongly affects Christianity, from which most scholars hold that it is

originated. So it is convincing to see it as an impinging Otherness or Alienness to Christianity. The intention of this endeavour is not to engage in an in-depth study in the origin, history and evolution of this complex and rather intriguing but interesting philosophy per se, but to see how some of its current principal traits find expression in Keats's aesthetic and philosophical thought, or more precisely his psycho-spiritual experience.

Etymologically, Gnosticism stems from the term "gnosis," which in Greek means knowledge. It is therefore a state of consciousness, and Gnosticism denotes the Gnostic system. As we shall discuss later, Gnostic consciousness combines both epistemology and ontology. So its conception of the acquisition of knowledge and the contemplation on the mystical and spiritual ramifications of life are inextricably linked, for the one works towards attaining the goal of the other. Many scholars have tried to assemble authoritative material and expound the different referential possibilities of Gnosticism rather than tried to give a concise definition to the term. They include Hans Jonas, Carl Gustav Jung, Joseph Campbell, Harold Bloom, Clark Emery, Robert Grant, Richard Smith, Emile Gillibert, Anne Marie McGuire, Giovanni Filoramo, Mark Jeffery Olson, Peter Sorensen, Bentley Layton, Maureen Roberts, Gilles Quispel, Herbert Christian Merillat, Douglas Groothuis, and Stephan Hoeller.

We shall briefly discuss some of the views presented in the works of Emery, Bloom, Roberts, Merillat and Hoeller, for they express with lucidity and conformity with the varying views of the mentioned scholars, some of the ramifications of the term, which appropriate the possibility to applying it to Keats's speculative thoughts on spirituality and salvation. Emery's investigation on the mystical/spiritual aspects of Blake in his work *William Blake: The Book of Urizen* (1966), provides an accurate and concise description of the Gnostic mythos, which a number of later scholars have all agreed with, and considered among the best normative characteristics of Gnosticism.

Hoeller, for example, recognises these characteristics, asserting that Emery's line of inquiry, though not a conclusive statement on the enigma of Gnosticism's decisive meaning, calls attention to definitions, or better still characteristics that are historically unimpeachable and terminologically definite. In *William Blake: The Book of Urizen*, Emery advances twelve fundamental points on the concept:

- .The Gnostics posited an original spiritual unity that came to be split into a plurality.
- .As a result of the pre-cosmic division the universe was created. This was done by a leader possessing inferior spiritual powers and who often resembled the Old Testament Jehovah.
- .A female emanation of God was involved in the cosmic creation (albeit in a much more positive role than the leader).
- .In the cosmos, space and time have a malevolent character and may be personified as demonic beings separating man from God.
- .For man, the universe is a vast prison. He is enslaved both by the physical laws of nature and by such moral laws as the Mosaic code.
- .Mankind may be personified as Adam, who lies in deep sleep of ignorance, his powers of spiritual self-awareness stupefied by materiality.
- .Within each man is an "inner man," a fallen spark of the divine substance. Since this exists in each man, we have the possibility of awakening from our stupefaction.
- .What effects the awakening is not obedience, faith, or good works, but knowledge.
- .Before the awakening, men undergo troubled dreams.
- .Man does not attain the knowledge that awakens him from these dreams by cognition but through revelatory experience, and this knowledge is not information but a modification of the sensate being.
- .The awakening (i.e., the salvation) of any individual is a cosmic event.
- .Since the effort is to restore the wholeness and unity of the Godhead, active rebellion against the moral law of the Old Testament is enjoined upon every man. (pp. 13 – 14)

These points do not reconcile or compromise with the canons of Christianity, nor do they cohere with the core content of any of its myths. Blake's work, which can be termed as protestant against Christianity, clearly consists in a Gnostic prophecy that provides an altogether new and uncommon spiritual instruction, for it maps out processes which aim at raising man into the perception of the infinite. Urizen, in its Greek roots, means "to limit" or "to bound." Understanding it creates a liberating space for man's spiritual advancement. The reality created by Urizenic consciousness

is limited to finite perception, to a reality centred around the errors of the mundane and corporeal.

Blake contrasts Urizen (the adversary, the body of error, and eternal forces of rationalism and empiricism) with the Eternals (the infinite and the eternal). Blake, no doubt, recognises the human body as the blood and flesh of divinity. So it is not primarily an error, the error in this context apprehended as depending on the kind of perception which closes and estranges the body from divinity. The adversary, operating only on the sense organs and negating the infinite, is therefore that which can reside in every human and prevent them from visionary experience, the spiritual journey, and the eternal. So to Blake, mankind must overcome or annihilate the adversary and ignorance through self-scrutiny and mystical knowledge which is beyond the senses. This is an aspect that he attributes to the imagination which he calls a divine and higher consciousness. Blake in a typical Gnostic consciousness rejected the Christian myth of the Fall. His scheme places the individual at the centre of their own ingrained spiritual powers and apprehends reality as meta-rational and transcendental.

This brings in the complexity of the ontological self and its relationship with the Other. The question of Otherness which constitutes a typical Christian strain in spiritual salvation, is nuanced and displaced from its Christian context by the Gnostic thought pattern. Generally, Christian theology sees the Other from a divergent perspective, though God takes the centre-stage. That is, while it marks a clear dichotomy between sinful and fallen man, and an omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God, there is also recourse to mediating representations like Christ, Virgin Mary and the saints (depending on the religious denomination, with exceptions like Unitarianism which is strongly aversive to the concept of the trinitarian orbit). Salvation becomes a matter of covenant and faith or grace, with man with his



consciousness of being deprived and distanced, looking up to an external transcendent God. In fact, the scheme specifies a judgement day, the outcome of which will determine eternal bliss in heaven or perpetual suffering in hell. We shall come back to this when we examine Hoeller's hermeneutic and phenomenological investigations of the Gnostic myth of creation, deity, the cosmos, salvation and so forth.

We have established that Gnosticism rejects Christianity's myth of salvation, is resistant to the requisites of discursive intelligibility, and struggles to transcend the limitations of the senses and the materiality that is supposed to imprison the soul. The above excerpt on the power of spiritual self-awareness that is stupefied by materiality, means that there is an Otherness in Gnostic thinking as well. But this Other, which actually is dualistic, is embedded in the human being, is part of, and operates with his ontological self. That is, the Other is inverted here, because it is seen instead as that which acts as a barrier or impediment to achieving perfect knowledge and exploring the ingrained spiritual potential. In this vein, suffering, misery and despair as well as all that centres on the corporeal, can be interpreted as figurative repository of Otherness. It is through the understanding of these, considered very useful in the individuating process, that the desire to seek and sustain a higher state of consciousness is ignited. So the duality in this second aspect pertains to the part of the divine essence that is supposed to be lodged in the human.

Coming to Emery, his interpretative spectrum finds apt substantiation in Blake's work, and inspires further investigations on the diverse views on Gnosticism in a broader Romantic context. Though the intention of this chapter is not a contrastive attempt on Christianity and Gnosticism, it is vitally important to note that Keats lived and wrote in an era and country where Christian theology, however diverse, was and has been the standing order of religious and spiritual life for centuries. It therefore becomes impossible to neglect this distinction if the concept has to be well understood

within Keats's context.<sup>1</sup> We will realise that Keats no doubt directs bitter criticism against no other church than the Christian Church, which he considers to have lost the very essence of its preaching and doctrines, and so provides no assuring way to eternity or immortality. In this vein, he, like Blake, puts to question and challenges Christian myths.

Harold Bloom's complex handling of Gnosticism shows how multivariate the concept is. His investigations and criticism point to a careful conceptualisation of a systematic development from the aesthetic sublime to spiritual ideals. But, it should be noted that spiritual systems pertaining to Neoplatonism, Kabbalah, and Gnosticism from which Bloom draws extensive material to fashion out an aesthetic and interpretative matrix in literature, have usually not been associated with literary theory and practice. While Bloom's literary approach looks quite convincing, it serves rather as a veiled forecasting of his spiritual speculations, which form the substance of most of his later life and works.

In works like *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), *Poetry and Repression: Revision from Blake to Stevens* (1976), and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), Bloom develops the notion of Gnosticism from an aesthetic to a spiritual dimension. So his understanding and employing of Gnosticism in his literary career is limited basically to the artistic dimension, given that he uses the notion as a theoretical and interpretative measure or model in literature. He relates Gnosticism to the question of poetic revisionism and the quest for an authentic aesthetic voice. In the second work above, he reiterates the revisionist measures (pp. 1 – 21) discussed in Chapter Four, concerning *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), introducing the idea of gnosis, which he sees as a poetic process amounting to revisionary freedom of interpretation. Bloom equally re-examines the psycho-aesthetic process of Kabbalah,

connecting its religious and spiritual implications with Gnostic and aesthetic ramifications:

Kabbalah, demystified, is a unique blend of Gnostic and Neoplatonic elements, of a self-conscious subjectivity founded upon a revisionist view of creation, combined with a rational but rhetorically extreme dialectic of creativity. (p. 14)

In his treatment of what he calls the Gnostic Sublime in Yeats, “Yeats, Gnosticism, and the Sacred Void” (pp. 205 – 235), Bloom is approaching a level where aestheticism moves towards metaphysics and spirituality. He reiterates that Gnosis is kind of knowledge rather than a mode of thought. He further asserts that:

This kind of “knowledge” is itself the form that salvation takes, because the “knower” is made Divine in such a “knowing,” the “known” being “the alien God.” This kind of “knowledge” is anything but what the West has meant by rational “knowledge,” from the Greeks until our time.... It is *not* what normative Judaism or orthodox Christianity have meant by human “knowledge” of God, for Gnostic “knowledge” transforms man into God. (pp. 213 - 214)

In the third work Bloom provides an advanced and confident statement on the complexity of revisionism with regard to the metaphysical implications of the religious and spiritual beingness of the human personality. Gnosticism is not just a method of interpretation, but becomes a dialectical process. With this conviction, he equates gnosis and poetry to expound the conviction that aestheticism and spirituality are inextricably intertwined. One can begin to understand that in his early works Bloom has constantly been preparing the minds of his readers towards the core content of his theory, which is an aestheticism whose end product is a spirituality that eludes rhetorical expression. The excerpt above justifies this view. This provides and informs the interpretative strand with which one can understand Keats’s aesthetic-spiritual philosophy. To put it differently, Gnostic and/or poetic knowledge interweave as modes of antithetical knowledge, a knowledge that is at once secret, revealed, and

saving. Bloom discusses three major characteristic features of Gnosticism. This complicated triad consists of negation, evasion and extravagance.

Negation in Bloom's understanding is not understood in Hegelian terms, nor is it considered from a Freudian perspective of negation. He rather subscribes to the Nietzschean thought of the motive of art, which captures the artist's antagonistic and contesting spirit that strives for supremacy. Negation is therefore seen as the desire to be elsewhere, the desire to be different. This marks an important analogy between aesthetics and spirituality. Man's search for, and affirmation of his spirituality and immortality has to be sought out in the same measure as the artist's struggle for independence from the imprisoning influence of the precursor. Thus, from a strict religious and spiritual view, one has to negate the constrictions imposed by orthodoxy and seek alternative measures if one desires to attain true spiritual selfhood.

Bloom interestingly makes careful choice of words when he insists on evasion rather than substitution. The idea of substitution in Gnostic dialectics is usurped by evasion, because like every mode that battles its own belatedness, Bloom conjectures, Gnosticism insists upon evading rather than fulfilling time in an apocalyptic climax, or living in time through substitution. Bloom's explanation of extravagance is somewhat complex, but principally alludes to the restitution of power by a mode of figuration that moves from the symbolic or synecdochic through the sublime or hyperbolic and ends in an acosmic, anti-temporal trope. However complex and intriguing Bloom's handling of Gnosticism is, he undoubtedly points to the central question of aversion and subversion to dogmatic principles of spiritual strength and salvation. He sees poetry and aesthetics as offering such a space for the exploration of new modes of spiritual utterance, as the scene and trope for spiritual sublimity and mankind's deepest longing for transfiguration and immortality through individuation.

In his writings, Stephan Hoeller, the Bishop of the Gnostic Church, Ecclesia Gnostica in Los Angeles, has carried out extensive research on extant Gnostic literature, and given more substance and clarity to Emery's points as well as on some other important scholars listed above. Among his essays are *The Gnostic World View: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism*, "What is a Gnostic," and "Valentinus: A Gnostic for all Seasons."<sup>2</sup> These essays show proof of the extensive reading, which is evident in his published works, and for every important idea that he discusses, we are going to supplement with published material to authenticate his findings. In the third essay, Hoeller provides some historical perspectives on the evolution of Gnosticism. He uses the example of Valentinus, a superior Catholic priest of Rome who turned Gnostic, to situate Gnosticism from within the Catholic Church, or more appropriately Christian Church, given that Protestantism had not started. So the ideas discussed here with regard to Valentinus's preaching and doctrine are similar to those in the other works. In the first and second essays, he is basically concerned with providing appropriate contexts within which the concept can best be understood amidst its diversity. In this vein, he uses the views of some of the above mentioned scholars.

The biography of Valentinus in most texts on Gnosticism is very blurred. But he is identified with the second century at the beginning of which he was born in Egypt. After having studied in Alexandria, he moved to Rome around 140 A.D. where he served the Church between 135 and 160 A.D. (Anne Marie McGuire, *Valentinus and the Gnostike Hairesis: An Investigation of Valentinus's Position in the History of Gnosticism* 1983, pp. 76 – 78 and Layton Bentley, *The Gnostic Scriptures* 1987, pp. 217 – 222). Valentinus, considered not only as the founder of Christian Gnosticism but the most influential in the Gnostic school, is said to have arrived at a position on spirituality that was a pressing threat to the very Church he served, given that his essentially unbiblical teaching was aimed at deconstructing or decentering existing

Christian notions. Hoeller asserts that the elaborate mythic structures of cosmogonic and redemptive content bequeathed by Valentinus are but the poetic-scriptural expressions of his grand proposition, which has a direct relevance to the existential condition of the human psyche in all ages and in all cultures. To Hoeller, his hermeneutic speculations created an authoritative paradigm of Gnostic Christianity which would have changed the course of Christian theology if he were made Bishop of Rome. Valentinus challenged the myth of disobedience to the creator, and strongly opposed the guilt-ridden view of Christian life as well as the blind belief in a vicarious salvation by way of the death of Jesus.

Redemptive potential was resident in the soul of each human being, he claimed, and the question of cosmic defect was seen as an integral part of the creative divinity. This particular aspect will be examined later. Hoeller stresses that Valentinus did not negate or diminish the importance of Christ, an issue which will not be discussed here. But the Gnostics generally hold that Jesus was a convinced Gnostic, and that most of what he said has been misinterpreted or has been kept out of the scriptures. Thus, Jesus lived an exemplary and transcendental life, making use of the divine powers that he possessed, and helping others to discover their own inward spirituality and divinity.<sup>3</sup> He cites two important excerpts from Valentinus's views on Gnosticism and blessings respectively:

Perfect redemption is the cognition itself of the ineffable greatness: for since through ignorance came about the defect ... the whole system springing from ignorance is dissolved in Gnosis. Therefore Gnosis is the redemption of the inner man; and it is not of the body, for the body is corruptible; nor is it psychical, for even the soul is a product of the defect and it is a lodging to the spirit: pneumatic (spiritual) therefore also must be redemption itself: Through Gnosis, then, is redeemed the inner, spiritual man: so that to us suffices the Gnosis of universal being: and this is the true redemption. May the Grace beyond time and space that was before the beginnings of the Universe fill our inner man and increase within us the semblance of itself as the grain of mustard seed.<sup>4</sup>

Hoeller concludes here with the conviction that we don't need to be saved. Rather, we need to be transformed by Gnosis, which transcends the disunity of the self. Fullness of being can be truly attained by an activation of the redemptive potential of self-knowledge. Spiritual self-knowledge, he accentuates, thus becomes the inverse equivalent of the ignorance of the unredeemed ego.

The two other essays basically continue to offer further details on Gnosticism. In the second essay, he is principally concerned with what he calls the confusing voices of Gnosticism. He elaborates on perspectives such as political confusion, traditionalist difficulties, academic ambiguities, and psychological and existential models. The last point, which he equally discusses in the first essay ("Gnosis and Psyche: The Depth Psychology Connection"), is what interests our investigation. It should be stressed that Hoeller's Gnostic position favours and advocates theosophy and a psychological approach to Gnosticism rather than a historically based one. This explains why he underscores the psycho-spiritual implications of Gnosticism from the perspective of depth psychology elaborated by Carl Gustav Jung and Gilles Quispel. Jung saw analytical psychology as vitally relevant to understanding Gnosticism rather than reducing Gnostic teachings to depth psychology as some scholars may have it. To Jung, Gnosticism is not merely an issue of depth psychology, but involves ways that probe into the true essence of spiritual consciousness. The repression of the Gnostic approach to religion, he holds, has greatly de-spiritualised Western culture. But as Hoeller claims, Gnosticism is far from being a vanquished heresy in Christianity. In another work on Jung entitled *The Gnostic Jung* (1982), he connects his arguments with Christianity, asserting that Christian Gnostics held a

conviction that direct, personal and absolute knowledge of the authentic truths of existence is accessible to human beings, and, moreover, that the attainment of such knowledge must always constitute the supreme achievement of human life. (p. 11)

With regard to Quispel, a close associate of Jung, Hoeller examines his own contribution to the debate on the relationship between depth psychology and spirituality. Quispel is said to have published an important work on the subject (“Gnosis as World Religion” 1972), contending that the Gnostic effort involves a deep insight into the ontological self. Hoeller concludes that Gnostic psychology and Gnostic religion are mutually inclusive and complement each other within the implicit order of wholeness, and that while Gnostics hold that divinity is immanent within the human spirit, this does not mean that it is limited to it. More evidence of Hoeller’s analyses finds expression in *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Psychology and Contemporary Culture* (1995), which features several articles, two of the most important of which are Robert Segal’s “Jung’s Fascination with Gnosticism” (pp. 26 – 38) and Murray Stein’s “The Gnostic Critique, Past and Present” (pp. 39 – 53). Stein provides the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth* in Jungian Translation (pp. 44 – 47) to show the close affinity between depth psychology and Gnosticism.

Other very important areas, evident in authoritative texts that Hoeller covers, are concerned with the Gnostic world view of the cosmos, deity, the human being, salvation, conduct and destiny. Hans Jonas’s *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (1963) and Giovanni Filoramo’s *A History of Gnosticism* (1990) provide detail readings to the subject. Without attempting to repeat much of what has already been said, it would be important to recapitulate some of these distinctive features. Like most religions, Gnosticism recognises the suffering and imperfections of earthly life. But the Gnostics interestingly hold that the world is flawed not because of humanity’s shortcomings, but because its creator is a false one to whom blame has to be apportioned or appropriated. To understand this position which appears grossly blasphemous to



Christianity, is to apprehend the Gnostic conception of the Godhead and its myth of creation.

Gnosticism acknowledges a true, ultimate and transcendent God. This God, the myth holds, was not responsible for creation in the true sense of the word. This God emanated or brought forth from within Himself the substance of all that there is, visible or invisible. There is also the recognition of deific beings (Aeons), who exist between the ultimate true God and humanity. Together with the True God, they form the Pleroma. Pleroma is the realm of Fullness, wherein the potency of divinity operates, and stands opposite to the existential state. Sophia (Wisdom) is one of the Aeons, who came to emanate from her own being a flawed consciousness. This false being became the creator of the material and psychic cosmos. The material and the cosmos are taken to be representing his own flaw. This being is said to have imagined itself to be the true and authentic God, but it is in true essence a Demiurge, possessing only a part of the realm of Pleroma. Jonas's and Filoramo's works respectively express these ideas, the former particularly in "Gnostic System of Thought" pp. 101 – 238), and the latter in "The Gnostic Imagination" (pp. 38 – 53), "In the World of Pleroma" (pp. 54 – 62), and "The Arrogance of the Demiurge and the Creation of the World" (pp. 73 – 86).

The human being is perceived as a mirroring of the duality of the world. And though it was created by the false god, it all the same has a spiritual component or divine essence, owing to the false god's divine possession. Gnostic doctrine therefore holds that humans should learn how to discover the true essence of their spiritual self. This discovery is not helpful through the Demiurge because like Blake's Urizen, he dominantly fosters the ignorance of humanity and prevents it from authentic spiritual strive. Hoeller makes the distinctions to show the exact orientation of Gnosticism. Only spiritually conscious humans (pneumatics) can undergo Gnosis and liberation.

Materialists who recognise only physical reality (hylectics), and those who largely live in their psyche (psychics), are not likely to attain spirituality. So the kind of evolution that Gnosticism views for the consciousness, is that which struggles to attain spiritual paradise.

The question of humans brings in the issue of conduct and salvation. Gnosticism, especially of the Valentinian School, sees the whole literature of the Ten Commandments or Mosaic laws as insignificant and not conducive to salvation. These commandments, as they are, encourage a dogmatic and almost spiritless orthodoxy. Morality and ultimate salvation should be an inner integrity that arises from the illumination of the indwelling spark. Post-corporeal existence is therefore perceived in Gnosticism as a direct re-unification of the individual spark and its divine source, the Pleroma or realm of Fullness.

Maureen Roberts has also done important research on Gnosticism, pointing out most of what other Gnostic scholars expound. What is interesting in her case is that she uses it as an interpretative measure in literature, not from a Bloomian aesthetic perspective of antithetical thinking in the creative process, but from a purely aesthetic-spiritual dimension, where she intentionally draws no distinction between the two. In *The Diamond Path: Individuation as Soul-making in the Works of John Keats* (1997), she throws more light on the characterisation of Gnosticism.<sup>5</sup> As an ardent member of the Jung Circle, most of her research is devoted to depth psychology and its relevance and applicability to Gnosticism and other modes of spiritual expression like Alchemy and Platonism.

With regard to literature, she devotes her investigations and applicability of Gnosticism to Romanticism (dominantly on the metaphysical and spiritual implications of the imaginative faculty), arguing as well that Platonism, Alchemy and myth strongly affiliate with Gnosticism and Romanticism. In all these systems, she

stresses, there is a common feature of an initial unity which is divided, then re-collected as a higher unity through growth in consciousness. This high awareness constitutes the Romantic quest for wholeness as a Gnostic inversion of the redemption myth. On Gnosticism, she particularly accentuates that suffering and despair, whether circumstantial or through the pain of conscious growth, is not an “evil” consequence of “sin,” but rather the amoral paradox of necessary evil, the cathartic potential of which transforms the individual through erasing the Gnostic sin of ignorance as the unenlightened self.

We have so far tried to discuss some of the major characteristic features of Gnosticism. It should be noted that this is far from being an exhaustive attempt at the referential possibilities of the term, and equally that the thrust of the argument here is not whether Gnosticism is a better and superior form of spiritual salvation than Christianity or otherwise (unless in Keats’s arguments and convictions). Only those aspects that seem relevant to the discussion of Keats’s poetry and philosophy have been taken into consideration. The major questions therefore centre around the idea of psycho-spiritual processes of individuation as a key way to salvation. Gnosticism is considered as an esoteric mystical knowledge of ultimate reality. As a superior form of knowledge, esotericism leads to the hidden divinity of humanity, and is therefore connected with the self-deification of the individual rather than mere exoteric religiosity which obscures the spark of divinity within. In fact, Keats’s Gnosticism is going to be seen to relate as well with Theosophy which has Gnostics undertones and deals with wisdom and divinity.

We must stress that Gnosticism was not an overtly expressed spiritual attitude in nineteenth century England per se. In fact, the Nonconformist and Dissenting attitudes of the past two centuries fuelled Romantic insurgencies, especially the liberating spirit encapsulated in reflective curiosity and imaginative thinking. But with

the Romantic revival of Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Pantheism and Theosophy, it was clear that anti-clerical positions were strongly favoured. The context in which we view Gnosticism is therefore logical, given that it has a relation to the philosophies stated above. In what follows, we are going to briefly discuss the Western and Eastern religious systems to situate Keats, either in conformity with the West or the East or both. In fact, the main thrust here will be to outline some of the orthodox philosophy and theology of Keats's time to provide a contrastive background for the discussing of his work within Gnostic circles.

### **WESTERN CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY AND EASTERN MYSTICAL TRADITIONS**

This short and brief section of the chapter is an attempt to examine some of what one may call the paradoxes of the Western modes of spirituality vis-à-vis Eastern mystical systems. The arguments will largely evolve around English Romanticism and the affinities that it shares with philosophical and spiritual issues generally considered Eastern as opposed to the dominating propositions of Christian theology and ethical philosophy. The relevance of this in the present study is obvious, because Keats's spiritual thought, though apparently rooted in Western religious history, affiliates more with Eastern patterns which have remained genuinely spiritual and more resistant to materialism and other negative global changes that are influenced by the West. A brief discussion on orthodox philosophy and theology in Keats's time becomes a pressing issue.

The history of Christian orthodoxy is very complex, and needs the expertise of a theologian to categorise it. But it has had a long tradition as far as upholding its theological philosophy is concerned. As far back as the second century AD, Church Fathers like Ireneaus had strongly defended the biblically backed doctrines and

dogmas of the Church against the heresies, the most dangerous of which was Gnosticism. Though there have been slight variations with time, pointing to a relative heterogeneity, the fundamental positions of the Christian Church remain the same. The variation of Christian history in England, with its split from Rome in the sixteenth century, is another complex phenomenon. With the adoption of Anglicanism as its main religion, the different variants that emerged from it have made the question on the theological and philosophical ethics more heterogeneous. Yet, in the midst of all this, no radical views saw the light of day, with the exception of Unitarianism which refuses the conception of the Trinitarian orbit, seeing God as one and only.

Before the nineteenth century, there was much religious revolution recorded in England. The Anglican Church was inextricable from the social, economic and political life, and till today, is the state church. From Puritanism, inspired by Calvinist doctrines, emerged the Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Ana-Baptists and other later minor dominantly Christian sects. Though there was religious toleration in Keats's time, the prevailing Christian dogmas were supposed to dominate the religious and spiritual consciousness in whatever biblical orientation that was pursued. What we are going to outline below are those fundamental facets of mainstream Christianity that will be directly concerned with the position taken by Keats.

In the psychology and spirituality of Christian experience, the Bible is the dominant and determinant source or reference to its myth and dogmatic ethics. It is therefore related to the question of God, creation, the universe/cosmos, man, the Fall and sin, Jesus Christ, faith and belief, revelation, apocalypse, spiritual salvation/redemption and heaven and hell. The application of the teachings of the scriptures and doctrines is a biblically based devotion to God, and characteristic of a rationalistic approach and dogmatic affirmation. God is the Almighty, Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. His is the Maker of Heaven and Earth and all that is

therein, and the inspired voice behind all the books of the Bible. Christianity presents him as an object of worship, as a dichotomous Other who must be impartially revered, and can be reached only through belief, faith, prayer (a common ecclesiastical tool in Anglicanism was *The Book of Common Prayer*) and meditation.

The Book of Genesis is the myth that gives an account on the creation of the world and cosmos. This was a decreed act of God, and cannot compromise with the position advanced by the Gnostics, who, as we have seen, claim that the God of creation was a false God, the Demiurge. Man (represented by the first parents, Adam and Eve) as God's creation must look up to God for salvation. As a fallen and depraved being, and conscious of this as an ingrained Titanic sin ("Mea Culpa"), his essential integrity is lacking. In order to correct this defective nature of his moral and spiritual life, he has to observe and strictly apply the canonical laws of God, the Ten Commandments.

Jesus Christ is the son of God, who was sent to redeem man of his sins. His preachings, suffering, crucifixion, resurrection are to serve as an exemplary guide to salvation. He is therefore the main mediator between man and God. He is part of the Holy Trinity and God's revelation to man of the possibility of the restoration of celestial bliss. Having faith and belief in Christ presupposes a key way into heaven and paradise. In the various rituals and rites characteristic of Christianity, worship is done in congregation, and final salvation and redemption are sanctioned through death and the judgement day. Man will be judged according to his acts and beliefs in his earthly existence. While the faithful in Christ and God will enjoy eternal bliss in Heaven, the sinful and unredeemed will suffer from perpetual torture in hell.

We need not overemphasise the disparity between these positions and what we have discussed under Gnosticism. They do not cohere with Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Pantheism and Theosophy either. This brings to mind the intriguing question as to why

exactly there was so much display of religious scepticism during Romanticism. Was it simply because the established Church(es) and all its/their institutions were bad and morally and spiritually unreliable? Or was it that something more subtle and complex explains these changing attitudes? The idea, for instance, of Wordsworth joining the clergy was appalling to him. His pantheistic longing was more valued in his search for a satisfying spiritual self, though at old age, he showed a compromising attitude towards the Anglican Church. Coleridge took Unitarian orders and later converted to Anglicanism. But like Wordsworth, he remained firmly attached to his monistic broodings. Keats, Byron and Shelley took an uncompromising stance against established dogma and relied on the evidence of their imaginative potential, the capacity of the self to perceive intuitively, to convey their sense of aestheticism and spirituality.

As a literary study, the issue here is not an explicit and satisfactory assessment on theology or religious philosophy, nor an in-depth study on comparative religion. It is simply in the light of later connecting certain patterns with Keats's poetry and philosophy that give allowance for this to be done. It sounds very intriguing and even problematic to attempt to compare and contrast the West and the East in terms of religious and spiritual matters. Yet, it is undoubted that even though both interweave to an extent, there is a great disparity that draws a distinctive mark between the two. As already mentioned in an earlier part of the chapter, the stance adopted here is not necessarily in the light of favouring or condemning either of both sides of the debate, but an objective assessment from Keats's writings to demonstrate that he has the right to a personal view to religious and spiritual matters whether or not they conform with the theological outlook of his time. It is appropriate to judge him from his own convictions rather than condemn him by applying values that he did not favour.

There has been quite a disparity that exists between the West and the East in terms of spiritual matters. The general categorisation has grouped Christianity and Judaism as dominantly Western religions, and Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and other less popularly known ones as Eastern or Oriental religions. And while the Western religions are seen as exclusively monotheistic, conceiving spiritual salvation as basically a question of faith and a given immortality from God, adherents of the Eastern ones (with the exception of Islam which is also monotheistic, with a theology based on dogma like its Christian counterpart) seek enlightenment and spirituality by looking from within the mysterious voices of the inner self. (for instance see Edward Conze's "Buddhism and Gnosis" 1995 [1970] and Kenneth O'Neill's "Parallels to Gnosticism in Pure Land Buddhism" (1995)). It is obvious that Western religions, especially Christianity, carry the highest number of worshippers. But with the ever changing times many seem to be impatient with its theology and dogmas, most nowadays accepting Christianity as a simple matter of denominational identity rather than genuine religiosity or spirituality. With an increasing sense of capitalism and materialism, religion in the West seems to be engaged in several paradoxes, for while it tends to give the impression of upholding Christian canons, it is far from answering the pressing and pertinent questions on man's true spiritual yearnings. Western empiricism has constantly overshadowed the very essence of its spirituality, which is more of historicity than religiosity and spirituality. As Maureen Roberts holds, Christian ideas are now statically projected as concepts which have lost contact with universal psychic processes. However, the spiritual circuits and cross currents remain between the West and the East, with only the degree of interpretation and intensity differing.

Romanticism was not indifferent to these changes, and manifests a very strong revolutionary tendency in this direction. David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination:*



*Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (1981) can be very helpful in this context for it advocates a harmonious or compromising rather than an antagonistic relation among religious and spiritual systems. Asserting that in the work of theology the quest for understanding is never done, Tracy argues that if the modern pluralistic tradition of theology has to flourish there is the need for an analogical imagination. The object of theological endeavour far from being past event, he continues, is an ongoing encounter with God who precipitated the event and continues to make it operative in our lives. Tracy interestingly acknowledges that the analogical imagination can allow the Christian theologian [or believer] not only to continue a journey into their particularity, but also to open to the riches of other religions and theological systems [spiritual systems one may add], since not all spiritual systems are guided by a theological tradition. The journey into the particularity of life, the necessity of an analogical imagination and the pluralistic culture that Tracy expounds here gives allowance to treating Keats from a positive spectrum rather condemning him for not conforming with the system of his day.

There should be no doubt why extant literature discussed in the previous chapters with regard to hermeneutics and phenomenology of spirit on both Coleridge and Keats, is so aversive to the poets' adoption of spiritual positions that are far from conforming with Christian orthodoxy. This explains why it sounds normal to have the Romantics styled as infidels, pagans, agnostics and atheists. Most of the critics are obviously Christian-oriented critics who should be blind or refuse to see the undoubtedly repairable faults of some of the major creeds in Christianity, and who take the naive delight in condemning other modes of spirituality as an undesirable Other (especially connected with Eastern religions or spiritual orientations). It is also interesting to know that some of the Romantics themselves were caught in the paradox

of an antithetical stance to other religious and spiritual views other than that propagated by Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

Literary criticism and practice in the modern, post-modern or post-structural circles consider matters of a religious and spiritual character as not very important, specifically in Romantic studies. In fact, literary studies delving into the mystical and metaphysical are mostly denounced as outdated, not scholarly or as pseudo-intellectual. Harold Bloom, Maureen Roberts, Paul Davies, Herbert Christian Merrilat, Mark Lussier, and William Libaw are among some of the scholars who have pointed out some of the impatience which Western culture has adopted towards the subtle implications of the metaphysical, religious and spiritual not only in literary circles, but even on theology as a whole. There is the phenomenon of increasingly seeing the Romantics not from a typical homogeneous point of view, an obvious challenge to their identity as Western. For instance Merrilat holds that:

In much [Western] contemporary thinking mysticism has a negative resonance, suggesting something occult, supernatural, magical, intellectually mushy, paranormal.... To admit the overwhelming character of a unitive experience goes against our pride in rationality. Scientific rationalism (which dominates our modern mind-set) regards mysticism with suspicion. And so do mainstream monotheisms, which regard creator and creature as distinct entities and discourage private pursuits of enlightenment not mediated by the Church. ("Experiences of Oneness," *The Gnostic Apostle Thomas*, 1997)

In her discussion of the imagination as a soulful mode of consciousness in *The Diamond Path: A Study of Individuation in the Works of John Keats* (1997), Maureen Roberts notes that in our time and notably in critical circles, the notion of direct inspiration is mocked or marginalised, and imaginative leaps beyond, or rather beneath surface rationality seem misguided. Paul Davies in *Romanticism and Esoteric Tradition: Studies in Imagination* (1998), is not indifferent to the concerns expressed by the other critics. His concern with esotericism as a mystical strain in Romantic esoteric mystical poetry points to what he calls *gnosiology*, an obvious coinage from Gnosis or

Gnosticism. Romantic poetry, he accentuates, delineates tendencies towards creativity that have affinities with the world's mystical traditions. These mystical tendencies "are the effective expression of a non-sectarian spiritual impulse that underlies the religious traditions of the world and holds potential for our evolution." The meditative and contemplative mode of thought, Davies conjectures, is dominantly relegated by the West which is pro-rationalist and intellectual in religious and spiritual matters.

Mark Lussier's *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality* (1999) grapples with the bridges that exist between material and spiritual processes, contending that this should be respectively apprehended as reconciling Western science and Eastern religion. Libaw has aired out similar ideas in "How we got to be Human: Art and Science as Subjective and Objective Knowledge" (2000). Libaw does not only point to the splits that exist between/among Protestant patterns and Catholic Christianity with regard to material and spiritual issues, he considers Gnosticism as a Middle Eastern form of religiosity which is irreconcilable with Christianity. The paradox persists as to why the supposed dominance of the Christian faith is substituted by the reversion to Eastern spirituality. The concern of these scholars with the esoteric implications of Gnosticism, which is generally agreed to be pro-Western, is paradoxically regarded by the same West with scorn and even ridicule, but its essence suits the pursuits of Eastern metaphysics and spirituality, given its characteristic individual approach to self-knowledge and discovery and spiritual realisation. As we shall see, it is in this regard that Keats's spiritual philosophy can be seen to be paradoxically Oriental rather than Western.

The foregoing commentary brings in another interesting and important strand of the debate, what is known as Romantic Orientalism, and in some specific cases as Oriental Exoticism in Romanticism. This branch of Romantic studies answers some of the preoccupations on the present thrust of argument. Romantic Orientalism is not very

easy to categorise and clearly define. From a general and broad perspective, it may refer to Asian and African influences on Romanticism with regard to perspectives like places, names, religions, philosophies, art and architecture. For another description, we can have a look at Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978). It asserts that Orientalism is the strategic fiction of an Orient in the service of Western ideology. We shall not go into details here, but it should be noted that Said is mostly concerned with the Arab and Islamic world. It does not touch other regions that fall under the category of the East, that is, the Far East. Besides, he focuses more on the negative impact of Colonialism and Neo-colonialism on the East.

The English Romantics were generally averse to colonial exploits, and so the connection in this endeavour between them and the East is important. The basic concern here is centred on philosophy and religion, and therefore a positive aspect of Eastern spiritual influence on the West. So the common words that accompany Orientalism and are highly centred on Eurocentric or Occident prejudices, are Foreignness, Otherness, and Alienness. It should be noted that these are the very words that are considered by the fundamentalism of extremist Christianity vis-à-vis any other religion or tendency within Christianity that violates its tenets. What has been taken to be distinctive marks of the hegemony of Romanticism such as the inner workings of the mind, the transcendental imagination, and the mystical and sublime in nature, have a lot of affinities with oriental religious or spiritual philosophy.

Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron all have oriental inclinations in their writings. Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' can be read from an Orientalist perspective. Shelley's 'Ozymandias,' 'Alastor,' and 'The Indian Girl's Song' provide interpretative measures that connect with Orientalism. Byron's 'Don Juan,' and 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' have been viewed along similar lines. Keats, for example, read *The Arabian Nights* and *The Tales of the East*. Poems like *Endymion*, 'The Eve of St.

Agnes' and 'Lamia' can be associated with Orientalism. Given the conflicting perspectives with which the term is apprehended, the above mentioned works may not appropriately fit in the orientation of the present argument. But it is significant to say that what characterises Keats's spirituality finds more affinities with Eastern spiritual modes rather than Christianity. A number of studies have been dedicated to this phenomenon in Romanticism. We should be reminded of Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780 – 1830* (1999), which sees this influence from a very negative pro-Western perspective. Referring to Sir William Jones's Indian-based Orientalism, wherein he asserts that all religious and spiritual traditions are equal, Priestman examines this view throughout the period of his study, contending that mythology and Orientalist philosophy initially fuelled atheist tendencies.

We have the positive example of Naji B. Oueijan's investigations. *The Progress of an Image: The East in English Literature* (1996), "Orientalism: The Romantics' Added Dimension; or Edward Said Refuted" (1998), and "Echoes from the Orient in Romantic Visions" (2003), show Oueijan's preoccupation with Romanticism and Eastern mystical traditions. He strongly believes that Said's seminal work needs a reconceptualisation, providing a broader and positive perspective of Orientalism, which goes beyond the notion of prejudiced Western apprehension of the East. To him, the spiritual regeneration advanced by the power of the imagination and visionary/mystical experiences of the Romantics, are echoes of Oriental voices and prophecies. Oueijan is also of the conviction that Christianity and Judaism, which are supposedly Western religions, are in true essence a gift from the East which is their birthplace. So the Romantic recourse to the East is an attempt to master the authentic path to the spiritual and divine source rather than remaining entangled in the constrictions of Western theology and dogma.

## **KEATS'S GNOSTIC SCHEME: THE INNER SEARCH FOR A NEW PATH AND PROPHETIC SELF-ELEVATION**

This section of the chapter proposes to critically examine Keats's Gnosticism with regard to his epistolary self-consciousness and poetry. It will therefore analyse the extent to which we can apply the preceding discussion on the term and its relation with Western and Eastern modes of spirituality, and show the specificity of Keats's case with a focus on the poetics of becoming. We will begin with a number of claims before proceeding to textual analyses of his writing. Keats never used the word Gnosticism, nor is there evidence that he read any specific literature pertaining to it or connected with Eastern mystical traditions. Yet, his writings lend credence to the conviction that he has a strong self-intuited philosophy, that his spiritual speculations share common characteristics with Gnosticism and its Eastern implicated features. We have already argued and will reiterate that his apprehension of the imagination as a spiritual and divine faculty and as a way into an authentic reality that transcends phenomenality, is highly connected with the notion of becoming, justifying the view that Keats was strongly aware of a post-existent life, even if he was stoic or remained reconciled with the realities of earthly existence through out his life. His philosophy of earthly and material luxury, suffering, tragedy and death is so enriching, it befits the thesis and logic of Christianity, and greatly contributes to the understanding of his Gnostic character, both epistemologically and ontologically.

Harold Bloom has rightly said that Freudian psychoanalysis is a scientific and systematic expression or codifier and abstractor of Shakespeare's artistic creativity ("An Interview with Harold Bloom" 1986, p. 69 – 88). This can be partly true in the case of certain important strands of Keats's Gnosticism and Schopenhauerean philosophy. In fact, the inclusion of Schopenhauer should not be taken as an

unnecessary digression. On the contrary, it emphasises the richness of Keats's philosophy, and the conviction that this philosophy was shared by other thinkers. Keats's understanding of suffering, tragedy or despair shows that he does not evade these earthly realities. Rather, he embraces and struggles to transcend them contrary to what many critics think. So the contention that he seeks refuge from the unbearable harshness of the world in imaginative illusion is misleading and inappropriate. Keats is not utopic, his aestheticism and spiritual speculations complement with the all-embracing comprehensibility of the agonies of life. But as we are soon going to see from textual analyses, it may be grossly misleading and inappropriate to reduce or construe Gnosticism in Keats as having to do only with the pains of life and death as a spiritual relief. The cumulative evidence of agony and suffering should not be seen to overshadow the basic understanding of Gnosticism in general and Keats's writing in particular.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) was to conceptualise and develop this Keatsian question on the tragic side of life as vitally necessary in man's metaphysical longings. More precisely, he articulated his most important ideas in *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), the same year that Keats showed great maturity in aesthetic and spiritual thinking. And though there is no influence or confluence between the two, there is, in fact, a Gnostic element in Schopenhauer's philosophy like Keats's. To him, man is a metaphysical being, and there is a distinction between metaphysical longing and metaphysical and transcendental capacity. Philosophical thinking is greatly generated by pain and misery and this gives a clue to the metaphysical interpretation of the world. It is the limit of rational thinking which enhances religious and spiritual thought. It should therefore sound paradoxical that Keats should want to escape from what he consciously knew was important as will be seen below. Schopenhauer's thinking on immortality also has an affinity with Keats.

As we shall see, Keats's spiritual quest does not consist in looking up to a God from a theological sense. Like Keats, Schopenhauer also sees the issue of spiritual search not in terms of looking for a God above, but closely as possible from within the self. We have to understand the context in which he discusses the impossibility of immortality. Schopenhauer does not contend that immortality is an illusion. Its impossibility is seen from the fact that man estranges himself and is misguided by dogma about a transcendent God while forgetting the true essence of his spiritual duty. It is also important to note that his engagement with Eastern mysticism indicates his dissatisfaction with religious dogma. There is substantial evidence, contrary to Douglas Kenning's biased assessment on Keats's inability of an analytic mind and thought, that Keats was conscious of a steady growth in his spiritual life which, though is distinguishable from aestheticism, is inextricably connected with it.

It should be carefully noted as indicated above that Gnosticism does not capitalise on tragedy and suffering as the sole generative force behind or fundamental reference to Gnosis, for they are not the culmination of materialism. Materialism entails all that gives human pleasure or deprives one of it, it also means the phenomenal as a whole to which earthly attachment is considered in Gnostic terms as ignorance. Though Keats's Gnosticism strongly connects with his suffering, his writing is to be seen as evincing his ideology, not as exclusive of other facets of materialism as a whole. Keats was a lover of luxury and pleasure, and these also constitute his Gnostic broodings.

Maureen Roberts has been singled out as having closely examined Keats's individuation and Gnosticism. Roberts's depth-psychology-based Gnosis and spirituality are very complicated so much so that it could perhaps necessitate a Shamanic mind to understand the depths of her argument. In fact, this is even what preoccupies her in "The Axial Shamanic Self: Cross-connecting Spirit and Soul in



Shamanism, Art and Life” (1998). In this essay she appropriates Shamanism with Keats, putting forth contentions that connect with his Gnostic vision. It would be important to closely examine some of her findings on the poet to show where the problematic in her work lies. Roberts’s treatment of Keats’s Gnosticism is characterised by a complex and intriguing interweaving of Milton, Blake and Keats himself.<sup>7</sup> And as we earlier said, she reverts to Greek mythology and posits arguments that, even though they have a spiritual perspective, accrue more to aesthetic convictions rather than the spiritual.

Largely drawing from Blakean mysticism, she describes Gnosticism well within the specific context of English Romanticism, but her relating Keats’s Gnostic character with the variants of Greek classical deities sounds a bit problematic to Keats’s scheme. From a Nietzschean perspective, she contends that Keats is engaged in a Dionysian duality which he compensates with an Apollonian tranquil unity. Though Nietzsche’s conviction of the Dionysian-Apolloian axis of consciousness is more appropriated to art and creative life, it is seen to have a typical spiritual implication. Besides, discussing this feature as exemplified in poems like ‘Lamia,’ *Endymion*, and ‘The Eve of St. Agnes,’ in which she asserts that Keats expresses an Apollonian desirability, is too complex to logically follow and see the validity of her convictions. That these poems express the spiritual (an issue which will be examined in Chapter Six), is acceptable, but they don’t fit well with a Gnostic scheme, especially with the analogies on classical Greek deities which Keats is emulating according to her interpretation. At the same time, she sees Keats’s broodings simply as an unrealistic speculation. Her contention thus wrestles with the present in Keats’s expression and not with becoming or futurity. She concludes that Keats remains a mundane poet, resigned to material and mortal fate, a position that disfavours and discredits her initial thesis on the transcendental longings associated with Gnosticism. This

notwithstanding, the considerable strength of her work is unquestionable. Her handling of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ and the Hyperion poems is very insightful and informative.

In what will be the nature of our argument on Keats’s Gnosticism, we propose a more comprehensible graphical presentation on the analogies that Roberts tries to work out with regard to the Gnostic relations among the three poets:

Poet	Features or traits considered in Gnosticism as pertaining to material illusion (Demiurge or Material self)	Features or traits considered in Gnosticism as pertaining to authentic spirituality (Pleroma or Realm of Fullness)
Milton	Satan Belzebub Hell	Christ God Paradise
Blake	Reason Hell Experience Urizen Disunity and self-division Contraries	Imagination, Energy Heaven Innocence and Higher Innocence Eternals Self-discovery and unification Wholeness
Keats	Sensation without knowledge  Luxury, Pleasure (Epicurian) Rubbish  Mortal pain, Vale of tears, Spiritual ferment  Dionysian pole  Dark chambers  Dreamer	Sensation with knowledge, Imagination Philosophy (spiritual) Sparks of divinity, Intelligence, Ultimate Soul, Spiritual pearl, Particles of light Vale of Soul-making  Apollonian pole, Intuited Individuation Chambers of light  Visionary

From this table, we can clearly see how distant Keats’s Gnostic position is from mainstream orthodoxy evinced in Milton. The Christian redemption myth is transposed into Gnosis as self-knowledge and self-elevation in spiritual consciousness whereby the divine counterpart is embedded in the self. This will concretise the contrastive background that we have previously established.

Keats understood the disparity between materialism and idealism, and struggled to emphasise the importance of the latter from a Gnostic perspective throughout his mature life as this endeavour will argue. Spirituality to him, was the prerogative of the individual who matures in thought and vision by his/her reliance on

and exploration of personal experiences. The most important letters by Keats that throw light on the present discussion date from late 1817 to 1820. A systematic evaluation of these letters shows a steady and convinced mind at work, conscious of the processes and changes in growth and maturity to death and post-existence. But before expressing his strong spiritual convictions, he was not completely free from a position one can call orthodox. This, for example, can be seen in a poem like 'To Hope' (1815). This poem, consisting of eight stanzas, shares certain similarities with what Pope expresses with regard to the subject in the excerpt in the introductory part of this chapter:

When by my solitary hearth I sit,  
    And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom;  
When no fair dreams before my 'mind's eye flit,  
    And the bare heath of life presents no bloom;  
Sweet Hope! ethereal balm upon me shed,  
And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head.

Whene'er I wander, at the fall of night,  
    Where woven boughs shut out the moon's bright ray,  
Should sad Despondency my musings fright,  
    And frown, to drive fair Cheerfulness away,  
Peep with the moonbeams through the leafy roof,  
And keep that fiend Despondency far aloof.

Should Disappointment, parent of Despair,  
    Strive for her son to seize my careless heart;  
When, like a cloud, he sits upon the air,  
    Preparing his spell-bound prey to dart:  
Chase him away, sweet Hope, with visage bright,  
And fright him, as the morning frightens night.

.....

And as, in sparkling majesty, a star  
    Gilds the bright summit of some gloomy cloud;  
Brightening the half-veil'd face of heaven afar;  
    So, when dark thoughts my boding spirit shroud,  
Sweet Hope, celestial influence round me shed,  
Waving thy silver pinions o'er my head.

(Stanzas I, II, III & VIII)

Hope is here personified and gives the impression of an estranged Other from the poet's self rather than a Gnostic inner quality that he can exploit for self-transcendence, but hopes presupposes futurity and becoming. Hope is seen as a balm, a defender against hateful thoughts, despair and despondency. This poem does not actually point to any serious spiritual brooding though composed in the same year that he started showing manifest qualities of Gnosticism. But when we take into cognisance the rapid psychological, aesthetic and spiritual growth and vision, we should not doubt Keats's swift change in position and the strong conviction with which he held his views.

We begin a careful Gnostic interpretation with Keats's famous letter to Benjamin Bailey, dated November 22 1817 (pp. 364 – 367). This letter reverberates some of the ideas that Keats raises in two previous letters (to Benjamin Bailey, November 3 1817 and to John Hamilton Reynolds, November 22 1817), pertaining to religious antagonism and the soulful state of man. In the letter, Keats talks of circumstances that have increased his humility and capability of submission, expressing the strong conviction that: "Men of Genius are as great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating upon the Mass of neutral intellect – by [for but] they have not any identity, any determined character." What Keats may be trying to articulate here when we carefully follow his developing thought, is an aversion to dogma or any fixed notion that opens up no allowance for debate or modification. This also underscores the question of becoming, whereby the self, far from being fixed and unchanging, should be opened to dynamism and transformation. To put it differently, the constrictions of dogma imprison the self in inflexible rationality, preventing the individual from discovering the mysteries they embody.

It is in this same letter that Keats goes further to air his understanding of the metaphysical and spiritual function of the imagination, conveying with clarity his

ability to distinguish between the material and the ideal. Keats's concern with what he calls the truth and authenticity of the imagination, is resistant to the scriptural prescription of institutionalised theology, points to the soulful mode of existence and aligns with his Gnostic attitude:

The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it true. I am more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning – and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside many objections. However it may be, O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts. It (Imagination) is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come - and this consideration has further convinced me for it has come as an auxiliary to another favourite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. ... Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that the Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its Spiritual repetition. – the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness – (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 365 – 366)

This letter conveys the basic substance of Keats's further Gnostic speculations on the spirituality of life and existence. The comparison of the imagination with Adam's dream relates to the question of creation and spiritual awareness, and therefore the divine source, far more than reverence to God or heavenly Father. This brings to mind a previously held hermeneutic view that to know oneself is to know his/her source as well. The imagination can lead one to his/her authentic spiritual source. The imaginative potential here is not an orthodox or theological prescription, as it is highly individualistic and deals with levels of sublime and spiritual perception that subverts the constrictions of dogma. It paves the way to a greater reality which centres on the spirit rather than the normal and rational perception of the word. What Keats calls consecutive reason (it could be what Nicholas of Cusa termed as "learned ignorance") is sanctioned by rationality and relates to orthodox philosophy and theological ethics as well. The idea of becoming engenders the imagination as a constant prefiguring

instrument, for it foreshadows something not yet complete, but moving towards completion.

One remarkable thing, for sure, about Keats's concept of the imagination is that it does not aim at replacing physical phenomena. His notion of beauty and truth in a poem like 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is very inclusive in the sense that pain, agony, misery, in short, all pertaining to suffering, are combined with their opposite to give a complete view of experience. Keats also demonstrates a distinction between aesthetic beauty and spiritual beauty in his work, but the one implicates the other. So far, our interpretation of Keats's Gnosticism does not give room to affix tragedy and suffering as hallmarks of his broodings. But his imagination is not an illusory attempt to soar above human limits. Rather, it is an enriching medium in his understanding of human suffering and earthly reality, but with the possibility to "burst our mortal bars" in a life to come, a reaffirmation of the philosophy of becoming.

Keats's re-affirmation of the potential of the imagination to Shelley in a letter, dated August 16 1820 (pp. 535 – 536), shows that it was the greatest tool he possessed for his aesthetic and spiritual quest. In this letter, Keats makes an interesting analogy, asserting that "My Imagination is a Monastery and I am its Monk." This should not be seen from a Catholic point of view. What one has to understand here from a phenomenological perspective is that the imagination is a reliable and liberating faculty that opens up different vistas for psycho-somatic explorations. As an instrument or faculty that identifies with the strong Gnostic feature of the self's transcendental potential, the imagination capacitates self-reliance. This subverts the notion of grouping or congregational meetings as requisites of conventional piety and ethical code.

The advancement of Keats's distinctive sense of spirituality is expressed in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, dated February 19 1818. In it, Keats is formulating a

concept on man's spiritual construction and wellbeing, which he later refers to and connects with what he calls the "spiritual yeast" of the self, the "vale of tears," and "the Burden of the Mystery," culminating with "the Vale of Soul-making." Keats employs the powerful metaphor of the spider's web to articulate this strong conviction:

It appears to me that almost any Man may, like the spider, spin from his own inwards his own airy citadel – the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine web of his soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury. (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 378 – 379)

The forecasting of the discovery of the divine spark through Gnosis is highly indicative in this excerpt. Spirituality, as Keats presents it, has the characteristic feature of the individual's conscious awareness and construction of themselves. The notion of "beautiful circuiting" points to spiritual growth and maturity, resulting in the constant attempts of the self to transcend life's polarities. The spiral nature of the web can be interpreted from a Gnostic standpoint as the process of becoming, of attempting to discover the spiritual potential from within, and therefore seeking the authentic source of this potential which is the Pleroma or Realm of Fullness. This brings in the notion of the spiritual seed which is common in most religious traditions, but greatly differs in terms of interpretation. In Christianity, the seed is conceived as the body of the growing faith of the church in Christ. In Gnosticism, the seed is the divine essence of God that man possesses and has to discover through Gnosis. It is the self-same substance of God or the Pleroma or Realm of Fullness. It is therefore part of the cosmic creation myth, indicating the infinitesimal thing from which all else springs. From this perspective, man is seen in some essential reality as God, a heretic proposition in Christianity.

Keats continues his line of Gnostic thinking in three other letters before boldly presenting his spiritual vision of Gnosticism. These are the letters addressed to John Taylor, April 24 1818, John Hamilton Reynolds, May 3 1818, and Richard Woodhouse, October 27 1818. They all point to his conviction in engaging his speculative thought on knowledge, wisdom and spiritual assurance. Self-reliance is seen as a distinctive mark in the process of knowledge-acquisition and spiritual discovery. In fact, it is appropriate to see Keats's notion of knowledge as that which opens up the self to its spiritual essence and potential. In the first letter Keats conjectures that:

I know nothing I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon's directions of "get Wisdom – get understanding" – I find cavalier days are gone by. I find that I have no enjoyment in the World but continually drinking of Knowledge – I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world ... there is one way for me – the road lies through application study and thought (*knowledge through Gnosis*: my emphasis). ... I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and love for Philosophy (*spiritual philosophy*: my emphasis) – were I calculated for the former I should be glad – but as I am not I shall turn my soul to the latter. (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 391 – 392)

Wisdom and understanding are a persistent pursuit related to an idealistic quest, which reverberates the previously stated idea that rational knowledge (consecutive reason) limits the human capacity to explore ingrained transcendental and immaterial qualities. Though Keats sounds vague here, the parenthetical emphases are inserted in connection with the conviction that there is a systematic trend of thought which later lends credence to the contention that his philosophy adheres to certain pertinent strands of Gnosticism. When he talks of "cavalier days are gone by," it takes us back to 'Sleep and Poetry' in which he outlines his journey to aesthetic maturity and identity (L. 101 – 124). He must advance from the realms of Flora and Pan to a more nobler life characterised by strife and agony, that is, a more philosophical and contemplative level of consciousness. We have previously noted that Keats's Gnostic



attitude is not exclusive of the pleasure and bliss of mundane life. The rejection of the quest of “an exquisite sense of the luxurious” is a re-affirmation of his choices. This comment is very pertinent as a point for substantiation, for it seconds the issue of cavalier days. Here, the poet is obviously not referring to a life of suffering or agony. The sense of sensuousness and sensuality, either in nature or human relations cannot bring true knowledge in his understanding. In the second letter Keats (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 394 – 398) states on similar lines as above that:

An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people – it takes away the heat and fever; it helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery: a thing I began to understand a little, and which weighed upon you in the most gloomy and true sentence in your Letter. The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this – in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all [the] horror of a bare shouldered creature – in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear. (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 395)

We are presented here with the question of high sensations without knowledge, which introduces us to the Gnostic concept of ignorance and the material illusion which imprisons the self’s potential for transcendence. In the state depicted here, it becomes difficult to wipe away or annihilate ignorance because no process of Gnosis has occurred, no authentic imaginative experience has been arrived at to sanction divine vision.

It should be recalled that this is the same letter which discusses the issue on the Mansion of many Apartments. We can again connect this with our argument above with regard to the letter to Reynolds. The successive chambers to unburden the mystery begin with the Chamber of Maiden thought, which pertains to luxurious and mundane blissfulness. But any authentic aesthetic-spiritual quest must necessitate more complex chambers. We have interpreted this specific excerpt in the previous chapter with regard to the aesthetic rituals that the poet is supposed to go through. We argued that this process could also serve as an interpretative measure in understanding

Keats's spiritual speculations, given that his aestheticism, far from serving as art for art, culminates with the transcendentalism of his Gnostic vision.

That Keats manifests the Romantic trait of anti-self-consciousness discussed in Chapter Two and Three, is aptly translated in the third letter. This again affirms the affinities that both he and Coleridge share. Keats is concerned with the axioms of poetry, and though the letter articulates the aesthetic qualities of the poet, it manifests certain Gnostic characteristics:

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of thing which, if I am any thing, I am a member' that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself – it has no self – is everything and nothing – It has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or rich, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion poet. ... A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no Identity ... the Sun, the Moon and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of God's creatures ... (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 418 – 419)

This excerpt does not only point to an aesthetic quality but suggests a clue to understand Keats's later Gnostic intentions. Though it sounds paradoxical and self-contradictory, conveying the idea of no identity and his ironic aversion of the egotistical sublime, it once more depicts and re-affirms Keats's resistance to the fixity of the self which is the very centre of his spiritual longings. This relates with the concept of negative capability which gives a dynamic and widened space for speculation and possibility. Keats goes further to pose a series of rhetorical questions and re-affirms his intentions and ambitions that he will write the greatest poetry, not only concerned with human affairs but connected with his acuteness of vision. It should be stressed here that this is one of Keats's central passage which the poetics of Deconstruction has interpreted in line with its concept of unreadability, undecidability, aporia and irony. In this vein, it is considered as an expression of the impossibility to

construe meaning or formulate concepts. Yet from a hermeneutic perspective, Keats is attempting to formulate and articulate an idea that is open to constructive aesthetic and philosophical broodings.

The most important letter in which Keats boldly airs out his Gnostic convictions is among a series of letters which he wrote to his brother and sister-in-law George and Georgiana Keats, dated February 14 to May 3 1819. This letter, written specifically on March 19 1819 has undergone diverse interpretations, but its connection with the ontological self and spiritual engagement is beyond doubt. It offers a hermeneutic and phenomenological clue into the depths of Keats's spiritual self which is far from having any Christian connections. From a Gnostic perspective, the spiritual philosophy that Keats advances is a mature statement on what he has hitherto been articulating both aesthetically and spiritually in the previous letters.

Characteristic of Keats's letters is the insertion of poems that he composed. That poems like 'Why Did I Laugh Tonight,' 'Sonnet to Sleep' and 'Ode to Psyche,' to be discussed later, are included in these letters can be interpreted as non-coincidental, given that they strongly connect with the philosophical content of the letters. In fact, this strengthens the contention expressed in the previous chapter that we are compelled to invert the generally held view that Keats's letters are accompaniments to or side statements on his poems. A considerable bulk of his letters resists this view, because he was fond of making a good number of important poems part of the letters, even though it is not in all cases where the contents of the letters correspond with the poem(s) therein.

The circumstances that inspire Keats's speculation here are dominantly related to the life of tragedy, suffering and despair. These are very general experiences and are related to all art, philosophy, and theology. What is important here is the perspective with which Keats handles them in his spiritual vision. These are necessary components

of the process of Gnosis, because they probe the imagination to speculative thinking that evokes the metarational and spiritual. It is in the face of torments and tribulations that man must strive to go beyond the mere realities of his corporeal self. From a Gnostic position, Keats asserts that:

There is an electric fire in human creatures [,] there is continually some birth of a new heroism. The pity is that we must wonder at it: as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish. I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two – Socrates and Jesus – their Histories evince it. What I heard a little time ago, ... with respect to Socrates may be said of Jesus --That he was so great a man that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his Mind and his sayings and his greatness handed to us by others. It is lamented that the history of the latter was written and revised by Men interested in the pious frauds of Religion. Yet through all this I see his splendour. Even here though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal – I am however young writing at random – straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness – without knowing the bearing of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin? – Do you not think I strive – to know myself. (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 464 – 465)

The Gnostic undertones of this excerpt are very glaring. As previously examined, the Gnostics posit arguments that see man as embodying the spiritual, which they have to discover through an intense process of self-seeking. When Keats talks about the electric (which we can liken to spiritual) fire that humans have and are supposed to search for as a pearl in rubbish, he is obviously referring to the Gnostic conception of the sparks of divinity which he later elaborates. We have also pointed out the Gnostic conception of Jesus as a convinced Gnostic, but whose life and sayings are considered to have been altered and distorted to suit the purposes of organised and dogmatic theology, an issue Keats terms the pious frauds of Religion. This is an issue he takes up as well in the poem ‘Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition’ (1816), where he shows his disenchantment with the de-spiritualising nature of the Christian Church. It would be necessary to examine this sonnet:

The church bells toll a melancholy round,  
Calling the people to some other prayers,  
Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares,  
More hearkening to the sermon’s horrid sound.

Surely the mind of man is closely bound  
In some black spell; seeing that each one tears  
Himself from fireside joys, and Lydian airs,  
And converse high of those with glory crown'd.  
Still, they toll, and I should feel damp, -  
A chill as from the tomb, did I not know  
That they are dying like an outburnt lamp;  
That t' is their sighing, wailing ere they go  
Into oblivion; - that fresh flowers will grow,  
And many glories of immortal stamp.

We see here an apt expression of the mere routines of the institutionalised church that import no authentic spiritual light to the mass of worshipers. The poet's bitterness and disgust is not disguised. Associating the church bells with melancholy, prayers with gloominess, and sermon as horrid, Keats is obviously directing his attack to the corrupt clergy of the church, who indulge in spiritually empty ceremonial rituals that deprive Christians from discovering the real nature of spirituality. This anti-church and anticlerical stance is again clearly captured in his negative regard for parsons as "a lamb in the drawing room, a lion in the vestry – peculiar self diabolical - Hippocrite to the Believer and a Coward to the unbeliever," and smothered in the absurdities of the Bishops (Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, February 4 1819, pp. 452 – 453). Christianity is therefore lost in vulgar superstition, and has misguided and misconstrued the true nature of Christ. Gnosticism is more concerned with the myth of the divine human and sees Christ in such terms. So the inner experience of Christ as a symbol of the divine self is what matters. In this vein, Socrates and Jesus are reputed to have discovered the pearl in the rubbish, the pearl being their divine powers and the rubbish the corporeal mass of the human being that urges him to all forms of materialism. His struggle to know himself is therefore a Gnostic ambition which should not be seen as an expression of sin, but his own adopted measure at spiritual self-discovery.

In his continued effort to articulate his Gnosticism, Keats makes a an analogy and comparison:

Suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning, it enjoys itself – but there comes a cold wind, a hot sun – it cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances – they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in Spite, the worldly elements will prey on his nature – The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is “a vale of tears” from which we are to be redeemed by a certain interposition of God and taken to Heaven. (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 472)

Keats is re-iterating the question of the inevitability of earthly suffering in the Gnostic process of self-discovery and authentic divine identity. But the context is not a simple one. This excerpt signals the duality of materialism and its connection with spiritual quest. This duality necessitates a specified context. We can make the balance between the luxurious life of man and moments of adversity to lend credence to the analogy of the rose. Keats’s reference to worldly elements brings to mind Gnosticism’s notion of ignorance, engendered and encouraged by the false material god of creation, the Demiurge. This explains why earthly pleasures lead only to the “vale of tears” though with the possibility of overcoming it through Gnosis or what Keats calls “the vale of Soul-making.” Thus, when he talks about the rose’s blooming nature and its inescapability from cold wind and hot sun, he likens it with man’s fate. But there is a clear difference between the two. The rose unfortunately cannot destroy its unavoidable annoyances, but man has the capacity to do so. Therefore, man is subtly seen here as more than the rose, because even though he cannot evade his annoyances he can overcome them through knowledge.

This excerpt also has an affinity with a sonnet, which also echoes the inevitability but necessity of man’s torments and tribulations on earth:

How fever’d is the man, who cannot look  
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,  
Who vexes all the leaves of his life’s book,  
And robs his fair name of maidenhood;  
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,  
Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom,  
As if Naiad, like a meddling elf,  
Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom,  
But the rose leaves herself upon the briar,  
For winds to kiss and graceful bees to feed,  
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire;

The undisturbed lake has crystal space;  
When then should man teasing the world for grace,  
Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?

Keats extends his analogies to the plum, Naiad and lake. What he is trying to articulate here from a hermeneutic standpoint is that luxury and happiness form part of human experience, but cannot be permanent all through man's life. Such a permanence could mean long lasting illusion and ignorance. While he enjoys this experience, the inevitable transition to woes and strife that evokes his mortality comes in. The fundamental question is how man has to face, come to terms and accept this shift for his continued strengthening of the essence of his existence from a positive spiritual perspective. The poem's preamble, the proverb "You cannot eat your cake and have it too," can throw light on the question. We must make positive use of the circumstances in life rather than try to evade or avert them. Instead of lamenting his agony ("we are destined to hardship and disquietude"), man has to open up to and embrace this reality as a breakthrough to a redemptive realm rather than an irreparable breakdown. This reflects the duality which Gnosticism takes into consideration, asserting that the material world must be superseded if the Realm of Fullness has to be attained. The vale of tears is therefore a spiritual yeast which leads to the consciousness of overcoming or annihilating the illusion of materialism. It is in line with this that Keats calls the world "the Vale of Soul-making":

I say "Soul making" Soul as distinguished from Intelligence – There may be Intelligences or Sparks of the divinity in Millions – but they are not souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. Intelligences are atoms of perception – they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God – How then are souls to be made? How then are these Sparks which are God to have identity given them – So as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this? This point I wish to consider because I think it a grander System of Salvation than Chrystian religion – or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation – This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years. These three Materials are the *Intelligence* – the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the *World or Elemental* space suited for the proper action of *Mind* and *Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence* destined to possess the sense of Identity. (John Keats: Letters, p. 473)

There is clear evidence in Keats's articulation of a redemptive vision which he claims to be convincing and superior to the Christian religion. With regard to the dynamics of becoming, soul-making is a constructive process whose end goal is the attainment of the realm of Pleroma. The discovery of spiritual knowledge is not seen in terms of the Christian myth of salvation. Rather, it corresponds with what the Gnostics elaborate in connection with Jung's depth-psychology, in which Gnosis gives not only psychological but also spiritual allowance pertaining to ontological issues at odds with mainstream orthodox theologies. This excerpt also points to the question of Eastern mystical traditions which see man's spiritual and divine engagement as a basically individualistic potential. Meditation and divine reflection are therefore important components of Gnosis, given their strong individualistic character.

To explain the workings of his proposed system of spirituality and redemptive vision, Keats is aware of the fact that discursive and rational language may not be enough or appropriate to elaborate his convictions, but relying on comparison he highlights that:

I can scarcely express what I but dimly perceive – and yet I think I perceive it. - I will call the *world* a school instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read – I will call the *human heart* the *horn Book* used in that school – and I will call the *Child able to read*, the *Soul* made from that *School* and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? ... Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Mind's Bible, it is the Mind's experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity. As various as the Lives of Men are – so various become their Souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the Sparks of his own essence – This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity – I am convinced that many difficulties which Christians labour under will vanish before it – (*John Keats: Letters*, p. 475)

From this excerpt, we need not re-emphasise some of the basic characteristic features of Gnosticism. But what is so interesting is that Keats should have expressed such a depth of spiritual thought. Christianity accepts that man is made from God's image, but the question of the divine spark or God's essence in man is an encroaching



Otherness or Alienness or Foreignness to its ideals, it is a typical Eastern mode of spiritual enlightenment rather than a Christian concept, though Keats asserts that it would work well in a Christian redemptive framework. He expresses his belief and conviction that the Gnostic system of Soul-making is parent of the original Christian myth of redemption. Soul-making, Keats accentuates, is a more palpable and personal scheme, and his reference to the Hindus is an indication of a relation to or knowledge about Eastern mystical and spiritual systems to which he is inclined.

Self-reliance<sup>8</sup> therefore distinctively stands as the basic key to Gnosis. It leads to self-knowledge, self-discovery and a deep spiritual self-awareness. Intelligence in Gnostic terms will be the Pleroma or the realm of Fullness and not the Demiurge. So the divine spark should be corresponded with the true God and not the self-deceptive and deceiving one. When one carefully examines this letter and the poems that Keats wrote in this same year, there is a consistency of thought. 1819 was the most productive and maturing year for Keats in his search for an aesthetic identity and an alternative quest for spiritual wellbeing and assurance. There is a systematic connection between the Gnostic elements in his letters and poems dating from 1817 to 1819, and his philosophy of death with its spiritual implications dominantly preoccupied most of his 1820 engagements. In what follows, we are going to discuss a few poems that give interpretative possibility on Gnosticism and then an examination on the question of death and how it connects with Keatsian Gnosticism.

‘Ode to Psyche,’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale,’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ ‘Ode on Melancholy,’ ‘Ode on Indolence,’ ‘Bright Star, would I were Stedfast as thou art’ and ‘The Fall of Hyperion’ are among the poems that best express Gnostic features in Keats’s poetry, and strongly affirm the contention of becoming as a constructive deferral. Criticism has variously held the odes as the highest expression of Keats’s aesthetic and to an extent spiritual maturity. These odes show a vast operative

spectrum in which Keats understood the subtle realities or undercurrents of life. In a typical visionary perspective, Maurice Bowra, for instance erroneously sees the odes, especially 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' as a realisation and achievement of Keats's true voice and perfection which he had been seeking. In fact, Keats is said to have realised his hopes. But Bowra concludes that what is characteristic of the ode is almost exclusively Keats's theory of art (pp. 126, 148). But given that Keats was ever aiming at something higher, Bowra's visionary and idealistic reading is not satisfactory in its stance on the finality of poetic expression.

Using Schlegel's idea of "The continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts" in connection with his conceptualisation of Philosophical Irony or the Critical Faculty (p. 12), Anne Mellor rightly says that the odes are unresolved odes. She contends that being mortal, we are finite. Therefore, she accentuates that our perception of the infinite must be but partial and in that sense false. Mellor's contention is right in the context that mortality is partial, but in trying to argue that the search for transcendence is false renders her argument problematic. We have already discussed her understanding of the notion of becoming above. We are subsequently going to see that mortality in Keats's sense ("mortal pains") is somatic and not spiritual. And so there is evidence that he goes above the aesthetic and the mortal and concentrates even more on this domain which affiliates with his Gnostic character. The characteristic duality that permeates the odes as well as many of Keats's poems, connects with the recognition of this in the Gnostic categorisation or distinction between the material and the ideal.

In the previous chapter, we discussed 'Ode to Psyche' from an aesthetic standpoint. But, contending that Keats's aestheticism transcends art for art's sake and points towards non-rationality, we noted that spiritual self-awareness permeates the poem, not really in terms of the poet's supposed submission to the goddess Psyche as

an object for reverence and adoration, but a spirituality which points to a process of Gnosis and therefore inward spiritual feeling and awareness. There is no doubt that Keats makes references or draws from classical Greek mythology. But if a Gnostic perspective is taken into consideration, and if we follow his thought systematically, then psyche will be taken to represent what Friedrich Schleiermacher calls a transcendental signifier which corresponds with the imaginative faculty of the poet. It would signify Gnosticism's Realm of Pleroma or Fullness.

In the fourth stanza, the poet adulates Psyche, necessitating a careful evaluation as to what to what ends he actually wants to direct his spiritual broodings:

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,  
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,  
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,  
Holy the air, the water, the fire;  
Yet even in these days so far retir'd  
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,  
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,  
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd.  
So me be thy choir and make a moan  
Upon the midnight hours;  
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet  
From swung censer teeming;  
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heart  
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

These lines sound a note of liturgy, characteristic of orthodox circles, but the question is whether Keats is actually reviving an ancient Greek goddess or undergoing an intense imaginative experience within himself. The broodings on Psyche may point to the transcendentalism or spirituality of the poet's inner-self rather than a devotion to an external Other. Keats's self-reflexive attitude points to the question of Gnosis and individuation, which delineate the self as transforming.

If psyche is a mode of knowledge, if it consists in process and transformation, then it can be interpreted to have a Gnostic function or pattern in spiritual self-seeking. The last stanza of the poem which expresses the desired intention of the poet to build a

sanctuary for the goddess, is actually an expression of the reliance on the sanctuary of the poet's imagination. We have specifically pointed out to the lines "Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane/In some untrodden region of my mind,/Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain" as evoking aesthetic climax. Given that the basis of Gnosis is the discovery of the divine spark from within, this aesthetic experience leads towards a spiritual vision as well. It evokes what one can liken to a kind of self-mediation, an internal debate, characteristic of what Bloom calls the self-within-the-self. Psyche is not an external Other per se, but a revelation within the self of its transcendental and immanental potential. There is therefore a strong sense of spiritual self-discovery and elevation. In this vein, untrodden region of the mind and branched thoughts are not unrelated to the Gnostic process of seeking the authentic spirituality from within the self, and understanding it to be branched or connected with the Realm of Fullness. The poem can thus be interpreted as depicting a process consisting in the poet's displacement or inversion of Psyche into his own psyche and soul, thus a signalling of the characteristic Gnostic feature of self-deification.

Visionary and sublime experience and the recourse to the realities characteristic of earthly life, are the substance in 'Ode to a Nightingale.' What is very enigmatic in this poem is the various perspectives with which the duality of realism (the harshness and everyday reality of earthly life) and imaginative experience (visionary and idealistic domain) have been interpreted. While on the one hand the poet contemplates the song of the bird in terms of transcendence and immortality, he , on the other hand is self-conscious of submitting back to phenomenal reality. In Chapter Four, the basic concern was the interpreting of the poem as an expression of Keats's nature-consciousness. It was argued here that he is struggling to articulate a self-metamorphosis, or better still the self-transformative processes that are involved in the

seeking of a distinctive aesthetic voice and identity. This process clearly points to Gnostic patterns of self-exploration and discovery.

This poem is written against the background of pain and despair as evinced in the first and third stanzas:

I

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness, -  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singing of summer in full-throated ease.

III

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs,  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

In Gnosticism, this is connected with materialism which is a hurdle to spiritual self-awareness that must be overcome. Keats, throughout the poem, does not evade the reality of pain. Rather, he accepts and uses it as part of his psychological and spiritual self-transformation. It is obviously this reality that gives him the meditative and spiritual mode, that urges his metaphysical broodings. He has to understand suffering to know how to get out of it. So the supposed ambivalence of transience and transcendence should not be seen from a viewpoint of discursive intelligibility, but from a hermeneutic and phenomenological perspective. Stanzas III, IV, VI, and VIII attract particular attention on an interpretation based on Gnosticism.

Stanzas I and III as pointed out ignite the process of Gnosis, since the reality characteristic in them represents what Gnosticism considers as pertaining to the false god, the Demiurge. We are not necessarily saying that the Gnostic conception of the Demiurge is reductively dealing with pain and suffering, given that it capitalises more on ignorance (whatever the cause) of true innate qualities. As we have persistently said, what is important in Keats is how he uses adverse circumstance from a Gnostic perspective. Stanza IV evokes a strand of the imaginative faculty which deals with the metaphysical or spiritual longing consisting in overcoming and annihilating despair and tragedy:

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

Flying to the bird “on the viewless wings of Poesy” shows an intense inner process experienced by the poet rather than an outer longing to an Other, the bird. Poesy becomes a communicative channel for the expression of this vision, evoking the epistemological and ontological (transcendental) attributes that it has.

Stanza VI, which will be discussed later, relates to the question of the death instinct and Keats’s philosophy of death and its spiritual implications. The last stanza evokes the questioning presence and points to what we can interpret to be expressive of the philosophy of becoming. We can also consider the nightingale to be a repository representation of transcendence as indicated in the discussion on ‘Ode to Psyche.’ Self-knowledge and transformation or metamorphosis here is seen from a psychological and spiritual spectrum which can be analysed from the Gnostic

understanding of the relation between depth psychology and spiritual self-awareness through individuation. The last stanza is very determining and deserves further attention:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:- Do I wake or sleep?  
(Stanza VIII, L. 71 – 80)

This stanza has been considered as very problematic in terms of Keats's choices between the material and the ideal. In Chapter Four, we said the recoil of the poet from imaginative vision to earthly reality is an issue to be examined in this chapter. A number of questions come to mind in an attempt to understand the subtlety of the stanza: Does Keats's submission to his sole self presuppose that he remains the same sensual or sensuous personality without any genuine change? Do the unanswered questions he poses in the last lines of the stanza mean that his visionary experience is illusive and has no authentic metaphysical or spiritual significance attached to it?

Characteristic of the Gnostic processes in Keats is his anti-self-consciousness. If we accept the concept of "The continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts" in Keats, it becomes appropriate to see his anti-self-consciousness not as signalling imaginative and spiritual failure, or the impossibility of transcendence, but as a dynamic anticipation of a greater reality to come. Seeing the imagination as prefiguring a higher realm of reality engenders a hermeneutic interpretation of his Gnosis from a positive spiritual standpoint. When Keats talks of "fancy cannot cheat so well/As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf," we must look back to the stanza VI to

understand his apprehension of death. The frame of mind in which Keats articulates these two lines shows that he does not understand the imagination as depriving life but enriching what is and anticipating what will be. The struggle to remain at the visionary realm would look as though he is suicidal or unrealistic that while he lives he must embrace life's polarities. Yet, he usually re-emerges from transcendence with a modified metaphysical perception of life. The unanswered questions are a manifestation of a maturity of a mind that is conscious of the infinite but does not pretend to have permanently had grasp of it. The culminating personal evidence in the poem as well as others show that the open-ended nature of the poems evoke a further sense of reflection of transience and transcendence, of the phenomenal and the metaphysical. The aesthetic text is not a closure since it depicts the inquiring and questing self as dynamic and therefore as a result of textual transcriptions.

'Ode on Indolence' is quite a complex and intriguing poem, which quite often, has been neglected in the discussion of Keats's odes. The argument on becoming here offers an entirely new reading and interpretation of the poem. A careful hermeneutic and phenomenological reading of the poem, included in Keats's serial letters to George and Georgiana Keats, gives allowance to a Gnostic reading and the transformative processes of the self in the desired goal of spiritual plenitude. The apparition of the three figures, Love, Ambition and Poesy can be interpreted as pointing to a process of Gnosis which leads the poet to a more reflective and meditative mood rather than avowed concern for the three personifications. Stanzas II, IV, V and VI need detail commentary. In stanza II the poet asserts that:

How is it, Shadows! that I knew ye not?  
How came ye muffled in so hush a mask?  
Was it a silent deep-disguised plot  
To steal away, and leave without a task  
My idle days? Ripe was the drowsy hour;  
The blissful cloud of summer-indolence  
Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;



Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower:  
O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense  
Unhaunted quite of all but – nothingness?

From this stanza as well as the first, the identity of these figures is indeterminate, but this is an indeterminacy that attracts the attention of the poet in his indolent state. “Leave my sense/Unhaunted quite of all but – nothingness” signals a desirable engagement at something, and therefore suggests that the poet's idleness is paradoxically what Wordsworth calls wise passiveness. Stanzas IV and V convey the identity of each figure, Love, Ambition and Poesy:

A third time pass'd they by, and, passing, turn'd  
Each one the face a moment whiles to me;  
Then faded, and to follow them them I burn'd  
And ach'd for wings because I knew the three;  
The first was a fair Maid, and Love her name;  
The second was Ambition, pale of cheek,  
And ever watchful with fatigued eyes;  
The last, whom I love more, the more of blame  
Is heap'd upon her, maiden most unmeek, -  
I knew to be my demon Poesy.

They faded, and, forsooth! I wanted wings:  
O folly! What is love! and where is it?  
And for that poor Ambition! it springs  
From a man's little heart's short fever-fit;  
For Poesy!-no, - she has not joy, -  
At least for me, - so sweet as drowsy noons,  
And evenings steep'd in honied indolence;  
O, for an age so shelter'd from annoy,  
That I may never know how change the noons,  
Or hear the voice of busy common-sense!  
The poet is vague with what he actually means by Love and Ambition, or

perhaps he has a limited perception of them. This indeterminacy or ambiguity gives room for diverse interpretative perspectives. There is a certain level of self-awareness in the poet's mind. He does not provide any answer to the question as to what love is or where it is. Ambition is associated with paleness, fatigued eye and poverty, and Poesy, “the more of blame,” “has not a joy.” The most pressing question that comes to

mind is what all this means with regard to Gnosis from a Gnostic perspective and becoming. The last stanza seems to provide an answer:

So, ye Three Ghosts, adieu! Ye cannot raise  
My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass;  
For I would not be dieted with praise,  
A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce!  
Fade softly from my eyes, and be once more  
In masque-like figures on a dreamy urn;  
Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,  
And for the day faint visions there is store;  
Vanish, ye Phantoms! from my idle spright,  
Into the clouds, and never more return!

When one looks at Keats's love and ambition for poetic and aesthetic greatness, we can easily see this stanza as an expression of the paradox of determination, or an irony of trying to run away from oneself or again an act of self-imposed denial. But it points to a Gnostic process of realisation of the self as transcending these qualities. In the first stanza, Keats uses the derogatory word Shadows, and in the last Ghosts and Phantoms. His decision to discard all the three does not suggest that they are completely useless, but that they are obviously limited and cannot fulfil his visionary ambition. Love and Ambition may therefore be considered worldly as well as Poesy in the sense that they deal with pleasure or aesthetic attainment which is not spiritually satisfactory. Sticking to them may correspond with the Gnostic idea of ignorance, and so they must be surpassed if the authentic path to reality has to be followed. The lines, "Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,/And for the day faint visions there is store;" particularly suggest that he has a more intense reflection and meditation. This should not be read as an embryonic stage of Gnosis, but rather as a confirmation or a re-affirmation of the poet's stance on the individuating processes he is undergoing. Even though the poet is not precise on what his intense visions would be all about, we can, on considering the specific

attitude of his spiritual orientation, interpret that these visions are connected with the hermeneutics of Gnosis and the question of an anticipated goal.

The sonnet 'Bright Star, would I were Stedfast as thou art' also conveys a Gnostic characteristic, whereby we can take the star, like the nightingale, to stand for a transcendental symbol of Being or the Realm of Fullness in strict Gnostic terms, which the poet aspires to attain or be attuned to. He is seeking the perfect, the unchangeable. The reason is obvious, since his preference leans more on the reflective and contemplative mode on the mystery of the ontological self. But it is not from a vacuum that this transcendental longing is inspired. It is the strife and agonies of life, "the vale of tears" that the "spiritual yeast" is ignited:

Bright star, would I were stedfast 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 – yet still stedfast, still unchangeable, ...

We can liken the star and other repository figures of transcendence like psyche, the nightingale or even the urn. There is no clue here to give allowance to the conjecture that this longing for transcendence and permanence has to do with despair or suffering. On the contrary, the poet associates his desire with an erotic dimension (to be discussed in Chapter Six) which evinces spirituality. The use of the personal pronoun "I" sanctions the individualistic attitude of the poet in his desire for Gnosis.

The line of argument adopted with regard to 'Ode to a Nightingale' will be pursued in the discussion of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.' Philip Stambovsky in "Keats and the Senses of Being: 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'" (1997) uses as interpretative measure William Desmond's categorisation of four senses of being in *Being and Between* (1995). This four-fold ontological categories, the univocal, equivocal, dialectic and

metaxological, help provide what Stambovsky calls uniquely valuable hermeneutic ends, which can help in throwing more light on the present discussion.<sup>9</sup> In our Gnostic discussion on the ontological self of Keats, the second, third and fourth categories are important. Seeing the univocal category as pertaining to that which is rational and discursive, Stambovsky holds that it cannot be used to explain the paradox or irony in the poem. The equivocal and dialectic categories can be used to describe the process of Gnosis, which relates with the philosophical perspective in which Stambovsky and Desmond employ the terms. The metaxological, even though it evokes plurality, paradoxically resists reconciliation at certain levels. From a Gnostic viewpoint, materialism will not be seen as reconciling with spirituality, nor the temporal with the timeless. They lead to Gnosis but do not dialectically operate with it terms of reconciling synthetic sense.

We will go into details as far as the basic content of the poem is concerned for the purpose of convenience. What is important are those instances that oscillate between the material and ideal and how Keats understands them. The transience-transcendence, impermanence-permanence, mortal-immortal, and mundane-soulful dichotomies in this poem evoke a number of Gnostic related issues. The most pressing one is that the one becomes possible because of the an understanding of the other. The metaphysical or transcendental is lived only temporarily, but there is a strong sense of spiritual discovery which indicates that the infinite is attainable and therefore justify the prefigurative spiritual power of the imagination.

The ten questions that Keats poses in stanzas I and IV of this poem are a clear indication of Gnosis, of a process of individuation and knowledge-seeking which culminate with self-discovery and continuous spiritual yearning:

I  
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,

In Tempe or the dales of Arcady? (1)  
What men or gods are these? (2) What maidens loth?(3)  
What mad pursuit?(4) What strange escape?(5)  
What pipes and timbrels?(6) What wild ecstasy?(7)

.....  
IV

Who are those coming to the sacrifice?(8)  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowering at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?(9)  
What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?(10)

These questions and what he philosophises on his meditative observation and reflection, show his synaesthetic and empathic character which relates with the qualities that consist in his capacity of negative capability. The questions can be seen as more directed to the speaking self, as an act of inner self-inquiring and questioning rather than the silent and inarticulate object that has inspired the reflective attitude to life and the desire for transcendence. The questions therefore resist the deconstructionist view that they are unanswerable, and justify nothing but aesthetic and spiritual impasse. Using Desmond's ontological category of the equivocal sense of being which appeals to the non-discursive and metaphysical, Gnosis leads to an intuited knowledge of the absolute. So in its timeless existence or trans-temporality, the urn is a symbolic representation of eternity. This Gnosis can further be understood by applying the dialectic category. Stambovsky rightly sees the urn in this perspective as a reflective medium, stressing that the encounter with the urn is an encounter which is a self-mediating drama that gets played out entirely in the beholder's consciousness. He interprets the Keatsian persona as remaining at once dialectically other to the urn while he self-transcendentally speaks as the urn.

Stambovsky refers to Desmond's conviction (Desmond, p. 134) on the dialectic sphere to discuss the last stanza of the poem:

[The dialectic] is concerned with the articulation in intelligible saying of that interplay [among self and other], with respect to both mind and being. Moreover, it is intimately linked with the sameness of univocity and the difference of equivocity, and most especially the oscillation between them.

We can conclude with similar lines on his conviction that dialectically conceived, the ode fulfils the promise of an encounter between two antipodal poles of truth: the earthly and the ideal. With regard to the antithetical thinking in the poem, Maureen Roberts rightly contends that the urn epitomises the function of all symbols of the absolute principle of knowledge and being in that it represents the irrepresentable. In this vein, it symbolises what the ode itself delineates, the lived paradox of the inherent polarities of life. This, she stresses, are action through non-action, fullness through emptiness or void, knowledge through ignorance, being through non-being, and the immanence of the eternal within the temporal. From strict Gnostic terms, emptiness, void, ignorance, non-being and the temporal only serve as an igniting force for Gnosis, but do not reconcile with it. This brings to mind the metaxological strand of senses of being which, as indicated above, resists reconciliation of opposites. We can also refer to the poem 'Song of Opposites' which conveys a similar theme. All these point to an intense process of exploration into the ontological self in the bid to come to terms with and transcend the material limitations of life.

"Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity" has often been misconstrued as Keats's rejection or renunciation of imaginative and visionary experience. But from a hermeneutic and phenomenological viewpoint, this statement clearly posits the conviction that Keats is aware of the limitations of rational knowledge, which must be superseded into non-rational and non-discursive spheres. Teasing out of thought presupposes another level of reflection that goes beyond the rational. Keats strongly believes that it is eternity that teases us out of thought. So

seeing the urn as representing that eternity, or more precisely as providing visionary space is related to the Gnostic search for the true essence of spirituality.

The concluding lines of the ode's last stanza attract a careful hermeneutic and phenomenological interpretation within the frame-work of the present argument:

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' – that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

There is a clear change of emphasis here, that is, from the speaking presence to the articulating voice attributed to the urn. The urn, though silent, paradoxically has a voice to transmit what we can call an elliptical transcendental message to humanity, which the poet universalises as the most important thing to humanity. This gives room for a dialogic perspective or what one can call an inter-mediation in the complex act of self-investigation; the urn being an imaginative Other with a self-reflective attitude, and the poet who contemplates the urn. The urn can therefore be said to articulate through the act of the poet's delicate process of consciousness as self-mediation or inner-self-dialogue. This message, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' is an enigmatic proposition that has been subject to a multiplicity of interpretations. Our concern here is its applicability to the discussion on Gnosticism. As a transcendent voice, the urn (the poet's self-transcendent self) will speak for eternity to humanity, who in successive generations will be subject to woe and agony, but with its message, can change its state from woe to transcendence, immanence and spirituality.

The contents of the message calls for a hermeneutic reading. The question of Beauty and Truth can be seen from a dual perspective as evident in our contextual definition of the terms of the introductory part of this thesis. Beauty is considered as a highly inclusive category, and here will apply to the aesthetic faculty in relation to its (that is, Beauty) outer qualities; phenomenal, sensuous and sensual beauty, and its

inner qualities; spiritual and transcendental. Truth is seen, among others, from a pragmatist and correspondent dimension, and from its intuitionist and metaphysical ramifications. We can respectively interpret the phenomenal and pragmatist views of Beauty and Truth with regard to Keats's negative capability as an empathic embodiment of all experience. From this perspective, Beauty can be seen as that which must die, 'Ode on Melancholy' (Stanza III, L. 21), and therefore not an ultimate or lasting Beauty, "eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty" (Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds April 9 1818, pp. 390 - 391) or as captured in the opening lines of *Endymion*:

A THING of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but will still keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing  
(Book I. L. 1 – 5)

Therefore, the Beauty that must perish is not metaphysical or spiritual enough (say in the Wordsworthian or Coleridgean Neo-Platonic conception whereby it is associated with their spiritual vision of monism). This problematic therefore necessitates another dimension of viewing the terms. In other words, if we consider Keats's general theory on Beauty, we can say that at the level of expression, it sounds contradictory and perhaps deconstructive when he says that Beauty must die. But when carefully evaluated from the level of contents, this supposed aporia that Beauty is transcendent but must die, can be hermeneutically and phenomenologically resolved. Truth, on its path, could be interpreted not from a non-discursive or purely rational basis, but as that which appeals to the non-rational. The urn seems to provide this resolution. In this vein, Beauty and Truth and the transcendental and spiritual message that they import, can be transposed into Gnostic terms. The urn can therefore be interpreted as a symbolic representation of a Gnostic voice. Ultimate Beauty and



Truth become a repository signification of the Pleroma or Realm of Fullness, which Keats constructively aspires to attain.

Keats's aestheticism in 'The Fall of Hyperion' correlates with Gnosis and evinces spiritual character. His quest shows a consciousness of an unindividuated self that strives at individuation which leads to knowledge and wisdom. Transcendence and immanence permeate the poem, but are not represented as permanent or final. His power to embrace and go beyond the extremes of life justifies his determinedly optimistic attitude and relentless effort at Gnostic self-discovery and fulfilment, and also strengthens his redemptive vision. Though Roberts has stressed that Keats had a typical Hellenic temperament and sees the Dionysian and Apollonian polarities as characteristic of the poet's spiritual engagement with and attainment of a unified Apollonian self, the direction of her thesis does not really suit the basic patterns in Keats. As the god of the sun, medicine, and poetry, Apollo offers an imaginative space for the poet's aestheticism. But Keats's search for a self-sufficing spiritual energy goes beyond the supposed reverence for Apollo. The most intense imaginative or visionary experience that the poet goes through in this poem is when he has the feeling of having attained godhead. This is not only an instance of self-creation, but also an experience of self-discovery, a discovery of a potential that is there rather than has been created. He discovers the godlike man in himself, which in Gnostic terms is a culminating result of knowledge, both from an aesthetic as well as spiritual level. The godlike nature can be appropriated or approximated with the Gnostic concept divine spark.

In the previous chapter, we attempted Bloom's critical approach of the psychology of influence and antithesis, contending that the use of personal pronouns in this poem signals an allegorical reading as the poet's own aesthetic experience as he reworks myth and incorporates it into his life. Our Gnostic reading here will touch on those particular passages, considered self-referential or self-representational, that is,

with regard to Keats's life. The poet's first encounter with the visionary voice attracts attention:

... 'If thou canst not ascend  
These steps, die on that marble where thou art.  
Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,  
Will parch for lack of nutriment; thy bones  
Will wither in few years, and vanish so  
That not a quickest eye could find a grain  
Of what thou art now on that pavement cold.  
The sands of thy short life are spent this hour,  
And no hand in the universe can turn  
Thy hourglass, if these gummed leaves be burnt  
Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps.'  
(Canto I. L. 107 - 117)

These lines signal a consciousness transmitted to or imparted in the poet that necessitates his distinction and choice between the material and the spiritual if he has to achieve immortality. This visionary voice, which is later recognised as Moneta's, re-enforces its spiritual message in Canto II:

'MORTAL, that thou may'st understand aright,  
I humanise my sayings to thine ears,  
Making comparisons of earthly things;  
Or thou mightst better listen to the wind,  
Whose language is to thee a barren noise,  
Though it blows legend-laden thro' the trees.  
In melancholy realms big tears are shed,  
More sorrow like to this, and such like woe,  
Too huge for mortal tongue or pen of scribe.'  
(L. 1 - 9)

A Gnostic undertone is discernible as this involves a process of Gnosis in the poet's inner-self. This Gnosis presupposes the acquisition of knowledge both aesthetically and spiritually. In other words, we are trying to differentiate between Gnosticism as literary theory and method (strongly connected with the analyses in Chapter Four) and Gnosticism as a spiritual philosophy. The process of Gnosis goes on with the questioning attitude of the poetic personae or poet as he resolves to quest for enlightenment. He makes the choice for immortality and his struggle towards the immortal steps results in a kind of dying-into-life experience. Thus, on posing the question, "What am I that should so be saved from death?/What am I that another

death come not/To choke my utterance, sacrilegious, here?" (Canto I. L. 138 – 140),  
the voice answers:

‘Thou hast felt  
What ‘tis to die and live again before  
Thy fated hour; that thou hast power to do so  
Is thine own safety; thou hast dated on  
Thy doom.’  
.....  
‘None can usurp this height,’ ...  
‘But those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest.  
All else who find a heaven in the world,  
Where they may thoughtlessly sleep away their days,  
If by chance into this fane they come,  
Rot on the pavement where thou rottedst half.’  
(Canto I. L. 141 – 154)

This response serves a hermeneutic end, because one understands that the dying-into-life experience, as a result of his progression towards the steps, is the poet’s self-decreed act, it is his distinctive individual stance not through an act of reverence or devotion, but through his own internal broodings. We have stressed the question of ignorance in Gnostic terms. This seems to find expression here with regard the process of spiritual knowledge that the poet is acquiring. Ignorance impedes divine and spiritual revelation within the human, but the awareness of this propels Gnosis and the strive for authentic knowledge. This series of questioning and answering actually point to a kind of self-dramatisation in the poet rather than an external and internal dialogic act. It is therefore phenomenologically self-dialogic. The poet’s reaction to the above answer and further response from the deity, is very important and points again to aspects on the outlined Gnostic processes examined with regard to his epistolary consciousness.

On inquiring whether there are not thousands of human beings like him who are likely to be in his situation (Canto I. L. 154 – 160, 83 - 98), Moneta’s answers emphasise and strengthen the poet’s decision and subsequent convictions that propel

him to an intense imaginative experience. Moneta tries to differentiate between visionaries and those who delight in worldly pleasures, and also the dreamer as distinct from the poet (Canto I. L. 160 – 182, 199 – 103). Dreamers cannot have any authentic aesthetic or visionary experience, because theirs is a world characteristic of self-delusion. This in Christian terms corresponds with the Fall and sin, which corresponding counterpart in Gnostic terms is the realm of the Demiurge. So they have a limited and earth-bound vision. That the poet pours a balm upon the world already points to the direction that Keats's aesthetic and spiritual vision engages our interpretative context. What happens subsequently is the transcendental experience that leads the poet to a godhead consciousness:

... whereon there grew  
A power within me of enormous ken  
To see as a god sees, and take the depth  
Of things as nimbly as the outward eye  
Can size and shape pervade. The lofty theme  
Of those few words hung vast before my mind  
With half-unravell'd web. I sat myself  
Upon an eagle's watch, that I might see,  
And seeing ne'er forget.  
(Canto I. L. 302 – 310)

This is a visionary experience that obviously goes beyond any reading of the poem as an Apollonian identification or worshipping. It is a Gnostic process of the revelation of the spark of divine light and therefore an instance of a prophetic self-elevation and self-deification.

We have talked about the question of self-dialogue and internal debate to explain the notion of the poet and a supposed Other. When carefully examined in line with the dynamics of self-referentiality or self-representation, we can say that Keats employs the myth for a self-dramatising purpose. In this vein, Moneta is paradoxically an Other within rather than without the self. The written text (poetry) is a transcription that approximates the lived visionary experience. The fall of Hyperion and the

ascendancy of Apollo can be transposed into a Gnostic framework of the paradox of a fortunate fall and spiritual progress towards the realm of plenitude or as the self's intoxicated immersion and the progress to the source of unfallen bliss. Though this poem is a fragment, the preceding events point to the inevitability of the fall of Hyperion and the rise of Apollo as a new godhead is evoked. The poet obviously identifies with, but displaces and transcends Apollo in the act of inner spiritual intensity and self-deification. This discovery is an assurance, not an expression of plenitude, because the self is still exposed to ironic and antithetical experiences. We therefore restate that becoming evokes the unfinished but possible acts of self-transcendence and immanence.

#### **THE GNOSTIC IMPLICATIONS OF KEATS'S PHILOSOPHY OF DEATH**

Though the Gnostics do not talk much about or capitalise on death, there is much evidence in their philosophy that there is post-existence. That man possesses the spark of divine does not mean his enjoying the Realm of Fullness, nor does it presuppose that he is already free from the impinging presence of the material and all that characterise it. Yet, death is not really as important as the various processes of Gnosis through which an individual is supposed to attain wisdom and spiritual plenitude. Giovanni Filoramo briefly discusses the question of the complexity of death, "Gnostic Accounts of the Ascent of the Soul" (pp. 137 – 141), contending that it is openly topical and seen as a welcome relief rather than a grief, and that it is synonymous with birth and rebirth in the sense of acquiring the plenitude of Pleroma. Keats's preoccupation with death is one of the distinctive marks in our understanding of his Gnosticism and philosophy of post-existence. The philosophy of death is common in most of his writings, and 1820 is the year in which he presented a deep insight into issue. It is not a mistake to believe that with the 1819 odes and the strong Gnostic

sentiments that characterise them, Keats seems to have foreseen the circumstances of his brief life by concentrating the following year on death, post-existence and posterity. Keats permanently lived with the consciousness of death, and it is evident that he saw it as one of the measures necessary for the overcoming or annihilating of the agonies and strife of earthly existence. And as we have already said, the question of death as a common topical or thematic concern in poetry need not be overemphasised. We cannot reductively view suffering alongside death as all that is to be said about his Gnosticism. But what holds one's interest is how it can be treated as pointing to a Gnostic attitude, how Keats blends his premonition of death with his philosophy of becoming and post-existence.

One of the first intense broodings of Keats's philosophical attitude towards death can be traced in 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles' (1817):

My spirit is too weak – mortality  
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,  
And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep  
Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die  
Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.  
Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep,  
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep,  
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.  
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain  
Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;  
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,  
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude  
Wasting of old Time – with a billowy main –  
A sun – a shadow of a magnitude.

Contrary to what some critics have understood to be the basic message of this poem, contending it to be an expression of pessimism and death generated by the Grecian ruins, the poem is a positive philosophical attitude towards the reality of death. The tone does not show the poet as being afraid of or wanting to escape from it. "Such dim-conceived glories of the brain/Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;/So do these wonders a most dizzy pain," suggests what one can call the spiritual

ferment in Gnosticism. Relating the marbles to wonder, feud and dizzy pain shows an awakened consciousness in the self of transience and transcendence. The question of the sun and a shadow of the magnitude is not very clear, but could suggest an aspired transcendental and textually elliptical signifier. If we examine the development of Keats's thought from this year onwards, there is substantial evidence that he modified his view on the question of spirit, integrating death more than usual into the fabric of his Gnostic attitude.

'Sonnet to Sleep' and 'Why did I laugh Tonight' are inclusive in the last letter discussed above. We have said that the figuring of these poems in the letter are not coincidental when interpreted alongside the content of the letter. There seems to be a recorded change in attitude in Keats's outlook on death which corresponds as well with the growing spiritual strength that he expresses in the letters. Sleep and dreaming are connected with death in a Keatsian perspective. They are seen to act like a trance which produces various results. In the first poem Keats seems to understand sleep as a transition or a death to life experience:

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,  
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,  
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,  
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:  
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close  
In midst of thine hymn my willing eyes,  
Or wait the 'Amen,' ere thy poppy throws  
Around my bed its lulling charities.  
Then save me, or the passed day will shine  
Upon my pillow breeding many woes, -  
Save from curious Conscience, that still lords  
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;  
Turned the key deafly in the oiled wards;  
And seal the hushed casket of my soul.

A critical examination of this poem points to the hermeneutic dimension with which sleep is apprehended by the poet, and relates it with 'Sleep and Poetry.' Like death, it is sublime and seen as a soft embalmer and therefore has a therapeutic

function on the poet. This apprehension is part of the process of Gnosis through which he goes. A major statement on death is discernible in 'Why did I laugh Tonight' and stanza VI in 'Ode to a Nightingale.' In the former poem, Keats presents death not as an end of existence, but as a rite of passage, recalling his apprehension of the imagination as a prefigurative faculty of a finer spiritual life to be lived after earthly existence:

Why did I laugh to-night? No voice will tell:  
No God, no Demon of severe response,  
Deigns to reply from Heaven or from Hell.  
Then to my human heart I turn at once.  
Heart! Thou and I are here, sad and alone;  
I say, why did I laugh! O mortal pain!  
O Darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan,  
To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain.  
Why did I laugh? I know this being's lease,  
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads;  
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,  
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;  
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,  
But death intenser – Death is Life's high meed.

There are a number of Gnostic traits that can be identified in the poem. It points to the typical Gnostic notion of reliance on the self in the quest for aesthetic and spiritual knowledge. He is seeking a more richly orchestrated self. His turning to his heart to seek an answer to his question recalls the place that it plays as examined in the philosophy of soul-making above. There is also the question of the Other. We have argued that the Other in Gnosticism is the divine spark of the self which has to struggle to attain the Realm of Fullness. This is reflected in this poem, for the poet is not looking up to hell or heaven, but must turn to himself. Self-meditation and reflection therefore inverts the dogma of the Other in organised religion. If death is considered supreme, it is because we do not die into nothingness but into another more authentic realm of existence. Only pain which belongs to the false realm of the Demiurge is mortal. This means that what pertains to immortality belongs to the Realm of Fullness.

This same intensity of death is a desirable experience in 'Ode to a Nightingale':



Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain –  
To thy high requiem become sod.

This shows the validity and vitality of the transforming self in the face of death.

“I have been half in love with easeful death” may point to what Roberts refers to as the lived paradox of transformation and stasis in Gnosticism. It can easily be read autobiographically as the yearning to overcome a life of illness as well. But what makes it more implicating than this is the circumstantial situation he found himself in at a young age, and how he does not lament from a purely biological perspective but develops a philosophical and spiritual attitude towards this. His partial wish for death may therefore be seen as consciousness that earthly realities must be lived till death comes naturally rather than in a precipitated way. Taking into consideration the contention that the bird is a transcendental symbol of bliss or a symbolic representation of an immortal sign, the poet’s desire for easeful death is an anticipation of transcendence.

The content of this excerpt is similar to that in a letter to Charles Brown, dated September 30 1820. Here, the notion of death takes a more complicated philosophical turn:

I wish for death everyday and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing. Land and Sea, weakness and decline are great spectators, but death is the greatest divorcer for ever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed. (*John Keats: Letters*, pp. 538 – 539)

There seems to be some contradiction here, that is, wishing death and wishing it away. But from a hermeneutic and phenomenological spectrum, Keats is advancing a whole philosophy that points to the oscillation between the desire for earthly existence and metaphysical existence. “These pains” can again easily be read as confirming an autobiographical rather than a Gnostic reading. But what we are trying to say here, as pointed above, is that this can give a clue in the construing of the conjecture that he positively embraced the circumstances of his life. In another letter to the same recipient, dated November 30 1820, Keats posits the conviction that: “I have the habitual feeling of my real life having passed, and that I am leading a post-humous existence” (pp. 542 –543). This cannot be taken to be a sign of pessimism. It is rather a mature statement of someone who had come to face life from a strong philosophical and spiritual level, and was determined to construe a positive and lasting pattern to his life. Keats’s stoicism is therefore not a mere resignation to life because he possesses both the characteristics of metaphysical longing and capacity.

#### **A REALISTIC MEDIUM OR A POETIC-PHILOSOPHICAL POSTULATION? ROMANTIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL IRONY**

The following comments are more of a concluding statement on this chapter rather than a further argument on its main concerns. We have all along tried to discuss Gnosticism in Keats’s letters and poetry to justify the contention that the poetics of becoming strongly manifests itself in this domain. Keats’s writings evoke several basic patterns of the complexity of Gnosticism that point to his epistemological and ontological sense of being, completely uncommon with the prevailing established theological philosophy of his time. His aesthetic and spiritual maturity are inextricably linked with Gnosis as a medium of knowledge acquisition. Aestheticism and

spirituality in his poetry and letters cannot easily be considered as separable from the events and circumstances of his life.

His anti-clerical stance has not been interpreted as a manifestation of atheism or agnosticism, but as an antithetical alternative at spiritual wellbeing. His antithetical thinking has a Gnostic implication of the duality or opposites between materialism and spirituality and Demiurge and Fullness, and therefore, the sense of spiritual advancement in him is not actually a dialectical ascent from a strict Hegelian perspective. Keats's Gnostic quest is an antithetical progress, which, though it is focused on a specific goal, does not attain the goal. So what is important is the strive towards his ideal, and we have argued here that this strive is a permanent engagement and preoccupation of Keats. Though supposedly embedded in Christianity as a corrective rather than an antagonistic Otherness, Gnosticism has been viewed by Christianity as dangerous, heretical and blasphemous, and as dominantly pertaining to modes of spirituality that affiliate with Eastern mystical systems.

As to whether Keats's conviction is realistic or a mere poetic or philosophical postulation, remains a question largely open to debate. We have established that the concern in this chapter is not whether one form of spiritual knowledge and conduct is better than the other. Besides, the thrust of the argument as pointed out several times is whether the ideal is obtained, but the processes involved in attaining it. Many human beings have transcendental and immortal hopes. While they adopt whatever method to achieve this, what we call infinite spiritual reality is always anticipated and therefore characterised by becoming. It is a question of subjectively lived experiences still to be fully attained. This is the way we have to approach Keats with regard to Romantic irony, not from a rhetorical viewpoint but from a re-conceptualisation of the Schlegelian and Mellorian handling of it. Romantic irony therefore conforms with the idea of unity and wholeness as a condition that is constantly deferred, or a futurity that

is constantly present and deferred. It is acceptable that the question of becoming Being (Pleroma or Realm of Fullness) entails a psychological conflict, consisting of the tension of two opposing psychic forces, the one orientated towards the ideal, and the other towards chaos or the mundane.

The deferral of wholeness, ultimate truth and spiritual reality does not presuppose a perpetual elusiveness of the uniting ideal, nor a sense of self-betrayal, self-deception, self-subversion, imaginative loss or inability of transcendence. The lived paradoxes and antithetical thinking of the poet are not aporias from the viewpoint of Deconstruction, but hermeneutically and phenomenologically point to an individuated finality that is to come. The answer to the above question falls back to the conviction of the individual who subjectively tries to convey their experience. In this sense, Keats's avowed preferences are obvious, and his writings evince and substantiate them. Keats is spiritual, his sense of reality in this domain transcendental, temporarily lived as visionary and mystical experience, and trans-temporarily graspable through death. His work strongly conceptualises the poetics of becoming.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The controversy that exists on the relationship between Christianity and Gnosticism is not an easy one to clear. It is generally held that Gnosticism was a branch of the Christian Church, which succeeded in vanquishing and deadening it. But with the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi archives in Egypt, there has been a complete re-evaluation and re-affirmation of Gnosticism's connection with Christianity. These significant archaeological finds consist of thirteen ancient codices and fifty texts which make up what is known today as the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Phillip* and *Gospel of Truth*. These gospels are believed to have been written in the same period that the New Testament was written, but were deliberately and purposefully left out or sidelined from the Bible in the process of the conceptualisation and rendition of Christian dogma and orthodoxy the way it stands today. In other words, Gnostics hold the fervent conviction that the Hammadi texts are supposed to be part of the New Testament. The truth is that Gnostic texts and scriptures are unacceptable by orthodox dogma. It is not uncommon within Christian circles today that the books of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, are not only limited but certain portions are left out. So what is said to be the Bible and its interpretation is only what suits the dogma of the Church. The Hammadi texts were translated and the first English version appeared in 1977 as *The Nag Hammadi Library*. Andrew Helmbold's seminal work *The Nag Hammadi Gnostic Texts and the Bible* (1967) provides insightful information on the matter. He, among others, provides details and pictures on the Coptic Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi, stresses the difficulty in defining the term, discusses some of its main features, distinguishes the major sects, and

appropriates the medieval and modern implications of the term, “The Hydra-Headed Heresy” pp. 23 – 31. The following online sources can be consulted for further reading on the subject; Lance S. Owens’s “An Introduction to Gnosticism and The Nag Hammadi Library,” <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhlintro.html> and The *Gnostic Society Library*, <http://www.gnosis.org/library.html> .

<sup>2</sup> These essays can be accessed in <http://www.gnosis.org/valentinus.htm>, <http://www.gnosis.org/whatisgnostic.htm> and <http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm> Stephan Hoeller is a renowned lecturer in the Theosophical Society of America and a contributor to the journal *American Theosophist*. His works are published by The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton IL. For more on Hoeller and Ecclesia Gnostica see Richard Smith’s “The Revival of Ancient Gnosis,” *The Allure of Gnosticism* (1995), pp. 204 – 224. It should be noted that though Hoeller’s essays discussed here are online essays and can bring to question the authority and authenticity of the Gnostic ideas they express, they serve as a very comprehensible synthesis on what finds expression in authoritative and published material, some of which he is author and some which he acknowledges. Some of his published works which this study has not had complete access to include “Gnostic Rituals: Early Sacramental Techniques of Ecstasy” (1977), *The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead* (1982), *Jung and the Lost Gospels: Insights into the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library* (1989), and *Gnosticism: New Light on the Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing* (2002).

<sup>3</sup> The Gnostic understanding of the role of Christ in spirituality and redemption is somewhat antithetical to Christian apprehension. Douglas Groothuis’s work *Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus* (1990) insightfully handles the perspective on Jesus’s Gnosticism. Among the Gnostic scholars that have employed Jesus from a Gnostic dimension are F. F. Bruce and Bentley Layton. In *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (1974), Bruce cites Jesus, “The Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realise that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you will dwell in poverty and it is you who is that poverty” (pp. 112 – 113). In *The Gnostic Scriptures* (1987), Layton equally quotes Jesus as saying, “For he who has not known himself has known nothing, but he who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge of the depth of all” (p. 403). All these excerpts, in Gnostic thinking, point to the secret of self-knowledge and the possibility of discovering the divine potential that exist in the human. Gnosticism’s main quarrel with Christian grounds on Jesus is that his life is grossly misinterpreted and largely embedded in historicity rather than spirituality.

<sup>4</sup> The full text of this essay can be accessed in <http://www.gnosis.org/valentinus.htm> By 180 A.D the Bishop of Lyon, Irenaeus, advocate and staunch defender of Christian dogma against the impinging heretical Valentinian influence of Gnosticism, quoted this very excerpt in his *Adversus Haereses* (*Against the Heresies*) I. 21. 4. For further reading on Irenaeus’s heresiology see Robert Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (1966), particularly “The Nature of Gnosticism” pp. 1 – 38 and “The Heavenly World” pp. 39 – 69, J.T Nielsen, *Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons* (1968), particularly Chapter Two “Contemporary Gnosticism described by Irenaeus” pp. 24 – 42, Mark Jeffrey Olson, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics, and the Kingdom of God* (1992), particularly “Valentinian Teaching on the Kingdom of God” pp. 11 – 56, and Dennis Minns Op, *Irenaeus* (1994), particularly “Heresies” pp. 10 – 22. It should stressed here that Irenaeus’s heresiology paradoxically promoted Gnosticism against which it wrote and tried to eradicate from the Church. One would easily understand Valentinian Gnosticism from Irenaeus’s careful presentation of it as an exposition to the heresies of the Church.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Roberts alludes to a historical perspective, with regard to an international colloquium on Gnosticism that was held in Messina (Italy) in 1966. The Gnostic scholars gathered to discuss the term in general, and summarised the Gnosticism of the second century sects as involving the central idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world by fate, birth and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated. It was also noted, Roberts stresses, that not all gnosis is Gnosticism, but only that which involves in this perspective the idea of the divine consubstantiality of the spark that is in need of being awakened and reintegrated. This gnosis of Gnosticism involves the divine identity of the knower (the Gnostic), the known (the divine substance of one’s transcendent self) and the means by which one knows (gnosis as an implicit divine faculty to be awakened and realised). The proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, held in Stockholm in 1973, confirm the same trend of understanding the term.

<sup>6</sup> Coleridge is a glaring example with regard to Gnosticism. As one who had a characteristic feature of engaging in every department of knowledge, he did not leave this matter unattended to. In Lecture Five (pp. 195 – 212) of his lectures on politics and religion, he attacks Gnosticism as a heresy, especially its doctrine of redemption. Drawing largely from Joseph Priestley’s *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782) and *Early Opinions* (1786), he argues (in fact, re-enacts Priestley’s arguments) that the Gnostics corrupted Christianity by introducing the doctrine of Christ’s divinity (p. 196). To Coleridge, it is baseless and engages in mean suppositions, it is absurd and a disgrace to the Christian Church (p. 199). But when one examines Coleridge’s spiritual life, it owes more to Eastern-related ways of thinking rather than Christianity. There is undoubtedly a Gnostic element that can be interpreted in Coleridge’s philosophy. Martin Priestman uses the very topics of Coleridge’s lecture on Gnosticism and atheism to condemn him. Paul Davies’s work also provides a good reading on the issue. We established in a previous chapter that Coleridge’s concerns with Christianity were largely a matter of financial necessity and perhaps hypocrisy (a fair weather Christianity). When one carefully considers a poem like ‘Kubla Khan,’ it goes without doubt that the mystery and spirituality of the poem attached to the imagination is strongly related to Eastern modes of spirituality.

<sup>7</sup>Roberts makes complex analogies or cross examinations on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Milton*, Keats’s ‘Hyperion’ and ‘The Fall of Hyperion,’ and biblical references to an extent to discuss the Dionysian and Apollonian polarities in the process of Gnosis in Keats. She therefore argues on the one hand that Milton’s Satan, Blake’s Reason and Keats’s Hyperion are representative of the Dionysian self-divided, sufferer or dis-ease. These, in other words, are the material and non-spiritual pole. On the other hand, Milton’s Christ, Blake’s Energy and Keats’s Apollo are an Apollonian or spiritual pole. Roberts’s ideas can be graphically presented thus:

Milton	Blake	Keats
Satan	Reason	Hyperion (Dionysian Pole)
Christ	Energy	Apollo (Apollonian Pole)

These poles, Roberts accentuates, are very important in self-genesis. They are not exclusive but mutually inclusive even if distinct. So every human being, like Christ, embodies self-division and healing potential as well. This is obviously not an orthodox position, and these analogies are not to be taken uncritically. Roberts’s comparing Hyperion with Milton’s Satan or Blake’s Reason does not stand well, given the transformative or metamorphosis nature of the poems. The fall of Hyperion and the succession of Apollo do not appropriately fit Miltonic and Blakean conception of the myth of the Fall and redemption. This notwithstanding, the Dionysian-Apollonian polarities on a general Gnostic perspective could be acceptable but not in the interpretative approach Roberts uses them in the very poems from which she derives the distinctions.

<sup>8</sup> The question with regard to self-reliance brings to mind American Romanticism and Transcendentalism, with the specific case of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson’s transcendentalism has a lot of Gnostic strain and his essays strongly evince this. As a form of idealism, American Transcendentalism was a spiritual, philosophical and literary movement in the history of American thought. Succinctly, it was post-Unitarian and free-thinking in religious spirituality, Kantian and idealistic in philosophy, and Romantic and individualistic in literature. The influence of English Romanticism on this movement was great, and though Emerson was greatly influenced by Coleridge and Wordsworth, Keats’s spiritual broodings are clearly discernible in Emerson’s essays like “Divinity School Address” (1838). Here, he laments the state of the Christian Church which he considers to be drained of the true essence of spirituality, and even proposes the abandonment of organised religion, and asserts a move towards Eastern mysticism and spiritual modes of existence. In “Self-Reliance” (1841), his concern is similar to the process of Gnosis, which largely depends on the individual struggle to attain true spiritual knowledge by discovering their inward powers. It affiliates with Keats’s understanding of the philosophy of “Know yourself.” “The Over-Soul” (1841) is the true God in Gnostic terms, and a reflection of what Keats calls Intelligence, its Gnostic coinage being Pleroma or the Realm of Fullness. Like Keats, Emerson strongly believes that an individual possesses part of the spirituality of the Over-soul and can discover it through knowledge and enlightenment.

<sup>9</sup>William Desmond’s four ontological categories are as follows: The univocal category pertains to rational and discursive intelligibility. It deals with modes of thought that are linear or formally logical. The equivocal category goes beyond the determinacy of the univocal, it involves an irresolvable indeterminacy. It is therefore characterised by ambiguity and heterogeneity, but it can, among others, point to the ideal and transcendental that can best be hermeneutically understood in the dialectical perspective. The dialectical mindset or sense of being involves the mutual and transforming process of

antipodal poles, with also the possibility of symbiosis. But as both Desmond and Strambovsky hold, the dialectical can also be hermeneutically read excluding rather than synthesising. The metaxological category is a frame of reference that complements the univocal, equivocal and dialectical senses of being, and therefore in Desmond's words open "to plurality, but knows also the interstices of being that resists any easy assertion of continuity and facile reconciliation." In discussing the notion of mediation, Strambovsky, for instance, holds that the metaxological orientation can lead us to rethink the mediated wholeness of the dialectical. He substantiates his conviction as he quotes Desmond's once more, "Mediation is an intermediation where there is an infinitely open doubling of being, redoubling beyond self-closure, both inwardly and outwardly" (Desmond, pp. 200 – 201).

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE EROTIC AND SPIRITUAL MOTIVE: THE FEMALE IMAGE IN COLERIDGE'S AND KEATS'S POETRY

The aim of this chapter is to look at the aspects that characterise poetic expression with regard to Romantic re/presentations of femininity, effeminacy and masculinity in both Coleridge and Keats to show the interpretative contexts of the dynamics of self and the poetics of becoming. These aspects are inextricably connected with the arguments raised in the previous chapters. That is, they form part of the epistemological and ontological ramifications of the developing self and the question of becoming. In line with the phenomenological and hermeneutic concerns adapted in this endeavour, the major issue is to see the handling of the somatic, aesthetic and psycho-spiritual aspects of love and relationships, pointing to how they relate with the idealism of the writers. In other words, the question of eroticism and spirituality are going to be viewed not as diametrically opposed but as having a mutually rewarding relationship. And though the discussion will take a dominantly psycho-biographical perspective (basically in the sphere of Freudian psychoanalysis), both poets are not to be interpreted as having been concerned exclusively with themselves, but as having used their experience to convey certain subtleties that underlie human relationships and experience. So the question of self-referentiality or self-representation will have a limited interpretative context in the arguments. This also means that an experience must not necessarily have been lived by the poet, but forms the substance of what finds expression in the psycho-sexual realities of society.

The thrust of the argument will therefore be based on an additional dimension with which our subject will be treated, against the background of extant literature that has persistently limited its interpretative engagements. In other words, most of what characterises extant readings on the question of the erotic in both poets, has been appropriated and



construed to the extent of creating a myth of sexuality and eroticism that is very far from having any positive relationship with aestheticism and/or spirituality possibility. The imagination's potential is also limited to the psychological phenomenon of wish-fulfilment and sublimation, often without insight into the epistemological and ontological impact of such processes.

Most psychologically based readings have focussed on the cause rather than the effect of eroticism as psycho-aesthetics or spirituality. So the move here is actually towards a decentralisation or deconstruction of such negative hermeneutico-phenomenological readings, the centrality of the argument complemented with the psychology of the imagination to show that it is far from being a mere escape valve for unfulfilled wishes and desires, and that it helps in the surmounting of sensuous and physical limits of love and engenders a positive aesthetic, sublime or spiritual vision. In this vein, becoming evokes discourses that pertain both to the phenomenal and transcendental, since the spiritual dimension of sensuality or eroticism is perceived as dealing with a greater reality more than the phenomenality of the erotic and the requisites of discursive language would convey. Besides, there are important interpretative features, derived from new theories on gender, feminism, sexuality, not based on spirituality, but playing a very important role as they point to aspects that prefigure the re-conceptualisation and re-modification of certain traditional stereotypes.

Given that a considerable number of the poems to be discussed or studied are related to the lived experiences of the poets as indicated above (we do not necessarily mean that they are all a strict transposition of the poets' lives), psycho-biographical criticism, whether or not it evinces self-referentiality or self-representation from a strict critical perspective, becomes a pertinent theoretical and interpretative concern here alongside the spiritual ramifications of Neo-Platonism with regard to the question of relationships. These paradigmatic clues will be seen to interact with other interpretative theories and methods that will provide a broader perspective on the matter. In this vein, analyses will include acceptable contemporary features

of gender reconstruction, of sexuality like eroticism and the sublime, auto- and homo-erotic elements and so forth. The main idea is a drift away from typically conventional modes of interpretation which, following orthodox or otherwise ethically based conventions, tend to negatively look at some of the stated features. In other words, biased interpretations based on prejudices concerning these concepts need re-evaluation and re-conceptualisation. This will help in providing readings that will resist traditional Romantic criticism of the self with specific regard to the issues raised.

In the first, fourth and fifth chapters, we have examined some of the views posited by critics with regard to sexuality in connection with spiritual and transcendental longing. The sexual and erotic have dimension of Keats's poetry has been treated with scorn and scepticism, and the feminised imagination, or more appropriately the androgynous imaginative faculty of both Coleridge and Keats considered unconventional and immoral or an undesirable Otherness in certain extreme cases. The question of gender representations, of femininity and effeminacy and masculinity has often followed a typical patriarchal or male hegemonic (phallogocentric) theoretical perspective so much so that anything that subverts the subordination of women to men in all artistic, social and cultural domains, or is non-conforming with hetero-sexuality seems grossly problematic.

When we consider the interpretative matrix of scholars like Herbert Wright, Jack Stillinger, Tilottama Rajan, Kathleen Wheeler, Karen Swann, Sunday Uche, Martin Prochazkà, Debbie Lee, and Douglas Kenning (see Chapter One), there is every conviction that alternative or modified readings of the dynamics of self and becoming in both poets are pressing within a more acceptable and inclusive perspective with regard to the changing positions towards gender and sexuality that inform criticism. It should also be noted that both Coleridge and Keats, as evinced in their works, perceived love not only from an erotic point of view as much extant literature shows. There is a distinctive aesthetic and spiritual inclination demonstrated by them, in connection with Freud's positive conception of

sublimation and psycho-literary views expounded in “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” that resists the partial view that their religious poetics was eroticism, and that they were effeminate from a conventional phallogocentric point of view. Effeminacy is a controversial word that is difficult to define clearly and categorise appropriately, but we can attempt to establish a distinction between the way it was viewed in the nineteenth century and today. With regard to the former period, the term had a very negative resonance. It was associated with homosexuality, especially gay. It was considered as an inappropriate behaviour and therefore a detestable practice. Any person who was suspected of being effeminate was considered mean, filthy and inferior. Today, the word is somehow free from the stigmas of the nineteenth century. It generally pertains to any male who possesses feminine characteristic traits and behaves like a woman. This does not, however, mean that the person is homosexual or loses everything about his masculinity.

A brief biographical perspective is important to situate and underscore the extent to which the women in Coleridge’s and Keats’s lives affected both their psychological, aesthetic and spiritual inclinations, and therefore the interpretative paradigm that will be partly adopted in this section. There are three women, who in varying degrees influenced Coleridge’s psycho-aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual attitude to love and relationships.<sup>1</sup> These were Mary Evans, Sara Fricker (Coleridge’s wife), and Sara Hutchinson. Of all the three, Hutchinson, whom Coleridge first met at the Wordsworths in Stockburn on November 24 1799, left a lasting impression on Coleridge as far as poetic and spiritual broodings are concerned. Poems like ‘Lewti,’ ‘A Wish,’ ‘On a Discovery Made too Late,’ and ‘The Sigh’ have as inspiration Mary Evans, with whom Coleridge developed a highly romantic friendship while he was in Cambridge. His love grew so strong that he suffered the agony of indecision, but had to make up his mind to marry Sara Fricker (the only poem in which Coleridge makes reference to Sara Fricker is ‘The Eolian Harp’) as part of the arrangements on the project of Pantisocracy.

As for the unfortunate circumstances regarding his wife and the relationship entertained with Sara Hutchinson, it remains one of the most compelling love stories, comparable to Keats and Yeats, that found expression in poetic and even prose form. Coleridge married Fricker not out of genuine love, but for the sake of a scheme that never materialised, and this left a lifelong stigma on the poet. Coleridge's marital problems, coupled with his idealistic and unfulfilled love for Sara Hutchinson (Hutchinson is said to have possessed all qualities and sensibilities that Fricker lacked; sympathy, understanding, indulgence, intellectual companionship, being, therefore, the object of his erotic wishes and desires), inspired enduring poems that, although they show an interesting aesthetics of sublimation, can be read beyond the psycho-biographical question of self-referentiality or self-textualisation from a general philosophical and spiritual perspective on relationships between opposite sexes.

There is a series of poems called the "ASRA Poems" (Asra as well as "Isulia" and "K0y" have been deciphered as Coleridge's pseudonyms for Sara Hutchinson), which are all supposed to have been inspired by the sense of longing or wish-fulfilment in Coleridge. Some of the poems include 'Love,' 'To Asra,' 'Love's Sanctuary,' 'Phantom,' and 'To the Nightingale.' Other important poems include the famous epistolary 'Dejection: A Letter,' 'Constancy to an Ideal Object,' 'The Presence of Love,' 'Recollections of Love,' 'A Day Dream,' and 'The Picture or the Lover's Resolution.' These poems, as we shall see in our analyses of some, all have a strong psycho-biographical element, but are self-transcendental, pointing to a strong sense of self-awareness of how psychic energy can be transformed and modified into a useful philosophical and spiritual purpose.

Keats, on his path, was overwhelmed by the tempestuous love he had for Fanny Brawne. He, no doubt, had known other women; Isabella Jones and Jane Cox,<sup>2</sup> for instance; but the impact of Brawne on him was remarkable. In fact, she is an aesthetic and even spiritual symbol in his life and to an extent his works. A number of readings have interpreted

Keats's eroticism as an expression of repressed sensual feelings for Brawne. Poems like 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' 'Isabella,' *Endymion*, and 'Ode to Psyche,' are thus seen as self-referential in such interpretations. Besides, poems like 'Lamia' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' have dominantly been read and interpreted as expressing the futility and illusiveness of his erotic and sexual desires. There are usually neglected poems, which he directly addresses to Fanny Brawne, and which can produce fine critical reading. These include 'Lines to Fanny,' 'Ode to Fanny,' and 'To Fanny.' The problematic to be raised here is how is this question of self-referentiality, both in the epistolary as well as poetic expression to be treated within a more positive perspective. Keats has even been accused of misconstruing and misappropriating religious language to express his "misguided" erotic wishes in poetry. We are not going into any details here, for much has already been done in the domain. The main issue is to attempt a more positive phenomenological and hermeneutic approach to understand the relation between effeminacy and masculinity and psycho-eroticism and spirituality.

The textual interpretation of this chapter will be short. It will also avoid much details on theoretical concerns. It intends to re-evaluate certain already discussed aspects of Coleridge's and Keats's works and will be structured as follows: The present absence and the psycho-spirituality of sublimation in Coleridge, decentring conventionalism: prefigurative modern sexuality in Coleridge's hetero-lesbian representation, and eroticism and psycho-spirituality from a Keatsian dimension.

### **THE PRESENT ABSENCE AND THE PSYCHO-SPIRITUALITY OF SUBLIMATION**

This section is going to focus on two of Coleridge's poems, 'Dejection: A Letter,' and 'The Picture, or the Lover's Resolution' to show the question of psycho-biography and how they give interpretative allowance to be apprehended as explicitly or implicitly transcending self-representation to positive aesthetic and spiritual ramifications or otherwise. Thus, as an

accompanying critical paradigm, we have to take recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis with regard to the dynamics of sublimation, dreaming and creative writing. We have already discussed Freud in Chapter Three in connection with the question of creative writing and day-dreaming. The main contention, which applies here as well, was that creative writing can provide psychoanalytical clues into an autobiographical reading and interpreting of art and literature. Self-conscious intention in connection with self-textualisation were deemed necessary to comprehend the psychology of Coleridge's personality. Sublimation is not unconnected with this phenomenon.

Sublimation is very important in the understanding of art and literature from a Freudian based psychoanalytical perspective. In other words, psychoanalysis informs aesthetic theory. As already said, we don't intend to go into details, but will comment on the issues that directly touch the interpreting of the two poems listed above. In *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) Freud expounded this psychoanalytic phenomenon, which, as we have mentioned, is connected with his previously analysed question on creative writing and daydreaming. To understand the psychology of sublimation is to understand the dynamics of two fundamental principles which Freud calls the pleasure principle, which is associated with the id, and the reality principle, which is associated with the ego. The pleasure principle aims at whatever brings satisfaction or gratification to the self. Emanating from the id, which inhabits all inborn drives and motives, it is amoral, it seeks immediate satisfaction regardless of circumstances or undesirable effects. There are certain urges (rape, theft, killing, etc) that, if they are allowed to have control over the personality, will certainly produce results that are usually very negative. The reality principle plays the vital role of appropriately handling the demands of the id. It is a channelling of energy and a subordination of pleasure to something useful and productive.

Sublimation can therefore be briefly defined as the psychic transformation and modification of unaccepted impulses into great accomplishment in arts, aesthetics, religion, or

life in general. The greatest instinct, Freud asserts, is the sexual instinct. The redirection of the unacceptable forms of sexual behaviour or urges can be very profitable to the individual and society. In fact, Freud associates this with aesthetic and intellectual interest. The psychoanalytical concept of sublimation, therefore, is strongly connected with aesthetic theory, and favours the reading of the poems. They (the poems) have a strong psycho-aesthetic and therapeutic effect, demonstrating a deflection from sexuality or eroticism to appropriate textual transcription. The question of the imagination as an aesthetic faculty will be seen not simply as aestheticism, but also as a move toward the sublime, given that sublimation has a resonance with the sublime.

Coleridge wrote much with regard to the aesthetic and spiritualising effect that love could have on humans, all this a consequence of redirected energy ignited by unfulfilled sensual or erotic motives. Apart from his poems, he made important comments in his notebooks and letters that throw more light on the different perspectives with which he saw love and relationships, and the question of gender differentiation and mutuality. The question of referentiality in this section will be limited to the impact Sara Hutchinson had on his mind, and the extent to which it can be appropriated with his poetry. The two poems, supposedly generated by his emotional inclination to this woman, are therefore expressive of how he positively transformed and redirected psychic energy from a Freudian perspective, and logically how we can understand the question of female representation and effeminacy, not just as societal or cultural variants, but as highly interconnected with the psychology of the developing self, with spiritual idealism, and with the poetics of becoming. But before we analyse the poems, it would be important to briefly discuss certain strands of gender discourse in Coleridge's thought, and how they can be appropriated not only in the context of his work but a broader scope in Romanticism as a whole.

Though we are not going to delve much into gender or feminist theory here, the issue of gender is very important for the understanding of female representations by male Romantic

poets. As a dominant poetic muse to Coleridge, the presence of Sara Hutchinson brings to question what Coleridge expressed not only with regard to his domestic agonies,<sup>3</sup> but also the male vision of the female and the intrinsic female in the male. Coleridge made a series of comments that can help in understanding the precise nature of his engagements (both on gender, psychology and religion) and the poems under study. It is certain that most of his views were engineered by his own experiences. For example he asserts in a notebook entry that:

The best, the truly lovely, in each and all is God. Therefore the truly Beloved is the Symbol of God to whoever it is truly beloved by! – but it may become perfect and maintained lovely by the function of the two/ The Lover worships in his Beloved that final consummation <of itself which> produced in his own soul by the action of the soul of the Beloved upon it, and that final perfection of the soul of the Beloved <which is in part> the consequence of the reaction of his soul upon the soul of his Beloved/ till each contemplates the soul of the other as involving his own, both in its givings and receivings, and thus still keeping alive its *outness*, its *self-oblivion* united with *self-warmth*, and still approximates to God.

Coleridge sounds somehow sexist here, twice employing the pronoun “his.” But this should not be taken negatively as a kind of chauvinistic tendency, it normally follows a linguistic construct. Whatever the case, the issue that lies deep in this excerpt is the evenness with which he appropriates the male and the female as mutually interacting halves of the same whole. This reverberates his idea that sympathy constitutes friendship; but in love there is a sort of antipathy, or opposing passion. Each strives to be the other, and both together make up a whole. The revelation of love’s deeper significance involves first of all a psychological process of self-interdependence and then a spiritualising one. One of the most interesting remarks that Coleridge made on the question of love and sexual differentiation is perhaps what finds expression in his 1829 notebook:

By *feminine* qualities, I mean nothing detractory – no participation of the *Effeminate*. In the best and greatest of men – and less so, yet still present in all ..., there is a feminine Ingredient. There is a *woman* in the Man – tho’ not *perhaps* the Man in the



Woman ... and it is the Feminine in us that makes every Adam loves his Eve, and crave for an Eve –

Why, I have inserted the dubious “perhaps” – why, it should be less accordant with truth to say that in every good Woman there is a Man as an Undersong, than to say in every true and manly Man there is a translucent Under-tint of the woman... At present it is enough to say, that the Woman is to look up to *the Man*, not in herself but out of herself. The Man looks out of himself for the realisation and totalisation of that in himself, which in himself dare not be totalised. (*Notebooks* Vol II. 2530)

This excerpt sounds intriguing and complex with regard to the question of masculinity and femininity. As to whether Coleridge bases his arguments on stereotypes (to be discussed in the second part of this chapter) is not very clear. But he is certainly trying to articulate an important psychological phenomenon on the self with regard to gender mutuality and interdependence, or the self as dialogic with a counterpart or an Other for wholeness. The pivotal issue of effeminacy which he leaves out is however very important in the understanding of the male Romantic poets’ perception of the female and themselves.<sup>4</sup> What is easily understood here is that Coleridge, as well as the other male Romantics, present the female not from a strict conventionally dichotomous perspective of gender roles. The treatment of the poems and other remarks by Coleridge will show the extent to which Coleridge might have meant what he tried to articulate.

‘Dejection: A Letter’ is one of the most famous poems (or letter) Coleridge wrote in 1802. Later modified (obviously by necessity) and titled ‘Dejection: An Ode,’ this verse letter seems not to have attracted much attention, given that critics have capitalised their interpretative engagements on the latter as a polished poem, up to the point of almost overshadowing the depth of the substance that lies in it, that is, the original epistolary version. Some editors also leave it out in their editions, or at times see it not as an independent poem in its own right, but as a manuscript that underwent modifications. For example see *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge 1912 [1966] and *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Ed. H. J. Jackson, 1985. They exclude the original epistolary version of the poem.

Of all the diverse interpretations that have been used on the ode version, there seems to be a mere philological fact that it is a modified poem, whose original version was addressed to Sara Hutchinson. More often, it has been taken as an expression of Coleridge's failing visionary potential, loss of imaginative and creative strength and so forth. In Chapter Two, the poem was discussed with regard to the question of Coleridge's antithetical thinking or his anti-self-consciousness as strongly constitutive in the poetics of becoming. It was seen as a paradoxical affirmation of imaginative strength within the domain of deferral and becoming. This is, however, not what is immediately important here. But this letter (Found in James Reeves's selection) is very pivotal in the interpretative matrix of the above discussion on psychoanalysis and aesthetics and the sublime. It is inappropriate to treat Coleridge's emotional life towards women without taking recourse to the original version of this poem, for it stands as one of, if not the best among the most confessional pieces he ever wrote in connection with Hutchinson and his idealistic enthusiasm.

Several questions come to mind when reading this poem. Why did Coleridge specifically address it to Sara Hutchinson and not Southey, W. Wordsworth, D. Wordsworth, Poole or Allsop for instance? To what extent can the poem be said to be self-textualising? Is the poet actually lamenting imaginative loss, or he is more subtly engaged in a veiled expression of unfulfilled erotic wishes? How does the poem as a literary text substantiate psychoanalytical aesthetics and the sublime? What affinities do these have with the question of femininity, effeminacy, masculinity and the androgynous? What is the dimension of becoming here and how can one associate it with the poem? Coleridge's obsession with Hutchinson need not be overemphasised. It justifies the poet's choice. And given that this poem acts as a self-confession, necessitates a careful hermeneutic look at its contents in connection with the complex of questions stated above.

The intriguing question of present absence gives a psychological context within which arguments can be based. Conscious of the moral and social repercussions of his attraction to

Hutchinson, Coleridge had to divert his innermost feelings for her only through the sublime process of aestheticising. As Freud upholds, what triggers creativity is connected with past memories. The context of this poem signals what has already been, the desirability and impossibility of possession (perhaps only through art), and which kindles the creative imagination of the poet, given it is the only appropriate way for him to face whatever sentimental or emotional problem he has. Hutchinson, as the addressee of the letter, therefore becomes a repository of the present-absent-interpretation. Not physically present, she holds and greatly preoccupies the imagination of the inspired poet. The creative process becomes psychologically and phenomenologically cathartic, with the written words assuaging the erotic or other tension. The enigmatic question as to whether Coleridge is actually lamenting imaginative or spiritual loss or the inevitable futility of ever satisfying his longing ignited by Hutchinson, needs a close examination. He despairs that:

A Grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,  
 A stifling, drowsy, unimpassion'd Grief  
 That finds no outlet, no Relief  
 In word, or sigh, or tear-  
 This, Sara! well though Know'st,  
 Is that sore Evil, which I dread the most,  
 And oft'nest suffer! In this Mood,

.....  
 O dearest Sara! in this heartless Mood  
 All this long Eve, so balmy and serene,  
 Have I been gazing on the western Sky  
 And its peculiar Tint of Yellow Green-  
 And still I gaze – and with how blank an eye!

.....  
 I see them all, so excellently fair!  
 I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

(L. 17 – 23, 30 – 34, 42 – 43)

Providing an appropriate answer to the question does not actually look likely. But one can say from a psychological perspective that the poet's distraction and heartless mood is a veiled expression of his emotional frustration, and that the poetic process should

paradoxically be taken as an amelioration of the situation rather than an aggravation of it. For the purposes of convenience, we will touch only those excerpts that directly answer or provide clues to answers.

A strong sense of retrospection permeates the poem. The poet recalls specific moments they had had together:

Sweet Thought! and dear of old  
To Hearts of finer Mould!  
Ten thousand times by Friends and Lovers blest!  
I spake with rash Despair,  
And ere I was aware,  
The Weight was somewhat lifted from my Breast!  
O Sara! in the weather-fended Wood,  
Thy lov'd haunt! where the Stock-doves coo at Noon  
And watch'd Crescent, and its ghost-like Moon.  
And yet, far rather in my present Mood  
I would, that thou'dst been sitting all this while  
Upon the sod-built Seat of Camomile –  
.....  
I feel my spirit moved.  
And whereso'er thou be,  
O Sister! O Beloved!  
Those dear mild Eyes, that see –  
Even now the Heaven, I see –  
There is a Prayer in them! It is for *me* –  
And I, dear Sara, I am blessing *thee*!  
(L. 74 – 66, 92 – 98)

In the first excerpt, the poet expresses the desire to relive a past experience, which cannot have been entirely a happy one, though a little further, (L. 98 – 110), he recaptures happy moments with Sara and her sister Mary (wife to Wordsworth). When he says he spoke with rash despair and was aware of that, it can be interpreted that he must have been feeling a sense of frustration. The desire to bring back the time is a desire to amend what was wrong in the past. But the second excerpt interestingly points to a move towards a cathartic dimension. The poet imagines that he is seeing the forgiving and prayerful eyes of Sara, but this is actually an aesthetic and probably a spiritual self-sense of assurance and atonement. The

reciprocal blessing of Sara as a present absent Other becomes a psychological move towards deadening his tension, and can be considered a self-directed or self-projected blessing. The past continues to haunt the poet, justifying a sense of his ever unsure mind, and the use of the present poetic transcription as a corrective measure:

Ah fair Remembrances, that so revive  
The Heart, and fill it with a living Power,  
Where were they, Sara? – or did I not strive  
To win them to me? – on the fretting Hour  
Then when I wrote thee that complaining Scroll,  
Which even to bodily Sickness bruis'd thy Soul!  
And yet thou blam'st thyself alone! And yet  
Forbidd'st me all Regret!

(L. 111 – 118)

There is a sense of a double loss expressed here with regard to the past and present. The poet is guilty of having hurt the feelings of Sara and has tried to express regret or remorse, which from every indication Sara refuses to recognise, attributing blame on herself rather than on the poet. In what follows, the poet reiterates his sense of regret (L. 119 – 138). Besides, he wants, and at the same time does not want the physical presence of the object of his dreams. This brings in the complex of the text as a psychoanalytical aesthetics, deemed appropriate by the poet. But as we shall see, he tends to subvert this very desire, again through the text as a transcription of the longing of the physical presence he wants to avoid:

Be happy, and I need thee not in sight.  
Peace in thy Heart, Quiet in thy Dwelling,  
Health in thy Limbs, and thine eyes in the Light  
Of Love and Hope and honourable Feeling –  
Where e'er I am, I shall be well content!  
Not near thee, haply shall be more content!  
To all things I prefer the Permanent  
.....  
But (let me say it! for I vainly strive  
To beat away the Thought), but if thou pin'd  
Whate'er the Cause, in body or mind,  
I were the miserablest Man alive  
To know it and be absent! Thy Delights  
Far off, or near, alike I may partake –

But O! to mourn for thee, and to forsake  
 All power, all hope, of giving comfort to thee –  
 To know that thou art weak and worn with pain,  
 And not to hear thee, Sara! not to view thee –  
     Not sit beside thy Bed,  
     Not press thy aching Head,  
     Not bring the Health again –  
     At least to hope, to try –  
                     (L. 44- 50, 169 – 182)

These contrasting moods seem to point to a self-contradiction, yet it hermeneutically shows the intensity of the poet's feelings. In fact, we reiterate here that the various poems that Coleridge wrote with regard to the present research question, are a kind of positive and constructive deferral of any permanent state of aestheticised erotic or spiritual bliss. The imagination mediates presence and absence which are a polarity that interests the poet, and most particularly involves the psycho-aesthetics in which he is engaged. It becomes difficult to decide whether Coleridge is suffering from indecision, self-pity or even self-parody. Yet it remains clear that Sara is not only mere physical and sensual object. She is an aesthetic symbol to him, she is enlarged into playing a kind of spiritual role as well:

But thou, dear Sara! (dear indeed thou art,  
 My Comforter, a Heart within my Heart!)  
 Thou, and the Few, we love, tho' few ye be,  
 Make up a World of Hopes and Fears for me  
 .....  
 Sister and Friend of my devoutest Choice  
 Thou being innocent and full of Love,  
 And feeling in thy Soul, Heart, Lips, and Arms  
 Even what the conjugal and mother Dove,  
 That borrows genial Warmth from those, she warms,  
 Feels in the thrill'd wings, blessedly outspread –  
 Thou free'd awhile from Cares and human Dread  
 By the Immenseness of the Good and Fair  
 Which thou seest everywhere –  
 Thus, thus, should'st thou rejoice!  
 To thee would all things live from Pole to Pole;  
 Their Life the Eddying of thy living Soul –  
 O dear! O Innocent! O full of Love!  
 A very Friend! A Sister of my Choice –  
 O dear, as Light and Impulse from above,

Thus may'st thou, evermore rejoice!  
(L. 49 – 52, 324 – 340)

We here have clues as to how Coleridge presents the female, both implicitly with regard to his wife, and explicitly with regard to Hutchinson. His reference to domestic strife shows the estrangeness and incompatibility between herself and him. Sara is his “Comforter, a Heart within [his] Heart” and “devoutest Choice.” Sara does not represent the female as a symbol of male conquest and empowerment. Coleridge shows aspects of the androgynous self, distancing himself from the typical stereotypical presentations of women as secondary or subordinates to the male. Sara is aestheticised and is even attributed qualities that point to the spiritual. The complexity of becoming surfaces at this juncture. Becoming can be explained as the self-conscious attempt of Coleridge to transcend eroticism and sensuality to spiritual plenitude. His aestheticising and spiritualising of Sara Hutchinson justify this transforming process in him.

There is evidence that helps in the interpretation of this poem as well as the other ones to be examined. Sara's ever presence in the poet's mind only extends the mystery of their relationship.<sup>5</sup> In a notebook entry, recorded while resident at the Wordsworths' Allan Bank home in 1808, six years after 'Dejection: A Letter' was composed, the poet wrote:

Two wedded Hearts, if e'er were such,  
Imprisoned in adjoining cells,  
Across whose thin partition-wall  
The Builder left one narrow rent,  
And where, most content in discontent  
A Joy with itself at Strife –  
Die into an intenser Life

.....  
The Builder left one narrow rent,  
Two wedded Hearts, if e'er were such,  
Contented most in discontent  
There cling, and try in vain to touch!  
O Joy with thy own Joy at Strife,  
That yearning for the Realm above  
Would'st die into intenser Life  
And union absolute of Love.

(*Notebooks* Vol. III, 3397)

One needs to imagine the psychological state the poet must have been going through to write this piece. Staying in the same home with Sara, but under the reproofing and ever-watchful eyes of Wordsworth, Coleridge self-consciously had to transform any sort of longing into creative dreaming and writing. We are not simply presented with an aestheticised sense of longing, but most importantly what it seems to positively import on the poet. The association of joy, content and discontent, the yearning for the Realm above, and death and a more intense life points to a supra-sensual dimension and suggests a spiritualising hermeneutics of the poet. He can consume his love only spiritually, if not aesthetically. This is seen in the context of becoming as he anticipates an “intenser life” and “union absolute of Love.” In another entry from October 29 1810, he reiterates, and this time more plainly, the deeper understanding that he has with regard to Sara Hutchinson:

My Love of K0y is not so much in my Soul, as my Soul in it. It is my whole being wrapt up in one Desire ... all Hopes & Fears, Joys & Sorrow, all the Powers, Vigour & Faculties of my Spirit abridged into <one> perpetual inclination. To bid me not love you were to bid me annihilate myself – for to love you is all I know of my Life, as far as my Life is an object of my Consciousness and my free Will. God is our Being, thro’ his works alone doth he reveal himself – and that for which all other objects have a [vital] meaning ...force or attraction are desired or avoided – that of which all other Objects are but a Copious language of epithets and synonymes – that is God appearing to one – in that he reveals himself ...I hold it therefore neither impiety <on the one hand> nor superstition on the other that you are God within me, even as the best and most religious men have called their Conscience the God within them. But you, tho’ existing to my senses, have ever abode within me – you alone have been my Conscience – in what form, with what voice, under what modification can I imagine God to work upon me, in which you have not worked? (*Notebooks* Vol. III, 3996)

This is another strong instance of sublimation, which purports a positive religious view. Is Coleridge simply seeking solace or the redirected and modified longing for Sara has amplified his spiritual vision? She seems to be a divine instrument of the poet’s consciousness of a deeper and intense meaning behind the mere art of loving. Seeing Sara as God within him or as his conscience may sound like an exaggerated idealism or extremist spiritual position. But it points to the fact that the feminine is an unavoidable Other that must complete the poet’s self. Again, the poet is above aesthetic pleasure, pointing to a spiritual reality that can



be the possible outcome of his ontological engagement. This prose excerpt finds poetic expression in 'Love's Sanctuary,' which points to a desired departure from sensual to spiritual love:

This yearning heart (Love! witness what I say)  
Enshrines thy form as purely as it may,  
Round which, as to some spirit uttering bliss,  
My thoughts all stand ministrant night and day  
Like saintly Priests, that dare not think amiss.

To Coleridge, physical beauty is a way into the contemplation and understanding of celestial beauty. The lover's beauty is therefore perceived in terms more than the eroticism or sensuality of phenomenal beauty. "Like saintly Priest, that dare not think amiss" is suggestive of the desire to transcend the materiality of sensual love to a spiritual vision of it.

We can say that 'Dejection: A Letter' holds a key into the complexities of Coleridge's love poetry with specific regard to Sara Hutchinson. In whatever dimension we interpret the word dejection, it should not represent failure, for it is a positive psychological yeast for his aesthetics and spirituality. He affirms rather than resigns to any sense of despair or frustration. The present absence question indicates the paradoxes of the poet's choices, but remains an ingrained psychological reality. He can, from past memories, recreate aesthetically. In the creative process, he reveals significant aspects of human experience that go beyond this aestheticising and fall in his unitive vision of apprehending everything from a spiritual perspective as all together related with the final principle, Being, or the One, which can be graspable through becoming. The poem therefore depicts a complex relationship with the issues discussed in Chapter Two.

'The Picture, or the Lover's Resolution' is another complex variation of Coleridge's psycho-aesthetics of love. It is the least overtly confessional of the love poems, and as to whether it is self-referential or self-representational of Coleridge is an intriguing question. However, the biographical circumstances behind the poem's composition and later references to it links it to the referentiality of Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson.<sup>6</sup> In a notebook entry, dated

March 1802, Coleridge writes, “A Poem on the endeavour to emancipate the Soul from day-dreams & note the different attempts & vain ones” (*Notebooks* Vol. I. 1153). In her notes to this edition, Kathleen Coburn has commented on the connection between this statement and ‘The Picture,’ pointing out the referentiality to lines 118 – 120 (*Notebooks: Notes* Vol. I. 1153 6. 144). Another very remarkable clue is found in Coleridge’s letter to his publisher Joseph Cottle, dated May 27 1814. Twelve years after he wrote the poem, Coleridge confesses to Cottle, relating the significance of this emancipation, “In my early manhood in lines, descriptive of a gloomy solitude, I distinguished my sensations in the following words ...” (*Letters* Vol. III. pp. 498 – 499). The words are an excerpt from ‘The Picture:’

Here Wisdom might resort, and here Remorse;  
Here too the love-lorn man, who, sick in soul,  
And of this busy human heart weary,  
Worships the spirit of unconscious life  
In tree or wild-flower. – Gentle lunatic!  
If so he might not wholly cease to be,  
He would far rather not be that he is;  
But would be something that he knows not of,  
In winds or waters, or among the rocks!  
(L. 17 – 25)

Thus, the poem as a text seems to conceal Coleridge’s personality. Yet, his very comments or references to it reveal him as the poem’s subject. Given that Coleridge dominantly saw the self as subject, we can, from this perspective, consider it as self-referential and connected with his passion for Sara Hutchinson. Analysing this poem therefore necessitates the same Freudian psychoanalytical approach used in the dejection poem. It deals with erotic and poetic day-dreaming. To put it differently, it points to the dynamics of creative wish-fulfilment and self-discovery. It highlights poetic dreaming as inextricably related to waking life, and points to how the creative imagination can be apprehended with regard to the dynamics of sublimation. Our treatment of the poem is, however, not with the aim of providing a final reading to it, given its depth of complexity. It is an appropriation of the foregoing views.

The poem is a kind of narrative, with a complex network of the narrator/poet, a maiden and a youth, complex because of a hermeneutic interpretation of the narrator as creating a self-dramatisation through the youth as a surrogate of himself and the maiden as a desirable Other for self-completion. As with the first poem, questions again arise: What does the picture signify? Who is actually the lover that is resolute? On what is he resolute and to what extent does this resolution reflect the narrator/poet's intention? How is the poem associated with day-dreaming, the creative imagination and becoming? And how is the female represented in the poem? Again, we shall be concerned with those specific instances that facilitate the interpretative paradigm of this section. The narrator is wandering in the woods and makes a number of intriguing comments:

I know not, ask not whither! A new joy,  
Lovely as light, sudden as summer gust,  
And gladsome as the first-born of the spring,  
Beckons me on, or follows from behind,  
Playmate, or guide!  
The master passion quelled,  
I feel that I am free.

(L.7 – 12)

In these lines, we are given no clue to determine the exact state of the poet's mind, but the lines point to a new awareness, aesthetically expressed and delineating a positive sign of sublimation. This is clearly captured by the expression, "The master-passion quelled." One can analyse this in terms of a temporal freedom from, or more appropriately quelling down of erotic tension through day-dreaming and poetic transcription. A little further the narrator asserts that:

This is my hour of triumph! I can now  
With my own fancies play the merry fool,  
And laugh away worse folly, being free.  
Here will I sit myself, beside this old,  
Hollow, and weedy oak, which ivy-twine  
Clothes as with net-work: here will I couch my limbs,  
Close by this river, in this silent shade,  
As safe and scared from the step of man

As an invisible world – unheard, unseen,  
And listening only to the pebbly brook  
That murmurs with a dead, yet tinkling sound;  
Or to the bees, that in the neighbouring trunk  
Make honey-hoards.

(L. 46 – 58)

These lines reiterate a kind of resolution suggested in the first excerpt. The hour of triumph and continued sense of being free, point to the question of self-emancipation from dreaming, a dreaming that is connected with erotic and sensual longing (“worse folly”). But what kind of world does he want to create for himself? An invisible dream-world, unheard, and unseen, a phantom world. One starts doubting if at all the emancipation is genuine. Whatever the case may be, the poet is resolved to adopt an alternative stance. Poetic textualisation shows a psychological and hermeneutic understanding of the poet’s dreaming. But in what appears to be a self-contradiction, the poet lunches a complaint:

The breeze, that visits me,  
Was never Love’s accomplice, never raised  
The tendril ringlets from the maiden’s brow,  
And the blue delicate veins above her cheek;

.....  
Sweet breeze! thou only, if I guess aright,  
Liftest the feathers of the robin’s breast,  
That swells its little breast, so full of song,

(L. 58 – 61, 68 – 70)

The first part of this excerpt suggests that the poet is still love-sick and might only temporarily have given up his longing. This is a psychologically justified phenomenon, for the urges of the id are never permanently annihilated, even when repressed or suppressed. The same breeze that “was never Love’s accomplice” is the “sweet breeze” that accompanies the bird’s song. Poetically or aesthetically, the song of the bird is associated with love. So it appears the poet struggles to give up, but is still continuously caught in the same desire. The contradiction does not pose any problematic feature in interpreting the poem as poetic day-dreaming, which is a positively sublimated eroticism.

The poem takes the most interesting and complicated turn when the poet introduces the maiden and the passionate youth as seemingly distinguished from himself:

And thou too, desert stream! no pool of thine,  
Though clear as lake in latest summer-eve,  
Did e'er reflect the stately virgin's robe,  
The face, the form divine, the downcast look  
Contemplative! Behold! her open palm  
Presses her cheek and brow! her elbow rests  
On the bare branch of half-uprooted tree,  
That leans towards its mirror! Who erewhile  
Had from her countenance turned, or looked by stealth,  
(For Fear is true-love's cruel nurse), he now  
With stedfast gaze and unoffending eye,  
Worships the watery idol, dreaming hopes  
Delicious to the soul, but fleeting, vain,  
E'en as that phantom-world on which he gazed,  
But not unheeded gaze:

(L. 72 – 86)

The image of the pool, stately virgin and gazing youth, particularly stands as a challenge to the hermeneutics of self-referentiality. Yet the already established argument that the poem connects with the poet/Coleridge, and the stance that we can appropriate it with Freud's theory of creative day-dreaming, resolves any sense of ambiguity, even if we cannot get satisfactory answers to all the questions raised. This scene may be taken as mirroring the poet's self-reflexive stance. It may point to his wish for or dreaming of the "stately virgin." The introduction of "he," which changes from the personal and possessive pronouns "I" and "my," sounds so abrupt. The youth, through the lens of the supposed observing poet, becomes the focus of what we can call a self-staged episode. The youth that worships the image is therefore a surrogate of the poet as already pointed out. The experience is a kind of double dream in imaginative creativity, an aestheticised self-dramatic act. As the poet himself says, it is a phantom (dream-like) world, different from the reality of experience. That the youth "dreams hopes," and that they are fleeting and vain, may not look favourable as a positive

sign of sublimation. Yet, we are involved with the text and not the reality of the erotic longing, and can say that art fulfils its cathartic function.

Focussing attention on the maiden and her reactions ushers in another dimension of the argument. She is seen here as serving and the at same time undercutting the ends of masculine and erotic desire. The poet calls her a “sportive tyrant,” because she destroys her image, mirrored by the lake, by throwing flowers into it:

Then all the charm  
Is broken – all that phantom world so fair  
Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,  
And each mis-shape the other. Stay awhile,  
Poor youth, who scarcely dar’st lift up thine eyes!  
The stream will soon renew its smoothness, soon  
The visions will return! And lo! he stays:  
And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms  
Come trembling back, unite, and now once more  
The pool becomes a mirror; and behold  
Each wild flower on the marge inverted there,  
And there the half-uprooted tree – but where,  
O where the virgin’s snowy arm, that leaned  
On its bare branch? He turns, and she is gone!  
Homeward she steals through many a woodland maze  
Which he shall seek in vain. Ill-fated youth!  
Go, day by day, and waste thy manly prime  
In mad love-yearning by the vacant brook,  
Till sickly thoughts bewitch thine eyes, and thou  
Behold’st her shadow still abiding there,  
The Naiad of the mirror!

(L: 91 – 111)

This is a very essential passage in the poem, pointing to the complexity of the poet’s imaging of the distortion of the charm of the poor and ill-fated youth’s erotic engagement. In fact, it suggests a narcissistic inference or a solipsistic wish-fulfilment, with the pool hermeneutically reflecting or mirroring the poet’s veiled desires. One can say that the poem is a delineation of a variation of pictures or dreams. That is, the concern is not only the picture that the poet subsequently sees, but also that which is created in the central scene of the pool, youth and maiden. As an allegory, the maiden is representative of Sara and the youth of

Coleridge. The breaking of the charm, encapsulated in “scatters,” “vanishes,” “mis-shape,” and “fragments” could explain the complex of the poet psychological staging of the resolve not to pursue the maiden, who will only burn without satisfying his wishes. Yet, she appears to be his muse, he is inextricably bounded to her and must incessantly and appropriately use her influence. The desire to hang on for the pool to regain its smoothness so that the reflection can once more be seen, suggests the continued bond that binds the poet to the maiden. Yet, when the water is calm, the maiden’s reflection is no more, she is gone, and the narrator recommends his surrogate self (the youth) to continue in “mad love-yearning.” And, interestingly, the youth abruptly disappears and we are left again with the poet/narrator and the maiden. It is not the youth that continues to follow the course of the stream, but the poet, who seems to be interested in tracing the divine maiden.

The allegorical nature of the poem can find its parallel in another of Coleridge’s poems, ‘A Day Dream,’ infused with a display of psychoanalysis. This poem was addressed to Sara Hutchinson, is connected with lines 99 – 107 in ‘Dejection: A Letter,’ and is engaged with another interesting strand of poetic day-dreaming. It overtly demonstrates Coleridge’s obvious passion for Sara, and the central passage that connects it with ‘The Picture’ presents a different but possibly connected imagery with the pool. This is the image of fire and shadows:

The shadows dance upon the wall,  
By the still dancing fire-flames made;  
And now they slumber, moveless all!  
And now they melt to one deep shade!  
But not from me shall this mild darkness steal thee:  
I dream thee with mine eyes, and at my heart I feel thee!  
(L. 24 – 30)

That this poem was written just a few weeks after ‘The Picture’ can lend credence to the conviction that its familiarity with the former poem can convincingly treat it as aesthetic self-delineation. We once more see poetic day-dreaming as a valuable aesthetics of

sublimation, with the poet using the power of the written word and text as a substitute to erotic fulfilment.

As already pointed out, the supposed emancipated poet continues to wander into the woods after the mirroring scene. He comes across a “curious picture” which he associates with the “Divinest maid” and poetic muse Isabel (L. 159 – 175). But she is “full of love to all, save only me (the poet).” The poet asks himself questions, “My heart,/ Why beats it thus? ... /Why should I yearn/To keep the relique?” and resolves to take it to the maiden (he has no doubt that the picture dropped unaware) rather than keep it, for it will idly feed the passion that consumes him (L. 180 – 183). The resolution here is not actually to abandon, but to pursue the object of interest, “She cannot blame me that I followed her:/And I may be her guide the long wood through” (L. 185 – 186). The lover’s resolution therefore becomes psycho-aesthetic productivity, connected with dreaming. It evokes continuity in conflicting polarity, but mutual inclusiveness of erotic and spiritual longing of the self. Creative writing does not estrange the dreamer from the dreamed and wished, but provides an acceptable medium through which erotic fantasies can be directed. As to whether day-dreaming rekindles memories and erotic desires rather than assuages them or both, is complex. But given that aestheticising and textualising always involves the psycho-dynamics of present absence, with the physicality of the desired object not in sight, we should try to understand the text as an appropriate, even if problematic way of handling and presenting eroticism through sublimation.

What is remarkably interesting in both poems is that Coleridge constantly resists or subverts conventional labels of gender. The issue of masculinity and femininity does not fit into the hegemonic patriarchal categorisations, which are dominantly male dominated in nature. Besides, the idea of an ever evolving self in the quest for stability, psychological or spiritual, relates with the interpretations of the previous chapters. This domain of his life can



therefore be understood as an important tributary in his constructive move towards a central visionary or spiritual goal in his idealist philosophy.

### **DECENTRING STEREOTYPES: PREFIGURATIVE MODERN SEXUALITY IN COLERIDGE**

This section of the chapter deals with a very different and perhaps unfamiliar dimension of Coleridge's poetry as exemplary in the poetics of becoming, in this sense prefiguring. From its title, it is certain that the poem is to be treated from a modern perspective with regard to gender differentiation and sexuality. By gender we are generally referring to the social and cultural distinctions between men and women. Sexuality is seen from the perspective of eroticism, that is, erotic desires or practices which have an erotic significance. It is connected with, but distinguished from sex, which refers to the biological distinction between men and women and the activity associated with sexual intercourse. One of the main questions here will be to know if the use of gender to describe sexual behaviour guarantees a clarity of definition, and if same-sex relations are equal to gender infraction. The specific poem in question is the enigmatic 'Christabel.' This poem has continued to impose its enigma on criticism. The present investigation is therefore not a finite statement on reading and interpreting the poem, nor is it an altogether new approach to understanding the main arguments. But the reading is certainly innovative within the paradigmatic stance adopted. The poem is irresistible to questions on gender and sexual identification and orientation. Most of the readings of the poem have been based on conventional gender attributions, Hermeneutics, (Post)Structuralism, Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis.

It should be noted that this poem hardly received positive appreciation when it was published, and it also looks likely that most later criticism was inspiration from the initial reactions in Coleridge's time. William Wordsworth, William Hazlitt, Lord Byron and Thomas Moore did not at all provide any favourable reading to the poem. *The Edinburgh Review*, *The*

*Quarterly* and *Examiner* only helped in aggravating the situation. Most of the views about the poem centred on its structure, considered incoherent and incongruous and problematically incomplete. The conventional notion of evil and good, captured in the nightmarish and obscene sexuality (its implicit lesbian and pornographic atmosphere) of the poem was not left uncommented. They were all considered as damaging to the poem, if at all it were even to be taken as such. Later critics like L. D. Berkoben, Tilottama Rajan, Kathleen Wheeler, Karen Swan and Ash Tekinay have followed similar trends of early criticism. (see Chapter One) The most remarkable observation with these critics is that they do not really focus on the question on sexuality, unless in certain cases where it is related with evil and obscenity. But this poem points to the reshaping of a hegemonic male-centred tradition into a feminine voice. The reason may be obvious. Patriarchal and phallogentric mentality has often presented the male as determining gender roles, both male and female. The question of challenging stereotypes therefore reactivates the modern debate concerning gender representations and sex-roles under the background of traditional or stereotypical notions. The expression sex-roles sounds slippery, but can be interpreted as the behaviour of partners in sexual intercourse, whether in heterosexual or homosexual relationships, and also as the male and female distinctions that are attributed to individuals by culture.

Stereotypes are either negative or positive attributes that are given to individuals or groups, and at times with a strain of exaggeration, false prediction and false generalisation. The observation, differentiation and identification and categorisation of individuals, groups of people, or even societies as fixed or inflexible images (for instance with regard to race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national identity), does not usually take into consideration the complexity of exceptionalism and the multidimensional character of attributes. Prejudices and biased considerations have always led to false assumptions, necessitating, at times, misunderstanding. It becomes very problematic, for example, to simply or reductively judge someone based on a stereotype without proper knowledge of facts pertaining to the

uniqueness or distinctive features he/she has that may not adhere to the stereotype. While stereotypes may be accurate and even necessary, there should be allowance or space for complexity and flexibility. That is, they should not be reductively seen as absolutes, but as dynamic and modifiable. Some undesirable, damaging or dehumanising stereotypes may even be completely challenged and, if possible, wiped out.

Gender stereotypes are a specifically complicated issue that this work cannot satisfactorily handle, given that it focuses on the dimension of maleness and femaleness with regard to eroticism and sexuality as portrayed and interpreted in literature. It will then focus on the central notions that have traditionally shaped the concept, and show how moving away from their created centre gives the opportunity to re-define and re-conceptualise the notion in a modern mind-set. In fact, gender stereotypes bring into the question differential sex-roles with regard to the complexity of heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality and transsexuality. Gender has had such a huge influence on sexual behaviour that the appropriate answers as to what is masculinity or femininity are not always easy to come by, given the variety and at times irreconcilable clash of opinions.<sup>7</sup>

While all four stated orientations are not new to humanity, convention has dominantly favoured the first, seeing the man as masculine and the woman as feminine. Appropriate sexual behaviour has to be based on such stereotypical categorisation, and most of what characterises the remaining three has always been very problematic, even if accepted. But as already stated, strict stereotypical attributions can be very unfavourable and unnecessarily biased, especially when an individual is considered as acting contrary to the gender and/or sex-role which they have been attributed. Not every individual can be a representative of a group. So the question of what we can call a metonymic function of an individual sounds unfairly reductive. The issue of differential sex-roles in the specific discourse of English Romanticism is what will enable our understanding of stereotypes and how Coleridge's creative imagination and hetero-lesbian consciousness tackle the problematic in 'Christabel.'

If we closely examine some of the extant literature on this poem since it was written, we realise that most interpretative stances are somehow connected with the problem of conventional and stereotypical orientation. Lesbianism is female homosexuality, which, like its gay counterpart, is dichotomously regarded as a normal way of life, or as a psychosocial disorder or psychiatric distortion.<sup>8</sup> It is not a new sexual phenomenon, nor was it unknown in Coleridge's time. But there has been an evolution in the apprehension of the term since Coleridge's time, and as we shall see, Coleridge's text does not treat the concept within the meaning of time the text was composed, justifying the question of prefiguring and futurity. The resistance to positively see the poem as an expression of sexual freedom and orientation may be a result of societal imprint on the basic sex-types into which males and females must fit themselves. It becomes easy to say the homosexual undertones of the poem is a delineation of evil as Berkoben and Tekinay would assert, or to dismiss the poem's worth on deconstructive grounds as Rajan and Wheeler do.

Karen Swann, from a typical stereotypical perspective in "Literary Gentlemen and Lovely Ladies: The Debate on the Character of *Christabel*" (1993), asserts that the greatest scandal of the poem is that Geraldine is a woman. Such a stereotypical critical view brings in the very important questions as to whether same-sex practice is a betrayal of gender role, or an overlooked issue in stereotypical categorisation. Another question is whether sex differentiation and orientation is simply a biologically or culturally or religiously determined issue, or whether it is the physical feature or an interiority characteristic of an individual that necessarily determines their sexual feelings. All these questions can help in the understanding of the reading we propose here.

'Christabel' is not a reposition of the myth of masculine self-possession, and should not be seen as having a specifically targeted gender audience. Its presentation of a same-sex eroticism is another dimension in which Coleridge portrays and into which he translates the female image. So it is neither self-referential nor self-representational, it neither betrays nor

veils any facet about Coleridge's life. But it is socially contextualised, and it is clear that modern readings and interpretations will largely vary in terms of the sexual orientation of the reader. That Coleridge, a heterosexual, was interested in a lesbian oriented story shows the complexity of his imaginative engagement in different fields of experience. In fact, he is concerned with another unavoidable, even if considered disturbing psychosomatic reality about human sexuality. We can thus say that the Coleridgean imagination is engaged in a constructive deconstruction of hitherto uncritically received patterns, affirming the previously held view that he is decentring male chauvinism in his imaging of the woman.

Andrew Elfenbein's *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (1999), to which this section is indebted, has carefully pointed out the different conceptions of lesbianism prior to Coleridge's time.<sup>9</sup> In the section dedicated to Coleridge, "A Sight to Dream of, Not to Tell: Christabel, Pornography, and Genius" (pp. 177 – 202), Elfenbein holds that Coleridge unyokes lesbianism from its patriarchal context, for he does not really represent a heterosexual background. The traditional conception of lesbianism had always seen it as attached to a heterosexual framework, since lesbian representations always showed the insertion of a hidden male, not indifferent to eroticised females. He is therefore of the strong conviction that:

Christabel, for the first time, made lesbianism sublime. What had been a mildly amusing or shocking topic became a matter of almost sacred mystery. In Christabel, sex between women loses the characteristic corporeality of eighteenth-century representation. Instead, a black space in the text marks an event so burdened with sublime horror that it cannot even be spoken. Like a cultic rite that remains unknown only to initiates, lesbianism in Christabel points to mysteries forbidden to ordinary mortals (p. 177).

Though Elfenbein associates lesbianism with the conventional concept of genius and the sublime purification of art, asserting that the poem assumes an aesthetic autonomy, he provides a modern background to interpreting the poem. It is this background that inspires the

need to attempt an interpretation of the poem as a challenge to stereotypical sexual concerns, and to re-examine Coleridge's productive imagination.

In *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (1996) Marilyn Farwell advances a contention that can set the pace for our analysis of the erotic and lesbian implications inherent in 'Christabel:'

Traditional lesbian theory treats the lesbian narrative as a text determined by the shared experience among identifiable lesbian authors, readers, and characters and treats narrative itself as a relatively neutral tool into which lesbians can be written; postmodernism treats lesbian as a fluid and unstable term and narratives as a powerful if not closed ideological system into which lesbians enter only to be entangled in a heterosexual, male story. (p. 5)

Farwell's argument is very delicate, but she clearly distinguishes between lesbian narrative and narrative itself. But it would appear that she inverts or rather complicates the understanding of the relationship between lesbianism and literary representations. She is very clear with her categorisation of lesbian authors, readers and characters, that is, whether they are themselves lesbians or not. Any person with interest in lesbian theory or fiction can fit her categorisation, depending whether he/she is a writer or a reader. She therefore grapples not only with lesbian writers, but also with non-lesbian writers whose writings treat lesbian themes. The second part of her assertion, referring to postmodernism's favouring of text and treating lesbianism as fluid, furthers the depth and complexity of the debate that cannot be pursued here. This notwithstanding, one of her main arguments that a given narrative must disrupt historically conventional heterosexual master plotting in order to qualify as lesbian, is important in the framework of the argument here. We have already pointed out the fact that Coleridge is heterosexual, though his poem delineates a lesbian atmosphere, and reading the poem as a text from a modern perspective as proposed here, does not see lesbian representation as a fluid, but as a seriously treated issue that does not fall into or is entangled in a heterosexual story.

There is no doubt that Part Two of the poem involves a male narrative, but it is a male narrative that is more of a flashback and/or an accompaniment to a homosexual female story. Most interesting is also the nature of the bond between Sir Leoline and Lord Roland. They have children, no doubt, but it can be suggested that they once shared a kind of psychological, if not physical homosexual relationship. The poem can therefore be interpreted as a struggle to resist and efface signs of phallic male power, to use Elfenbein's words, or to disrupt conventional heterosexual master plotting from Farwell's perspective. In fact, the all-female encounter in Part One is clearly non-heterosexist in nature, and the lasting bond between the two fathers does not look heterosexual. In what follows, we are going to address the basic issues here with a series of questions and attempt at answers to demonstrate Coleridge's presentation of lesbianism.

The poem begins at midnight, and the first question is what should Christabel be doing out at such a time in the woods. Does she really represent good as conventional readings attest? If Geraldine on the other hand is evil, why is she attributed qualities pertaining to good? Does Coleridge implicitly or explicitly answer all the questions that he poses? Does the wine that awakens Geraldine's erotic and sexual desires represent evil, or is her act actually diabolical or a repository transgression of sex-roles? Does Christabel's reaction to Geraldine's dominant and overpowering nature prove her innocent? What are the implications of Bracy's story, and how can we interpret it through dream theory? Is Sir Leoline to blame for his bitter attitude towards his daughter? What does the unexplained gap in the poem signify, and how can we interpret the poem's open-ended nature with regard to the argument?

We cannot really say whether Christabel is definitely innocent or not, for it remains mysterious. But her being outside at midnight does not stand favourably as a sign of innocence. She is concerned with a kind of ritual performance, which she could as well undertake in the chapel in her father's castle. The attributes of Geraldine only complicate the matter. Her description does not portray her as evil incarnate, unless her good qualities are a

veiled expression of her so-called evil and the evil and sinister atmosphere she perpetuates. All through the poem, the poet does not seem to be concerned with evil per se. Rather, interpretation has created the myth of evil as the most inherent issue of the poem. We have the following qualities, “A lady so richly clad as she -/Beautiful exceedingly!” (L. 67 – 68), “And her voice was sweet and faint” (L. 72), “Bright dame” (L. 106), “She was most beautiful to see” (L. 224), “Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!” (L. 374), and “Yet he, who saw this Geraldine,/Had deemed her a divine thing” (L. 474 – 475). These are not qualities to be simply dismissed because of her behaviour towards Christabel. In fact, they point to a voluptuousness of Geraldine, which connects with the erotic and sexual urges that push her to consume them with Christabel.

One of the unanswered questions that the speaker poses further helps to understand the nature of Geraldine, “And what can ail the mastiff bitch?.../For what can ail the mastiff bitch?” (L. 149, 153). It may sound too reductive to simply say that the old bitch “an angry moan did make” is because Geraldine embodies evil. Dogs usually react like this to people with whom they are not familiar, and this may as well be the case of the scene. The question of the wine and Geraldine’s supposed strange behaviour is very central in the lesbian reading. Christabel associates the cordial wine with her mother and Geraldine’s reaction is captivating:

And will your mother pity me,  
 Who am a maiden most forlorn?  
 Christabel answered – Woe is me!  
 She died the hour that I was born.  
 I have heard the grey-haired friar tell,  
 How on her death-bed she did say,  
 That she should hear the castle-bell  
 Strike twelve upon my wedding day.  
 O mother dear! that thou wert here!  
 I would, said Geraldine, she were!  
 But soon with altered voice, she said –  
 ‘Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!  
 I have power to bid thee flee.’

(L.194 – 206)



The questions that immediately follow are very intriguing, “Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?/Why stares she with unsettled eye?/Can she the bodiless dead esp’y?” (L. 207 – 209). We can add ours, why is Geraldine so disturbed with the mentioning of Christabel’s mother’s dream and wish for her wedding? This is where Coleridge brings in the complex involved in the dismantling of heterosexual inclinations. Christabel’s expected marriage is unquestionably within the conventional and heterosexual frame, which is incompatible with Geraldine’s same-sex desire. Her attitude is therefore a challenge to stereotypes, “Off, woman, off! this hour is mine -/Though thou her guardian spirit be,/Off, woman, off! ‘tis given to me” (L. 210 – 2113). She seems to be overcome by a strong sexual urge. This again is justified when she further drinks and appeals to Christabel to undress herself, which she does without any resistance (L. 220 – 238). After undressing herself as well, Geraldine creates a very erotic and sexual atmosphere, with no suggestion of a male presence. Two excerpts convey this:

Then suddenly as one defied  
 Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
 And lay by the maiden’s side! –  
 And in her arms the maid she took,  
     Ah well-a-day!  
 And with low voice and doleful look  
 These words did say.  
 In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
 Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
 Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know tomorrow  
 This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;...  
 .....  
 A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
 O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
 Have been the lovely lady’s prison.  
 O Geraldine! one hour was thine –  
 Thou’st had thy will!

(L. 260 – 270, 302 - 306)

The atmosphere is very suggestive of a lesbian erotic encounter. It is a kind of ritualised performance of female bodies, a kind of loss of virginity or an introduction or initiation rite of Christabel into womanhood, though from the viewpoint of a decentralisation

from a heterosexual into homosexual act. We cannot really tell whether it is Geraldine's first encounter, but she is the dominant partner in this same-sex consummation, and does not seem to be innocent in this direction. Her self-conscious expression of anything abnormal in the act, must be seen from the ethics and stereotypes that convention has struggled to implant in the consciousness of society. Geraldine is therefore not an undesirable Other because she defies conventional sexuality. She manifests some of the important traits which stereotypical categorisation does not take into consideration.

Christabel's reactions are not very clear, but there is every indication that a kind of awakening is in her. This is discernible in the ambiguity with which the poet narrates the events after the trance, (sexual act?): (She) Gathers herself from out her trance;

Her limbs relax, her countenance  
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids  
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds –  
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!  
And soft the while she seems to smile  
As infants at a sudden light!  
Yea she doth smile, and she doth weep,  
.....  
No doubt she hath a vision sweet.  
(L. 312 – 319, 326)

Christabel's mixture of joy and sweet vision and the consciousness of the act as a sin (again captured in lines 381 – 386), shows that she does not completely reject it. And even when she refuses to tell the truth to her father, she is afraid of his reaction rather than actually expressing remorse over the performed act. So far, we can understand from a lesbian perspective that there is no real scenario of horror or evil that lurks in the mind of Geraldine, nor is it clearly expressed by Christabel. Rather, we could talk about Christabel's fears and anxiety in face of a new experience.

Part Two, as already indicated, involves the presence of, and allusion to male figures. But they pose no problem to Coleridge's homosexual scheme. This part is an unravelling of

the all-female scene in Part One. The proposed questions on this part may shed more light on the constant resistance to a heterosexual stereotype or framework. Bracy's story of the dove (which the Baron calls by the name Christabel) and the green serpent (L. 530 – 563), has been taken by structuralists and Deconstructionists as one of the subversive and resistant accounts to any deeper structure or meaningful context in the poem. The lesbian perspective here does not even necessitate a hermeneutic and phenomenological paradigmatic framework. While Sir Leoline's interpretation of the dream, "Sweet maid, Lord Roland's beauteous dove,/With arms more strong than harp or song,/Thy sire and I will crush the snake!" (L. 569 – 571), may be wrong or sound ironical to the reader, it is textually justified. It is the same case when he is very bitter about his daughter's appeal to send away Geraldine.

Sir Leoline is obviously not aware of what has happened between his daughter and Geraldine, and given Geraldine's account of the story, and the fact that she is the daughter to his greatest friend, there is no need for unexplained irony or irresolvable aporia. Reading and interpreting this way will certainly involve the creation or re-writing of a new text from a deconstructionist position. The present stance resists this position. The serpent image rightly suggests a phallic interpretation, obviously not in a heterosexist frame. A psycho-sexual perspective suggests that it can represent the androgynous or hermaphrodite quality in Geraldine. The Baron's anger is also suggestively connected with the question of his child's supposed jealousy of Geraldine, or a defiance to his authority.

Coleridge's display of imaginative energy rescues a multiplicity of references to the poem. This is paradoxically done with what we can call the large non-narrated space(s) that he creates, and the poem's open-ended nature, which leaves even the credibility of the present stance only as long as the narrative lasts. In other words, the gap/space that Coleridge creates or leaves unfilled in the narrative, gives possibility to diverse elliptical inferences. This is related to what the German literary theorist Wolfgang Iser in "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1988) calls "gaps of meaning" and the creative stimulation

engendered by “unwritten” parts or implications of the text (pp. 213, 216). But it is clear that Coleridge employs his creative imagination to advance a question of great and important consideration, the dismantling of prejudiced and biased sexual stereotypes (for example sexual intercourse must involve opposite sexes), which have been overlooked. If he is not conscious of this, the text at least urges reading and interpreting in this direction. This is where the strength of the poem lies. That is, implied meanings depend on interpretative contexts. The incomplete or fragmentary nature of the poem is fascinating and significantly contributes to the open-ended nature of different critical pursuits. This is another mark of the poem’s strength and aesthetic value. It could be a deliberate technical measure can be connected with the poetics of becoming. Our analysis, though based on the text as narrative, struggles all the same to depart from the narrative as a structural reading to the poem. The fundamental issue is the unchallenged theme of sexuality that pervades the poem. Coleridge’s hetero-lesbian consciousness does not imply that he had any homosexual inclinations. It implies that, though he was a heterosexual, he carefully explored, through the prefigurative power of the imagination, a theme that gives prominence to the changing patterns involved in the re-conceptualisation of sexual and erotic orientation. As it has been the stance with the two poems on the present absence equation, we here again see the dynamic and inclusive poetics of Coleridge’s considerations on gender and sexuality. Though this poem neither implicitly nor explicitly point to the question of spirituality, Coleridge does not explicitly nor implicitly present it as anti-religious or anti-spiritual.

### **EROTICISM AND PSYCHO-SPIRITUALITY: THE KEATSIAN DIMENSION**

This last section of the chapter focuses on Keats’s psycho-somatic aesthetics and spirituality. This brings us back to the question of sublimation as a positive aesthetic handling of longing and desire. As already discussed in the first part of this chapter, sublimation can lead to intense intellectual as well as spiritual contemplation and productivity. Keats’s poetry and

prose do not only serve as a psycho-aesthetic function, but they also trigger a sublime and spiritual awareness, which should be the goal of the positive redirection of sexual energy. This means that this aspect of his life is inextricably intertwined with his epistemological and ontological speculations. In fact, when Keats talks about the truth of the imagination, “What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth – whether it existed before or not, - for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty,” we understand that it is only through the concrete that the spiritual can be apprehended. Associating the imagination with the sublime and essential Beauty is an advancement from the corporeality or phenomenality of love. We are dealing with texts as an expression of Keats’s erotic life and his presentation of the female, his effeminacy or his androgynous self. Within this frame work also, we are going to briefly comment on the question of gender and feminist politics. It should be stressed that work has already been done in this domain, that is, positive readings of Keats’s erotic and sexual politics, with critics like Stuart Sperry, John Barnard and Christoph Bode offering exemplary readings. So most of what will be discussed here will be a re-affirmation or emphasis on what has been done.

One of the most intriguing things about Keats’s life is his sexuality. In fact, there seem to be more implicit or explicit inferences from his works rather than tangible biographical information from the rich sources that exist. There is no evidence as of now, which testifies that Keats had any physical contact (sexual and erotic relationship) with Fanny Brawne or any other woman in whom he had interest. His sexual and erotic life<sup>10</sup> is therefore blurred, perhaps mysterious, if at all he really had one except through aesthetic self-textualising. This explains why his texts tend to be the referential point to any discussion in this domain. And though we can say that Keats’s epistolary and poetic pieces are self-referential or self-representational, they go beyond this, as they transcribe the search for ultimate love and Beauty through human relationships.

The question of gender, especially femininity and effeminacy or more appropriately the androgynous, is very interesting in Keats's case. The poetic muse and the quest for the ideal are all connected with the feminine image. The intriguing question is, to what ends do the poet's representations take one? Or, how do we understand Keats's regard for women, and how does it challenge stereotypical views on him? And how does his aestheticism in this domain engender spirituality and explain the phenomenon of becoming? In *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), Anne Mellor has commented on what she refers to as Keats and the ambiguity of gender. She contends that:

Keats's ambivalent attitude toward gender infiltrates his poetry as well as his letters. On the one hand Keats repeatedly assigns to the feminine gender the possession of beauty, power and knowledge, everything that the male poet yearns to possess. On the other hand, he anxiously tries to establish a space between the male poet and the female object of desire, a space where the poet can preserve a recognisable masculinity. (p. 181)

This contention shows the complexity of gender discourse in the poet, and shares similar concerns with those held by Elizabeth Bronfen and James Heffernan. Bronfen's *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (1992) adopts a feminine perspective with specific regards to Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' Contending from a biographical level, she is of the conviction that Keats's many letters in which he longs to possess both Fanny and death suggest his sexualised relationship to a feminised death. She stresses that the female body's association with the universal condition of mortality is because the woman as a man's object of desire is on the side of death and she so often serves as a non-reciprocal 'dead' figure of imaginary projection (p. 62). Madeline, she intimates, can be interpreted as staging an aesthetic allegory of speaking death. Bronfen brings in an interesting gender issue that:

Staging disembodiment as a form of escaping personal and social constraints serves to criticise those cultural attitudes that reduce the feminine body to the position of dependency and passivity, to the vulnerable object of sexual incursions. (p. 142)

Here again, we see the image of the woman as a simple quality for masculine authority and power. Heffernan's *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis* (1993) asserts that Madeline is a self-inscribed figure of art, necessitates the poem to be read as an ekphrastic poem that accounts for the authority that Madeline invests in her aesthetic self-representation, and the ambivalent way in which the male poet engages with a feminised object of art. To Heffernan, the contest that ekphrasis stages is often powerfully gendered: the expression of a duel between male and female gazes, the voice of male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening, of male narrative trying to overcome the fixating impact of beauty poised in space (p. 1). With regard to the poem, the contest can be interpreted at two levels, textually between Porphyro and Madeline, and extra-textually, between the poet and Madeline. We cannot go into the details of Heffernan's analysis. What is important to note is the question of ambiguity and his conviction that the woman surrenders to male dominance at the end.

Our interest is not the conflict between the sexes, nor the supposed ambiguity in the poet's presentation, but an attempt to see the feminine and masculine as mutually inclusive. This explains why we take recourse to the middle path. That is, understanding gender discourse in the poet not in terms of ambiguity, but rather in terms of the effeminate or androgynous quality that constitutes his psychology. With this view then, it becomes appropriate to strike a balance between the female and male gender in the poetic and epistolary expression of the poet. We have already contended that the major muse behind Keats's poetry is the female. With the exception of Apollo, the rest of aesthetic influences, that is, with regard to the question the female image, are represented by the women. Pan, Maia, Psyche, Autumn, Melancholy, Indolence, Phoebe, Moneta, and Fanny Brawne, are all female representations that strongly lurk in the Keats's mind. Mellor's assertion can be right as far as we have to understand the poet as seeing the female as a significant representation of beauty, power and knowledge. But that Keats departs from this in trying to create a space for

his masculinity sounds problematic, because his broodings show a persistent negotiation between the sexes, perhaps more emphasis on the female rather than the male self.

We are going to take the example of Brawne.<sup>11</sup> Keats wrote her thirty nine love letters, and a series of poems. And as aforementioned, some of these demonstrate a desire to depart from the erotic and sexual. The paradox about his unfulfilled tempestuous passion for this woman, is that it enriched his aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual attitude to life and experience. Three of Keats's letters attract critical attention in the direction of our argument. These are letters addressed to Fanny and Charles Brown. The first to Fanny, dated October 13 1819, is a subtle mixture of love and religion:

You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving – I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of seeing you soon ... I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion – I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more – I could be martyr'd for my Religion – Love is my religion – I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet. (*John Keats*, p. 519)

This letter, alongside others,<sup>12</sup> has given enough room for certain critics to accuse Keats of abusing religious terminology in his erotic and sexual poetics. Absorbing and dissolving are taken to stand for a strong adherence to corporeality and nothing else, but they could go further than that. The conviction here is that there should be nothing wrong in expressing a sense of religion that is limited with his imaging of Brawne, who, as a feminine principle, influences a great part of his psyche and aesthetics. Our readings show that whenever there is mention of Keats's aestheticism, there is always the possible reading of the sublime and spiritual, given that this aestheticism always points to the spiritual. The problematic is even greater if one contends that spirituality always involves a feminine undertone, or a female principle. But is Keats himself trying to distract any attempt to see him as going beyond the bounds of physical love, or is he contributing to that however difficult?



In the next letter, addressed as well to Fanny, he says, “I long to believe in immortality. I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here – how short is the longest Life. I wish to believe in immortality – I wish to live with you for ever.” To Brown, he confesses about Fanny that, “My imagination is horribly vivid about her.” It is not clear whether the poet is referring to a mundane immortality with his love or otherwise. So the realm in which this immortality is desired is not expressly stated. But if we take a close look at the attempt to spiritualise, we notice that the poet means something far beyond the simplicity of love. This leads to an important observation. 1819 and 1820, as discussed in the previous chapter on Keats’s Gnosticism, were the years that he showed a great maturity in aesthetic and spiritual consciousness. He wrote all his love letters as well as poems directly written to Fanny during this period. Though they demonstrate a strong sense of erotic and sexual longing, linked with the material, they should not be taken to be subversive or aversive to his spiritual quest. They are not a contradiction, but an expression of complexity. Poems like ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ discussed under Gnosticism, are connected with human passion, but they express the strong desire for transcendence. As we shall see from a few poems, Keats’s unrequited love and emotional starvation is paradoxically a gift and necessity to the poet’s understanding of life’s deeper meaning. Fanny or the female image is a source of inspiration, a poetic symbol, a repository not only of phenomenal, but of ideal Beauty as well. As a feminine symbol, she is part of the poet’s creative psyche and psycho-aesthetically complement his masculinity.

‘Lines to Fanny’ is one of the so-called minor poems of Keats that can trigger interesting critical comment. The poem can be read from a similar dimension as Coleridge’s ‘Dejection: A Letter’ and ‘The Picture.’ It grapples with creative day-dreaming as a positive psycho-aesthetic measure, related with sublimation. Keats is very direct, for he conceals nothing about his feelings for Fanny. The persistent question is whether poetic transcription is a mere re-affirmation of his unrequited longing, or if it plays a positive role in assuaging his

erotic tension. The position here is that it obviously plays a therapeutic role, since the transforming of his erotic desire into aesthetic creativity suggests a modified frame of mind in the poet. In the first stanza Keats connects his longing with retrospection and introspection:

WHAT can I do to drive away  
Remembrance from my eyes? for they have seen,  
Aye, [but] an hour ago, my brilliant Queen!  
Touch has a memory. O say, love, say,  
What can I do to kill it and be free  
In my old liberty?

.....  
My muse had wings,  
And ever ready was to take her course  
Whither I bent her force,  
Unintellectual, yet divine to me; - Divine I say!  
(L 1 – 7, 11 – 15)

Keats's characteristic questioning attitude is very intriguing here. The first impression one may have here is that he wants to be free from the object of his affections. But the situation seems to be more complex rather than its implied simplicity. This is a typical situation of poetic day-dreaming, with the absent lover serving as inspiration, and delineating the poet as paradoxical running away from what he desires. The question of remembrance and seeing does not presuppose the actual sight of the poet, but formed mental images, or mental mirroring of what is not there. He is inextricably bound to love, whose touch and memory cannot be wiped out from the conscious or subconscious mind, but could be surmounted. With regard to the muse, the poem is primarily inspired by the one to whom it is addressed. Yet Keats talks about another muse, whom he associates with divinity. Whatever this second muse represents, it is also associated with the female principle, and can be taken to be a transcendental surrogate for Fanny.

The poet continues with his longing for a new orientation that is superior to love:

How shall I do  
To get anew  
Those moulted feathers, and so mount once more  
Above, above  
The reach of fluttering love,

And make him cover lowly while I soar?  
Shall I gulp wine?  
No, that is vulgarism,  
A heresy and schism,  
Foisted into the canon-law of love; -  
No, - wine is only sweet to happy men;  
More dismal cares Seize on me unawares, -  
Where shall I learn to get my peace again?  
(L. 18 – 30)

These lines are very suggestive and continuously point to a dire need to depart from mundane love to a more intense aestheticism and perhaps spirituality. “Those moulted feathers” underscore a mythical reference, that is, the myth of Icarus and Dedalus. The desire to soar above fluttering love, and the determination to do so not through vulgar means, even if he is constantly tempted, is a pointer to a positive vision. The last stanza captures the same issue, with the poet caught between erotic desires and the resolution to abandon or transcend them for a superior engagement, “Enough! Enough! it is enough for me/To dream of thee.” There is no real sign of frustration in this poem, and the poet/Keats’s decision for a new orientation is an added mark on the text itself as a medium through which he can positively come to terms with his love problems. Going back to the issue on gender poetics, one can say that Keats does not conceive of masculinity as absorbing femininity for its empowerment. Rather, masculinity seems to be unstable or dangling without the female principle. This therefore means that both are mutually inclusive of an inevitable androgynous self.

For more textual evidence to the argument, we are going to briefly discuss ‘The Eve of St. Agnes,’ and *Endymion*.<sup>13</sup> The ongoing critical debate on ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’ has problematised the question as to whether the poem should be read as an affirmation of the erotic to spiritual, as an expression of auto-eroticism, or as an expression of erotic and spiritual futility.<sup>14</sup> Besides, the poem has also strongly attracted the question of gender. The stance taken here recognises the strength of the phenomenal nature of eroticism, but proposes to re-affirm the contention that the attempt to transcend the limitations of the materiality of the

erotic to a spiritual realm, confirms part of Keats's understanding of the ontology of the imagination.

This poem presents the complex mixture of the expectations of the ritual involved on the eve of St. Agnes and the journey of Porphyro to win the heart of his love. We have established that it negotiates between the worldly and the spiritual, and tends to place emphasis on the latter, even if it is difficult to come by. There is no doubt that the background and atmosphere under which the romance is set is gothic and points to all signs of danger and uncertainty (Stanzas I, X, and XII). But limiting interpretation in this domain, with the assertion of futility and tragedy, may sound too simplistic. Though this atmosphere justly represents phenomenal reality, it can also indicate spiritual possibility.

Keats's choice of romance needs a close examination with regard to this problematic. Taking as preference a story line which delineates ease and simplicity in erotic and spiritual matters, must not have been in line with his world vision, partly contributed by his own bitter but enriching experiences. Therefore, his narrative choice does not actually aim at failure, but from a hermeneutic perspective, aims at the difficulty and complexity that involves any serious aesthetic and spiritual engagement. Difficulty and complexity hardly means impossibility. Porphyro does not have an easy task in getting into Madeline's chamber, nor does her vision so simply and clearly rendered or apprehended. This is a positive rather than a negative aspect of the story. Again, using a legend which associates love, marriage and spirituality must not have been coincidental to the poet, for such a story is far from being a parody or banality on religion. We will comment on those specific instances that substantiate the argument, focusing on a series of questions. Some include: Why does Porphyro chose to come on the same day that Madeline has to undergo her dream ritual? What are his intentions? Of whom does Madeline dream and what is the difference between her sleep dream and waking dream? If she dreams of Porphyro, is it because he is present in her chamber, or does this point to a holy or divine sanction? What makes the ending suggest a positive resonance

on the part of the lovers? How does the romance portray Keats's imaginative dramatisation of the subtle intricacies involved in love?

Porphyro is not new to the castle, he has been wooing Madeline, and Angela at least knows him. He knows it is St. Agnes Eve, but his coming is not obviously to compel or force Madeline to dream about him, and besides, there is no indication that she is expecting him. In fact, Angela brings to his attention that Madeline prays for him every day and night ("Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,/Were never miss'd," Stanza XVIII), which suggests a devotion that she has for him. Porphyro has no evil intention, he implores all saints to enable him have sight of Madeline. He wants to worship her beauty and if possible touch and kiss her (Stanza IX). And when he is reprimanded by Angela for his unruly behaviour, he assures her that he has no desire to hurt the very object of his love (Stanzas XVI and XVII). The idea proposed by Stillinger that he is dangerous, unheroic and even a rapist is therefore unfair. Like any other love seeker, his intentions sound normal, and his use of religious terminology does not imply an abuse of religion.

The most important instances are those of Madeline's supposed dream, the physical consummation of love with Porphyro and the elopement at the end of the poem. Madeline's vision and sleepy trance translate the problematic of the complicated nature of the poem. When Porphyro plays music and wakes her up the situation is intriguing:

Her eyes were wide open, but she still beheld,  
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:  
There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd  
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep  
At which fair Madeline began to weep,  
And moan forth witless words with many a sigh;  
While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;  
Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,  
Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.'  
Ah, Porphyro!' said she, 'but even now  
Thy voice was a sweet tremble in mine ear,  
Made tunable with every sweetest vow;  
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:

How changed thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!  
Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,  
Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!  
Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,  
For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go.'  
(Stanzas XXXIV and XXXV)

The question that comes to mind has to do with the nature of Madeline's dream. Has she been dreaming of Porphyro before he speaks in her sleepy state, or has she mistaken Porphyro's love protestations as her dream vision? It looks likely that her sleep vision points to a coincidence with Porphyro's presence. Whatever the case is, there is a difference between the visionary Porphyro and that of her waking experience. The words "painful change," "pallid," "chill" and "drear" contrast with "her dream so pure and deep," "sweetest vows" and "looks immortal." This contradiction suggests the duality that exists between the mundane and the spiritual. This description of Porphyro does not mean he or his love cannot possess spiritual ability. Porphyro's melting into her dream (Stanza XXVI) is a veiled expression of erotic consummation with her. Again, this is not necessarily subversive to spirituality. Though a material act, sexual intercourse can have a divine benediction. In other words, as far as it is not the most preferential in face of spiritual matters, there is nothing spiritually wrong with the sexual act. In the next stanza, she is convinced by Porphyro that she has not been dreaming. Though she accepts this, she all the same wants Porphyro to be her saviour. Porphyro, who considers himself a pilgrim who has toiled in his quest for her, accepts to elope with her from the dangers of her dreary home. They get out with ease, and even though we understand that they got into the storm, it is evident that they are triumphant and would possibly overcome other obstacles.

Instead of saying that the poem is a negative fiction because of the dominance of phenomenal description, we can alternatively say that it points to the difficulties involved in the struggle between mundane attraction and transcendental aspiration. That this poem is an optimistic imaginative dramatisation of Keats's relationship with Fanny, can appropriately be

compounded with the premise of self-referentiality or self-representation. But this is only to an extent, that is, a psycho-aestheticised rather than an actual issue.

*Endymion* is another controversial poem when addressing the question of gender, eroticism, and spirituality. The first observation here is that Keats was very plain about his intentions in composing this poem, which was a testing and maturing of his creative and aesthetic potential. But the poem cannot evade the question on the present debate. It should be recalled that this poem suffered almost the same fate of Coleridge's 'Christabel.' Keats's case proved delicate not only because he was condemned for poetic immaturity, but also because the story was considered self-referential to Keats. With regard to the self-sexualising act or auto-eroticism, a contemporary like Byron expressed the conviction that the poem was a mental masturbation act by Keats. In Chapter Four, the poem was viewed with regard to Keats's strategic engagements in the search for an aesthetic identity. We therefore analysed the poem in connection with aesthetic as well as philosophical knowledge, contending that an allegorical approach could best explain this. The question on the spiritual dimension of the poem was to be discussed here. We may take recourse once more to allegory, this time an allegory of the quest for ultimate Beauty, which connects with Keats's aestheticising strategies (see Chapter Five) and Neo-platonic influences. In other words, the poem allegorises the Platonic quest for Beauty. Keats's imaginative reconstruction of the myth is not just for mere narrative fiction, but a complex and difficult rendition of the depth and insight of sensual and erotic politics.

Endymion's adventure in the quest for love and beauty, his encounters in the four major stages of this quest, his decisions and choices and final vision all point to the longing for and the departure from pure physical notions of human relationships to a spiritual vision, or alternatively, his desire to depart from earthly or material Beauty to spiritual Beauty. Following the Neo-platonic concept of love and absolute Beauty,<sup>15</sup> we can hermeneutically understand Endymion's search for this quality in the three apparently different female

representations of his quest, who are a manifestation of physical and spiritual love as generative and self-transcending, to use John Barnard's words. Allegorically, Cynthia, Diana and the Indian maid are a progressive manifestation of Phoebe or the Moon goddess. The final vision of the poem is a divine sanction to Endymion's endurance, and suggests the spiritual possibility that goes beyond the erotic and sensual manifestations in the story. So the different dimensions of the Beauty of a single woman can be interpreted as relating to the Beauty of God and absolute reality. We are once more attracted to the question of the female principle as part of a spiritualising effort.

Endymion's quest from land through the underworld, ocean and back to land, this time connected with the celestial sphere, is a mixture of eroticism and sensuality and the drive towards the religious or the spiritual. There are many passages that substantiate this argument. We shall discuss a few of them. Passages that are highly erotic or sensual include Book I, (L. 835 – 42), Book II, (L. 739 – 743, 756 – 761, 806 – 821, and 944 – 948), Book III, (L. 983 – 985). Following the psycho-somatic realities of human beings, there should be nothing wrong with the expression of a strong erotic desire. In this case, passages of this sort are a positive psycho-aesthetic expression. Other specific passages include both the erotic and spiritual ramifications of Endymion's encounters. In Book I for instance he makes an interesting comment:

'Now if this earthly love has power to make  
Men's being mortal, immortal; to shake  
Ambition from their memories, and brim  
Their measure of content: what merest whim,  
Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,  
To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim  
A love immortal, an immortal too.  
Look not so wilder'd; for these things are true,  
And never can be born of atomies  
That buzz about our slumbers, like brain-flies,  
Leaving us fancy-sick. No, no, I'm sure,  
My restless spirit never could endure  
To brood so long upon one luxury,  
Unless it did, though fearfully, espy  
A hope beyond the shadow of a dream.



(L. 843 – 857)

This excerpt suggests the possibility of finding immortality through love, and the idea that earthly love can lead to a spiritual awareness that goes above its materiality. Endymion is convinced that his broodings cannot be wrong, given that his hope is that which goes above the shadow of a dream. His determination to pursue his goal is further expressed by the end of the Book when he decides to embark into the cave despite Peona's warning of the dangers involved:

I'll smile no more, Peona; nor will wed  
Sorrow, the way to death; but patiently  
Bear up against it: so farewell, sad sigh;  
And come instead demurest meditation,  
To occupy me wholly, and to fashion  
My pilgrimage for the world's dusky brink.  
No more will I count over, link by link,  
My chain of grief: no longer strive to find  
A half-forgetfulness in mountain wind  
Blustering about my ears:

(L. 965 – 104)

Endymion will neither renounce his engagements and nor let grief or sorrow deter him. Rather, he seeks a meditative mind and considers his adventure a pilgrimage. So what draws attention here is the process of learning and knowledge acquisition that love leads the hero into. His anticipated final vision is obviously not the mere sensuality and eroticism of the love, but the spiritual. In Book II a similar consciousness preoccupies Endymion, who this time is in the underworld. His questioning attitude (just like that of the poet himself) points to his preferences:

'How long must I remain in jeopardy  
Of blank amazements that amaze no more?  
Now I have tasted her sweet soul to the core,  
All other depths are shallow: essences,  
Once spiritual, are like muddy less,  
Meant to fertilise my earthly root,  
And make my branches lift a golden fruit  
Into the bloom of heaven: other light,  
Though it be quick and sharp enough to blight

The Olympian eagle's vision, is dark  
Dark as the parentage of chaos

.....

... 'I urge

Thee, gentle Goddess of my pilgrimage,  
By our eternal hopes, to soothe, to assuage,  
If thou art powerful, these lover's pains;  
And make them happy in some happy plains.'

(L. 902 – 912, 1013 - 1017)

The first part of the excerpt shows the complexity between earth-bound and spiritual love, manifested in Endymion's experience with his lover. He decides to get along the light of his goddess, seeing any other manifestation of light as inferior. Secondly, we have Endymion's plea to the goddess with regard to the myth of Alpheus and Arethusa. Their story may be comparable to his, and this plea may be transposed as his own as well, given that he has not attained his final vision of absolute Beauty. Book III continues with Endymion's adulation of the moon goddess, but points to a different emphasis in his quest. We have for instance:

Thou wast the charm of women, lovely Moon!  
O what wild and harmonised tune  
My spirit struck from all the beautiful!  
On some bright essence could I lean, and lull  
Myself to immortality: I prest  
Nature's soft pillow in a wakeful rest.  
But gentle Orb! there came a nearer bliss –  
My strange love came – Felicity's abyss!  
She came and thou didst fade, and fade away –  
Yet not entirely; no, thy starry sway  
Has been under-passion to this hour  
Now I begin to feel thy orby power I  
s coming fresh upon me: O be kind!  
Keep back thine influence, and do not blind  
My sovereign vision. – Dearest love, forgive  
That I think away from thee and live! –  
Pardon me, airy planet, that I prize  
One thought beyond thine argent luxuries!  
How far beyond!

(L. 170 – 188)

Here again, Endymion seems to be caught between earthly love and celestial love. He wants to give preference to another love, but does not want the goddess to completely fade away. This is evident again in Book IV, where Endymion expresses a disturbed sense of dilemma as to whether he has to accept the goddess or reconcile with earthly life, or both:

‘Why am I not as are the dead,  
Since to woe like this I have been led  
Through dark earth, and through the wondrous sea?  
Goddess! I love thee not the less: from thee,  
By Juno’s smile, I turn not – no, no, no –  
While the great waters are at ebb and flow, -  
I have a triple soul! O fond pretence –  
For both my love is so immense,  
I feel my heart is cut in twain for them  
(L. 86 – 95)

Whatever the situation, Endymion makes the decision to stay with earthly love and his sister rather than pursue the goddess. It appears his quest for ideal Beauty is no longer what is important. But it appears at the same time that it is this choice that paradoxically leads him to his final vision of immortality and ideal Beauty. Cynthia in reality is the goddess and representative of the ideal. This is captured when Endymion tells his sister that he would command their grief and fate if it were God’s will:

At which that dark-eyed stranger stood elate  
And said, in a new voice, but sweet as love,  
To Endymion’s amaze: ‘By Cupid’s dove,  
And so thou shalt! and by the lily truth  
Of my own breast thou shalt, beloved youth!’  
And as she spake, into her face there came  
Light, as reflected from silver flame:  
Her long black swell’d ampler, in display  
Full golden; in her eyes a brighter day  
Dawn’d blue, and full of love. Ay, he beheld  
Phoebe, his passion! joyous she upheld  
Her lucid bow, continuing thus; ‘Dear, dear  
Has our delaying been; but foolish fear  
Witheld me first; and then degrees of fate:  
And then ‘twas fit from this mortal state  
Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook’d-for change  
Be spiritualis’d.  
(L. 987 – 1003)

The transformation here is a reward for Endymion's strength and determination. His seems to be rescued by the very person he rejects, but more complicated is the idea that she is characterised by different variations, the most supreme being that which urged his quest from the outset. He can find spiritual hope in his love. This spiritual optimism connects with the vision of celestial Beauty. We must stress that Keats is still human even if he is spiritualised. So this spiritual discovery cannot be said to represent plenitude, since it remains deferral, justifying the hermeneutics of becoming. In the previous chapter, we discussed allegory with regard to Keats's aesthetic quests. The dimension of allegory here affiliates with that, because he shows a constant consciousness of seeing aestheticism as connected with the spiritual. If we consider Endymion as a representation of Keats, the argument will be that he uses his experience through a consciously modified myth to express an advanced statement on the inter-implication between the material and spiritual aspects of love. We need not emphasise the question of the female principle. Here, the muse is connected with the female gender, and spirituality as well. This can help in answering some of the questions raised with regard to Keats's androgynous mind. He is constantly mediating the female and male distinctions into the central pattern of his visionary experience. His optimism for sexual satisfaction is deeply transposed into an optimism for spiritual plenitude.

We have all along tried to discuss the dynamics of eroticism and the female image in both Coleridge and Keats. The similarities they share in this domain are very glaring. The psycho-aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of the imagination are treated alongside the different ways in which becoming and reality are also perceived. While all the expectations of the discourse might not have been fully attained, we have in the three different sections seen the complex nature of texts with regard to sublimation, stereotypes and spirituality. We have shown the extent to which aspects of self-referentiality or self-representation can be applied in the interpretative context, and the great role the female plays in the poets' aesthetic and spiritual investigations. To reassert our contention, this domain of the poets' life is far from

being a less important aspect of their imaginative vision. It ties in with and strongly contributes to the general aesthetic as well as sublime and spiritual character of lives and philosophy. The dynamic and transforming self lends credence to the conviction that the poetics of becoming finds expression in both writers with regard to female representations.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> One of the seminal works on Coleridge with regard to this issue is that of Anthony John Harding, *Coleridge and the Idea of Love: Aspects of Relationships in Coleridge's Thought and Writing* (1974). Harding's study ranges from 1795 – 1834, and sees the question of relationships from a very broad perspective, including friendship, love, religion and poetry. Using the "Conversational Poems," it offers a typically traditionally philosophical concept of love, though Harding touches religious and spiritual aspects of love, considered important and helpful in the formulation of the thrust of this chapter. He asserts that: "It appears that, as love similarly to religion reveals the permanent inner pattern, and calls the individual self out of itself to be re-created in a higher form, love can be not only analogous to religious experience but an advancement of it" p. 89. We shall reaffirm this statement with more emphasis on the issue. Martin Prochazka's "Coleridge's Love Poetry" (1995) also grapples with some of the main issues in Coleridge's love concerns. His central focus is the creative process in 'The Tale of the Dark Ladie,' a poem that was considerably trimmed and published as 'Love.' Seeing the poem as an expression of the clash of erotic and aesthetic variants, Prochazka contends that it provides the key to interpret love as a recuperative and unifying power.

<sup>2</sup> Details about the two ladies are scarce. Keats is said to have met Isabella Jones in October 1818 and developed a modestly romantic encounter with her. 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is said to have been written on her suggestion, and it is also probable that 'The Eve of St. Mark' was inspired by her. As an injunction that Keats respected, the relationship was to be kept secret, for she was mistress to Donald O'Callaghan, member of a prominent Irish Whig family with which she was connected. Jane Cox was a beautiful and intelligent girl for whom Keats felt an admiring sensuality, though no tint of real feeling. She is usually not associated with Keats's poetry.

<sup>3</sup> Coleridge's marital frustration finds expression both in his prose and poetry. In a letter addressed to George Bellas Greenough, dated April 13 1801, he expresses the sad reality of the disparity between his wife and himself: "Coldness perhaps and paralysis in all tangible ideas and sensations – all that forms real self – hence the slave of her. She creates her own self in a field of Vision and Hearing, at a distance, by her own eyes and ears – and hence becomes the willing Slave of the Ears and Eyes of others. – Nothing affects her with pain or pleasure as it is but only as other people will say it is – nay by an habitual absence of reality in her affections I have had a hundred instances that the being beloved, or the not being beloved, is a thing indifferent; but the notion of not being beloved –that wounds her pride deeply" (*Letters* Vol. II, pp. 718 – 719). Coleridge's wife is an estranged Other rather than part of himself. In the letter version of dejection, he still alludes to his domestic malaise:

I speak now of those habitual ills  
 That wear out Life, when two unequal Minds  
 Meet in one House and two discordant Wills –  
 This leaves me, where it finds,  
 Past Cure, and past Complaint, - a fate austere  
 Too fix'd and hopeless to partake of Fear!

.....  
 But that my coarse domestic Life has known  
 No Habits of heart-nursing Sympathy,  
 No Griefs but such as dull and deaden me,

No mutual mild Enjoyments of its own,  
No Hopes of its own Vintage, None O! none –  
(L. 242 – 248, 258 – 262)

To fulfil or activate this missing or dormant part of his psyche, he has to look elsewhere. Sara Hutchinson seems to have squarely suited what he wanted. But the complications in this relationship were very intriguing, even enigmatic. Only through psycho-aesthetics could he come to terms with impossibility of realising his dreams of Hutchinson.

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on the question of effeminacy and gender as a whole see, for instance, Cynthia M. Baer, “‘Lofty Hopes of Divine Liberty:’ The Myth of the Androgyne in *Alastor, Endymion*, and *Manfred*,” *Romanticism Past and Present* 9 (1985), pp. 25 – 49, *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne Mellor (1988). It features interesting essays like Alan Richardson, “Romanticism and the Colonisation of the Feminine” pp. 13 – 25, Marlon B. Ross, “Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity” pp. 26 – 51, Karen Swan, “Harassing the Muse” pp. 81 – 92, and Sonia Hofkosh, “The Writer’s Ravishment: Women and the Romantic Author – The Example of Byron” pp. 93 – 114. Most of the essays in this collection deal with the question of the appropriation to themselves of female attributes by the Romantic poets, connecting it with the androgynous rather than the imprisoning of female images. In fact, the androgynous self will be seen to be more appropriate rather than the effeminate. However interesting they are, they, as short essays, are limited to critical theory and method, providing no substantial textual backing. They are therefore characterised by assertion rather than textual demonstration. There is also Diane Long Hoeveler’s *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (1990), Anne Mellor’s *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), Sylvia Walby’s *Gender Transformations* (1997), and Andrew Elfenbein’s *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (1999), particularly “Danger Zone: Effeminate, Geniuses and Homosexuals” pp. 17 – 38.

<sup>5</sup> There are a series of notebook entries in which Coleridge continues to express his passion for Sara, and love in general. We have, for instance an 1808 entry:  
“For Love, passionate in its deepest tranquillity, Love unutterable fills my whole Spirit, so that every fibre of my Heart, nay, of my whole frame seems to tremble under its perpetual touch and sweet pressure, like the string of a Lute ... O well may I be grateful – She loves me – *me*, who – O noble generous, KØy! – Herein my Love, which in *degree* cannot be surpassed, is yet in *kind* Inferior to yours!” (*Notebooks* Vol. III, 3370)  
There are other examples, *Notebooks* Vol. III, 3562, 3386, and 3442.

<sup>6</sup> Though this poem is not overtly confessional, it can be suggested to form substantial evidence that the events leading to and even after its composition lend credence to the conviction that it is an advanced aesthetic presentation of Coleridge’s self-created reflection in the form of a kind of allegory. This poem appeared in the section of the *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) entitled “Love Poems.” The imagery that Coleridge utilises in this section is said to be drawn from a walking tour of the Lake Country he undertook in August 1802. A description of this tour finds expression in several of his notebooks (with landscape sketches) and also in a series of letters that he wrote Sara Hutchinson that summer. See *Collected Letters* Vol. II, particularly letter number 450 August 1 – 5 1802, pp. 834 – 841, 451 August 6 1802, pp. 841 – 845, 453 August 10 1802, pp. 848 – 851, 454 August ? 1802, p 851, and 456 August 25 1802, pp. 852 – 855. See also *Notebooks* Vol. I, particularly entries dated between August 1 – 9 1802, 1207 – 1228. All these give substantial grounds to a psycho-biographical reading. But as we have established, the intention is always to go beyond such readings.

<sup>7</sup> Most of the work I have come across in connection with this section are based on Romantic studies, with the background of previous views, that is, seventeenth and eighteenth century gender and feminist views. They include; Andrea Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity 1774 – 1830* (1996), Daniel Watkins, *Sexual Power in British Romanticism* (1996), Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (1996), Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* (1998), George Haggarty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (1999) and Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (1999). Haggarty’s introduction for instance tackles the very sophisticated understanding of different sexualities. The inherent complexity of sexuality, he contends, leads to several critical questions, How should it be called? queer studies? queer theory? Lesbian and Gay studies? sexuality studies? upon whom to focus? Homosexuals? gay men and lesbians? queers? sodomites? sapphists?

<sup>8</sup> For further reading see general works on lesbian theories like Bettie Wysor, *The Lesbian Myth* (1974). In fact, she is not concerned only with theory, but addresses literature as well, Chapter Six “Lesbianism

in Literature” pp. 190 – 256). David H. Rosen’s *Lesbianism: A Study of Female Homosexuality* (1974) also provides an insightful reading to lesbian theory. See particularly Part Three, “Female Homosexuality as a Way of Life” pp. 65 – 78. Here he tries to debunk the myth that has seen lesbianism as an abnormal, deviant or pathological problem. Marilyn Farwell’s *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narrative* (1996) also attracts interest with regard to the theoretical aspects of lesbianism, even though she strongly appropriates her theorisation and literary representations.

<sup>9</sup> Elfenbein uses extant literary works to contend that they serve as an unacknowledged background to Coleridge’s revisionist attitude to eighteenth-century lesbian representations. The obscene works that he holds to have inspired Coleridge include M. G. Lewis, *The Castle Spectre* (a gothic drama), Bishop Percy, ‘Sir Gauline’ (a ballad), *The Frisky Songster, Being a Select Choice of Such Songs, as are Distinguished for their Jollity, High Taste and Humour, and above two hundred Toasts and Sentiments of the most Delicious Order* (a collection of obscene songs, two important ones being ‘The Dispute’ and ‘The Crab-Tree’). The critic also holds that Coleridge must have read ‘Christabess,’ published by John Duncombe. Providing textual detail with ‘The Dispute’ and ‘The Crab-Tree,’ Elfenbein argues that they are set in a heterosexual atmosphere because the ladies involved here undress themselves, their defined intention being to determine who would please a man’s sexual desire, and for the erotic excitation of a gazing male respectively. So the scenes are not strictly same-sex consummation, but the all-female company suggests lesbian undertones.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Gittings’s seminal biography on the poet, *John Keats* (1968) provides some useful but controversial material on Keats’s sexual life. In Appendix 3 pp. 446 – 450, he discusses Keats and venereal disease, raising conjectural objections to the myth, which states that the poet’s promiscuity in Oxford earned him either syphilis or gonorrhoea. The most interesting objection is that Keats was a virgin and could not have caught a venereal disease. When we examine a poem like ‘Women, Wine, and Snuff,’ we are left with more perplexity rather than clarity over the issue:

GIVE me women, wine, and snuff  
 Until I cry out ‘hold, enough!’  
 You may do so sans objection  
 Till the day of resurrection;  
 For bless my beard they aye shall be  
 My beloved trinity.

As to whether these lines delineate Keats’s creed of a strong erotic and sensual life, or whether they are a mockery or parody on the Christian notion of the resurrection and the Trinity, is a very complicated question which is not possible to answer. There is another poem, a sonnet addressed to Fanny, which Keats neither intended to have published (Richard Monckton Milnes published it in 1848) nor did he include in any of his letters:

I CRY your mercy – pity – love! – aye, love!  
 Merciful love that tantalises not,  
 One-thoughted, never-wandering, guileless love,  
 Unmask’d, and being seen – without a blot!  
 O! let me have thee whole, - all – all – be mine!  
 That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest  
 Of love, your kiss, - those hands, those eyes divine,  
 That warm, white, lucent, million-pleasured breast, -  
 Yourself – your soul – in pity give me all,  
 Withhold no atom’s atom or I die,  
 Or living on perhaps, your wretched thrall,  
 Forget, in the midst of idle misery,  
 Life’s purposes, - the palate of my mind  
 Losing its gust, and my ambition blind!

This is an intense feeling of eroticism or sensuality, even pointing to a neurotic situation. The sonnet suggests a strong and overwhelming sexual impulse, demonstrated by the imagery. Yet, no matter whatever direction Keats’s eroticism is read, there is the undeniable fact that the poet always struggles to depart from issues on corporeality towards the sublime or spiritual. This is the aspect to which much materialist criticism is resistant. Keats was a poet of thought, but most importantly a poet of sensation (intuition, creative and productive imagination).

<sup>11</sup> There is still much controversy on the image of Fanny Brawne, especially when it comes to her attitude towards Keats. A good number of Keats’s letters indicate that there was a correspondence between the two of them. But, there are no letters yet available that justify Brawne’s side of the debate.

This notwithstanding, there is evidence that Fanny wrote Keats's sister Frances a series of letters, published by Oxford University Press 1937, in which she confessed her interest and even love for the poet. This can help in the re-evaluation of Keats's supposed obsession with Fanny, given that he must have been encouraged by the object of his love.

<sup>12</sup> Other letters addressed to Fanny, dealing with passion and love date, July 8 1819, and others between February and March 1820, whose precise dates are not traceable. Materialist readings see most of them as a continued expression of the physicality of Keats's passion for Brawne, and resist any interpretation relating to spirituality.

<sup>13</sup> We should be reminded that poems like 'Lamia,' 'Isabella,' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' have quite often been read as an antithesis to 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and even *Endymion*. The suggestion, or rather contention here is that these poems' engagements (with the exception of 'Isabella') are dominantly on the mundane side of love with no authentic spiritual affirmation. This should not necessarily be taken as self-referential. Keats's choices might as well be didactic rather than deconstructionist or self-destabilising. That is, the poems transcribe more than the personal to a general or universal message on the material and spiritual levels and limitations of love manifestations.

<sup>14</sup> We have already discussed the view of Jack Stillinger, who in "The Hoodwinking of Madeline," outrightly dismisses the question of religion or spirituality, comparing the plight of Madeline with that of the Knight in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and Lycius in 'Lamia.' Similar views have been aired out by Tilottama Rajan, "Threshold of Tragedy" pp. 97 – 140, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (1980). Her deconstructionist inclined contention is that the poem cannot be a central exemplification of Keats's idealist poetics. In fact, her assertion echoes that of Herbert Wright, whose rhetorical question (the very title of his essay), "Has Keats's 'Eve of St. Agnes' a Tragic End?," contends that all of his romances have a tragic resonance. Mark Sandy's "Dream Lovers and Tragic Romance: Negative Fictions in Keats's Lamia, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Isabella," *Romanticism on the Net* (2002), extends Rajan's convictions. With regard to all the lovers involved in the narrative fictions, he holds that, such lover's struggles against mutability are constantly tested by tragic realisations and the often suffocating infertility that their self-imposed isolation produces. He advances this position, affirming that Keats's lovers remain forever on the verge of regeneration and unregenerated, eternally suspended like the unconsummated couple on the Grecian urn or the sculpted dead in 'The Eve of St. Agnes.'

<sup>15</sup> A very fundamental though complicated rendition of the Neo-platonic philosophy of love finds expression in M.M. Bhattacheje's work, *Keats and Spenser* (1944). He quotes the Neo-platonic concept of the progression of the soul as elaborated by Pico Della Mirandola. This progressive movement involves six stages: From material Beauty we ascend to the First Fountain by six Degrees: (1) the soul through the sight represents to herself the Beauty of some particular person, inclines to it, is pleased with it and while she rests here, is in the first, the most imperfect material degree. (2) She reforms by her imagination the image she hath received, making it more perfect as more spiritual; and separating it from Matter, brings it a little nearer Ideal Beauty. (3) By the light of the agent Intellect abstracting this Form from all singularity, she considers the Universal Nature of Corporeal Beauty by itself; this is the highest degree that the soul can reach whilst she goes no further than sense. (4) Reflecting upon her own operation, the knowledge of Universal Beauty, and considering that everything founded in Matter is particular, she concludes this Universality proceeds not from the outward object, but her Intrinsic power; and reasons thus: If in the dimme Glasse of Material Phantasmes this beauty is represented by virtue of any Light, it follows that, beholding it in the clear Mirror of any substance divested of those Clouds, it will appear more perspicuous; thus turning into herself, she finds the Image of Ideal Beauty communicated to her by the intellect, the object of Celestial Love. (5) She ascends from this Idea in herself, to where Celestial Venus is, in her proper form: who in fullness of her Beauty not being comprehensible, by any particular Intellect, she, as much as in her lies, endeavours to be united to the first Mind, the chiefest of Creatures, and general Habitation of Ideal Beauty. Obtaining this, she terminates, and fixeth her journey; this is the sixth and last degree (pp. 109 – 110). Though this progressive stages may not be strictly applied in the case of Keats, what is understandable is that *Endymion* demonstrates a similar, even if complicated, progression from the materiality of love to a spiritual sphere, which transcends the material but must operate through it.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has been grappling with the poetics of becoming as a fundamental and innovating phenomenon in understanding idealism in Romantic textual discourse in Coleridge and Keats, engaging readings and interpretative contexts that mediate between typical Romantic visionary criticism and certain strands of modern and Postmodern critical theory like psychoanalysis, feminism, intertextuality, New Historicism and Deconstruction. The novelty of the thesis lies in the contention that the poetics of becoming, as a strand of Romantic discourse, has received relatively little attention in extant interpretative engagements. Yet it rescues Romantic texts from the radically idealist readings of Romantic visionary critics and deconstructive propositions, either on the grounds of anti-theory, or a rejection of Romantic idealism and the conceptualisation of alternative constructive approaches in discussing Romantic textuality. The major issue has been a modified understanding of Romantic idealism, which has dominantly been seen from two extremist and almost irreconcilable perspectives. That is, both visionary criticism and modern, Postmodern and Poststructural criticism have made almost stereotypical assumptions on poetic and prose texts, so much so that there is a need for reconstruction or re-conceptualisation of their meaning. The poetics of becoming has largely been interpreted against the background of Schlegelian and Mellorian discourse of Romantic fragmentation and irony, and to a limited context, Hegelian dialectics. It becomes difficult to discuss epistemological or ontological issues in Romanticism without recourse to the notion of Romantic idealism and what it entails. The enigmatic problem has always been its ramifications with regard to different critical and theoretical perspectives.

The discussion has also posited antithetical and contrastive views in modern theoretical and practical criticism with regard to New Historicism and psychoanalysis. The rejection of idealist philosophy by New Historicism, which de-personalises and de-spiritualises Romantic texts, and negative psychoanalysis of Romantic idealism, which

discusses self-presence in terms of an irreparable psychic distortion and self-de-stabilisation, are what bring these critical perspectives in close relation with Deconstruction. In other words, they are a deconstruction and dismantling of Romantic idealism, though not of the Derridean, de Manian or Millerian sort.

We have advanced a justification for treating both Coleridge and Keats, and have reiterated the relevance of their similarities in several portions of the work. It is quite evident that the distancing of both poets as belonging to two different strands of English Romantic discourse can be bridged, given that the texts of both have almost similar aesthetic and spiritual concerns, with little dissimilarities that do not really impinge their unified goal, and the context of the poetics of becoming in which they are discussed.

We have, in the introductory part of the project, tried to briefly comment on or give operational definitions of concepts like becoming, Romantic idealism, Deconstruction and other important ones, including Romanticism, Romantic Visionary criticism, Postmodernism, creative process, constructive deferral, beauty, truth, imagination that relate to the main thrust of the arguments. The various readings and interpretative contexts have analysed Coleridge's and Keats's texts from an aesthetic (the aesthetic here highly implicates epistemological and ontological perspectives) and a spiritual point of view, with the phenomenology of becoming justifying a break with or challenge to some of the stereotypical attributes of Romantic idealism. This phenomenology of becoming justifies part of the ways in which the concept of grasping an ideal is apprehended. Spiritual and non-discursive reality, beauty and truth, constitute some of the desired ideals, and have all been viewed from a dual dimension, with the contention that they appeal both to rational and empirical or phenomenal terms, and idealist, transcendental or spiritual, that is, noumenal or metarational terms. And throughout the chapters, other important terminological issues have been discussed or commented on, in view of treating selected prose or poetic texts. In Chapter One, we have viewed terms that relate to theoretical criticism like hermeneutics, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, New

Historicism and Deconstruction. In Chapter Two, we have as examples spirituality, symbol, German Romantic philosophy and Idealism, Romantic irony, constructive deferral and Being. In the third chapter we have handled issues like childhood, psycho-aestheticism, intentionality, self-mirroring and the dynamism of narcissism. Poetic revisionism, or more precisely the psychology of anxiety and antithesis, allegory and myth-making, constitute the major discourse in Chapter Four. Chapter Five has commented on orthodox theology and Orientalism, and discussed Gnosticism and constructive deferral. And Chapter Six has viewed sublimation, stereotypes, gender, sex and sexuality

The hypothetical statement of the thesis proposed interpretative contexts, which see the texts of Coleridge and Keats as constructive of a poetics of becoming, stressing with firm emphasis on the concept of constructive deferral that this is discernible and exemplified by the Romantic self-awareness of paradox, irony, progressive antithetical thinking or constructive anti-self-consciousness or logical and constructive self-contradiction. Though a central term in Romantic aesthetics and philosophy, the imagination, which necessitates the understanding of Romantic idealism and becoming, is not the key to everything, even if it gives this impression. It informs the limits of its attempts at perfectibility of expression and insight, but proves to be re-creative, constitutive and constructive. Idealism implicates aestheticism and spiritualism, which are distinctive but inextricably intertwined in the way this project treats them. In other words, aestheticism is not a matter of art for art's sake, for it has an epistemological significance and also points to an ontological direction. The ontological implications of the imagination require the question of becoming and being. With regard to the interpretative paradigms adopted in the project, Being, as discernible from selected texts, is viewed as temporality, and becoming suggests another greater and anticipated dimension of Being to which transcendental reality and possible finality is attributed. The poetics of becoming therefore resists Schlegel's Romantic theory of irony (and becoming), which argues for the non-progressive contradiction of self, and Hegel's transcendental dialectics, which expound

the attainment of absolute knowledge. Constructive deferral points to becoming as the continued effort to attain the pursued aesthetic or spiritual ideal.

This conclusion necessitates a series of important questions regarding the thesis: Has the project satisfactorily met its ambitions? Has it been conscious and critical of its own concepts and assumptions? That is, to what extent have the arguments raised met the thrust of the project's arguments? Has it shown any improved and advanced reading and interpreting with regard to extant critical assumptions, that is, has the project made any contribution? Given the complexity of the issues raised in the project, all expectations might not have been met, but most of the assertions and claims made, are substantially affirmed. From a self-critical perspective, this is a remarkable aspect of the project, for certain false assumptions, especially relating to the belief that a reader implicitly understands certain conceptual presuppositions, and textual evidence from mere reference and not careful explanation and concrete demonstration, have been avoided or minimised. Yet, textual evidence has proved at times to be very complex and intriguing, limiting the validity of arguments at certain junctures. That is, there is the recognition of the limits of practically analysing theoretical assumptions, the paradox being that it stimulates and enriches the debate, and also points to the question of the project as critical to its arguments.

Chapter One has all along been a fundamental pace-setter to the many claims made in the project. Dealing with a review of extant related literature, and doing this in the context of certain theoretical and practical issues on reading and interpreting, this section marks and maps the bases of the major arguments of the work. Its impact is felt throughout the work, because it provides the contrastive or antithetical background against which new or modified arguments are made. The tendency in the chapters has always been to echo or recapitulate some of the critics' concerns for the purposes of convenience. We also notice further readings in the various chapters, most of which particularly serve as affirmative to some of the critical or analytical issues raised. From extant readings in this chapter, we have categorised the

review with a diversity of theoretical and practical issues under the broad topics of phenomenology and hermeneutics, psychology, ideological criticism and postmodernism. The statement of research serves as an affirmation of the hypothesis of the work.

The examination of the complexity of nature in Coleridge has been the major preoccupation of Chapter Two, “Metaphysical Ecology: Nature and the Transcendental Realm.” The contention is that the dynamics of becoming involves a discourse that cannot evade the imagination and its transcendental ramifications. The imagination is viewed here as an aesthetic faculty, but most importantly as a spiritual faculty. The strong contention here, in connection with the debunking of the myth of the two irreconcilable phases of Coleridge’s life, is that Coleridge’s pantheistic and monistic vision forms the strongest spiritual convictions that he held all through his life. Such convictions were not without adversity and setbacks, but he remained focused and progressive rather than regressive or deconstructive. That Coleridge’s transcendental and spiritual experience, as transcribed in texts, are an expression of a finite attainment of his vision, appears to be an exaggeration and very uncritical as well. That his so-called recourse to Christianity in the late phase of his life and poetic career was an abandoning and rejection of his early intuitive and visionary potentials, sounds too simplistic and reductive. That his texts are expressive of terminal uncertainty and aporia, without reaching at any conceptual and satisfying meaning, is an unfair attempt not to recognise idealism and constructivism in Romantic consciousness and its position within the development of Western philosophy.

The move has been to locate texts within the poetics of becoming, which stresses the need to distance the question of the transcendental and spiritual nature of the imagination and spiritual reality from the extreme categorisations of visionary criticism, Historicism and Deconstruction, or any other critical approach that limits its understanding of the terms to problematically reductive spheres. A number of important issues are raised here. There is the problematic of authorial intention and the question of the self as subject, which claims the

possibility to read and interpret written texts as self-referential or self-representational of Coleridge. The question of influences on Coleridge by other contemporaries, most especially German Romantic philosophers, has helped to situate Coleridge's assumptions on a number of important issues such as the imagination, the will and the symbol. Most importantly, they help in the conceptualisation of the poetics of becoming, which it should be reiterated, is the core of Romantic aestheticism and spiritualism. His poetic and prose texts have therefore been seen not as finite statements about epistemological and ontological representations, but as situated within the domain of becoming. The self is fluid and dynamic rather than fixed. So a text cannot say all about the self, but provides hermeneutic and phenomenological clues to its understanding. In fact, if Coleridge's developing self demonstrated any tint of conservatism, this conservatism was obviously his transcendental idealism. The imaginative reconstruction of fragmentation, complexity and irony, have been treated within the phenomenological and hermeneutic dynamics of becoming, which is characterised by constant process, and typifies the self-consciousness and anti-self-consciousness or logical self-contradiction of ontological broodings. In this regard, the poetics of becoming is to be regarded as constructive deferral, showing the self as constantly undergoing modification in the struggle for a desired idealist goal. The goal is the attainment of the ultimate reality of Being or the One. No categorical answers can be provided as to whether this ideal is achieved or not, but that it is permanently pursued is unchallenged.

Chapter Three, "Psychological Introspection and Retrospection: The Self in Time," employs Freudian, and to an extent Jungian psychoanalysis to debunk the myth of Coleridge's embattled psychic life and place it within the context of becoming. This chapter is inextricably related with Chapter Two, because it throws more light on the problematic of Coleridge's visionary potential as he approached old age, pointing once more to the self as process and becoming. The question of Coleridge's supposed neurotic or hysterical problems, encapsulated in his writing as expressive of self-destabilisation or self-disunity, has

paradoxically been justified by critics, who use the very same psychoanalysts whose dynamics on art and creativity we positively use here. The main thrust of this chapter is that the attempt to unify re-creatively through the balance and synthesis of psychic opposites, preoccupied Coleridge all through his life. This shows that interpretative engagements that treat his life as characteristic of a dichotomous and irreconcilable self sound very unsatisfactory. His philosophy of the synthesising and reconciling potential of the imagination justifies this. Most critics wrongly tend to read his difficulties at self-unification and harmony as an expression of complete failure and futility. The question of self-textualisation does not only justify an honest aestheticising of Coleridge's sense of self-disunity between childhood and adulthood, but points to a constitutive and constructive attempt to harmonise this split self. In this vein, the synthesising and re-creative potential of the imagination is positively understood rather than seen or apprehended as an expression of irresolvable guilt and negative narcissistic manifestations.

Self-mirroring and the Other as a mirror to the questing self, engage a possible phenomenological creation of harmony. It is not self-destabilisation nor is it self-deconstruction nor projection or transference of problems on others. As already pointed out, this is not without enormous difficulty, but texts as aesthetic expression from a Freudian or Jungian perspective, have a therapeutic effect on the poet's psychology, and show his self as constantly transforming. The question of becoming is not primarily viewed here from a primarily spiritual aesthetic, though it is not unconnected with it, but as delineating the self as constantly engaged in antithetical and paradoxical processes, but at the same time progressing towards a final state of harmony. It is this wholeness of self which reassures the transcendental and spiritual possibility in Coleridge. From a narcissistic dimension, we have discussed that Coleridge's case is very positive rather than a problematic pathological situation that cannot be remedied. His narcissistic traits are healthy and rewarding and point

once more to his anti-self-consciousness as an appropriate fluidity and dynamic of the development or regenerating the self rather than a static or regressive state.

The aesthetic dimension of Keats's nature-consciousness and mytho-poetic experience and expression form the basis for the investigations on the poetics of becoming in Chapter Four. The dimension with which nature is treated is dominantly connected with Keats's aesthetic quest, which forms the main contention of his mytho-poetic experience. Though Keats treats nature from a largely reductive perspective, there is a Coleridgean or Wordsworthian strain in his nature-consciousness. He does not universalise nature, but his aestheticist approach to nature shows an awareness of its sublime and spiritual impact on the human mind. With regard to mytho-poetic experience, the paradigmatic stance adopted is intertextuality and revisionism, with specific reference to Harold Bloom's psychological theory of anxiety and influence. The issue here is not Keats's indebtedness to Spencer, Milton, Shakespeare or Hunt. The aesthetic dimension of the imagination sees it as a reconstructive potential, given that Keats's recourse to classical Greek literature and culture is not a simple re-enactment but a self-implicated issue. In other words, Keats's employment of myth is self-referential, as it points to an aesthetic process which does not only demonstrate artistic identity, but significantly links epistemological and ontological concerns. This antithetical but dynamic process of aesthetic development is justified as Keats's self-consciousness of becoming greater, that is, advanced in intellectual maturity and spiritual acuity. His poetic and prosaic texts justify this positively changing awareness of his self. Knowledge is an important word here, which connects with the dynamics of being and the question of Gnosis and spiritual reality discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five is a deconstruction or decentring of the myth of Keats's (non)spiritual life. This chapter, "Keats's and the Gnostic Tradition: Inner Self-Searching," is a continuation and advanced dimension of the aestheticism discussed in the previous chapter. It is a rehabilitation of Keats's spiritual speculations and convictions. Antithetical to the arguments



that Keats was nothing but an aesthete who lacked the visionary potential of Coleridge, that he was a pagan, agnostic or atheist, and that he was an ardent believer and worshipper of classical Greek deities, this chapter treats him as demonstrating a Gnostic consciousness within which the centrality of becoming is apprehended. Some of the relevant theories of Gnosticism have been discussed against the background of Christianity in which Keats wrote. The argument is that Keats's imagination demonstrates a Gnostic strain, which involves epistemological and ontological variances. Through Gnosis, self-knowledge leads to self-discovery and self-revelation. Spirituality is an individualistic issue and the divine is situated within the human, though it is considered as a spark which can attain complete plenitude only in a post-corporeal existence. Considerable textual evidence substantiates this view, not without pointing to the complexity and tricky or intriguing nature of some of the selected texts.

The question of becoming which involves the graspability of spiritual non-discursive reality is also central here. Keats distinguishes between phenomenal truth and spiritual truth, phenomenal reality and spiritual reality, and phenomenal or aesthetic beauty and ultimate beauty. The former categories are embedded in materialism, which according to Gnostic tenets, have to be annihilated, while the latter pertain to the transcendental which, justifies the longing and capacity for spiritual plenitude and immortality. The ultimate of real Being is an anticipated transcendental reality and therefore embedded in the context of becoming. So the question of creative and constructive deferral comes in place once more. Just as in the interpretative procedures in Chapters Two and Three, Keats's poetic or epistolary texts are not treated as an expression of finite experience, but as constituting a dynamic and progressive process, characterised by ironic and antithetical thinking. Keats understood the limits of the material and phenomenal, but was a very spiritually conscious poet. If he was not consciously Gnostic, his aesthetic and spiritual philosophy strongly points to Gnosticism.

It was deemed important to discuss the question of eroticism and its relation with psycho-aesthetics and spirituality. The sixth chapter, “The Erotic Motive: The Female Image in Coleridge’s and Keats’s Poetic Experience,” has tried to tackle this. The question of eroticism and sensuality as epistemological and ontological, connects with the problematic of femininity, effeminacy, masculinity and the androgynous, and provides the context within which we can apply the poetics of becoming. Again, different strands of the notion of becoming have been discussed in connection with Freudian psychoanalysis. The imaging of the female and how the feminine operates within the epistemological and ontological broodings of the poets, show an interesting mixture of aesthetic and transcendental possibility. Though without going into details, questions on gender and sexuality have been commented on or made reference to, against the background of problematic stereotypical categorisations, which in every indication are challenged by both poets.

This chapter’s textual substantiation sees both Coleridge and Keats from very complex perspectives with regard to a critical evaluation of the above categorisations. Coleridge has been viewed from a dual perspective. That is, from a self-referential point of view, and an altogether non-referential point of view. We have demonstrated with two poems that Coleridge uses his erotic longings in a psycho-aesthetic and spiritual way, which shows the positive way in which he handles matters of experience in life in this domain. The female image plays a vital role of self-completion and therefore resists readings that point to a masculine attempt at overpowering a weak or subordinate feminine Other in a patriarchal or phallogocentric conception. The second perspective has tried to provide a refreshing reading with regard to the redefinition and re-examination of gender stereotypes. Here the attempt has been to transform a once strongly controversial poem into an acceptable modern reading with regard to homosexuality, specifically lesbianism.

Keats has also been seen from more positive readings with regard to eroticism and spirituality. His poetry also shows an androgynous mind with regard to female influence on

male psychology. His female presentations and eroticism cannot be trivialised or marginalised into simple acts of sensuousness and sensuality, for they strongly contribute to the understanding of the aesthetic and spiritual ramifications of his life. In both poets, the role of the imagination and the extent to which becoming and reality can be treated, have been viewed in relation to the complex arguments. So we once more reiterate that the concerns of this chapter play a major role as part of the central aesthetic and spiritual speculations of the poets.

As already stated, this project might not have met all its lofty expectations on the phenomenological and hermeneutic investigations on the Romantic concept of becoming. But the various chapters have tried to map out a direction, which shows the extents of its achievements. Given the complexity in understanding Coleridge and Keats, the arguments in this work are not a final statement in reading and interpreting them. Rather, they are arguments which are substantially valid only in the context and limits of the theoretical paradigms and selected works used. The debate goes on. One clear fact, however, is that the centrality of idealism and becoming in Romantic discourse is unavoidable even if it is impeachable. This innovating approach can be applied within a larger context of Romanticism. The real problem that continues to pose its presence, is how exactly this phenomenon has to be viewed as different critical perspectives indicate.

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