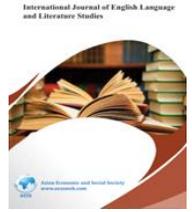




International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies

journal homepage: <http://www.aessweb.com/journal-detail.php?id=5019>



S T COLERIDGE'S SEARCH FOR UNITY IN A HETEROGENEOUS UNIVERSE: PERCEPTIONS AND POETIC EXPRESSION

Charles Ngiewih TEKE¹

ABSTRACT

This essay wrestles with an innovative and refreshing reading of Coleridgean perceptions and poetic experimentation of unity in diversity. The poetics of Romantic idealism continues to resist postmodernist academic ventures on Romantic hermeneutics and phenomenology. Coleridgean prose and poetry texts are interpreted as articulating a dynamics of fusion, the former serving as philosophical bases of transcendental idealism and the latter as substantiation of self-experiencing and possibility. The texts and excerpts used have hitherto not attracted much critical attention. The question of unity in a heterogeneous universe takes on board Coleridge's conceptualisation of symbol, will, beauty, reality and imagination as the culmination of transcendental fusion of the whole. In a world where environmental issues are taking centre stage it become relevant to revisit Romantic articulations on the physical and metaphysical connotations of everything that underlies nature. Re-reading Coleridge provides clues in this direction.

Key Words: Romantic idealism, Imagination, Romantic symbol and will, Reality and beauty, Unity in heterogeneity and transcendental fusion.

Received: 5 May 2012 / Revised: 13 September 2012 / Accepted: 17 September 2012 / Published: 21 September 2012

INTRODUCTION

This essay examines Coleridge's prosaic theorisation and poetic expression of his conception of oneness in diversity. He made 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 connected with some of the nature poems he wrote. For example in his

¹ Assistant Professor, European Union (MC-IIF) Guest-Researcher Department of English and American Studies University of Munich Germany E-mail: tekengiewih@yahoo.com

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. (94)

This sounds Deist, but it is important to note that Coleridge was already changing this stance toward what one might have considered deist inclinations. 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 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. (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 fusion, justified in the upward move of ascending. The impression one can draw 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, 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, 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 he was to expound in *Biographia Literaria*.

ROMANTIC SYMBOL AND WILL

In all of his early and later views on the imagination, the question of symbol is increasingly unavoidable as it plays a very vital role in the operative functions of the imagination. Symbol 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. 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?" (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*, 2546)

This excerpt explicitly or implicitly conveys the idea of what one can term the apocalypse of inner life, which is inextricably linked to the Divine Reality, or what Coleridge himself calls the Logos, Creator, or Evolver. This can also mean that in recognising and identifying nature's symbols, it becomes possible to get 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. 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 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 gives some mysterious insight into an unspeakable spiritual reality, given its connection with the searching soul. Like the imagination in which it operates, symbols 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*” (156). In *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) symbol is connected with the idea of understanding, Coleridge receiving 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 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. (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 [1].

Like symbol, another very pivotal concept necessary in the discussion of the Coleridgean imagination is will. The question of will connects with self-consciousness, subjectivity and authorial intention. [2] 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.

Teleological choice in Coleridgean hermeneutics 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 from a negative hermeneutic or phenomenological basis. 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. A poem that is interpreted in the sense of failure, is unfairly interpreted, because it cannot be taken to represent everything 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, however controversial, 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.

ROMANTIC REALITY, BEAUTY AND IMAGINATION

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 very common in New Historical discourse of Romanticism. In this essay phenomenal reality is 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 transcendental harmony, 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 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 the Logos towards and into which the human soul strives to fuse. The imagination leads to an ultimate reality which is spiritual, 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 [3] 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. (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 an 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. 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 never perfected, while to Mellor (1980) the ultimate reality in Romantic metaphysics is becoming, that is, the process itself. In Coleridge 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 seminal 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 critical examination in view of substantiating Coleridge's poetics of unity. 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. (304 – 305)

This definition indicates Coleridge's self-consciousness of the imaginative faculty as engaged in processes, and therefore expressive of fusion 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 for dividing the two phases but for dividing the world perceived from 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 evokes 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 everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole. (15 – 18)

This statement goes not only in an aesthetic direction, towards poets, but also in an ontological and practical direction, towards the Romantic man. It evokes both the aesthetic and spiritual broodings of experience. No matter what negative criticism this idealisation of the imagination has received from Deconstruction, 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 in 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 Romantic poetics as a permanent struggle to achieve the pursued ideal. The whole process 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.

REASSESSING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

If Coleridge is said not to have attained the 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 (1995) has pointed out in her deconstructionist reading, or describing an alien and unobtainable Other to his self as other deconstructionists like Jean-Pierre Mileur (1989) and David Hogsette (1997) expound. Jean Mileur has 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 (1980) 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.

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 transcribe in logical and discursive terms what is generally non-discursive and metaphysical. This is basically what critics should try to understand about his poetics. 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.

One could be tempted on psychoanalytical grounds to situate 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, Spiritual Fusion and the Progressive Self

The section attempts 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 upward 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 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 the first poem 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 with the others, brings to mind a number of issues about Coleridge’s entire poetry in connection with our central investigation of this essay. 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 inscribes 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” prefigure the major development of Coleridge’s formulation of

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

In the second poem, 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 the third poem 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 transcendental enthusiasm. Here the poet expresses delight in the abundance of nature while hoping that after death he will fully 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 aptly demonstrated and therefore represents early notions in poetry that were to correlate with the theorisation 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 inexhaustible 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 he wrote, Coleridge has been credited only with a handful. '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 so called canonical poems that Coleridge is recognised to have written.

These 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 some of the poems will be analysed with the thrust of our argument, and in conjunction with the previously analysed 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, it is the likes 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 the transforming self embedded in Schlegelian Romantic philosophy and Coleridge's cosmic vision encapsulated in his immanental pantheism and monism. Three symbols attract our attention, the breeze, [4] 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. 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.[5]

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 they virtually have 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
Spirit 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 then 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:

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 [6] 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 in the unity of the whole.

ENDNOTES

1. 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 is 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.

2. 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).

3. 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 of German 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.

4. 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" (25 – 43).

5. 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.

6. 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.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor.** Poetical Works. Part 1. Ed. J. C. C. Mays. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Barth, Robert.** "Theological Implications of Coleridge's Theory of Imagination," Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today. Ed. Christine Gallant. New York: AMS Press, 1989. Pp.3 – 13.
- Cooke, Michael G.** The Romantic Will. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Eco, Umberto.** Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language. London: The Macmillan Press, 1985.
- Hogsette, David S,** "Eclipsed by the Pleasure Dome: Poetic Failure in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan,'" Romanticism on the Net, 5. <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/eclipsed.htm> 1997. Accessed on August 22 2012.
- McFarland, Thomas.** Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969. "Imagination and Its Cognates: Supplementary Considerations," Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination Today. Ed. Christine Gallanet. New York: AMS Press, 1989. Pp.15 – 30.
- Mellor, Anne K.** English Romantic Irony. London: Methuen, 1980.

Mileur, Jean-Pierre. “Deconstruction as Imagination and Method,” Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination Today. Ed. Gallant Christine. New York: AMS Press, 1989. Pp.65 – 82.

Miller, J. Hillis, “On Edge: The Crossways of Contemporary Criticism,” Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism. Eds. Morris Eaves and Michael Fischer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986. Pp.96 – 126.

Modiano, Raimonda. “Sameness or Difference? Historicist Readings of ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Complete, Authoritative. Texts of the 1798 and 1817 Versions with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives. Ed. Paul Fry. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. Pp.187 – 219.

Murfin, Ross, “Deconstruction,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Complete, Authoritative Texts of the 1798 and 1817 Versions with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives. Ed. Paul Fry. New York: St. Martins Press, 1999. Pp.261 – 282.

Rajan, Tilottama. Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology: Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Rzepka, J. Charles. The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Stillinger, Jack. “Poets Who Revise, Poets Who Don’t, and Critics Who Should (Issues of Authorship Seen in the Works of Keats and Coleridge),” The Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol.30. 1996. Pp.199 – 233.

Wheller, Kathleen “Coleridge and Modern Critical Theory,” Coleridge’s Theory of Imagination Today. Ed. Christine Gallant. New York: AMS Press, 1989. Pp.83 – 102.

Wilkie, Brian, “The Romantic Ideal of Unity,” Coleridge’s Theory of the Imagination Today. Ed. Christine Gallant. New York: AMS Press, 1989. Pp.30 – 47.

Yu, Eric K. W, “Romantic Alienation Reconsidered,” Dong Hwa Journal of Humanistic Studies, 1. 1999. Pp.235 – 263.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.