The Development of the Concepts of Materialism and Idealism in the Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

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January 2018
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the development of the concepts of materialism and idealism in Coleridge’s poetry and philosophy. ‘Trace’, in this sense, signifies the poet’s interaction with earlier and contemporary schools of philosophy and how their thoughts and influences contributed to the gradual evolution of his poetic identity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As such, the study will trace Coleridge's literary and philosophical development from his early engagement with classical literature and philosophy, particularly Plato, down to Neoplatonism which will be initially represented here by the two key figures of Thomas Taylor (1758-1835) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). The significance of this study lies in the renewed attention it will give to the poet’s endeavours to reform what he regarded as the constrictive influence of post-Lockean British philosophy. Furthermore, it attempts to show the poet's creative and causative abilities through which he has shown the possibility of synthesizing poetry and philosophy, mind and matter, in such a way that refutes the hypothesis of mind’s passiveness in front of mechanical nature. It will, therefore, demonstrate how Coleridge’s imagination invigorates the mind to transcend beyond the sphere of matter and nature itself.
Acknowledgements

I have been inspired by Coleridge since my undergraduate years at the College of Arts/University of Baghdad. Therefore, I am delighted to have been given the opportunity of completing a PhD thesis about him. I am indebted to the Iraqi ministry of higher education for helping me to realize this aspiration. I have accrued other debts of gratitude. First of all, I am sincerely grateful to my supervisor, Professor Philip J. Shaw, with whom I have never felt alone or without support. Thank you, Phil, for helping me to make the seeds of this project a mature ‘‘broad-breasted, old oak tree’’, for your patience and understanding, and for your wholehearted ‘‘Best wishes,’’ with which you sign off your encouraging emails.

The College Postgraduate Development Fund at the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities has generously awarded me five bursaries towards the costs of my participations in a variety of literary fora in York, Cambridge, Wales, Bristol, and Strasburg/ France. These participations enriched my experience and enhanced my self-confidence and presentation skills. I want to specifically thank Dr Kathy Baddiley-Davidson for her cheerfulness and efficient help. I like to express my gratitude to Dr Felicity James and Dr Julian North for their encouragement and willingness to speak with me about my project. Also I am grateful to Professor Tim Fulford and Dr Richard Berkeley for their invaluable comments and assistance as conference directors and as inspiring tutors. Thanks are also due to my colleagues at the School of English, specifically Dr Nisreen Yousef for her matchless congenial company, Rachel Evans, Sara Alzahrani, and Mona Albassam for their affections and cooperation with me. I am also indebted to the administrative staff of the School of English, particularly Stephanie Collins and Angela Hullait.

Lastly, and of course by no means the least, I would like to heartily thank my beloved family in Iraq: my dear mother, my sisters Nahla and Hala. Thanks to the second most important person in my life, my wife Sarah and my adored children Alaq and Alhassan who offered me their best support, love, and care throughout my PhD journey. Thanks to my lovely nieces and nephews Duaa, Rafal, Dania, Hussein, Mohammed Ali, and Ibrahim for their kind wishes and sincere prayers.

This thesis is respectfully dedicated to the heroes of Iraq, fallen and alive, who were combating terrorism during the time this thesis was written.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. i

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ ii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................... iii

List of Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................... iv

**Introduction** ..................................................................................................................................... 1

I. Thomas Taylor ................................................................................................................................. 2

II. Ralph Cudworth ............................................................................................................................... 10

III. Thesis Structure .......................................................................................................................... 14

**Chapter One** .................................................................................................................................. 16

I. Coleridge and the Kantian Thought ......................................................................................... 20

II. Coleridge, Kant, and Nitsch ...................................................................................................... 23

**Chapter Two** .................................................................................................................................. 50

I. “Imitations of Du Bartas” ........................................................................................................... 55

II. “Limbo: A Fragment”: ............................................................................................................... 57

III. “The Pang More Sharp Than All” ............................................................................................. 61

IV. “Christabel” ................................................................................................................................. 70

**Chapter Three** ................................................................................................................................ 84

I. Hartley, “our Greatest Metaphysician” .................................................................................. 94

II. Priestley’s Practical Necessitarianism: .................................................................................... 97

**Chapter Four** .................................................................................................................................. 115

I. Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie:* ............................................................................................. 120

**Conclusion** ....................................................................................................................................... 143

**Bibliography** .................................................................................................................................... 149
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EM</strong></td>
<td><em>Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine</em> 31(1819), October 1819.</td>
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<td><strong>LG</strong></td>
<td><em>The Literary Gazette or Journal of Belles Letters, Politics, and Fashion</em>. 27, 26 July 1817.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Introduction

Coleridge had a wide range of sources of inspiration and contemplation which he enumerated to Thomas Poole in 1797.\(^1\) However, as I will show, Coleridge seems to have been affected most notably by Plato who differentiated between two methods to access the truth of his archetypal Forms: either through knowledge “episteme”, or belief “doxa” (Kraut 58). Moreover, Plato saw that “people have an [sic] belief about everything, but have no knowledge about that of which they have a belief” (Republic 480a). Raphael Woolf argues that the steady recollection by which Forms are accessed make them “cognitively privileged items” over perceptible objects which are changeable and hard to remember (201). One may infer that in Plato’s thinking knowledge functions as a kind of oscillatory link between the Forms and the mind. Belief, however, is created whenever interplay occurs between the senses and observed objects. Consequently, material objects operate as catalysts that activate senses which in turn stimulate the mind to access the ideal realm by means of knowledge, a principal premise that will serve as a platform for Coleridge’s developing metaphysical thinking.

Also, Plato was trying to formulate a concept of objective truth that can be approached regardless of the context in which it is perceived. Heidegger, like Plato, connects truth with correctness which stands for the truths we already know and take for granted. “Such knowing […] can only arise from knowledge […] and knowledge grasps the true, for false knowledge is no knowledge at all” (2). That is to say, as a prerequisite for anything to be true, it must be intelligible and possess the “cognitive privilege” that Woolf ascribes to the Forms (201).

Plato’s premise is of particular significance to Romantic thought as it, first, draws the dividing line between those who view truth from the angle of belief and those who view it through knowledge. Second, it has, more or less, contributed effectively to perforate the partition between literature and philosophy which have been conceived as two incompatible entities. Patricia Sotelo believes that the influence most directly derived from Plato’s ideals is evident in the Romantic era as they correspond to the Romantics’ passionate yearning to penetrate into the truth that exists beyond physical surroundings. They, moreover, developed an enthusiasm to orchestrate artistic creativity with metaphysical philosophy, and to them

\(^1\) These are his infantile infatuations of reading “every book that came in my way without distinction”, the stories his father used to tell about “the stars—and how Jupiter was a thousand times larger than our world—and that the other twinkling stars were Suns that had worlds rolling round them”, his “early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c”, CL 1:354.
imagination is the intermediary and transcendental agent that links the material world with its ideal essence. Here, Sotelo argues that for the Romantic poet “the imagination, the instrument, *par excellence*, of the poetic mind, was as capacitated as the intellect to participate of the grandeur of truth, for both approaches sought to assimilate the world, to be imbued by it and to embellish it” (32).

In Coleridge’s conception, imagination is a faculty that “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate” (*BL* 1: 304). It disassembles and reassembles in order to construct a “creative Thought” out of an object. To him, moreover, imagination is a “synthetic and magical power” capable of revealing “itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty, with old and familiar objects” (*BL* 2: 16-17). This conception echoes the interplay between a perceived object and a perceiving subject which Plato had already expounded through the theories of Forms and recollection. In what follows these theories will be discussed along with the philosophies of Thomas Taylor and Ralph Cudworth to examine the extent to which Neoplatonism contributed to Coleridge’s literary and philosophical growth.

I. Thomas Taylor

Because of his controversial opposing attitudes towards contemporary philosophies, especially empiricism, and his passionate attempts to revive the Greek heritage, Taylor today, as in the eighteenth century, has emerged as an influential figure at the threshold of Romanticism (Raine “Thomas Taylor, Plato, and the English Romantic Movement”). However, the pivotal achievement that distinguished Taylor was not only his translations of Plato and classics, rather it was the staunch belief he advocated in the supremacy of their Ideas. In other words, he was a devoted practitioner of Platonic and Neoplatonic abstraction theories; “he believed in order to understand” in such a way that he made no difference between the Plato he read and the one in whom he infinitely believed. For Taylor, “Platonism was […] a religion rather than a system of thought” (Sotelo 71-2). He inaugurated this system as early as 1787 in his preface to *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*:

[…] and where sensible particulars have been the general object of pursuit, the science of universals has languished, or sunk into oblivion and contempt […] and experimental enquiries, increased without end, and accumulated without order, are the employment of modern philosophy […] the age of true
philosophy is no more [...] while abstract investigations, have necessarily declined: so that modern enquiries, never rise above sense. (4-5)

Taylor’s reasoning tends to oppose Locke’s premise that has already established the mind’s “passiveness before a mechanised nature” (Sotelo 87). “According to Mr. Locke”, Taylor writes, “the soul is a mere rasa tabula, an empty recipient, a mechanical blank. According to Plato she is an ever-written tablet, a plenitude of forms, a vital intellectual energy” (Dissertation on the Platonic Doctrine of Ideas 31). So, the alternative that Taylor offered was a return to Plato’s Ideas as representations of one immutable Principle:

I believe that this immense principle produced such things as are first and proximate to itself, most similar to itself [...] I believe that self-subsistent natures are the immediate offspring of this principle [...] that incorporeal forms or ideas resident in a divine intellect are the paradigms or models of every thing which has a perpetual subsistence according to nature. (The Platonic Philosopher’s Creed 440)

This kind of veneration tends to appeal more to the mystical Plotinus than to Plato’s “static, grey world of metaphysics” whose dialogues tend to exhibit focal interests in writing “pseudo-dialectic” in which “the semblance of investigation is merely a mask for the purpose of asserting the life-negating doctrine of Ideas and denying the reality of our everyday world” as James Vigus notes (7). So, what was implicit in Plato’s dialogues Taylor attempted to make more explicit, that is to say, he enhanced and prioritized the occult, esoteric, and mystical dimensions of an experience inasmuch as the physical aspect is involved in this experience. Taylor found this trend in abundance in Plotinus’s philosophy, which particularly focused on the creation as being made up of “two distinct notions”: physical and spiritual or the “brute” part and the one that transcends the “brute”:

The body is brute touched to life; the true man is the other, going pure of the body, natively endowed with the virtues which belong to the Intellectual-Activity, virtues whose seat is the Separate (unrolled) Soul [...] which [...] may be kept apart [...] that other Soul (of the human being) which is a radiation [...] from it withdraws also, drawn after it. (Enneads 1: 14)

A subtle classification of this kind would hardly escape Coleridge’s vigilant observation. He began to sense the significance of this kind of amalgamation theoretically outlining his philosophical thinking which is principally based on reconciling the opposites of the material and ideal aspects of an experience. Therefore in Coleridge’s ontological views,
two prerequisite and yet discordant elements must combine in us so that we might be worthy of the superbrute level:

Either we have an immortal soul, or we have not. If we have not, we are beasts; the first and wisest of beasts, it may be; but still true beasts. We shall only differ in degree, and not in kind; just as the elephant differs from slug [...] Therefore, methinks, it must be the possession of a soul within us that makes the difference. \( TT 2: 7-8 \)

Although he exhibits little interest in artistic authorship, Taylor’s contribution to the development of Romantic thought stretches farther.² Persuaded by the classical vestige of emphasizing the mind’s prominence, he believed, as Kathleen Raine argues, that “mind, not matter, is the primary reality of the universe” (“Thomas Taylor, Plato, and the English Romantic Movement”239). In other words, Taylor attempted to unveil a pre-existent and an unheeded triangular entity of body, mind, and soul within man himself. These three components collaborate symbiotically to maintain an ever-lasting link with the nous in descensional and ascensional movements: the soul’s immersion into body and mind’s transcendence to Plotinus’ Intellectual-Principle (the focal point of chapter four below):

[...] the soul is the connecting medium of an intelligible and sensible nature, the bright repository of all middle forms, and the vigilant eye of all cogitative reasons. Hence she is capable of rousing herself from the sleep of a corporeal life, and emerging from this dark Cimmerian land, into the regions of light and reality. \( \text{(Dissertation on the Platonic Doctrine of Ideas 31)} \)

Moreover, Sotelo argues that the true man according to Taylor is a “‘microcosmos’, an entity that encompasses in himself partially every thing which the world contains divinely and totally’” (116). In other words, man is a confluence where body and soul coalesce, albeit seemingly contraries. Stephen Platten believes that this is the “co-agency” which Coleridge applies to artistic creativity in which the “integration of the subjective and objective in human-divine confluence” is made possible (328). Arguably then, Taylor contributes significantly to the development of Romantic thought by relating it to classical hermeneutics, a statement of philosophical continuity which helped the Romantic mind to perceive itself as an animated organ connected not only with matter but with the realm of soul as well. Consequently, Taylor’s thought can be understood as a critique of Locke’s restrictive account of the mind’s passivity.

² Raine states that “Taylor himself was no poet; his verse renderings of the Orphic and other classical hymns have no literary merit at all”, 256.
In 1794, for instance, he highlighted an extract from Plotinus’s *On the Essence of the Soul* which illustrates the soul’s descent from the Supreme and its incarnation into corporeality:

> Thus it is that, entering this (corporeal) realm, (the soul) possesses still vision inherent to that superior phase in virtue of which it unchangingly maintains its integral nature [...] thus every particular entity is linked to that Divine Being in whose likeness it is made, the divine principle which the soul contemplated and contained in the act of each creation. (4: 284 and 302)

To the young Coleridge, it seems that Taylor was a source of precocious inspiration. In 1796 he wrote to John Thelwall that “‘Metaphysics, & Poetry, & ‘Facts of mind’—(i.e. Accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers from Tauth, the Egyptian to Taylor, the English Pagan,) are my darling Studies. —’” (*CL* 1: 260). This statement signifies the broad extent to which the Neoplatonist ideas were adopted by Taylor’s contemporaries. His efforts to revive the classical ideas helped to present two significant notions to the dormant spiritual phase within the Romantic frame of mind: first, soul as stranded in the labyrinth of body, yearning to be back to the Father’s realm, “‘an apostate from deity, an exile from the orb of light’”, and, secondly, man as a repository where mind and matter are merged (*The Platonic Philosopher’s Creed* 444). However, the Father’s realm for the majority of Romantics was not that unattainable deity of Plato or of Plotinus; it was, according to Sotelo, “‘their own creative and psychological energy, a kind of inherent magic idealism which is present in the inner religiousness of the poet’” (117), that is to say, an idealistic realm which, as far as Coleridge’s thinking implies, may be permeated into through the sphere of matter so that we may “‘resume our natural appearance; and may each of us at length recover the ruined empire of his soul’” (Taylor, Preface to *The Hymns of Orpheus* 4-5). This axiom seems to echo Coleridge’s notion of the *shaping spirit of imagination* when it oscillates between the circumscribed material body and the claustrophobic plight of the soul trapped within it as I shall discuss in chapter two.

In the broad sense, Coleridge felt that he was clearly at a crossroads in his intellectual development, i.e. whether to abide by the eighteenth century limitations which confined the mind within the sphere of matter (the Lockean view of the mind as a *tabula rasa*), or to invoke the “‘Plotino-platonic’” metaphysics to be a constituent element of his emanating philosophical scheme. In a notebook entry of 1810, Coleridge seems to have expressed his preference, but

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3 *Cf.* “‘We liv’d ere yet this fleshyly robe we wore’”, *Works* 274.
with the important caveat that both systems will be eventually encompassed by his system of amalgamation of opposites (a topic highlighted also in more details in chapter two):

One excellence of the Doctrine of Plato, or of the Plotino-platonic Philosophy, is that it never suffers [...] its Disciples to forget themselves, lost and scattered in sensible Objects disjoined or as disjoined from themselves. It is impossible to understand the Elements of this Philosophy without an appeal, at every step & round of the Ladder, to the fact within, to the mind’s Consciousness. (CN 3: 3935)

Keith Cunliffe argues that “Platonism here is presented as helping to recall the mind from the ‘lost and scattered’ existence which the empiricists had forced upon it by treating ‘ideas’ as internal pictures” (210). Coleridge endorses this attitude, that is the casting of doubt on the material world to decode the esoteric realm of the soul which might be accessible to only those “natively endowed with the virtues which belong to the Intellectual-Activity, virtues whose seat is the Separate Soul” (Plotinus 1: 14). Thus, the Platonic thought seemed to him as “poetry of the highest kind”, even though it had been “without metre”, because it enabled him to synthesize two potentially inconsistent dimensions, a strategy that can be considered as the cornerstone of his philosophical thinking. This dichotomy between “an indolence of mere attention [...] or positively passive affections of Sense & Sensation”, and the “acts and energies of creative Thought, & Recognition—of conscious re-production of states of Being” (CN 3: 3935), is extracted and substantiated in “Dejection: An Ode” (1802):

And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd (Works 699)

These lines portray a mood in which the poet appears inwardly incapacitated and therefore incapable of constructing any “creative Thought”, a state which proves the failure of matter to insinuate outer impressions into the mind. The natural elements around him are “all so excellently fair”, yet a state of mental lethargy prevails because the poet’s mind is bound by the limitation of senses which make him “see, not feel, how beautiful they are!”. However, to escape this state of indolence and imaginative stagnancy Coleridge proposes an inward retreat into the inborn ideal sphere of the soul within:

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element! (Works 699)

This formula will be discussed more broadly in chapter four. It argues that since “in our life alone does nature live”, nature becomes as stimuli rather than an end by itself in Coleridge’s methodology. He describes nature as having “susceptibility of impact” without which it would be “an absurdity” to look at (TT 2: 8). Coleridge construes this effect as “exciting or wakening any interest, any tremulous feeling of the heart, as if it heard or began to glimpse something which had once belonged to it, its Lord or its Beloved” (CN 3: 3936). This reciprocal interplay between the “nether sphere” of nature and one’s mind had already induced an early sensation in 1796 projected in “Sonnet: Composed on a Journey Homeward, the Author Having Received Intelligence of the Birth of a Son”:

Oft o’er my brain does that strange fancy roll
Which makes the present (while the flash dost last)
Seem a mere semblance of some unknown past,
Mix’d with such feelings, as perplex the soul
Self-question’d in her sleep: and some have said
We liv’d, ere yet this fleshy robe we wore. (Works 274)

As I go on to argue in chapter four, moreover, the process of recollecting the antenatal status is rooted in the Platonic theory of recollection, principally in the belief that man “has within himself true beliefs about what he doesn’t know”, that is to say a priori beliefs which “become knowledge when stirred up” by an external stimulant (Plato, Meno 85a-c and 86b). Coleridge reached much the same conclusion when he inaugurated his philosophical schema: “knowledge without a correspondent reality is no knowledge”, and “Truth is correlative to being” (BL 1: 264). Hence, through his contemplative imagination which “reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (BL 2: 16), Coleridge starts off his system from the rudimentary levels of the manifold matter which could be so outstretched, in Coleridge’s thinking, that it reaches a transcendental realm and becomes part of a unified whole. This state, when awakened, is best represented “as one of the principal functions of both poetry and philosophy” as Keith Cunliffe notes (213).

Moreover, in his recent book Platonic Coleridge (2009), James Vigus revisits Coleridge’s philosophical relationship with the Platonic heritage. Vigus contends that “Coleridge’s moulding of Platonic concepts was wider-ranging than that of his contemporaries, in that it spanned poetry and philosophy, and the tension between them” (29). One of the key techniques that helps resolving this “tension” was to read Plato “by anticipation” that gives the reader an early state of “Recognition”. In other words, instead of
sending the reader’s faculties into lethargy, the Platonic text develops a kind of interactive relationship with the mind which anticipates the former in such a way that enables the mind to ruminate on and recall the inborn ideas planted within during one’s antenatal phase: “I have read several of the works of Plato several times with profound attention, but not all his writings. I soon found that I had read Plato by anticipation. He was a consummate Genius” (TT 1: 98-99). This is the twofold movement of descensional and ascensational reciprocity which will be discussed in chapter two. In this chapter I will go on to argue that the result of this reciprocal relationship may be a “Thought” that sounds inexplicable or fragmentary nonsense to an uncritical lay reader (like the perplexing impression imparted to us by Christabel-Geraldine congress); however, to Coleridge it is “his dear gorgeous Nonsense!” (CL 1: 295). Perhaps, this accounts for the great bulk of Coleridge’s seemingly unsystematic or fragmentary poetry, especially when it deals with esoteric realms. In this respect, Vigus tellingly observes that formulating a “creative Thought” out of incoherent components in a reciprocal way involves dispelling what is called the language’s “denotational and logical adequacy to its objects”. This appears most vigorously when philosophy is deduced from poetry and vice versa. Only then are ideas left unexplained and “a tantalizing sense of esoteric doctrines lying beyond the text” emerges (6). This is the stupor one is likely to undergo, for instance, on reading “Christabel” or “Kubla Khan” had they been left without Coleridge’s own elucidative prefaces to those poems.

However, as I argue in chapter one, Coleridge was not a mere blind advocate of Platonism. Rather, he was attempting to modify or alleviate the Platonic antagonistic and dismissive attitude towards poetical creativity by reconciling it with the poet’s imagination which he conceives as a “synthetic and magical power” capable of invoking an abstract “creative Thought” out of two incoherent spheres, ideal and material (CN 3: 3935). Therefore, imagination seems to be the key factor which Coleridge employs to penetrate into Plato’s philosophy so that to “to poeticize philosophy and to philosophize poetry” in Ernst Cassirer’s words (156). An attempt as such is precisely summarized by Iris Murdoch who believes that synthesizing perceptible matter with transcendental philosophy by means of imaginative creativity has been the privilege that characterizes poets and artistic production:

[… ] much pleasure in art is a pleasure of recognition of what we vaguely knew was there but never saw before. Art is mimesis and good art is, to use

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4 See Cudworth’s definition of prolepsis below, and as defined in the OED.
another Platonic term, anamnesis, ‘memory’ of what we did not know we knew. (12)

In addition to this, recent debates have been casting doubts on the effect of Platonism on Coleridge as discussed above. Eric G. Wilson, for instance, considers that Plato and metaphysics in general with their emphasis on the theory of Forms to validate eternity, have so adversely affected Coleridge and constrained his imaginative creativity that “he murders energy and loves form” (quoted in Vigus 6). In other words, Wilson appears to warn against the methodical repudiation of the reality of our world which is inherent in the Platonic theory of Forms. Wilson’s construction of Plato as such will be investigated in more details in chapter two which provides an insightful analysis of Coleridge’s emphasis on the perceptible sphere as the ground for any metaphysical experience.

Furthermore, Mary Anne Perkins complains that this kind of metaphysical interplay may not sustain itself in modern realism, and that both Plato and Coleridge were endorsing shallow metaphysics that might turn social reformers into dreamers and concrete solutions less realistic: “Ideas have gradually been assumed as ‘unreal’ or ‘other worldly’. They may be images, objects, pictures – sense-dependent but inferior to the reality which they represent”. The alternative which Perkins suggests is deconstruction of Plato so that the “other Plato … the artist, the defender of dialogue which resists closure” will arise, thereby enabling an “other Coleridge” to emerge as “a creature of openness and inquiry” (43).

However, as this thesis attempts to demonstrate, Coleridge’s unique synthesizing character hardly tends to concede to either of the interpretations embraced by Wilson and Perkins. He is rather more apt to transcend the realm of matter, or even nature itself, and launches from thence towards the esoteric infinitude to reach not only “the poietical Sublime” but “to the sublime, communicated through art” (Vigus 8). To achieve this objective, Coleridge, as far as I can see, has intuitively and shrewdly attempted to trespass the “ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy” (Kraut 338): “No man”, Coleridge declares, “was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language” (BL 2: 25-26). In this regard, I have found no better statement that describes Coleridge’s contribution to the “idealistic movement” than J. H. Muirhead’s who believes that Coleridge “may be said to have broken into the line of the empirical philosophy at the height of its influence” (“The Cambridge Platonists” 158). This is perhaps the very point at which he intersects with Taylor. That is to say, the latter conceived the Platonic
“metaphysical allegories” as a pulpit from which he calls for a revival of an ideal state as seen from his own perspective. He, as Sotelo argues, “super-imposed his own inner elaboration, his private world, on objective reality” (83). And Vigus accurately adds that Taylor “shows more interest in preaching to the converted than encouraging intellectual seekers” (28). To Taylor, moreover, the Romantic imagination, as discussed above, and literature in general seems inept and “never destined for a lofty flight; it must be the eagle wing of genius, which can alone soar to the sun of philosophy” (The Platonic Philosopher’s Creed 22). For Coleridge, however, this dichotomy seemed bridgeable and Platonism plays a key role in the development of his concept of the “shaping spirit of Imagination”. This is probably the reason that explains the change in Coleridge’s attitude towards Taylor’s characteristic Platonism; a change that he articulates in 1813: ‘‘Southey very happily called Taylor a Pagan Methodist! He is indeed a thorough blind Bigot, ignorant of all with which he is intoxicated – rather, with the slang of which he is bewitched’’ (Marginalia 4:160). “Blind” and “Ignorant” are two key words which Coleridge was most susceptible to as he was developing his own aesthetic and philosophical thought which not only considers nature throughout its formation, but transcends to the cryptic infinitude that Taylor would have been unlikely to encompass.

II. Ralph Cudworth

Now that Plato’s influence on Coleridge has been examined from one of his contemporaries’ perspectives, I may readily trace it retrospectively to Ralph Cudworth’s binary philosophy of nature and recollection which had already established a fertile ground for Romantic aesthetics and Coleridge’s philosophy in particular. In 1795 Coleridge acquainted himself with Cudworth’s True Intellectual System “which [he] borrowed from the Bristol library on 15 May 1795 and again on 9 November 1796” (Newlyn 36). As has been shown earlier, nature according to Coleridge functions as a stimuli or a catalyst that exercises an effect upon a percipient. Cristina Flores argues that “Nature acquires a twofold being: on the one hand, it is inert and pure matter; on the other, it is the vehicle of spirit and hence symbolical of God” (75). Coleridge must have extracted the same meaning from Cudworth’s “plastic nature” which the latter conceives as “the true and proper fate of matter, or the corporeal world [...] which acts not by any knowledge or fancy, will or appetite of its own, but only fatally according to laws and impresses made upon it”. Despite its harmonious system, or ‘divine art’, nature:

[...] is neither god nor goddess, but a low and imperfect creature. Forasmuch as it is not master of that reason and wisdom, according to which it acts [...] nor indeed is it conscious of what it doth, it not knowing, but only doing,
according to commands and laws impressed upon it [...] without any knowledge and consciousness of its own, as forms of letters compounded together may print coherent philosophic sense, though they understand nothing at all. (System 250-1)

This reasoning corresponds to Coleridge’s transcendental philosophy which is “awakening” and growing so vast that nature, or “ratio mersa et confusa, a reason drowned in matter, and confounded with it” (System 252), is hardly able to preclude or contain it. Muirhead precisely describes this interplay when he argues that “[i]f Nature, as Plotinus said, is ‘a lover of contemplation’, the contemplation is of a drowsy, unawakened or astonished kind” (Coleridge as Philosopher 12).

Furthermore, Cudworth is renowned for the divergence from Plato’s theory of recollection. Based on theological grounds, Cudworth developed, first, a presumption that the mind is the God-given power bestowed on man and hence it is the divine “candle of the Lord”. Secondly, he developed a dismissive attitude against the “pre-existence of soul” hypothesis which opposes the Christian convention according to which the soul and the body were created together as one “Couplement”, in Plotinus’s words (Enneads 1: 9). Therefore, Cudworth’s premise adds more weight to the role of mind as a “God-given” faculty by which dormant truths are grasped by other means than recollection:

So when foreign, strange and adventitious forms are exhibited to the mind by sense, the soul cannot otherwise know or understand them, but by something domestic of its own, from active anticipation or prolepsis\(^5\) within itself, that occasionally reviving and meeting with it, makes it know it, or take acquaintance with it. And this is the only true and allowable sense of that old assertion, that knowledge is reminiscence, not that it is the remembrance of something which the soul had some time before actually known in a pre-existent state; but because it is the mind’s comprehending of things by some inward anticipation of its own. Something native and domestic to it, or something actively exerted from within itself. (Treatise 128-9)

Cudworth’s thinking tends to render Plato’s recollection theory redundant. Alternatively, an “inward, domestic, or native” faculty of mind takes over as more robust and reliable than mere recollection. Therefore, Cudworth’s innovative interpretation seems not only to expand the recollection theory but to defy it as well. In other words, instead of explaining the recollection process as repetitively and semi-mechanically happening, he uses his own

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\(^5\) According to the OED, prolepsis indicates “[t]he action or fact of representing or regarding (esp. as a rhetorical figure, originally in speech or writing) something in the future as already done or existing; anticipation; an instance of this. Also: use of or reference to a name, event, etc., in relation to too early a date”. 

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expressions which elevate the mind’s role as a vital principle that guides and regulates the functioning and relationship between the perceived matter and its corresponding ideas, that is to say, a role more active than that speculated by Locke (Essay 2: 5). Based on this, Ideas are:

occasionally invited and elicited by the objects of sense, when the mind, in the contemplation of them by its own active strength, perceives the signatures of art, counsels, contrivance, wisdom, nay goodness also […] printed upon them; yet they cannot owe their being or efficiency to the activity of those outward objects, but merely to the activity of the mind itself. (System 602)

It seems that the descensional and ascensional movements have gained a broader ground and definition which relate, more or less, to the domain of man as a “microcosmos” within which a circular motion is at work where “the end must be in the beginning” as Muirhead infers (Coleridge as Philosopher 170). Cudworth observes that “all intellection and knowledge ascend from sense … [produce] thin and evanid images … nothing but the improvement or result of sense”; whereas:

[…] all intellection and knowledge proceeding proleptically, and not with an ascending, but with a descending perception; whereby the mind first reflecting upon itself, and its own ideas, virtually contained in its own omniform cognoscitive power, and thence descending downward, comprehends individual things under them. So that knowledge doth not begin in individuals, but end in them. (System 613)

In many respects Cudworth anticipates the philosophical concerns of “The Eolian Harp”. In this poem, Coleridge envisages the mind, symbolized by the harp, as embarking on a journey ascending from natural surroundings to an imaginary “Fairy-Land”. In a mode that recalls Cudworth’s hypotheses above, Coleridge conjures, as it were, a contemplative state in which the mind becomes an agent which seeks to extract a unique entity or “totum” out of two distinct worlds, ideal and material, within and without:

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. (PW 224)8

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6 “Evanid” is interpreted in the OED as “[v]anishing away; of short duration; evanescent, fleeting, transient.”
7 See prolepsis above.
8 “The Eolian Harp” was first published in 1796. Mays observes that the poem appeared in four versions between “Aug–Oct 1795 and Feb? 1796, and they bear a somewhat complicated relation to one another”. Mays ascribes the variations between the poem’s versions to “the fact that the original simple description of a wind-harp at sunset was enlarged to involve different times, places, emotions, and ideas”. However, Mays believes that the
While these specific lines were added in 1817, they chime with Coleridge’s thought in the 1790s, which was still blinkered by the influence of the empirical philosophies developed by Locke and Hartley who depicted mind as a passive vessel. Hence, Coleridge seems reluctant to endow the mind with the power and divinity bestowed on it by Cudworth. Instead, he visualizes the mind “Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover”. However, this vexing image of an “indolent and passive brain” (PW 224) is about to change and jostle with another one implied within the following rhetorical lines:

And what if all of 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? (PW 225)

In this respect, Paul Magnuson argues that this shift from the “indolent and passive” mind or harp under nature’s disposal to “active” and “imaginative being” marks “a shift in [Coleridge’s] thinking from a materialism he associated with David Hartley to a philosophy in which mind constructs the world”. Thus, to Cudworth’s plastic nature, “Coleridge added the characteristic of consciousness to think of an ‘intellectual breeze’, so the physical world trembles ‘into thought’” (38). This, I argue here, is the ultimate and significant task that man, as a microcosmos endowed with divine mind, must accomplish; a task which must have exhausted a vast segment of Coleridge’s imaginative faculty and creative mind to achieve Cudworth’s postulate “De Nihilo Nihil, From Nothing Nothing” (System 64), or as Coleridge himself puts it “that every Thing has a life of its own, & that we are all one life” (CL 2: 864). Obviously, this is the very task which differentiates him from his fellow Romantics as a figure transcending poetry and “signatures of art” beyond nature to the infinitude via philosophical routes. It is a task that “shapes as it develops itself from within […] Each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror” in Sotelo’s words (128).

I believe this axiom summarizes the influence of the “Plotino-platonic” thought on Coleridge while his imagination was being shaped. The resulting effect of this interaction culminates in combining incompatible worlds at the top of which are philosophy and poetry. Whereas Taylor and Cudworth’s philosophies helped Coleridge to assimilate Neoplatonism in

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poem “underwent no major changes, although for a long time C[oleridge] continued undecided whether or not to include certain passages, and it obtained its present title only in 1817”. The lines I am quoting here did not change significantly; instead, they “were several times rearranged before they attained their final form in 1817”, Works 231.
a new sense that transcends even nature, Coleridge’s reciprocal receptivity added to it a transcendental dimension which results in an artistic creativity capable of combining or compromising the incompatible worlds of mind and matter. This interaction shaped Coleridge’s philosophy and crowned his dynamic literary career which he succinctly sums up publicly one month before his death: “It is wonderful to myself to think how infinitely more profound my views now are, and yet how much clearer they are withal. The circle is completing; the idea is coming round to, and to be, the common sense” (TT 2: 335).

III. Thesis Structure

In this thesis, development is used as a key word because it serves to trace Coleridge’s intellectual and philosophic growth from his infantile engagement with “the Vast” (CL 1: 354) until his kaleidoscopic maturity. As such, the thesis will be divided into four chapters in which I attempt to apply a panoramic analysis to the vastness of Coleridge’s philosophic views as well as his renowned conversions from one philosophic thought to another. Thus, development will both employed in its chronological and intellectual sense.

In the first chapter of the thesis I introduce Coleridge as a young Cambridge student posited right at the very centre of the ongoing conflict between the Platonic metaphysics and the experimental philosophies as advocated by John Locke. In a chronological, i.e. developing, manner, I explore some of the most prominent critical reviews written in this context, paying special attention to the methodology which Coleridge adopted to make his own philosophical views stand out from the so-called clash of philosophies. One of the most notable points this chapter will raise is the rise and decline of the Kantian influence on Coleridge which I suggest as an indication of Coleridge’s ability to manipulate variant philosophic views and to extract his own from them.

In chapter two I focus on the second phase of Coleridge’s literary progression as he moves on to the nineteenth-century London where he could engage more broadly with literary coteries. Therefore, the chapter traverses the significant and prolific period from 1801 to 1816. By concentrating on three of his lesser known poems, namely “Imitations of Du Bartas” 1807, “The Pang More Sharp Than All” 1807, and “Limbo: A Fragment” 1811, I examine the extent to which Coleridge was successful in adapting his poetical creativity as an instrumental medium that addresses two ages of rapid changes. In doing so, I explore “Christabel”, the flagship in Coleridge’s poems in which, I argue, his premise of “Extremes meet” is most clearly manifested. I demonstrate in what ways “Christabel” could be revisited from different
contexts; one of these, as I suggest, is to re-introduce the Geraldine-Christabel interaction as supplementary or symbiotic rather conventionally viewing it as a conflict between Christian redemption and satanic enticement.

In the third chapter I focus on Coleridge’s *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), and on how the philosophies of Hartley, Priestley, and Burke are integrated in Coleridge’s incorporative scheme. Thus, I demonstrate how Hartley’s associationism and Priestley’s mechanistic explanation of the human mind find a reflux in Burke’s emphasis on the sense organs and external stimuli as the only means to know the deity. More importantly, in this chapter I examine “The Destiny of Nations” as a specimen through which Coleridge argues for the vivacity of the human mind as it responds to an external stimulus. Relying principally on actual historical event, Coleridge re-introduces Joan of Arc as an exemplary human being who could function as the nexus between matter and idea, an earthly life and heaven, and the human “spiritual Senses and Sense-organs” (*CL* 6:595).

In chapter four, I turn my attention to Coleridge’s understanding of Nature. I analyse the scientific and realistic view with which Coleridge considers Nature as a realm lacking the free will possessed by humans. I demonstrate how Nature in Coleridge’s thinking is deficient and is constantly striving to ascend to the supreme status exclusively assumed by the human mind. This view of Nature is diametrically opposed to the one purported by Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* in which he transcendentizes Nature, as it were, by denying its polarity. Finally, I emphasize that the eventual interpretation of Nature which Coleridge arrives at reflects his remarkable ability as a synthesizer of “discordant qualities” (*BL* 2: 16).

Whilst the thesis attempts to focus principally on Coleridge’s incorporative philosophic system through which he seeks to amalgamate the materialistic and idealistic aspects of the universe, the subjective and objective, or to naturalize philosophy and philosophize Nature, the conclusion offers some suggestions so as to widen the scopes of these concepts. For instance, Coleridge’s later effect on twentieth-century Freudian psychoanalysis could be addressed in more details in future.
Chapter One

Literature Review and Methodology of Approach

This chapter centres around two primary purposes. First, it aims to provide a review of the most notable literature which has been written about Coleridge’s incessant attempts to amalgamate the material and ideal aspects of an experience. Thus it further contributes to the understanding of the Romantic metaphysics in general. Secondly, it outlines the methodology which will be employed throughout the whole thesis to achieve its aim which is to prove the kaleidoscopic nature of Coleridge’s philosophical thinking which embraces the subjective, objective and their combination.

By way of historical development, the chapter critically examines the literature which was written as early as the outset of the twentieth century up to recent critical analyses. As an example of the notable books written in this regard, the chapter reviews John H. Muirhead’s significant book *Coleridge as Philosopher* in which Muirhead critically investigates Coleridge’s ability to assimilate “‘the positive and negative parts of Kant’s teaching’”(*Coleridge as Philosopher* 91). This premise, I think, has a strong bearing to my argument which traces Coleridge’s object-subject incorporative system, and the philosophical attempts he makes to assign our a priori ideas a more constitutive role than that drawn by Kant.

The chapter, moreover, argues that Kant and German idealism in general were so inspirational in Coleridge’s early metaphysical meditations that Coleridge is considered now as “‘the most important mediator of German philosophy in the nineteenth century’” (Class 192). Nevertheless, by way of propounding counter argument, I consider the limitedness of Kant’s effect on Coleridge’s intellectual development and by so doing, I also emphasize the dynamic nature of Coleridge’s own thinking and distinctive literary style. As an example of Coleridge’s disagreement with Kant, I argue in this chapter that in the Kantian system Coleridge categorically opposes, first, Kant’s systematic denial of man’s free will and, secondly, the restrictions imposed on the Ideas by the ‘‘causality of physical necessity’’ which Kant sees as determined by ‘‘the preceding time’’ (*Reason* 151).
Finally, the chapter revisits the widely-held and disputed conception of Coleridge as a figure blindly devoted to relative Platonic abstractions that are irrelevant to universality and, thus, it keeps him aloof from actual everyday concerns. The chapter attempts to argue against this misconception by discussing representative examples of Coleridge’s œuvres as expounded in *Biographia Literaria*, *Literary Remains*, and *Aids to Reflection*, to name but a few.

A large body of theories, studies, and reviews have been brought forth to demonstrate Coleridge’s and that of the Romantic thought in general indebtedness to Platonism as well as to other concomitant philosophies. These philosophies contributed significantly to the development of Coleridge’s literary and philosophical thought, informing his early engagements with the classical tradition as well as his understanding of the conflicting philosophical trends of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to H. R. Rookmaaker “[n]o man works in a vacuum; the work of every artist is to some extent influenced, even determined by the work of his predecessors and contemporaries” (13). This interaction with a vast repertoire of thought may be epitomized in the figure of Coleridge. His reviewers, therefore, have often placed him within the Romantic framework as a *synthesizing* figure who could incorporate in one crucible “two opposite poles of all human thought, namely the objective and the subjective” (*PL* 113-6). Through this synthesis, Coleridge expects “to solve the process of Life & Consciousness” (*CL* 2: 706). This process “held an almost totemic interest for [Coleridge]”, in J. C. C. Mays’s words, that he favourably labels it under the renowned proverb “‘Extremes meet’” (*Works* 845).

However, in Coleridge’s case the reconciliation or *interrelations* between literary and philosophic poles – though vital for his whole identity as it were – was anything but easy. In A. O. Lovejoy’s words it has been considered as a “‘liaison dangereuse’” to attempt to provoke the “‘ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy’” (341). Yet, I think Coleridge was endowed with an “‘intensely ratiocinative mind’” that qualified him for not only absorbing, more or less amply, a wide spectrum of philosophies but their diversities as well (Lovejoy 361). He expresses a predisposition as such in a letter to Thomas Poole in 1801: “‘I have not formed opinions without an attentive Perusal of the

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1 David Newsome rightly notes that Platonism “was to become the lifeblood of Romanticism” 13. Also, G. M. Harper sees that “the revival of interest in Plato […] may be the most important single facet of the Romantic movement”, 264.
works of my Predecessors from Aristotle to Kant” (CL 2: 707). Therefore, Coleridge has often been seen as an exemplary figure in the Romantic epistemological quest. The nature of this entitlement as Coleridge understood it was manifested in his characteristic preoccupation with interweaving a philosophic and consistent whole made up of heterogeneous components, or a monolithic entity that might span the Platonism, which he came to know and cherish during his Cambridge years, up to the empiricism which was in its highest vogue in the eighteenth century intellectual foreground. This seems to find support when we learn that the Platonism and Neoplatonism that Coleridge studied during his university years provided his inquiring mind with an insight into the human mind which could perforate the frontier between the physical world and its arcane infinite counterpart. It follows that Coleridge began to sense that the infinite had been tacitly inherent within the finite object which had been encircled and yoked by the experimental intelligence conducted by Newton, Locke, or Hartley. “We may feel”, Coleridge concludes, “from and about a thing, an event, a quality, we can feel toward a Person only” (quoted in Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher 36).

Moreover, Coleridge’s most sophisticated disposition tends to emphasize the role of the mind as an agent mediating between the two distinct worlds of matter and idea, an agent, that is to say, that may effectively fuse the “discordant” poles into a uniform “creative Thought” that could embrace life and all its multiplicities. More importantly, this peculiarity of the mind means that it can fathom the self within and works from thence outwards an innate “constructive organizing force” (Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher 27). This observation seems to have altered the image of the mind and added to it more weight than was previously speculated by the avant-gardists of the Aristotelian inductive philosophy like Locke, Hume, and Hartley, to name but a few. That evolving line of thought must have undoubtedly appealed to Coleridge and his fellow Romantics who found an unconventional source of inspiration other than that imposed by outer experiences and impressions. Therefore, man was conceived by them as a “microcosmos” where the differences between “the body celestial” and “the body terrestrial” are merged:

[…] in the very nature of a living spirit, it may be more possible that heaven and earth should pass away, than that a single act, a single thought, should be loosened or lost from that living chain of causes, to all whose links, conscious or unconscious, the free-will, our only absolute self, is co-extensive and co-present. (BL 1: 114)
Over the past century there has been a considerable amount of critical commentaries which touch upon this theme but with a variable rate of focus. Nevertheless the attention this issue owes remains comparatively small if its due vastness is taken into consideration. One of the notable works in this respect is John H. Muirhead’s *Coleridge as Philosopher* (1930), which attempts to explore and assess the multiple aspects of Coleridge’s philosophical life. Muirhead’s work ranges from early “philosophical development” down to Coleridge’s eventual conceptualization of “The Origin of the Idea of God in the Soul” (249). One of the several definitions of philosophy which appeared in the eighteenth century, and which Muirhead associates with Coleridge’s early acquaintance with metaphysics was “the endeavour, starting from the unity of experience as a whole, to bring the different interests of the human spirit together so that it might feel itself at home in all of them” (*Coleridge as Philosopher* 29).² Muirhead’s presupposition is hardly deniable and Coleridge’s philosophical scheme does in fact operate, to certain extents, within the domain of this definition. In other words, Coleridge already conceived of philosophy – owing to his early Platonic readings as previously noted in the introduction – as revolving around the soul’s entrapment in the realm of sensible, physical objects and its yearning to return to where it essentially belongs, that is, to the “Divine Mind” from which, in Plotinus’s words, it had originally departed.³ Muirhead’s definition of philosophy, however, seems to confine Coleridge’s thinking within the arcane sphere of the soul. I would argue here, moreover, that Coleridge’s philosophical system was hardly anti materialistic in the sense, for instance, that Thomas Taylor was. Rather, he construed the prevalent Lockean philosophy as being inadequate to present a philosophically *intelligible* account of the world beyond the sphere of perception. Thus, Coleridge formulated a definition of philosophy that comprised the realms of both matter and idea:

The term, Philosophy, defines itself as an affectionate seeking after the truth; but Truth is the correlative of Being. This again is no way conceivable, but by assuming as a postulate, that both are ab initio, identical and co-inherent; that intelligence and being are reciprocally each other’s substrate. (*BL* 1:142-43)

² See, for instance, Novalis’s definition: “Philosophy is actually homesickness—the urge to be everywhere at home”, 135.
³ According to Plotinus, the soul is “far more honourable than anything bodily” because it “sprung from Divine Mind, Soul is intellective too; for its perfecting it must look to that Divine Mind which may be thought of as a father watching over his child”, *Enneads* 5: 1.2 and 3.
However, Muirhead associates his discussion of materialism with the Hartleyean effect on Coleridge’s intellectual development. He argues that Coleridge’s early acquaintance with philosophy was destined to interactively encounter Hartley’s associationism; an interaction that was perhaps partly induced by his relationship with the Unitarian and political reformer William Frend from 1791 to 1796.\(^4\) We have his own words for that recorded in a letter he wrote to Southey: “I am a compleat [sic] Necessitarian—and understand the subject as well as Hartley himself—but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought—namely, that it is motion—” (CL 1: 137). Muirhead contends that Coleridge’s early admiration for Hartley’s philosophy rests on four major propositions which he regards as the cornerstones in the development of Coleridge’s imaginative creativity:

1. the formation from a simpler of a more complex idea which “may not appear to bear any relation to its compounding parts”; 
2. the generation of voluntary action through the connection of a sensation or an idea with a movement; 
3. judgments of assent and dissent (i.e. beliefs) as only “very complex internal feelings which adhere by association to such clusters of words as are called propositions”; and 
4. the constitution of intellectual pleasures and pains, such as those of imagination, ambition, self-interest, sympathy, “theopathy”, and the moral sense, out of simpler constituents. (Coleridge as Philosopher 37)

Significantly these four key factors, I think, will be the determining principles of Coleridge’s future literary and philosophical character in that they will all contribute, as will be explained below, in one way or another to his evolving role as a synthesizer of opposed constituents; a mediator between any given thesis and its antithesis, matter and idea, and thought and its “corporeality” that might coalesce in a point indifferent to either.

I. Coleridge and the Kantian Thought

On the other hand, Muirhead rightly points out that Coleridge’s passionate tendency towards Hartley’s associationism has a turning point and he, Muirhead, refers to March 1801 as the date on which Coleridge began to assimilate the German transcendental philosophy. The ground on which Muirhead particularly associates this year with this significant event coincides with a letter Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole in which he

\(^4\) For a full account of Coleridge’s early admiration and friendship with Frend, see Nicholas Roe’s “Coleridge’s Early Years”, 19-21.
had decisively “overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern Infidels—especially, the doctrine of Necessity” (CL 2: 706).\(^5\) However, I think the effect of the German philosophy on Coleridge may be traced further back to September 1798, the date of his first visit to Germany where he spent ten fruitful months and “30 pounds worth of books (chiefly metaphysics / & with a view to the one work, to which I hope to dedicate in silence the prime of my life)” (CL 1: 519). Whether the German philosophy has had its effect on Coleridge in 1801 or 1798 may not concern us as much as the fact that Kant began to succeed Hartley on Coleridge’s mind “with a giant’s hand” in the sense that Kant has “invigorated and disciplined my understanding” and furnished what Coleridge was seeking namely, the “originality, the depth, and the compression of the thoughts; the novelty and subtlety, yet solidity and importance of the distinctions” (BL 1: 153). Coleridge’s pro-Kantian attitude, as will be pointed out below, will prove to be “a highly crafted piece of myth-making” which “has wide ramifications” in Monika Class’s words (Coleridge and Kantian Ideas 142).

It seems that this “importance of the distinctions” forms a backdrop to Coleridge’s thinking. It is from that point, I argue, that he begins to sense the difference between a perceived object and its abstraction, or the knowable thing as represented in the human mind in contrast to the unknowable thing-in-itself. This distinction requires the application of two faculties of knowledge namely, understanding and reason; two major categories which Coleridge had previously encountered in his reading of Plato, but were later enhanced through his reading of Kant and Friedrich August Nitsch, as I will explain below. The difference between these categories seems to be the same as “the Platonic distinction between discursive and intuitive thought”, that is to say, “the understanding is defined as the ‘faculty of judging according to sense,’ that is of making generalizations from particulars given in perceptual experience, and of drawing inferences from them according to the formal laws of identity and non-contradiction” while “reason is defined as the power of apprehending ‘truths above sense and having their evidence in themselves’, among these the law of non-contradiction itself” (Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher 65). These faculties, supposedly perceived as such

\(^5\) Despite Coleridge’s enthusiasm for the German idealism and its metaphysics, he availed himself of “lectures on Physiology, Anatomy, & Natural History with regularity, & have endeavoured to understand these subjects” during his 1798 visit to Germany, CL 1: 518. This particular interest will be discussed in more details in chapter four below.
by Coleridge, were responsible for forming the dialectical relationship between sense data and the a priori ideas of the mind; a relationship which was scattered, or at best oscillating, between Hartley’s materialism and Berkley’s subjective idealism, and at the centre of that fluctuation Coleridge’s thinking functioned most appropriately, as Claud Howard notes (19). In this case, the mind is to rise above the limits of mere interpreter of perceived phenomena because it possesses “the substantiating power—that by which we attribute substance and reality to phenomena, and raise them from mere affections into objects communicable and capable of being anticipated and reasoned of”. According to Muirhead, this is the very apex where the mind is invigorated and becomes equivalent to, or even transcends, a constitutive authority of an object (66).

So far Muirhead has been focusing on what he calls the “positive part of Kant’s teaching”, which helped Coleridge to grasp the aspiration he had been craving for since 1791, namely, to prove that “[t]hought was not an operation superinduced upon a given world, but was necessary in order that there might be an experiencible world of any kind”. However, Kant’s metaphysics has had its own drawback which Coleridge was able to identify and “carry the dialectic of Kant’s thought a step farther and turn criticism against the Critic” (Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* 91). It seems that Kant is thoroughly preoccupied with emphasizing that his forms or “categories” are the vital ground of any experience that he repudiated the realm of reality, or what Coleridge perceived as the noumenal world. In sharp contrast to Plato’s Forms, Kant’s categories are confined to a specific experience and thus they are detached from, even unable to identify, the real, unknowable world which lies beyond the given experience; a postulate that makes them regulative rather than constitutive principles. In this respect, I think Muirhead’s discussion of the effect of the “categories” or forms solely from a Kantian perspective hardly does justice to Coleridge’s kaleidoscopic thinking which will be discussed in more details in the following section.

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6 Here I refer to Berkley’s idealism which is founded on the postulate of “to be is to be perceived”, or “esse est percipi” which seems to have given vent for Coleridge to dissect and reshape physical objects through the agency of creative imagination: “For my part”, Berkeley argues, “I might easily divide a thing from itself. I may indeed divide in my thoughts or conceive apart from each other those things which, perhaps, I never perceived by sense so divided”, see *Principles of Human Knowledge*, 70.

7 Howard contends that “[t]his enthusiasm for idealists and materialists at the same time seems at first incomprehensible, but it is easily understood when one considers that Coleridge’s thought was not yet unified by a fundamental principle, and that his keen interest in all phases of life led him into an inconsistency of which he was ever becoming increasingly conscious” 20. Cf. James Vigus’s comment on Coleridge’s language and its supposed lack of “denotational and logical adequacy to its objects”, 6.
II. Coleridge, Kant, and Nitsch:

I would argue here, however, that in many instances Coleridge attributes higher significance to the philosophical discourses of Friedrich A. Nitsch than to Kant’s. In his book *A General and Introductory View of Professor Kant's Principles Concerning Man, the World, and Deity* (1796), in which he elaborately explains the theoretical and practical parts of Kant’s system, Nitsch perceives of the threefold faculties of “Sense”, “Understanding”, and “Reason” as both interdependently and symbiotically operating in the mind according to the nature of data received by each faculty:⁸

The most proper method of enquiring into the nature of the Power of Knowledge, and the faculties of Reason, Understanding, and Sense, is that which sets out with principles universally granted by the Systems of Materialism, Spiritualism, Idealism, and Scepticism, and, which, by an accurate deduction from what was granted, forces these dissenting parties to coincide in one unshaken sentiment concerning the particular nature of the mental faculties and their operations. (71)

To a great extent, this reasoning seems to be consistent with Coleridge’s understanding of the mind’s faculties and how they function as a connecting agency between two discordant realms or “dissenting parties”: “When we make a threefold distinction in human nature, we are fully aware, that it is a distinction not a division, and that in every act of mind the *Man* unites the properties of Sense, Understanding and Reason” (*The Friend* 2: 104).

Moreover, both Nitsch and Coleridge define the faculties of Sense, Understanding and Reason in much the same manner. According to Nitsch, the “Sense” is “totally passive” because it only deals with physical matter or “variety”: “[t]hat a given variety can occur in our perception, knowledge, &c. supposes a Receptive Faculty in the mind,

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⁸ Monika Class believes that Coleridge read *A General and Introductory View of Professors Kant's Principles* and knew Nitsch as early as 1796 through his regular correspondence with John Thelwall who was an acquaintance of Nitsch: “Thelwall wrote on the margins of his copy of the *Biographia Literaria* that he belonged to Nitsch’s Kantian Society and had several philosophical discussions with him.” Moreover, Nitsch was so enthusiastic for giving lectures on critical philosophy in English as well as in German. “[I]n 1796, Nitsch held his lectures near the venue in which the Whigs and the London Corresponding Society had their joint meeting […] During the time of Nitsch’s lectures, between 1794 and 1796, young Coleridge moved in these Whig and Jacobin circles”. More importantly, Coleridge was introduced to Kant’s philosophy by means of Nitsch’s English lectures. According to Class, Coleridge “must have been familiar with Nitsch’s work because he did not yet read German. Their mutual sensuous departure from the moral law supports the possibility that Coleridge knew Nitsch’s pamphlet; indeed, this conceptual similarity is so strong that Nitsch appears to have shaped Coleridge’s expectations of critical philosophy”, see “Coleridge and the Radical Roots of Critical Philosophy”, 53 and 52.
or a Receptivity which totally passive” (74). Coleridge, too, attributes passiveness to the “Sense” for exactly the same reason expounded by Nitsch:

Under the term SENSE, I compromise [sic] whatever is passive in our being, without any reference to the questions of Materialism or Immaterialism, all that Man is in common with animals, in kind at least—his sensations, and impressions whether of his outward senses, or the inner sense. (*The Friend* 2: 104)

One may infer, thus, that the “Sense” according to both Nitsch and Coleridge is positioned in the passive segment of the mind because it only deals with the physical matter which is no less passive. On the opposite pole of the mind lie the other two faculties of Understanding and Reason, which are supposed to constitute the active phase of the mind. In this regard, Nitsch believes that “man would be lost in an infinite crowd of particulars [i.e. matter and its manifold shape or “variety”] if he had no faculty to reduce them into certain order” (85). Nitsch regards Understanding as the faculty which could fulfil the task of reducing “particulars” into unified order:

There are, for this reason, a certain kind of ideas which are immediately formed from intuitions, and which contain their common nature. This kind of ideas may be called Conceptions, and are begotten by the Understanding. Hence the Understanding is a faculty of forming conceptions. (85)

In the same vein, Coleridge defines Understanding as “that faculty of thinking and forming *judgments* on the notices furnished by the Sense, according to certain rules existing in itself, which rules constitute its distinct nature” (*The Friend* 2: 104). Arguably, this definition furnishes the platform for Coleridge’s philosophical system which emphasizes the interaction between the mind and the data provided by the senses and, more specifically the necessity of amalgamating matter and idea. Philosophy’s “primary ground”, he contends, “can be neither merely speculative or merely practical, but both in one. All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject” (*BL* 1: 252). Monika Class argues here that “[t]he Understanding establishes order by imposing rules on manifold sense appearances” and therefore the Understanding in Coleridge’s thought is given particular interest “for forming cognitions” (*Coleridge and Kantian Ideas* 185).

The third and last faculty scrutinized by Nitsch is the “Reason”. He defines it as:

[...] a faculty of the mind which may be called the third and highest degree of mental Spontaneity. Its action consists like that of the
intellect, in connecting a variety … As intuitions are connected by the intellect into conceptions, and, as besides conceptions, there is nothing in the mind for reason to connect, it follows, that reason must connect our conceptions only. (119)

For Coleridge, “Reason” fulfils the task of connection as well. That is to say, it connects our minds to the abstraction of Ideas or Forms. He sees that “Reason” is:

[…] the power by which we become possessed of Principle, (the eternal Verities of Plato and Descartes) and of Ideas, (N.B. not images) as the ideas of a point, a line, a circle, in Mathematics; and of Justice, Holiness, Free Will, &c. in Morals. (The Friend 2: 104)

So, from these definition or “distinctions,” in Coleridge’s words, one may infer not only the vast concurrence of Coleridge’s thought with the German idealistic school, but also the extent to which he began to deviate from Kant’s confining conception of the Forms. It is true that both Kant and Coleridge regard experience as an outlet through which the world of reality, or the noumenal world, is revealed, and that, in addition to this, Kant affirms that such a reality is undeniably shown as well through the moral realm, freedom, free will and so on. However, what Kant decisively asserts is the impossibility of knowing that reality. In other words, he encompasses the principles or “categories” which are responsible for establishing experience within the boundaries of this experience and, therefore, he, contrary to Nitsch, repudiates the correlation between these principles and the world of reality, assigning to them, instead, a regulatory task which renders them regulatory rather than constitutive as Coleridge and Plato before him visualized.

Furthermore, according to Kant our experience is constituted when two main elements are integrated: first, the sensory data or the “manifold of sense” which are received by the mind in its total passive mode, and secondly, the “forms” or the “categories” whose sole function is to accommodate these perceptual and random data which pour into the mind from the external world. In virtue of this process the mind is considered active, otherwise it is inert as Kant assumes. The supposed “activity”,

9 Cf. Coleridge’s objection to Kant’s definition of will as “Der Wille ist nicht anderes, als practische Vernunft [sic]” which literally means “the will is nothing but practical reason [my translation]”, see CN 1: 1717.

10 Lovejoy believes that “this necessity applies not only to the sequences of our sensations but also to our motives”, that is to say, our motives which are based on moral rather than material grounds are subject to the availability of corresponding “forms” or “categories” in the mind to receive them, 344. Kant, more importantly, distinguishes “[t]he concept of causality as natural necessity” from “the concept of causality as freedom” in that the former “concerns only the existence of things insofar as it is determinable in time and hence as appearances” whereas the latter concerns only the causality of things as “things in themselves.
however, lacks freedom; a key point that would have tremendously concerned Coleridge who conceives of the mind as an agent which actively seeks to incorporate object and subject, despite their apparent differences, into one whole. “Now”, Coleridge asserts, “I do not feel this perfect synonimousness in Reason & the Wille [sic]. I am sure, Kant cannot make it out. Again & again, he is a wretched Psychologist” (CN 1: 1717).11 This system, i.e. “the dualistic assumption of the independence of thought and reality” in Muirhead’s words, is the mainstay of Coleridge’s metaphysics, a system, that is to say, that animates the moral we normally deduce from the Mariner’s expiation in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” or from Joan’s sympathy in “The Destiny of Nations” as will be discussed in chapter three.

The sequential extrication from major philosophical influences indicates the evolution of an alternative thought in Coleridge’s own thinking.12 He confides this thought to Thomas Poole:

I am about to do more—namely, that I shall be able to evolve all the five senses, that is, to deduce them from one sense, & to state their growth, & the causes of their difference—and in this evolvement to solve the process of Life and Consciousness. (CL 2: 706)

Having rejected the Kantian notion of disconnecting the “ideas of the Reason” (quoted in Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher 92), which results in the impossibility of knowing the world of reality, Coleridge sees that the physical aspect of an experience is a necessary and indispensable pole in the dialectical link with the metaphysical one, yet the former may not be applied to and equalized with the workings of the noumenal. Alternatively Coleridge assigns for physical objects a task which underlies the “more” he was “about to do” (CL 2: 706); that is to say, he regards the physical domain of the senses as a platform from which he transcends to a unified constitutive realm so that to dissolve or decode the boundary between two distinct realms, materialistic and idealistic.

Now, if one takes the determinations of the existence of things in time for determinations of things in themselves [...] then the necessity in the causal relation can in no way be united with freedom; instead they are opposed to each other as contradictory. For, from the first it follows that every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time. Now, since time past is no longer within my control, every action that I perform must be necessary by determining grounds that are not within my control, that is, I am never free at the point of time in which I act”. Reason 151-52.

11 In Coleridge’s thinking, “will and understanding” are so significant that they principally animate imagination: “This power [imagination], first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control”, BL 2: 16.

12 See CL 2: 706 and CN 1: 1717 for Coleridge’s opinions of Hartley and Kant respectively. For his view of Priestley, see CN 2: 2448: “That Unitarianism in all its Forms is Idolatry”.
I argue here that this is where the mind’s peculiarity as a synthetic agency is most fully expressed in Coleridge’s thinking. In a notebook entry that answers Kant’s postulate of unknowingness, Coleridge asks:

How can that be called a mannigfaltiges [i.e. manifold], which yet contains in itself the ground, why I apply one category to it rather than another?\textsuperscript{13} [...] The mind does not resemble an Aeolian Harp, nor even a barrel-organ tuned by a stream of water, conceive as many tunes mechanized in it as you like,—but rather, as far as Objects are concerned, a violin, or other instrument of few strings yet vast compass, played on by a musician of Genius. The Breeze that blows across the Aeolian Harp, the stream that turned the handle of the barrel-Organ, might be called ein mannigfaltiges […], but who would call the muscles and purpose of Linley a confused Manifold? (Marginalia 5: 248)

This kind of interactive disagreement has been explored and elaborated by A. O. Lovejoy in his article “Coleridge and Kant’s Two Worlds” (1940). It revolves around, first, the distinction between “the Reason and the Understanding” and, second, around the extent to which Reason may be “a source of philosophical insight”. Thus, Lovejoy argues for “man’s moral freedom and accountability” in a philosophical sense. In line with Lovejoy’s argument, Coleridge’s renunciation of Hartley’s “doctrines of Association” along with its subsequent “doctrine of Necessity”, in addition to his scheme of merging the five senses into a transcendental “one sense”, seems to have been founded on an inborn and vehement sense of freedom mixed with will that he has especially cherished. This conclusion was reached at a crucial stage in Coleridge’s philosophical contemplations. In the pivotal year 1816 he avowed that:\textsuperscript{14}

I believe that I am a free agent, inasmuch as, and as far as, I have a will, which renders me justly responsible for my actions, omissive as well as commissive. Likewise that I possess reason, or a law of right and wrong, which, uniting with my sense of moral responsibility, constitutes the voice of conscience. Hence it becomes my absolute duty to believe, and I do believe, that there is a God, that is, a Being, in whom supreme reason and a most holy will is coincident with the will of God,

\textsuperscript{13} That is to say, the “‘manifold of sense’”, in Muirhead’s words, which might be defined as “‘data supplied to the mind through sensation […] in accordance with its already preconceived forms (sensibilities, like space and time’)”, Sam Vaknin 5.

\textsuperscript{14} It was a year of significant events in Coleridge’s personal and literary life. For example, in 1816 major poems like “Kubla Khan”, “Christabel”, and “The Pains of Sleep” were published, Coleridge was engaged in hectic rivalry with Southey and Wordsworth, and finally 1816 witnessed the rise and relative decline of Coleridge’s opium addiction which was “the material cause of the mental states of which the 1816 poems were fragmentary pictures”, see Tim Fulford Romantic Poetry and Literary Coteries 80, 81, and 89.
and therefore secure in its ultimate consequences by His omnipotence.

(\textit{LR} 5: 15)

This seems to be the peculiarity whereby, and through a kind transcendental revelation, man could will transitory outer impressions received by his mind into an invariant “Supersensuous” realm which is \textit{connected} and defined by God’s omnipotence.\textsuperscript{15} In other words, when defined by philosophical and poetic sense, man may combine opposites into one entity and could transcend beyond matter to the world of reality which Kant had previously affirmed the impossibility of \textit{knowing} it. I argue, therefore, that Coleridge seems to have taken a step further and outpaced Kant’s premise; he overtly breaks with the Kantian metaphysics which aims to regulate the mind’s ability to grasp the reality beyond the phenomenal world. Here Coleridge’s intellectual development appears most fully in the dividing line he draws between “two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or \textit{find} itself in this infinity” (\textit{BL} 1: 297). Kant previously described this conflicting interaction within man as capable of yielding “pathological feeling”: a feeling created by a “pathologically affected self” whenever a perceptible object is sensed, that is when “we comprehend how it is possible to perceive a priori that the moral law can produce an effect on feeling” (\textit{Reason} 120), an interaction that will be fully investigated in chapter three. Muirhead comments on this relationship as reciprocally happening between a “percipient and the perceived world” in such a manner that “the power of the first to respond to the second and of the second to satisfy the demands made upon it by the first in the name of coherence and unity” (\textit{Coleridge as Philosopher} 94-5). Based on this assumption, I argue that the term “pathological” tends to indicate a positive rather than negative symptom in Coleridge’s intellectual growth, that is to say, it is an essential element for the development of the poet’s creative mind and identity. First, his childhood was blighted by an untimely feeling of isolation that would accompany him for lifetime:

When I was first plucked up and transplanted from my birth place and family, at the death of my dear father, Providence […] gave the first intimation, that it was my lot, and that it was best for me, to make or find my way of life a detached individual. (quoted in Holmes \textit{Coleridge: Early Visions} 2)

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Coleridge’s postulate in \textit{The Friend}: “Whatever is conscious Self-knowledge is Reason; and in this sense it may be safely defined the organ of the Supersensuous”, 1: 267.
This was an ordeal from which he found solace in poetry and in metaphysical meditation: “I was driven”, he describes himself at the age of six, “from life in motion, to life in thought and sensation” (10). Thus, the symptoms of detachment, analogous to those experienced by the Ancient Mariner, were obviously providing the basis that would mould Coleridge’s later literary career. They began to reflect his sense of belonging to, rather than detachment from, a different world which he portrays, for instance, in “This Lime Bower Tree my Prison” where these symptoms are transformed into more lively than dull momenta: “and sometimes/ ‘Tis well to be bereft of promised good, / That we may lift the Soul, and contemplate/ With lively joy the joys we cannot share” (66-68).

Secondly, these symptoms instigated within him an imaginative venture to idealize a world hardly known to the majority of the eighteenth century thinkers. At the age of eight he recalls how his “mind had been habituated to the Vast—and I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my sight—even at that age” (CL 1: 354).

The argument, however, may extend further to embrace his later philosophical maturity. Apparently Coleridge was creating what he called a “sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world”. He did that by developing “moral Sentiments, Affections, or Feelings” and associating them with the “Scenery of Nature”. This sort of synthesis, he adds, creates “a kind of thought highly favourable to delicacy of character” and this thought is quite unlikely to be revealed to an ordinary man unless the Kantian pathologically-affected self is generated in him. In Coleridge’s case, I think it is not only generated but reshaped as well, that is to say, the term “pathological” might be applied more broadly than the one intended by Kant. It could denote the unique and a priori faculty that perceives ordinary things in a transcendental light that associates them with the noumenal world that exists beyond the phenomenal one. The resulting feeling out of this synthesis will produce a type of poetry that may “domesticate with heart, and become, as it were, a part of our identity” (Coleridge, Poems 72). So, I think the hypothesis of possible pathological dilemma as a source of imaginative inspiration is the key point which has been overlooked by Lovejoy when he comes to discussing the origin of our motives.

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16 J. Shawcross believes that Coleridge “shunned the companionship of his playmates, and substituted for their pastimes a world of his own creation”, xi.
This phenomenon may be traced back to Coleridge’s first acquaintance with “the Vast”. In October 1780 he was an eight-year old boy wandering aimlessly in Ottery fields following a squabble with his brother Frank. Fatigued and disoriented he fell asleep and “had rolled from the top of the hill to within three yards of the River, which flowed by the unfenced edge of the bottom” (CL 1: 353). The idea of rolling signifies here an important aspect of Coleridge’s psychological development that would characterize his future literary career. It indicates the acute path (perhaps exclusive to inspired poets) that must be travelled so as to connect the inborn ideas which are responsible for the mind’s vivacity with the transcendental realm beyond the sensible world: “Some home-born Feeling”, Coleridge wrote to Robert Southey in 1794, “is the center of the Ball, that, rolling on thro’ Life collects and assimilates every congenial Affection” (CL I: 86). The implication of rolling here does sound Hartleyean in that it is based on mechanistic association of growing ideas; nevertheless, it also signifies a rising awareness of the ‘I’ within. Arguably to reach this awareness it may require resorting to a kind of pathological detachment. Nicholas Roe has recently alluded to such a prerequisite. He believes that Coleridge conducted his infantile “rolling” in order to reach the edge “beyond which finding a way through life is to experience detachment and solitude” (22). Moreover, the reshaped I within is developing steadily because it refuses to stop at the “edge” it reaches (perhaps this “edge” represents the ultimate point of the empirical thinking); instead, Coleridge’s I seems to be after the “unfenced” realm beyond the sphere of matter. In other words, Coleridge’s metaphysical individuality rejects the partial interpretations of the universe provided by the empirical observations. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that made Coleridge in John Keats’s opinion “incapable of remaining content with half knowledge” (Letters I: 193-4, italics mine).

The inclination of being dissatisfied with the surface interpretation of outer objects and impressions seems to have had a tremendous impact on the development of Coleridge’s intellectual thought. Anya Taylor argues that it has significantly contributed to the evolvement of the “kaleidoscopic, inclusive, and expansive ‘I’” within him (108). Perhaps this is the principal factor which is not only responsible for the wide spectrum of themes which he dealt with in his poetry, but also for his short-lived conversions which spanned a variety of disciplines, commencing with the Unitarianism he came to adopt in
his university years and would later renounce, through to his interest in Hartley’s associationism, and eventually to his engagement with and renunciation of Kant’s metaphysics. In other words, for Coleridge the pathological dilemma as outlined above seems to be the growing indignation caused by the restrictions imposed on Coleridge’s transcendental mind by the empirical boundaries. I think Coleridge, as will be discussed below, manages to transform this sense of indignation into momentum, as it were, that drives his metaphysical speculations beyond the “edge” of the sensible matter to the “unfenced” realm of infinitude. An inward momentum as such tends to propel creativity and give Coleridge the pathological inspiration from which he sought no recovery. Arguably this is where he surpasses Kant’s metaphysics. According to Lovejoy, Kant “was chiefly concerned to show […] that all the temporal events of our conscious life are completely predetermined” (343). Coleridge, however, emphasizes man’s freedom of will which coexists with the mind’s dynamism and its infinite ability to incorporate material and immaterial dimensions of an experience. He overtly propounds this attribute of the mind in a notebook entry:

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro’ the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim Awaking of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature / It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is […] the Creator! <and the Evolver! (CN 2: 2546)

The reasoning implied here may not only be considered as an answer to Kant’s postulate of the mind’s inability to connect its ideas to the noumenal world, but as a reaffirmation of the Platonic influence which furnished Coleridge with a significant outlet from the intellectual impasse that was the legacy of the eighteenth century natural philosophies. David Newsome rightly observes that Platonism has already highlighted two key concepts that significantly helped Romanticism to “unfold the deepest secrets of the universe”: first, confidence “in the claims of the visionary power” and, second, “the intuitive faculty in man” (3). It seems that Coleridge held both concepts as necessary for any intellectual thinking, and, moreover, he was fusing them in a manner that is consistent with his transcendental mind.

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17 Coleridge’s subsequent rejection of Unitarianism was mainly caused by the shallow and restrictive interpretations of Christianity. See “Lectures on Revealed Religion”, Lecture 4, in James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 174.
18 See CL 2: 387.
with his own metaphysical system. 19 In this respect, Andrew Keanie warns against indicting Coleridge for plagiarising Plato’s metaphysics; instead, Keanie sees that this process might be termed as “‘inspissation’” the definition of which is worth quoting here at length:

Coleridge is the example, *par excellence*, of the writer developing by inspissation—showing a steady thickening of the qualities of vision and method […] over the original framework […] the common-denominational factors, the general colour of which is borrowed from other writers […] until the process of saturation is complete and the mature work is left perfectly opaque with its author’s organically evolved quality. The result is, therefore, something new; its success is proportionate to the writer’s skill in adapting his personal material to the old framework […] The process may be compared to the substitution, in an existing building, of a new façade for the original one, without pulling down and rebuilding the whole. (449-50)

Thus, Coleridge appears to have found in Plato’s metaphysics the fertile ground where thinking might be founded, i.e. to see man as a finite microcosmos wherein the infinite is inherent. 20 In *Aids to Reflection* he minimizes this analogy to “‘—a grain of sand sufficing, and a whole universe at hand to echo the decision!’” (121). In doing so, moreover, he was pouring “‘new wine […] into old bottles’” (Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* 61). Nevertheless, Coleridge was confronted by two inevitable extremes brought in by the intellectual context of the eighteenth century, namely, the derogation of the human mind to the sphere of sensible objects versus the Romantic insatiable quest for the vast. 21 We have Coleridge’s own words for this dichotomy recorded in a notebook entry in which he distinguishes between “‘an indolence of mere attention […] or positively passive affections of Sense & Sensation’” on one hand, and on the other the “‘acts and energies of creative Thought, & Recognition—of conscious re-production of states of Being’” (*CN* 1: 3935). The “‘new wine’”, to borrow from Muirhead, that Coleridge was trying to present seems to be the orchestration of artistic creativity with metaphysical philosophy through the agency of imagination which he conceives as a transcendental link intermediating between the material world and its ideal essence. On the other hand, 20 Or ‘a living soul’ as Coleridge quotes from the *Book of Genesis*, see *TT* 12: 8.
21 A standoff as such has been precisely depicted by Northrop Frye as happening between two worlds: “‘sight’ and ‘vision’; in the former ‘we see what we have to see’ whereas in the latter ‘we see what we want to see […] the world we live in’ in contrast to ‘the world we create’”, *Fearful Symmetry*, 33.

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19 Cf. Coleridge’s definition of the poet: “‘He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination’”, *BL* 2: 16.
20 Cf. Coleridge’s definition of the poet: “‘He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination’”, *BL* 2: 16.
Plato’s metaphysics and the doctrine of *anamnesis* in particular served as the “old bottles”, or “poetry of the highest kind” though “without metre” (*BL* 2: 14):22

One excellence of the Doctrine of Plato, or of the Plotino-platonic Philosophy, is that it never suffers [...] its Disciples to forget themselves, lost and scattered in sensible Objects disjoined or as disjoined from themselves. It is impossible to understand the Elements of this Philosophy without an appeal, at every step & round of the Ladder, to the fact within, to the mind’s Consciousness— (*CN* 3: 3935)

This “synthesizing power”, as Rosemary Ashton terms it (“England and Germany” 501), has been elaborately defined by Coleridge as a “synthetic and magical power” capable of revealing “itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty, with old and familiar objects” (*BL* 2: 16), and thus this power, I think, seems to challenge another impossibility of connection assumed by Kant between “things … determinable in time … as phenomena [object]” and “things in themselves … as freedom [subject]”, in other words, opposites are irreconcilable according to Kant because they are determined by two different causalities: “[t]he causality of physical necessity” versus “‘the causality of things in themselves” (*Reason* 151).23 However, according to Coleridge the connection is not only possible, but it breaks through the limitations of time as well. This possibility was envisioned as early as 1796 in “Sonnet: Composed on a Journey Homeward, the Author Having Received Intelligence of the Birth of a Son”:

Oft o’er my brain does that strange fancy roll  
Which makes the present (while the flash dost last)  
Seem a mere semblance of some unknown past,  
Mix’d with such feelings, as perplex the soul  
Self-question’d in her sleep: and some have said  
We liv’d, ere yet this fleshly robe we wore. (*Works* 1-6)

Apart from the apparent indication to the doctrine of *anamnesis* suggested in this poem, I think the significance resides in Coleridge’s comment on it which is expounded in a letter sent to John Thelwall in December 1796, three months after the poem’s composition:

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22See *Meno*: “Knowledge is recollection; the immortal soul remembers its prior familiarity with the Forms”, 86b sq.  
23See *Reason* 151-52.
Now this thought is obscure; because few people have experienced the same feeling [...] Now that the thinking part of Man, i.e. the Soul, existed previously to it’s [sic] appearance in it’s [sic] body, may be very wild philosophy; but it is intelligible poetry, inasmuch as Soul is an orthodox word in all our poets. (CL 1: 164, italics mine)

Here Coleridge is perhaps referring to a cardinal premise that he has extracted from his acquaintance with Plato namely, philosophers are privileged for having the knowledge which “is…about what exists: to know about the nature of what is…as it is’’ whereas laymen resort to belief or opinion which is “‘something more obscure than knowledge, but clearer than ignorance’” (Republic, 478b-e). This assumption may include poets as well as philosophers. In other words, in Coleridge’s reasoning above he tries to show that the exalting metaphysical meditation into one’s antenatal phase and beyond the domain of the senses may be “very wild philosophy” not only in terms of its innate correlation to the basic and intuitive aspects of man, but because of its exclusiveness to inspired poets who, while experiencing that sort of reverie, are capable of grasping the infinite truth concealed in ordinary objects. Based on this, one may infer that this is the peculiarity of how a creative poet’s mind should operate: to cast a “‘wild philosophy’” into “‘intelligible poetry’”. Some reviewers argue that this is one of Coleridge’s contributions to the “‘idealistic movement’” through which he “‘may be said to have broken into the line of the empirical philosophy at the height of its influence.’” (Muirhead, “‘The Cambridge Platonists’” 158), or as James Vigus tellingly notes: “‘Coleridge’s moulding of Platonic concepts was wider-ranging than that of his contemporaries, in that it spanned poetry and philosophy, and the tension between them’” (29).

Furthermore, Coleridge’s premise above namely, the fusion of a “‘wild philosophy’” with “‘intelligible poetry’”, has induced a series of interpretations. One of these was David Newsome’s Two Classes of Men (1974); an influential work that focuses on Platonism and the English Romantic thought. Newsome asserts that the core pursuit of Romanticism revolves around the relationship between the One and the many. Generally speaking, Romantic thought was in the main developing a “‘yearning for the One underlying the Many’” (16), that is to say, for the universal that animates the particulars and for the vibrant “‘undergrowth and the wilderness’” underlying the grim Lockean
So, Newsome argues that imagination was a powerful medium to encroach on the realm of alien impressions as conceived by the Lockean philosophy. Seen from a Romantic perspective, Newsome categorizes imagination as a faculty of tripartite modes of operation: first, as a ‘‘loosing and binding power’’ (15); a process which is closely related to Coleridge’s imaginative creativity in that it describes the poet’s mind when it processes an amorphous perceptible object by breaking up its constituent parts and reassemble them into a new shape, a ‘‘creative Thought’’, that is linked with the ‘‘Supersensuous’’ realm; a process of elevating ‘‘the corporeality of thought’’ to ‘‘motion’’ as Coleridge names it (CL 1: 137). Secondly, imagination as a power that could reveal the ‘‘vision of the One’’ (16); another fundamental aspect interpreted by Plato as radiating from the One. It later helped Coleridge to reshape his religious beliefs as he began to denounce Unitarianism, as will be shown in chapter three. Newsome, moreover, sees that imagination leads to ‘‘Pure thought’’ whose sole domain was the ‘‘contemplation of the One’’ (17) and, consequently, imagination was conceived as the cardinal tool not only in artistic creation but in assessing one’s relation with God as well. Coleridge’s ‘‘Hymn before Sun-rise’’, for instance, might have induced a spiritual experience as such where the symbol (represented by the scenery of Scafell) becomes subordinate or mere ‘‘Ambassador from Earth to Heaven’’ in an attempt to reach the exhilaration of praising God (Works 723). Third, imagination, Newsome adds, is the ‘‘power to perceive the infinite within the finite’’ (18). This attribute has been directly associated with Plato’s dialogues whose chief aim was to relate the material world with its ideal Forms through a wearying process of philosophical contemplation. Moreover, Newsome asserts that German idealism was nowhere so influential on Coleridge’s metaphysical maturing than in its emphasis on the imagination’s ability to perceive the infinite through the agency of the finite. Newsome expounds this influence by drawing an analogy between Coleridge’s attitudes, especially the ones most related to

24 Cf. Plato’s Philebus, when Protarchus asks Socrates about what ‘‘dialectic’’ means, the latter answers: ‘‘Clearly the science which could know all that knowledge of which we are now speaking (the relationship between one and many)’’, 58; italics mine.

25 Of course, recent scholarship argues that Coleridge was, in fact, drawn to materialist, empiricist and sceptical theories. This view will be thoroughly discussed in chapter three.

26 Cf. in J. Shawcross’s words, it is the ‘‘habit of self-abstraction from his visible surroundings’’, xii.

27 See, for example, Plato’s Symposium, passim.
his religious thought, with, for example, those of Hegel towards the infinite essence and the role of mind to explore it. In the *Science of Logic*, for instance, Hegel appears corresponding to a Romantic tenet which was enthusiastically embraced by Coleridge:

The merely felt and sensible is not the spiritual; its heart of hearts is in thought; and only spirit can know spirit […] The form of feeling is the lowest in which spiritual truth can be expressed. The world of spiritual existences, God himself, exists in proper truth, only in thought and as thought. If this be so, therefore, thought […] is the highest and […] the sole mode of apprehending the eternal and absolute. (quoted in Newsome 18)\(^{28}\)

Moreover, the most salient part of Newsome’s book resides in what he calls “Coleridge’s Trichotomous Logic”. This phrase reminds us of the chasm between the Platonic and Aristotelian epistemological quest and Coleridge’s ceaseless attempts to create a mutual ground between them. While Plato sought immutable reality through a dialectical process between mind and an observed object within the temporal order, Aristotle fundamentally relied on “the practical rather than the speculative” calculations to reveal the truth underlying visible things, moral codes, and even wisdom itself. In other words, Plato saw truth residing in a “state of reconciliation of opposites” or a “coincidentia oppositorum” (Newsome 6), that is to say, opposites co-substantiate each other thus beauty cannot exist without ugliness. In contrast, truth, according to Aristotle, is an average point downsized by the interaction of two components at sharp variance: “We call it a mean condition as lying between two forms of badness, one being excess and the other deficiency” (quoted in Newsome 100). So, the virtue of “courage” becomes a mesothesis or a mediating agency or principle positioned between “foolhardiness” and “cowardice”. Newsome, however, argues that Coleridge was devising his own theory to approach reality; it stipulates that “Extremes meet” despite their apparent differences. So, instead of finding the truth of things in a middle point which is indifferent to its either poles –its “excess” and “deficiency”– as expounded in Aristotle’s “dichotamic logic”, Coleridge’s scheme, on the other hand, consists of a mesothesis or an ‘Identity’ in the attainment of which the collision between the opposites of “thesis” and “antithesis” becomes subordinate. This idea can be illustrated as follows:

\(^{28}\) Cf. William T. Harris comments on Hegel’s premise: “Art and literature do not betray a practical aim or purpose, but conceal it under the aesthetic form addressed to man’s sense-perception”, see *Hegel’s Logic: Genesis of the Categories of the Mind* 2.
Coleridge describes this formula as follows:

Where two subjects, that stand to each other in the relation of antithesis (or contradicdistinction) are connected by a middle term common to both, the sense of this middle term is indifferently determinable by either: the preferability of the one or the other in any given case being decided by the circumstance of our more frequent experience of, or greater familiarity with, the Term in this connexion. Thus, if I put Hydrogen and Oxygen Gas, as opposite Poles, the term Gas, is common to both; and it is a matter of indifference, by which of the two bodies I ascertain the sense of the Term. (AR 225)

But Coleridge, Newsome believes, took that formula a step further. From the resulting synthesized mesothesis, a “prothesis” emerges. That is to say, as a form which surpasses mere “synthesis” or “composition” which is “a putting together of the two [opposites], so that a third something is generated” (Newsome 104), prothesis emerges in Coleridge’s thinking as “a primary unity that gives itself forth into two things” (LR 4: 429). In other words, it is the “coherence” between opposites which can be superior to mere composition because it, prothesis, is a subtle process equivalent to the workings of Coleridge’s secondary imagination:

But the blade of a knife and its handle when put together do not form a synthesis, but still remain a blade and a handle […] so a prothesis is a primary unity that gives itself forth into two things. (quoted in Newsome 104)

To the above triple diagram Newsome adds two more components: prothesis as elevated above synthesis:

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29 Cf. “Both alike have quenched the Holy Spirit, as the mesothesis of the two”, Marginalia 2: 290.
30 In a spiritual sense that associates man with the figure of Christ, Coleridge restresses the hypothesis of man as a microcosmos: “The two opposites, here are flesh and spirit: this in relation to Christ, that in relation to the world; and those two opposites are connected by the middle term, birth, which is of course common to both.” That is to say, the middle point -birth- is common to both Christ and man; the antithesis is, however, Christ’s birth signifies a resurrection from the material world whereas man’s birth is an incipient phase “by which we belong to the present world”, see AR 225-226.
31 The OED defines Prothesis as “An antecedent entity or purpose”.
32 Cf. Coleridge’s various definitions of prothesis: “This Prothesis of Inwardness and Outwardness, which therefore is neither because the (N.b. not Synthesis, but) Prothesis or potential Identity of both, Moses has with the strictest logical Propriety named by anticipation from the Thesis”, CN 3: 4418. “As a synthesis is a unity that results from the union of two things, so a prothesis is a primary unity that gives itself forth into two things”, LR 4: 429.
So, the prothesis, Newsome concludes, becomes the ultimate “Higher Third. But in its absolute meaning it is the One, the Supreme Being, the apex […], the total idea in which subject and object are really one” (105). In other words, the prothesis, according to Newsome, is the indivisible entity that stands by itself as the absolute reality which is indifferent to any components that might contribute to its ultimate formation.33

However, I would argue that Newsome has overlooked Coleridge’s interest in “the Vast” (CL I: 354) which seems infinitely growing because the target that Coleridge sets out for this interest is the Supreme Being itself. Therefore the fivefold formula drawn by Newsome above is insufficient in two aspects: first, it truncates Coleridge’s interest in “the Vast” to only five stages, and, secondly, in Coleridge’s transcendental thinking the route to the Supreme Being stretches so infinitely that Newsome’s pentad structure could hardly traverse. Coleridge delineates this route as enervating and tremendously mind-exhausting: “My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great—something one & indivisible—” (CL I: 349). Therefore, I think the mind’s transcendence to the divinity as Coleridge envisages might go through multiple phases. First, the imaginative faculty intervenes and starts assimilating the symbols of nature – “rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns” – which serve here as only a physical stimuli, which is, according to J. Shawcross, “subordinate in dignity to the human soul” and merely represent the “mysterious analogy of matter and spirit in the forms of a sensible world” (35). Processed as such, these elements are reshaped and elevated to the soul world which is – as Coleridge

learned from Plotinus’s theory of incarnation—man’s link with the Supreme Being.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, the poet’s mind, propelled by its dynamism, embarks on a journey which commences from the mere sense of matter, and in this journey imagination, the ‘‘modifying Power’’ (\textit{CL} 2: 1034), transmutes the material particular into the immaterial universal. Characteristically these elements have been pieced together in Coleridge’s ‘‘Fears in Solitude’’ where the poet confines himself in ‘‘a quiet spirit-healing nook!’’. Here ‘‘he might lie on fern or wither’d heath’’; a foreground which could stand for the physical thesis. He is surrounded by the natural elements ‘‘the singing-lark’’, ‘‘the Sun’’, and the ‘‘breezy Air’’. These elements start provoking ‘‘Sweet influences trembled o’er his frame’’ till imagination summons ‘‘a meditative joy’’ and a mesothesis—a mediating agency— is reached when ‘‘Religious meanings in the forms of nature’’ have been invoked.\textsuperscript{35} As a mesothesis, the latter is unique in that it does not appear to belong to either poles of the scene. This state of revelation is concluded with an antithesis when the observed singing lark is transformed to an immaterial ‘‘angel’’ whose domain is ‘‘in the clouds’’ instead of the worldly ‘‘wither’d heath’’ with which the poem opens (\textit{Works} 470).

Moreover, one of the most interesting approaches to this subject, that is, matter permeated by religious spirituality, has been proposed and elaborated by James Engell in his renowned book \textit{The Creative Imagination} (1981). Engell argues that Coleridge’s philosophical career has been entirely dedicated to ‘‘reconcile the Dynamic Philosophy with traditional Christianity’’, that is to say, Coleridge’s philosophy on the whole aims at showing that God as the Supreme Being ‘‘is found neither in the objective world of phenomena nor in the subjective world of spirit, nor in the union of these two. God includes all three modes and can manifest himself in these three ways’’. But Coleridge’s religio-philosophical system, Engell observes, was trying to approximate a ‘‘fourth mode’’ (364). In \textit{Aids to Reflections}, for instance, Coleridge defines this ‘‘mode’’ as a ‘‘Point not contained in the Line but independent [... and transcendent to all production, which it caused but did not partake in’’ and the ‘‘all production’’ he refers to here symbolizes the three elements of the subjective and objective worlds and their union

\textsuperscript{34} ‘‘that other Soul (of the human being) which is a radiation […] from [the divinity] withdraws also, drawn after it’’, \textit{Enneads} 1: 14.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Cf.} the shift of this mood four years later in ‘‘Dejection: An Ode’’ in which Coleridge’s laments the failure of this ‘‘modifying Power’’, i.e. Imagination. \textit{CL} 2: 1034. Moreover, agonizing over the failing of this power was renewed towards the end of Coleridge’s life. He wrote to Thomas Allsop in 1820 ‘‘Alas! for the proud times when I planned, when I had present to my mind the materials as well as the Scheme of the Hymns, entitled Spirit, Sun, Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Man’’, \textit{CL} 5: 28.
which are all positioned on a virtual interactive circle. In other words, this “Point”, which he more precisely terms as “Punctum invisibile” [sic], is the “logical PROTHESIS” from which all the three modes generate and which “has no (real) Opposite or Counter-point” (AR, Note 50). Thus, the eventual circle of these correlations takes the following form:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Prothesis} &= \text{God} \\
\text{Thesis} &= \text{Son} \hspace{1cm} \text{Antithesis} = \text{Spirit} \\
\text{Synthesis} &= \text{Father} \hspace{1cm} (CN 3: 4427) \tag{36}
\end{align*}
\]

Based on the sketch above, it seems that Coleridge emphasizes the eternal symbiosis of the correlation between the “Absolute Essence” and the “Absolute Form” of what he calls “the Subject-Object in absolute Identity”. This union begets the Father, the typical synthesis of thesis and antithesis, subject and object, in Coleridge’s thinking. The ultimate and independent entity is God, the eternal Prothesis which is free from the need to liaise with other beings to form a whole because it “absolutely begets itself as it [sic] own Object”. Significantly, man is equipped with the innate faculty of imagination which is capable of dissolving the regions between subject and object so that to transcend and “return to the Prothesis, or re-affirmation” where the many become one: “[t]hus the Monas, the Dyas, the Trias, and the Tetractys are one” (CN 3: 4427).\(^37\) Engell’s argument, moreover, revolves around the role of imagination in this process. His view rests on the assumption that to Coleridge imagination performs a religious as well as artistic task. The mind, according to Coleridge, is a “portion of [God’s] own great attributes” from which imagination emanates and penetrates into the essence of objects as symbols so that to grasp the ultimate truth behind them (Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton 8). According to Engell the same can be said about imagination, the mind’s principal instrument. That is to say, in addition to its ability to dismantle the objective system of matter, imagination also attempts to expand its mode of operation to envelop tangible religious symbols like the “living Word, who is Christ” and the “written Word in Scripture”. These two elements form the “Objective manifestation” which, when united with the Holy Spirit (Subjective manifestation), forms the “Union of material and spiritual” represented by the ultimate synthesis of the Father (Engell 365). Herein lies the instrumental role of

\(^{36}\) Cf. Marginalia 2: 290.

\(^{37}\) Cf. Coleridge’s characteristic view of man as “his own creator, for by the improvement of the faculties bestowed upon him by God, he not only enlarges them, but may be said to bring new ones into existence”, see Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton, 8.
imagination: it becomes analogous to Christianity in terms of being the “ALL-COMBINING, ALL-PENETRATING, ALL-TRANSFORMING SPIRIT OF UNION AND ENNOBLEMENT” (PL 8: 257).

Moreover, Engell observes that the idea of extracting transcendent truth from outer physical objects seems to relate directly to one of Coleridge’s recurrent philosophical premises namely, the recourse to outer “symbols, names, shapes, or images” to reach a “truth of the reason” or idea (337). In other words, while reason only collects “ideas and spiritual truths”, understanding, on the other hand, employs symbolic elements to present ideas along with perceptual data. In Aids to Reflection, for instance, Coleridge clarifies this kind of interrelation between symbolic “Outness” and its immanent truth which is “in its own proper form [...] inconceivable. For to conceive is a function of the Understanding, which can be exercised only on subjects subordinate thereto” (223). In this respect, Engell emphasizes this interaction by relating it to the role of imagination. “It mediates”, he argues, “between immediate reason and immediate senses and expresses their union to the understanding”. Arguably, imagination is the sole human faculty that unifies two extreme opposites of an experience and fuses them into one coherent synthesis, and “while understanding [...] can grasp the two poles of the Dynamic [experience], it cannot unify them. It cannot create the images on which it depends” (Engell 336). Imagination, therefore, operates as the “laboratory” where the subjective quintessence and the objective world – the “intelligence” as “exclusively representative” and nature as the “exclusively represented” (BL 1:255) – interpenetrate and dissolve in one crucible so that to finally create, in A. J. Harding’s words, a “unified artefact” (Coleridge and the Inspired Word 72).

More significantly the salient part of Engell’s argument, I think, lies in the section which discusses the workings of the imagination within the mind itself. He argues that

38 Mary Ann Perkins, for example, believes that Coleridge considered symbol as “deeply intertwined” with the Logos or Word itself, see Coleridge’s Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle, 6.
39 Cf. CN 3: 3325. “All minds must think by some symbols—the strongest minds possess the most vivid Symbols in the Imagination—yet this ingenerates a want, [...] for vividness of Symbol: which something that is without, that has the property of Outness (a word which Berkley preferred to “Externality”)).” Also in Biographia Literaria 1:243, Coleridge concludes that “philosophy cannot be intelligible to all, even of the most learned and cultivated classes. A system, the first principle of which it is to render the mind intuitive of the spiritual in man (i.e. of that which lies on the other side of our natural consciousness) must needs have a great obscurity for those, who have never disciplined and strengthened this ulterior consciousness”.
40 CN 2: 3158.
imagination could perform another task in addition to being “simply a messenger emanating from ideas and dictating our understanding” (338). In other words, imagination emerges as not merely a synthesizer of the objective and subjective poles of an experience, rather its unique “esemplastic” nature makes all other inner faculties of the mind coexist in a compatible manner despite the disparate natures of their operations. Based on this assumption the imagination becomes a “protean” and intermediary agent that runs smoothly and freely through the seemingly divided faculties of sense, understanding, and reason informing, as it were, each faculty of the contents of the other in a process that Engell calls “continuous feedback”. In this case these constitutive faculties of the mind will “affect each other; they mix and transfer power, until they abolish the partitions between them and form one flow of sensation, ideas, reflection, and language” (339).

It follows, then, that imagination as expounded by Coleridge becomes an “Esemplastic” power that operates inwardly and outwardly “to shape into one”, that is to say, the inborn faculties of the mind as well as the outer material and the inner ideal aspects of an experience, and Engell’s premise appears to be applicable to Coleridge’s own circular sketch detailed above. However, Engell seems to have overlooked two essential aspects that are axiomatic for Coleridge. First, the faculties of sense, understanding, and reason might also stand for thesis, antithesis, and synthesis respectively. They are all subsumed by the “shaping and modifying power” of imagination. Consequently the mind itself as a “portion of [God’s] own great attributes” becomes the transcendental arena of the trinity of the Son, Spirit, and their coalescence as represented by the synthesized Father. These faculties combined symbiotically as such would form an immaterial entity whose domain of operation is beyond the sphere of phenomena. Only here and then does imagination acquire the more subtle definition of “philosophic imagination,” or the “modifying, and co-adunating Faculty” which is an exclusive privilege to highly-inspired poets as Coleridge observes:

They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar [...] they know and feel, that the

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41 PL 8.
42 This faculty, Coleridge believes, has always characterized the “Hebrew Poets” who assume that “each Thing has a Life of it’s [sic] own, & yet they are all one Life”, CL 2: 459.
potential works in them, even as the actual works on them! (BL I: 241-42)

Secondly, Coleridge, as Lovejoy notes above, has devotedly believed in man’s (and the poet’s in particular) free will as a triggering force of philosophic imagination. He has developed this belief not only as part of his counter philosophy which opposes the confining “cold System of Newtonian Theology” (CL 2: 459), but as a ground to reject the confusion between the actual workings of the imaginative creativity and pantheism which he thought would undermine the “poet’s individuality”.

Some critics, moreover, believe that Coleridge distinguishes himself from contemporary empirical thinking, namely that of Hartley and Priestley, by being independently and “keenly alive” to all the books (the Scriptures in particular), thoughts, and philosophies which he enthusiastically read about. In his recent book, Coleridge and the Inspired Word, Anthony John Harding argues that “Coleridge demanded of the reader a wider hermeneutic vision, which would at least attempt to grasp something of the authorial presence behind the text and sympathize with its aims” (60). In other words, Coleridge was profoundly attracted to a way of thinking that would summon the reader’s creative individuality and involvement when reading the spirit of the written words rather than their superficial and literal meaning. Harding notes that Coleridge considers “both the creation and the enjoyment of poetry are activities in which one’s whole being—moral, intellectual, and aesthetic—is freely involved”. So, if man is to transcend to the “moral being”, the “moral, intellectual, and aesthetic” powers that Coleridge was seeking should operate within a realm that is absolutely free from the associative explanations of an experience. In this respect, Harding argues that pantheism is one of the “ontological” hurdles which empties the poet’s mind “of all the affections, powers, values, and particular experiences that belonged to the poet as individual and became a mere hollow chamber in which the Objective was fused […] with the Subjective” hence it denies “free will and with it the whole meaning of the Christian faith” (60-1); this faith has been conceived by Coleridge, as explained above, as an attempt to dissolve the barriers between the objective and subjective, the natural and ideal, or the thesis and its antithesis so that we may attain the “perfect reconciliation” or the Prothesis which neither nature nor the subjective mind alone can realise:

43See Kathleen Coburn’s Experience into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks, 29.
44BL I: passim.
 [...] the artist must first eloin himself from nature in order to return to her with full effect. Why this? Because if he were to begin by mere copying, he would produce masks only, not forms breathing life. He must out of his own mind create forms according to the severe laws of the intellect, in order to generate in himself that co-ordination of freedom and law [...] which assimilates him to nature, and enables him to understand her. (LR 1: 223)

A recent support for this line of thought appears in James Vigus’s book Platonic Coleridge, which undertakes a complex investigation into Coleridge’s intermediary, or synthesizing, role between Plato and Kant as the “two foundational figures” in his philosophical development (35). Vigus’s argument starts with an attempt to situate Kant and the influence of the German idealistic philosophy in general within the British intellectual context during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He believes that the German epistemological thoughts were hardly received warmly in an English milieu, which had traditionally been known for its enthusiasm for Aristotelian empiricist philosophy. The main reason for a dissension as such, Vigus adds, was attributed to the “obscurity, scepticism, atheism, and hence revolution” which characterized German metaphysics; Coleridge’s significant role emerges here. Propelled by his early acquaintance with Kant and Germany, which he first visited in 1798, Coleridge at that point was trying to alleviate the tension that characterized the philosophical ties between England and Germany: “To me”, he declares, “it will be happiness and honour enough, should I succeed in rendering [Kant’s] system itself intelligible to my countrymen” (BL 1: 163), a task that put him under severe criticism by his own countrymen.45

Vigus’s argument focuses on the methodology that Coleridge applied in rendering Kant’s system intelligible. He argues that Coleridge sought to synthesize Plato’s concept of Ideas as absolute constitutive entities whose sublimity may be traced within the phenomenal sphere, with Kant’s regulative a priori Categories. The former, as Muirhead and Lovejoy explain above, are to be approached by the power of “Reason”, whereas the latter ones are conceived through “Understanding”. Despite the deprecating sentiments

45 Following his trip to Germany in September 1798, Coleridge was bitterly criticized by the radical Anti-Jacobin Review for being “one of the associates of the twin-bards was, not long since, at the University of Gottingen, where he has passed a considerable time with another Englishman [i.e. Wordsworth], ejusdemfarinea, for the express purpose of becoming an adept in the mysteries of philosophism, and of qualifying himself for the task of translating such of the favourite of the German school as are the best calculated to facilitate the eradication of British prejudice”, see vol. 4 (December 1799), 13, quoted in Vigus, 37. Cf. Rosemary Ashton’s The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought.
with which Kant’s ideas were received into England, for Coleridge, however, they were so overwhelming that they touched his whole being ‘‘with a giant’s hand’’ (BL 1: 153). He, therefore, was more disposed to see them incorporated with what he had already learned from the Platonic Ideas, which themselves, nevertheless, were in no better standing in Coleridge’s time. In this respect, Vigus believes that Coleridge initially had to address the issue of ‘‘dualism’’ pertinent to whether we use the faculty of Understanding or Reason to reach the truth beyond the visible world. Here Coleridge was trying to rebut Kant’s claim that the ideal ‘‘Ding-an-sich’’ (thing-in-itself) which exists beyond the sphere of matter is unknowable, i.e. it cannot be reached through discursive Understanding, thus the ‘‘transcendental ideas’’, Kant asserts, are:

[...] never of constitutive use, so that the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given, and if they are so understood, the result is merely sophistical (dialectical) concepts. On the contrary, however, they have an excellent and indispensable necessary regulative use, namely that of directing the understanding to a certain goal respecting which lines of direction of all its rules converge at one point. (Reason 672-3)

The reasoning ensuing from Kant’s postulate implies that ‘‘our intuitions ‘[…] are sensuous only — that we do not have intellectual intuitions’’ (Vigus 45). Moreover, Kant expressly contends that these ideas are exclusively performing regulative role, therefore the reference to the ‘‘sophistical (dialectical) concepts’’ seems an implied criticism directed against the inherent and transcendental essence which, according to Plato, permeates perceptible objects. A premise as such, however, would hardly be congruent with Coleridge’s metaphysical scheme which features man as an agent capable of mystical meditation and linked to the noumenal world by virtue of Reason which knows the divine being to which it is connected because it is:

[...] an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the Universal, the Eternal, and the Necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phenomena. But then it must be added, that it is an organ identical with its appropriate objects. Thus God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c. are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves reason. (AR 308)\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. James R. O’Shea who believes that ‘‘[i]n the long passage from the Lectures on Metaphysics […], Kant indicates that the metaphysical ideas of God, freedom and immortality ‘are pure concepts of reason that simply cannot be exhibited in appearance, [and] which therefore can merely be thought. One can therefore call them supersensible objects, noumena, i.e., objects of the understanding, and oppose them to the phenomena’. (Note that Kant himself will argue, […] that noumena or things in themselves are not in
However, Vigus believes that Coleridge significantly managed to conflate the Platonic Ideas with their rival Kantian ones. As previously mentioned, Coleridge infinitely believed that man himself is a complex *synthesis* of thesis and antithesis, of matter and idea, thus he is, in Vigus’s words, “simultaneously a causally determined member of the sensible world, and a free member of the intelligible world” (50). According to Kant there is an “incalculable gulf” that splits these two extreme *worlds*, and the connecting medium between them, which is also of particular interest for Coleridge, is the *power of imagination* which:  

[...] operates as a production cognitive faculty [...] which is very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material that actual nature gives it [...] in this process we feel our freedom from the law of association. Imagination, that is, is a mediating faculty that moves freely, as it were, between the ‘two worlds’, exercising creative power. It transforms natural materials into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature. (quoted in Vigus 51)

This, I think, is the Kantian postulate that touches Coleridge’s creative imagination “with a giant’s hand”. In other words, it tremendously helped to reshape the *I* within him from mere receptacle of outer impressions to a key partaker and creator of an experience. Recently Jane Kneller, in *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, argues in favour of “Kant’s account of imaginative freedom” and its contribution to the evolution of the creative imagination as a pathway leading to a “‘moral world’” beyond the phenomenal one:

The existence of a moral world presupposes agency that can bring it about, and the command to seek it presupposes that we can believe it possible through our own agency. Our ability to represent such a world in imagination would allow us to believe in the possibility of a moral world on earth and in ourselves as creators of that world. (52)

It can be argued here that this is one of the points where Plato and Kant are brought together to a common ground by Coleridge’s intellectual capacity for accommodating conflicting philosophies. Coleridge’s expression that would very likely correspond to Kant’s hypothesis above is reading Plato by anticipation: “I have read several of the

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47 See *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:175-6.
48 Cf. Kneller believes that “[a]s natural physical beings we are bound by the laws of nature, as moral agents by the law of practical reason, but as imaginative creatures we are constrained by neither and thus have creative power”, 52.
works of Plato several times with profound attention, but not all his writings. I soon found that I had read Plato by anticipation. He was a consummate Genius’’ (TT 1: 98-99), italics mine). The implied sense in Coleridge’s statement, I think, may indicate the profound effect Plato had on Coleridge. It perhaps suggests that Plato’s metaphysics readily corresponds to Coleridge’s “inward being”: “[i]t is impossible to understand the Elements of this Philosophy without an appeal, at every step & round of the Ladder, to the fact within, to the mind’s Consciousness”. The word “several”, moreover, is employed in lieu of total so as to suggest that Plato has already permeated Coleridge’s thinking so deeply that he needs no further reading. In other words, Platonism provided Coleridge with the constitutive elements of his own philosophical system: first, it salvaged his mind, so to speak, from the “indolence of mere attention […] or positively passive affections of Sense & Sensation”, and, secondly, it elevated it to the “acts and energies of creative Thought, & Recognition” (CN 3: 3935). Vigus argues here that Coleridge senses in the Platonic text “an effort to bridge the distance between the finite and the infinite by allowing words to dissolve into a religious sense of wonder” (27). Significantly the bridging process also “spanned poetry and philosophy, and the tension between them”, as Vigus observes. To mitigate this “tension”, Coleridge suggests that Plato should be read “by anticipation”, a method that he believes to give the reader a state of recognition: “the process by which a text seems to call up powers previously concealed in the reader’s mind, which one then recognizes to have been there all along” (Vigus 53). That is to say, the mind contemplates the Platonic text and becomes able to, first, recognize the a priori ideas inherent within it, and, secondly, to synthesize those with physical and a posteriori impressions. This would perhaps produce an arcane mixture understood by few recipients. In Coleridge’s case, this mixture generates an inconceivable “creative Thought” that sounds so bizarre and fragmentary to the extent that makes its author subject to constant vitriol. To Coleridge, however, the process of suturing opposites sounds like “his dear gorgeous Nonsense!” (CL I: 295). Vigus argues here that deriving a “creative Thought” out of “discordant qualities” necessitates dispensing with language’s “denotational and logical adequacy to its objects” because language, in its

49BL 2: passim.
50Cf. Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, letter 2: “in the Bible there is more, that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together”, 47.
51 For example, one of the reviewers in The Edinburgh Review comments that “[Coleridge] winks and mutters all unintelligible, and all impertinent things […] he ascends to the orbits of the fixed starts, or else enters into the statistics of the garden plot under his window”, 445.
material sense, fails to communicate the idealistic meditations contained in the implied “creative Thought”. This is, I think, the dilemma of judgement which Coleridge puts his critics in when they deal with a poem like “Christabel” which may provoke “a tantalizing sense of esoteric doctrines lying beyond the text” (Vigus 6).52

However, Coleridge’s metaphysics, particularly his devotion to Platonism, has been frequently revisited, especially in terms of its appropriateness to contemporary scientific and technological advancements. For example, in “Coleridge and the ‘Other Plato’,” Mary Anne Perkins cautions against excessively associating Coleridge’s transcendental system with Plato’s metaphysics. In other words, Perkins questions the idea drawn of Coleridge as someone “responding [...] to the sensory stimulus of nature [...] and ends in abstractions, in other-worldly idealism, spiritual puritanism, and dogmatic metaphysics”. This is “a false picture”, she asserts (32). Perkins believes that the infinite which Plato seems to pursue is more far-stretching than all Plato’s transcendental ponderings; what Plato is after, Perkins adds, is rather a “subjective reality” which might be “emotionally, aesthetically, and morally significant but has no claims to universality; and is therefore always seen as relative in the weak sense (that is, constrained by, rather than affirmed by, "otherness")”. Platonism, Perkins argues, becomes a relative concept dependant on the “other-worldly”. Therefore Perkins calls for a “reconstruction” of Plato and, accordingly, of Coleridge himself: “This process may also critically re-examine the “construction” of Coleridge as dogmatic metaphysician seeking solace and safety from Romantic despair and alienation within religion and an other-worldly Platonism” (33-5). Perkins, therefore, appears to reiterate a stereotypical image that has been habitually attached to Coleridge for almost two centuries: that of a poet who “[i]nstead of inquiring into the distresses of the manufacturing or agricultural districts, he ascends to the orbits of the fixed stars”, and, secondly, as someone who:

[…] illustrates the whole question of peace and war by observing that the ideal republic of Plato was, if he judges rightly, to the history of the town of “Man-Soul” what Plato was to John Bunyan:—a most safe and politic conclusion! (The Edinburgh Review 445)

52 In May 1796, Coleridge touched upon this dilemma: “Richard Poole of Sherbourne […] deems my religious Musings too metaphysical for common readers. I answer—the Poem was not written for common Readers. In so miscellaneous a collection as I have presented to the Public, Sigula cuique should be the Motto”. CL 1:209.
To sum up, with the given literary contexts in mind, this thesis argues that Coleridge viewed perceptible matter and metaphysical idea as interdependent and complementary. The reshaping power of imagination serves as the ideal instrument by which this coalescence might be achieved. As I show in chapter two, for instance, Christabel’s mundane distresses and restlessness might be attributed to her ingrained yearning for Geraldine, her supernatural counterbalance. Likewise chapter three attempts to re-evaluate Coleridge as a practical thinker by critically examining his immediate response to the atrocities of war and how they could stimulate within us an inborn and elevating sense of sympathy. Thus, instead of repetitively emphasising the epical trace attached to Robert Southey’s poem, chapter three demonstrates that in his version of Joan of Arc Coleridge modifies the poem’s moral so broadly that its realistic context itself becomes transcendental and ennobling. Finally, chapter four investigates the aspects in which Coleridge sought to modify Plato’s rejection of poetry by redefining literary aesthetics as more interactive with contemporary concerns.
Chapter Two

The Sage of “Christabel” at Highgate

This chapter attempts to cover the most prolific and controversial period from 1797 to 1816, which witnessed the composition and publication of “Christabel”. In addition, it argues that during this period Coleridge’s comprehensiveness of mind remained intact despite his delicate health, financial difficulties, and, most importantly, the rather hostile reception his writings received within London literary society.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Coleridge seemed determined to maintain the philosophical system which he had incessantly worked on at the outset of the century, that is to say, to amalgamate the objective (material) sensory data with the subjective (ideal) processing of the mind so as to extract a prothesis that belongs to neither poles. To illustrate this system in more details, three of Coleridge’s lesser known poems will be investigated, namely, “Imitations of Du Bartas” (1807), “The Pang More Sharp Than All” (1807), and “Limbo: A Fragment” (1811). These poems were written during the period that followed Coleridge’s return from Malta in 1806. They reflected Coleridge’s pessimistic and restless mood as he was moving towards an age where his “Metaphysics” (CL 5: 437) was about to undergo its paramount trial against the realism of the nineteenth century. Moreover, these poems will be compared to three model poems which Coleridge wrote earlier namely, “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison” (1797), “Frost at Midnight” (1798), and “Dejection: an Ode” (1802). The aim of these comparative analyses is to detect Coleridge’s intellectual adaptability and in what aspects it enabled him to fare effectively in an age of significant changes and different intellectual tendencies from the ones Coleridge experienced in the eighteenth century.

The chapter rounds off its main argument with a detailed analysis of “Christabel”, which methodically manifests Coleridge’s philosophical and poetical thought. It investigates the relationship between the poem’s two heroines as a representation of the interdependence of the thesis and antithesis and the poet’s role as a synthesizer between them. As an example of this process, I would argue that the symbiotic relationship between Christabel and Geraldine and their eventual fusion are essential to form what Coleridge calls prothesis. Thus the chapter questions the long-established view of Geraldine’s evil as pitted against Christabel’s purity, and it consequently argues against
the traditional postulate which categorizes “Christabel” as a poem about the Christian redemption versus lure of the satanic.

After an exhausting period of mental exertion, and health relapses mainly inflicted by heavy opium addiction, Coleridge arrived in London on 25 March 1816. Seventeen days later he was received at Highgate by Dr James Gillman who would be his medical carer till his death in 1834. For some reasons, and based on previous assessment already made by a colleague of his, Dr Gillman expected to receive “an unfortunate gentleman” who might be “incoherent, and possibly dangerous” (Holmes, Coleridge: Darker Reflections 426).¹ To a man like Coleridge who absorbed Platonism and the diversity of its accompanying pool of eighteenth century philosophies, incoherence and inconsistency would be characteristic attributes that might not be welcomed into the nineteenth century materialistic and utilitarian foreground. So it is the aim of this chapter to trace Coleridge’s idealistic philosophy and intellectual development throughout the dominant materialistic spirit of the nineteenth century.

Interestingly, Coleridge’s arrival at Highgate coincided with the publication of “Christabel”; a significant event that was both enthusiastically recommended by Lord Byron as “the wildest & finest I ever heard in that kind of composition” (Letters, iv.318-19), and severely criticized by William Hazlitt (434). Hazlitt’s views of “Christabel” and of Coleridge’s writings in general foreshadowed the challenges which lay ahead of Coleridge in the nineteenth century London. Thomas Carlyle’s view in The life of John Sterling, for instance, succinctly describes these challenges: “[t]he practical intellects of the world did not much heed [Coleridge], or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer” (231). Coleridge himself summarized the challenges lying ahead in a letter he sent out to John Taylor Coleridge concerning the burdens he and his publisher were enduring:

The Sale of the Christabel sadly disappointed Mr Murray. It was abused & ridiculed by the Edinburgh Review; & the Quarterly refused even to notice it […] In this mode Mr Murray expressed himself in such words, as led me, nervous imperfectly recovered as I was, to suppose that he had no pleasure in this connection— at least, that he would have nothing to do with what he called my Metaphysics — which were in truth my all. (CL 5: 437)

The closing phrase in this letter, I think, precisely epitomizes Coleridge’s forthcoming task in the nineteenth century, namely “my Metaphysics — which were in

¹ See Dr Joseph Adams’s referral letter in Richard Holmes’s Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 424.
truth my all’; it will thus form the focal point of this chapter. During this period Coleridge began to re-experience the sensations of detachment which had blighted his childhood. In addition to the prolongation of his recovery from opium addiction, he found himself dismissed by many of his contemporaries as someone who was deeply engaged with obscure metaphysics and as a political nonconformist who set himself aloof from everyday realities. Hazlitt characterises him as ‘‘The mob-hating Mr Coleridge’’:

Our Lay-preacher, in order to qualify himself for the office of a guide to the blind, has not, of course, once thought of looking about for matters of fact, but very wisely draws a metaphysical bandage over his eyes, sits quietly down where he was, takes his nap and talks in his sleep. (The Edinburgh Review 444)

However, this chapter will argue that despite Coleridge’s delicate health, financial difficulties, and tepid reception within London’s literary society, the comprehensiveness of his thinking remained intact. His ‘‘extraordinary intellectual adaptability’’ and his wide-ranging modes of writing enabled him to regain his professional confidence. In this respect, I would argue that Coleridge managed to evince and employ his exclusive ‘‘Metaphysics’’ to prove that the metaphysical aspect of a given experience was as pivotal as the materialistic aspect if the viability and truth behind this experience were to be validated. For instance, in his second Lay Sermon of March 1817 Coleridge employed a biblical analogy to remind the ‘‘Higher Classes’’ of their duties towards the working class, an initiative that could vindicate Coleridge of Hazlitt’s derogatory comment quoted above:

‘‘Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters’’ (139). Moreover, he attacks the ‘‘Evils’’ of the rapidly-growing mechanical system in which ‘‘all things find their level’’. ‘‘But persons’’, he asserts, ‘‘are not Things — but Man does not find his level. Neither in Body nor in Soul does the Man find his level’’ (203). It is in the synthesizing of matter and idea, Coleridge suggests, that objects find their being and Man, as the repository of infinite mind, is no exception.

The years which preceded Coleridge’s Highgate phase, as discussed above, were principally characterized by the frequent conversions he made from one philosophical trend to another or, more precisely, his thorough engagements with diverse philosophical

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2 Rosemary Ashton recounts that in his first edition of Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, De Quincey indirectly ‘‘refer[s] to Coleridge by name, he drops a very large hint in a footnote on the fourth page about ‘one celebrated man of the present day’ who has ‘greatly exceeded me in quantity’’’, The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography, 356.

3 Elsewhere he reminds the British aristocracy that when they had ‘‘subordinated persons to things […] the Poor almost in self-defence, learnt to set up Rights above Duties’’, TT 1: 260.
discourses until he eventually incorporated those diversities into one holistic system which might be described as uniquely his own: “some grand object connected with permanent effects”, as Dorothy Wordsworth attempts to define this system. In addition to his philosophical fluctuations, by the time he moved to London he had been already burdened with health concerns and, subsequently, with an irrecoverable addiction to opium, “that accursed Drug, into which the Horrors of Sleep antecedent to my ever taking it seduced me & to which the Dread of sudden Death [...] afterwards fettered me” (CL 3: 212). As Holmes comments, during the autumn of 1814 Coleridge was “fluctuating between the status of house-guest, medical patient and in the early weeks almost that of a prisoner under restraint” due to his increasing suicidal tendencies (354). However, despite the acuteness of the physical pains he was enduring during these years, the pains themselves did not seem to have concerned him as much as their possible adverse effects on the workings of his mind, effects which might eventually lead to the fear of living with remorse for being in a state “of ingratitude to my maker for the wasted Talents” (CL 3: 489). In other words, it seemed that Coleridge’s acute physical conditions exacerbated the long-standing childhood sensation of detachment which isolated him “like a Leopard in a Den, yet the anguish & remorse of Mind was worse than the pain of the whole Body” (CL 3: 463), a grave condition which he must have feared considerably.

So, in addition to the mounting and sophisticated critique of the effects of materialism on a range of institutions and practices – social and economic, as well as philosophical and religious – this chapter will examine the efforts Coleridge made to salvage what he cherished as, first, “my Metaphysics — which were in truth my all” and, second, his mind which, to him, would operate as the key and sole agent by which he could manipulate that realm.

On 6 April 1804 Coleridge set out for Malta and Italy in what would have been a two-year journey of convalescence in which he wished either “to retire into stoniness and to stir not, or to be diffused upon the winds & have no individual Existence. But all will become better when once I can sit down, & work: when my Time is my own, I shall be myself again” (CL 2: 1116). In this letter, I think, Coleridge seems to have been at a

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4 See The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 86-7.
5 Coleridge was so aware of the “direful Consequences” of addiction that he not only presented himself as “an ample exposition of it’s [sic] tremendous effects on myself”, but he “warned young men, mere acquaintances who had spoken of having taken Laudanum”, CL 3: 476, 511.
6 On 14 May 1814 he confided his principal concern, namely, “derangement of Volition”, to J.J. Morgan: “I was perpetually in the state, in which you may have seen paralytic Persons, who attempting to push a step forward in one direction are violently forced round to the opposite”, CL 3: 489.
decisive crossroads: either to cast his literary potential into the stony and static hypothesis of materialism, or to adhere to his lifelong vocation which emphatically stresses the role of imagination as a “modifying, and co-adunating Faculty” exclusively enjoyed by poets (CL 2: 866). The properties of Coleridge’s poetic accomplishments during the 1790s indicate that he was somewhere in between those two extremes. This state of intermediateness has been attributed to Coleridge’s ability to simultaneously handle diverse themes situated at diverse poles –material and ideal, physical and spiritual– a weighty task that must have profoundly concerned him as well.\(^7\) Morton D. Paley, who argues against Coleridge’s so called “failure to sustain the promise of his great achievements”, robustly emphasizes that: \(^8\)

Coleridge had always had several strings on his bow, or lyre. The same three years that brought ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, Part I of ‘Christabel’, ‘Frost at Midnight’, ‘Kubla Khan’, and ‘Love’ also brought ‘Parliamentary Oscillators’, ‘Fire, Famine, and Slaughter’, ‘Recantation: Illustrated in the Story of the Mad Ox’, and ‘The Devil’s Thoughts’. \(^1\)

In terms of poetic mood, purpose of composition, and the oscillation between the subjective and objective modes, these poems, I think, may serve as an example which reflects Coleridge’s thinking when he was formulating his own philosophical views. In other words it was obvious that Coleridge was resolved to seize on the philosophical system that he had already set out for his literary career: to amalgamate the objective (material) sensory data with the subjective (ideal) processing of the mind, so as to extract what Seamus Perry calls a Coleridgean “hybrid creature” (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 110) made up of heterogeneous elements, an entity which dispels Hume’s scepticism regarding the metaphysical aspects of life.\(^9\) This seems to have been the basis on which Coleridge established his philosophical thought which was about to undergo its paramount trial in the early nineteenth century. In Coleridge’s epistemology this thought refers to the very task “‘[o]f a great metaphysician: he looked into his own Soul with a

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\(^7\) Cf. Coleridge’s letter to William Godwin: “I was once a Volume of Gold Leaf, rising & riding on every breath of Fancy—but I have beaten myself back into weight & density, & now I sink in quicksilver”, CL 2: 714.

\(^8\) Ibid, “The Poet is dead in me— my imagination (or rather the somewhat that had been imaginative) lies, like a Cold Snuff on the circular Rim of a Brass Candlestick, without even a stink of Tallow to remind you that it was once cloathed & mitred with Flame”.

\(^9\) In a sceptical tone Hume inquires: “is there any principle in all nature more mysterious than the union of soul with body; by which a supposed spiritual substance acquires such an influence over a material one, that the most refined thought is able to actuate the grossest matter? Were we empowered, by a secret wish, to remove mountains, or control the planets and their orbit, this extensive authority would not to be more extraordinary, no more beyond our comprehension”, see Enquiries, 65.
Telescope: what seemed all irregular, he saw & showed to be beautiful Constellations & he added to the Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds” (CN 1: 1798). Anthony John Harding has precisely commented on this process namely, the introspection into the soul and the possibility of incorporating it with poetical creativity. He argues that ‘‘transcendental entities such as ‘Spirit’ and ‘Muse’ are:

metaphors for the elements of imaginative creative power which lie beyond or beneath the poet’s conscious control. The Absolute Other posited by the Romantic poet is the product of a defensive reaction, prompted by the poet’s awareness of his own solitude. (Coleridge and the Inspired Word 20)

Harding thus identifies a tenet that had been enthusiastically developed by Coleridge since the 1790s during his persistent engagements with diverse philosophical tendencies, and which would continue to characterize the disjunctive nature of his poetry long afterwards. Therefore, to illustrate Coleridge’s philosophical status and its development in the nineteenth century, three of his lesser known poems will be analysed as a representation of Coleridge’s transition to the more practical philosophy of the nineteenth century. These poems are “‘Imitations of Du Bartas’, “Limbo: A Fragment”, and “The Pang More Sharp Than All”.

I. “‘Imitations of Du Bartas’”

Originally “‘Imitations of Du Bartas’” appeared as a part of a notebook entry which Coleridge wrote in 1807 (CN 2: 3107) immediately after his journey to Malta and Italy, which, as Dorothy Wordsworth recounts, proved anything but rewarding in terms of bettering his troubled health and mood. In a sharp contrast to the relatively pessimistic opening lines of “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison”, for instance, where Coleridge complains of losing any sense of “‘Beauties and Feelings, such as would have been/ Most sweet to my remembrance, even when age/ Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness!’”,

10 Coleridge wrote this poem without giving it a title; instead, he ended it with a note in which he acknowledged the source from which it was derived: “I wrote these Lines, as an imitation of Du Bartas [Du Bartas His Devine Weeks and Works], as translated by our Sylvester”. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, moreover, was the one who gave this poem its current title, see E. H. Coleridge’s Poetical Works vol.1 486, and Kathleen Coburn NOTES on CN 2: 3107. However, Mays believes that E. H. Coleridge “gave lines 31-41 alone under the expressive title Coeli ennarant, ‘The Heavens are Telling’”, see Works, 830.

11 In 1806 Dorothy Wordsworth gave a full of account of “‘poor Coleridge’ following his return to England: “‘His fatness has a quite changed him—it is more like the flesh of a person in a dropsy than one in health; his eyes are lost in it [...] I often thought of Patty Smith’s remark. It showed the true feeling of the divine expression of his countenance. Alas! I never saw it, as it used to be—a shadow, a gleam there was at times, but now faint and transitory!’”, see The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 86-7. Also see CL 2: 1035: “‘My state of Health is a Riddle’”.

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“Imitations of Du Bartas” opens with an optimistic tone in which “Time” seems to correspond more convivially to the poet’s expectations:

Fire, That slept in its Intensity, Life
Wakeful over all knew no gradations,
And Bliss and its excess became a Dream,
And my visual powers involved such Sense,
all Thought, Sense, Thought, & Feeling,
and Time drew out his subtle
Threads so quick, That the long
Summer’s Eve was long one whole web,
A space on which I lay commensurate—

The image of the free flowing “Dream” which is presented here seems to derive its serenity and purity from the poet’s childhood which was once undefiled by the material world:

For Memory & all undoubting Hope
Sang the same note & in the selfsame
Voice, with each sweet now of
My Felicity, and blended momentely,
Like Milk that coming comes of its steady & in its
easy stream Flows ever in, upon the
mingling milk, in the Babe’s murmuring
Mouth/ or mirrors each reflecting each/— (CN 2: 3107)

Suddenly the tranquillity of this infantile dream-like scene becomes disrupted by an awakening which is expressed here in the ominous axiom of materialism:12 “What never is but only is to be/ This is not Life——”. It seems that the tentative pleasure which Coleridge has lighted upon in the poem’s initial phase is now submerged by the element of “Time”, which is presented now as hostile and perplexing: “O Hopeless Hope, and Death’s Hypocrisy!/ And with perpetual Promise, breaks its Promises——”. I would argue here that “Imitations of Du Bartas” accentuates a significant feature of Coleridge’s synthesizing philosophy, an aspect which he had already experienced in 1802 with “Dejection: an Ode”, namely, the failure of the “modifying, and co-adunating Faculty” in the task of creating an organized world out of incongruous elements, or what Perry calls the “mirrorment” which “seems ready to reassume the self should its imaginative partner fail, or step aside” (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 129). In “Imitations of Du Bartas” Coleridge’s “imaginative partner” (the infantile dream-like scene) fails or

12 Cf. Coleridge’s poem “To an Infant” (1795) where similar infantile image sways between innocent childhood and uncertain adulthood: “Man’s breathing Miniature! thou mak’st me sigh—/ A Babe art thou—and such a Thing am I!”, Works, 196.
steps aside once the materialistic one steps in and thus drags mind’s superiority over ‘outward forms’ into the mere materialistic calculation of ‘What never is but only is to be’ (CN 2: 3108). Therefore when Coleridge’s ‘genial spirits fail’ to seize on the idealistic scene which has already been contemplated, the counterbalancing partner—signified by the elements of nature—seems anything but benign:

The Stars that wont to start, as on a chase,
And twinkling insult on Heaven’s darkened Face,
And like a bold conven’d, Conspiracy of Spies
Wink at each other with confiding eyes,
Turn from the portent, all is blank on high,
No constellations alphabet the sky—
The Heavens one large black Letter only shews […] (CN 2: 3107)

In this respect Paley argues that Coleridge here attempts to present ‘“Nature as an unreadable text”’ and by so doing ‘Coleridge is surely conscious of nullifying the possibility of literary symbolism and with it the notion of the poet as interpreter of the universe’ (40). I think a poem like ‘“Imitations of Du Bartas”’, though undeservedly neglected and in spite of the deletions and crossed out words which Coleridge made, presents more assertions than doubts as to what the poet’s role in life should be. In other words, the poem seems minded to set itself firmly in favour of Coleridge’s constant belief in the interdependence of matter and idea or, as M. H. Abrams says, ‘“the dependence of nature’s life on the inner life of man”’ (The Mirror and the Lamp 67), a poetic Coleridgean prerequisite without which the poet is likely to fall into the chaos of the ordinary man where there is no place ‘“for the oracular poet, bearer of the incarnate Word”’ (Paley 40).

“In short”, Coleridge writes to James Gillman junior:

I would fain mechanise your mind into a kaleidoscope, which shall secure as symmetry to all sorts of objects placed within the field of vision, in an endless variety of forms. — Shift the things to be looked at, as choice or chance may dictate, the result is sure to be symmetrical: for this excellence belongs to the kaleidoscope itself, and is communicated to the subject-matters, not received from them. (CL 6: 635)

II. “Limbo: A Fragment”:

The other specimen poem which describes Coleridge as he was cautiously approaching the nineteenth century is “Limbo: A Fragment”; it also appeared within a notebook entry
written between April and May 1811 (CN 3: 4073). The poem opens with depicting Limbo as a kind of intellectual waste land:

Tis a strange Place, this Limbo! Not a Place,
Yet name it so—where Time & weary Space
Fetter’d from flight, with night-mair sense of Fleeing
Strive for their last crepuscular Half-being—
Lank Space, and scytheless Time with branny Hands
Barren and soundless as the measuring Sands,
Mark’d but by Flit of Shades—unmeaning they
As Moonlight on the Dial of the Day—

Here, as in “Imitations of Du Bartas”, Coleridge presents man as totally separated from nature, a dilemma which causes a paralyzing effect on the imagination. However the only way out of this dilemma is through “An Old Man with a steady Look sublime/
That stops his earthly Task to watch the Skies—”. Ironically “he is blind—a statue hath such Eyes—”. The old man is the poem’s main persona which has been subject to a variety of interpretations.13 David Jasper, for instance, believes that the “blind old man, recognizably Coleridge himself, embodies both spiritual deprivation and potential spiritual fulfilment” (110). By presenting the blind old man, on the one hand, as indifferent to earthly tasks and, on the other hand, as gazing at “the orb”, Coleridge seems to emphasize the synthesizing, or the coadunating, faculty of the imagination; therefore Coleridge, as Edward Kessler argues:

achieves a state of Being in which physical passivity and spiritual activity are combined. His mind is independent of the phenomenal world, and his soul is like the one described in the Biographia Literaria: ‘steady and collected in its pure Act of inward adoration to the great I AM’. (101-2)

I argue here that the state of “steady Look sublime” is conditioned by the elevation of the soul to a level that transcends the “crass and sensual materialism” which is merely grounded on “the Nihil nisi ad extra [‘Nothing if not from without’]” (Friend I: 494).

Furthermore, in “Limbo” Coleridge seems to amend the notion of matter and idea in a way that is proportionate with the increasing level of materialism he is about to witness in the nineteenth century. That is to say, Coleridge’s hypothesis of “Extremes

13 Coleridge here might be referring to John Gough the actual blind man whom he met in Kendal in 1799: “Good heavens! It needs only to look at him! Why his face sees all over! It is all one eye!”, see LR 1: 329 and CN 1: 572.
meet’’ does not guarantee that they meet in equal proportions in ‘‘Limbo’’. For example, the material image of ‘‘Nature as an unreadable text’’ seems to expand farther than its allocated domain and thus trespasses on its spiritual counterpart. To restore balance Coleridge resorts to his use of figurative language: the inhabitants of the Limbo are identified as an ‘‘unmeaning they’’; they are presented as disoriented, living the horror of total sterility, and hopelessly striving ‘‘for their last crepuscular Half-being—’’. In contrast the blind old man is described as ‘‘lovely’’, and although he is deprived of physical sight, he seems to have overcome his dire conditions and is capable of grasping the potentiality which the wandering souls have lost, i.e., ‘‘the potential spiritual fulfilment’’ which Jasper refers to above: ‘‘His whole Face seemeth to rejoice in Light/Lip touching Lip, all moveless, Bust and Limb, / He seems to gaze at that which seem to gaze on Him!’’ (CN 3: 4074).

To a large extent, I think, the state of the Limbo and its inhabitants resembles Coleridge’s status in the early nineteenth century milieu, i.e., as the sole prisoner who escapes the illusions imposed by the pseudo realities in Plato’s cave: the dynamic seer who judges by insight rather than by senses, pitted against his contemporaries who have been blinded by sheer indulgence in materialism. As Kessler rightly observes, ‘‘Limbo’’ therefore stands for ‘‘Coleridge’s own poetic life, a life lived on the border between the extremes of materialism (pure image) and mysticism (pure idea)’’. (103).

Coleridge’s determination to achieve a coherent and well-balanced reconciliation between matter and idea has engendered different interpretations. Focusing on Coleridge’s writings up to 1818 (the focal point of this chapter), Seamus Perry argues that ‘‘the permanent claim of [Coleridge’s] mind [rests] not in any abiding unity it synthesises out of its recalcitrant elements, but in the scrupulous energy of its inconsequence’’ (*Coleridge and the Uses of Division* 2). Perry sees that Coleridge’s intellectual output could have been more systematic and less esoteric, but he could have lost as well much of the appealing individuality and much more of the controversies that we usually assign to him; ‘‘he would not be Coleridge if there were not powerful cross currents’’ in Norman Fruman’s more pithy description (‘‘Coleridge’s Rejection of Nature’’ 72). In other words, the forces which are ‘‘diverse, in contention, and unresolved’’ could positively contribute to the making of ‘‘Good Poetry’’ as well (*Coleridge and the Uses of Division* 2). So, when dealing with Coleridge’s thought, we may not expect to come across an ‘‘intellectual structure’’, that is ‘‘systematic and orderly’’ as that which is contemplated by an empiricist. Therefore, instead of supposing a ‘‘division’’, Perry proposes ‘‘a
consistent double-mindedness [...] as ‘di-vision’, ‘twofold vision’ in Coleridge’s thinking (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 3). An ample support for Perry’s claim comes from a letter Coleridge wrote in 1820: ‘‘[i]n all subjects of deep and lasting Interest you will detect a struggle between two opposites, two polar Forces, both of which are alike necessary to our human Well-being, & necessary each to the continued existence of the other—’’ (CL 5: 35). One may instantly detect Coleridge’s ‘‘di-vision’’ through the fragmentation and constant polarities of his thinking: “imagination and fancy, reason, and understanding [...] Platonist and Aristotelian, subjective and objective, ideal and real, observation and meditation [...] or ‘‘Kubla Khan’’ and ‘The Pains of Sleep’’ (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 12). In ‘‘Limbo’’, therefore, the multiplicity of the ‘‘unmeaning they’’ are opposed by the individual, yet insightful blind old man. The same is true in ‘‘Imitations of Du Bartas’’ where childhood is presented in two contrasted images: “the Babe’s murmuring Mouth” in tranquillity versus “a Child beneath its master’s Blows”.

Grasping incompatible double visions simultaneously in order to create a unified one has brought criticism as well as homage to Coleridge: after their European tour in 1829, Wordsworth commented:

S.T.C. never did converse in the common sense of the word; he would lay hold of another person’s suggestion, & then refine upon it, divide & subtilize it till he had made it entirely his own. He borrowed largely, but he had the right to do so, for he gave away as largely. (TT I: 546)

Moreover, in an age of mono-philosophical understandings, mainly materialistic, this kind of aptitude would seem “an ambiguous one which hardly promises to make life very easy, for its possessor or for his interpreters” (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 13). So, in the early nineteenth century Coleridge’s ‘‘di-vision’’ was seen like ‘‘Alph, the sacred river of ‘Kubla Khan’ not flowing anywhither [...] but spreading everywhere in inextricable currents and regurgitations’’ (Carlyle, The life of John Sterling 55-6). More precisely Coleridge found himself in a situation similar to that of the ‘‘blind old man’’ in ‘‘Limbo’’.

I would argue here, then, that there are two Coleridgean aspects which have been recently the main focus of critical debate: first, the extent to which Coleridge’s thought as expounded above was welcomed into the more alienating nineteenth century philosophical background, and, second, how far Coleridge was thematically consistent in all kinds of his literary outputs whether in poetry, letters, lectures, journalism, or any other literary productions. J. C. C. Mays believes that Coleridge’s ‘‘poetry after 1800 is
different [...] in that the relation it bears to what precedes it is more accurately described as dialogic than retrospective. It looks back in order to negotiate a way forward, not to cement a long-sought position” (‘‘The Later Poetry” 90). In other words, Coleridge was devoted to his life-long system which stipulated that the quintessence of philosophy, and thus of poetry, was to emphasize that universal truths were made of interdependent discordant elements. Arguably, what Coleridge wrote after 1800 might well exonerate him from the charge of being confined to the personal context, which he seemed to have focused on particularly in the 1790s, and thus from failure to keep pace with the ongoing changes which were to crop up in the following century. Instead, it characteristically accentuates, I think, the dynamic nature of his thinking which allowed him to employ the similar or modified themes of his early career on different grounds. In 1820 he articulated to the young Thomas Allsop the intrinsic challenge of this undertaking to a philosopher poet: ‘‘Neither Philosophy or Poetry ever did, nor as long as they are terms of comparative excellence & contradistinction, ever can be popular, nor honoured with the praise and favor of Contemporaries” (CL 5: 24).

III. “The Pang More Sharp Than All”14

Mays rightly argues, however, that Coleridge found in the early nineteenth century the “magical moment”; an overlap point, in other words, which was necessary for his intellectual development and advance from the untested assumptions of his early poetry to the maturity of his later career. One of the examples which evinces “the connections and overlap” with the poems composed before 1800 is “The Pang More Sharp Than All” (Mays, “The Later Poetry” 92, 93). This poem features a theme which resonates through Coleridge’s early and later poems: the image of a child, which is identified here by his son, Hartley, “whom he was not to see face to face after Jul 1822” (Works 826). Mays believes that “The Pang More Sharp Than All” has a substantial bearing on Coleridge’s early poem “Frost at Midnight” (written in February 1798) mainly because of the synonymous phrases which are employed both literally or figuratively. For example, the phrase “believing mind” has been used literally in both poems, whereas phrases like “mirror seeking of itself” and “that crystal orb” have been used figuratively.

14 Mays notes that the actual date of this poem composition “is a mystery [...] Various dates have been suggested: 1807, 1811, 1819, autumn 1822, autumn 1823, 1825-6”. I will mainly rely on the version of 1807 because it is “related to feelings which were strong following C[oleridge]’s return from Malta”, see Works, 825-26.
I think, moreover, the connection between the two poems extends beyond the textual context. Significantly, both poems reflect how Coleridge’s dynamic mood has changed as he experiences the same situation in two different times. In “Frost at Midnight” the poet has been left:

[...] to that solitude, which suits  
Abstruser musings: save that at my side  
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.  
‘Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs  
And vexes meditation with its strange  
And extreme silentness. (5-10)

Here, in the opening lines, Coleridge establishes a mood of meditative calm, only to disrupt that mood through an excess of self-reflection:

[...] Sea, hill, and wood,  
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,  
With all the numberless goings on of life,  
Inaudible as dreams! (10-13)

This tranquil and inspirational setting turns into poignant and disheartening quandary in “The Pang More Sharp Than All”. In this poem the speaker seems to be struggling to cling to the remaining hope which he had already nurtured in the “Frost at Midnight”, and the “cradled infant” who used to sleep peacefully is now disturbed. Coleridge’s interactive gratification which he enjoyed in the infant’s presence has thus become provisional, a process signified by the sequential use of the words ‘too’ and ‘yet’:

He too has flitted from his secret nest,  
Hope’s last and dearest Child without a name! —  
Ah! He is gone, and yet will not depart!—  
Is with me still, yet I from Him exil’d! (34-35, italics mine)

More significantly, the evanescence of the elements of nature (the lament of “Dejection: An Ode”) which provide the raw materials for Coleridge’s creative imagination exacerbates his dilemma. “Alas!”, he wrote to Thomas Allsop, “for the proud times when I planned, when I had present to my mind the materials as well as the Scheme of the Hymns, entitled Spirit, Sun, Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Man” (CL 5: 28). Therefore, the receptiveness of Coleridge’s mind into the materialistic thought of the early nineteenth century, as stated above, was hardly favourable. Jerome McGann, for
instance, considers Coleridge’s later poetry to be “disturbing […] self-absorbed and introspective”: 

In these poems Coleridge is not exploring politics, society, or the apparatuses and ideologies of the state, he is applying an allegorical deconstruction to what he himself saw as the most fundamental objects of the mind, the heart, and the soul itself. (97)

The poems which Coleridge wrote during 1790s and after 1800 such as, to name but few, “France: An Ode”, written in 1798 right after France had invaded Switzerland; “The Three Patriots”, on the Reform Bill of 1832; and his “Lectures on Politics and Religion” would argue to a broad extent against McGann’s claim above. Mays points out, however, that in the early poems Coleridge wanted to:

[…] manipulate forces of nature which are supernatural in that they lie beyond the conscious mind. It supposed that poems can act like charms to call forth the powers residing in names and thereby adjust or control them. The later poems, differently, work like riddles, naming not summoning, working through pictures not sound. (“The Later Poetry” 94)

Consequently, the evocative phrases like “secret ministry”, “Abstruser musings”, “vexes meditation”, and “extreme silentness” of “Frost at Midnight” are all “Inaudible as dreams” simply because they seem to reflect, in Perry’s words, “the subjective, known, but only secondary [qualities]” and are in antithetical relation to the dispirited allegories of “The Pang More Sharp Than All” which are “objective, substantial, but actually quite unknowable primary [ones]” (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 108):

And this it is my woeful hap to feel,
When at her Brother’s hest, the twin-born Maid
With face averted and unsteady eyes,
Her truant playmate’s faded robe puts on;
And inly shrinking from her own disguise
Enacts the faery Boy that’s lost and gone.
O worse than all! O pang all pangs above
Is Kindness counterfeiting absent Love! (51-58)

So, the thematic continuity of Coleridge’s early poetry after 1800s may well refute the recurrent charge raised against Coleridge’s ability to handle themes beyond his personal experiences. Instead, he could develop a process, in Mays’s words, of “restatement and enlargement” (“The Later Poetry” 91); a bridge which connects two different ends “to
establish a concord and unity betwixt all parts of our nature, to give a feeling and a passion to our purer intellect, and to intellectualize our feelings and passions. This a [sic] happy marriage” (LR 1: 245).

An attitude as such led to an inevitable clash between “nature”, as Coleridge understood and came to cherish as a primordial “habit of Introition” (CN 1: 1616), and the one assumed by the nineteenth century philosophical understanding which was further deepening Locke’s premise that all pleasures, including the ones communicated by nature itself, are derived from the senses. Thus Coleridge, so far as I know, approached the nineteenth century with a sceptical view which had been clearly portrayed in 1802 through the frequently-quoted “Dejection: An Ode” where nature is presented as too vast to be solely grasped by the senses; nevertheless, it may be engulfed by the “shaping spirit of Imagination”. I would argue here that, as a poem which characteristically represents Coleridge’s dilemma in an age dominated by materialism, “Dejection: An Ode” deserves revisiting from a new perspective: it features, I think, the poet’s strife, particularly the philosopher poet, to liberate his mind from the blinkering “brutal” level. Coleridge saw that man could survive that degrading phase by a spiritual recourse to the divinity:

I believe most steadfastly in original Sin; that from our mothers’ wombs our understandings are darkened; and even where our understandings are in the Light, that our organisation is depraved, & our volitions imperfect; and we sometimes see the good without wishing to attain it, and oftener wish it without the energy that wills & performs– And for this inherent depravity, I believe, that the Spirit of the Gospel is the sole cure. (CL 1: 396)

In this letter Coleridge seems to be firmly intent on stressing that the sensory impressions, though essential for the finite mind in its initial creative phase, execute a provisional role in any given experience and are inadequate especially in terms of dealing with immaterial issues; “and henceforth”, according to Norman Fruman, “that portion of man’s nature and consciousness which derives from the senses is uniformly the ‘lower’ or ‘brutal’ part” (“Coleridge’s Rejection of Nature” 72). Therefore it is the “inherent depravity”, typically characterizing the materialistic aspect of man or “that inanimate cold world”, which Coleridge bewails and reintroduces in “Dejection: An Ode” as “afflictions [which] bow me down to earth” (Works 1: 82). These various “afflictions”,

15 John Worthen believes that Introition was first used in 1762 as a medical term “to describe how fluid enters a cavity of the body; being Coleridge, he used it figuratively to describe how his son Hartley entered on the experience of nature”. 86.
which worsened in the early years of the new century, had contributed to subverting, or, at best, deferring the spontaneous joy which he used to associate with nature. Significantly this state of spiritual stagnancy has had an adverse effect on “This beautiful, and beauty-making power”: the imaginative faculty “that ne’er was given, /Save to the pure, and in their purest hour” (63-5). I argue here that it is the lack of this faculty which makes man confined within what Coleridge terms as the “voluptuary system” (PL 212): “in all ages”, he wrote in On the Constitution of the Church and State:

individuals who have directed their meditations and their studies to the nobler characters of our nature, to the cultivation of those powers and instincts that constitute the man, at least separate him from the animal, and distinguish the nobler from the animal part of his own being, will be led by the supernatural in themselves to the contemplation of a power which likewise superhuman. (52)

So, when Coleridge in “Dejection: An Ode” is betrayed by the unstimulating material surrounding, he resorts to a mind-elevating process whereby he not only reconciles two discordant elements, “abstruse” as opposed to “nature”, but manages to raise the resulting synthesis beyond the mono-dimensional realm imposed on him by the constraints of mere mechanical thinking: “by abstruse research to steal/ From my own nature all the natural Man—” (89-90). Perry describes this synthesizing process as the “intellectual tussle” (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 105) between the empirical “it is” and the idealistic “I am”; two major conflicting ideas which Coleridge had already been engaged with since his early acquaintance with “the Vast”. Along similar lines, Thomas McFarland observes that this conflict may well stand for an imponderable problem in Coleridge’s metaphysics, i.e., “a hugely developed sense of inner reality” as opposed to “a hugely developed sense of outer reality, with neither sense giving ground” (111). I would argue here that McFarland’s latter phrase namely, “with neither sense giving ground”, may significantly be considered as the deadlock which Coleridge was attempting to unravel, particularly during the formative decade of 1790’s. To him the poet who thinks philosophically could fuse “inner reality” and “outer reality” into universal truths: “I feel strongly, and I think strongly; but I seldom feel without thinking, or think without feeling […] My philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from, my

16 Cf. “Lecture VI” where Coleridge revisits the same context: “Man must not be, man cannot be, on a level with the beast; either infinitely more blessed than they or incomparably more wretched, either above them beyond all measure, or deplorably below them”, PL 212.
17 Cf. a notebook entry of 1805 where Coleridge complains “that all the realities about me lose their natural healing powers, at least, diminish the same, & become not worthy of a Thought”, CN 2: 2557.
feelings: & this, I think, peculiarizes [sic] my style of Writing’’ (CL 1: 279). More specifically, Coleridge defines the outcome deduced from the blend of diverse constituents as ‘‘a sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world’’ (Works 2: 1193), or a ‘‘rare integrity’’ in McFarland’s words (110) because of its exclusiveness to highly philosophised poets. This reasoning could fend off Fruman’s charge as he bemires Coleridge, as it were, in ‘‘the mirage-shrouded-seas of Idealism’’ (74).

I think the ability to achieve such an incorporation of the material with the ideal may normally be held to mark not only the departure of the inspired poet, ‘‘the pure, and in their purest hour’’, from the rudimentary and bestial grounds of materialism, but it also emphatically manifests the arduous ‘‘afflictions’’ which the poet must undergo and conquer before reaching the transcendental level which extricates him from the despotism of matter. I think this could be one of the implicit, and least observed, messages which Coleridge has been trying to convey through ‘‘Dejection: an Ode’’, that is to say, it is the price that an intellectual like Coleridge would willingly pay for the redeeming his mind, so to speak, from an earthbound thinking.

The earthbound sphere from which the mind is to be redeemed has been highlighted by Coleridge in Biographia Literaria as ‘‘the system of modern metaphysics, which banishes us to a land of shadows, surrounds us with apparitions, and distinguish truth from illusion, only by the majority of those who dream the same dream’’ (1: 262). However, I do not wish to suggest here that Coleridge has categorically banished the material realm from his intellectual scheme, an element the lack of which has obviously stalemated ‘‘Dejection: an Ode’’. On the contrary, he was touching upon this issue with tremendous caution lest he might be accused of confining himself in sheer transcendentalism or ‘‘the mirage-shrouded-seas of Idealism’’ as Fruman complains (‘‘Coleridge’s Rejection of Nature’’74). I think Coleridge was adding further and more intricate stress on the material aspect of an experience than the one interpreted by Locke or even Hartley for instance. The alternative which he proposes, disclosed to Thelwall in 1797, consists of two lines of thinking: the first opposes the Lockeanans who were guided

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18 Cf. a notebook entry of 1805: ‘‘[w]ho that thus lives with a continually divided Being can remain healthy!’’, CN 2: 2557.
19 Cf. ‘‘—but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporality of thought—namely, that it is motion’’, CL 1:137.
to the essence of “things” by means of the senses only. This premise seems to describe “[t]he unsatisfyingness, the felt insufficiency, of all Finites in themselves” to which Coleridge firmly stood up if they were to be considered as the sole constituent of an experience (CN 4: 5294). As Raimonda Modiano rightly observes, this premise describes the natural philosopher or poet “who was in the habit of surrendering the mind to objects of sense and [who consequently was] in need of more ample philosophic training” (134).

The second segment of Coleridge’s proposal, I argue, features his incessant endeavour to rise to an immaterial level which could be incorporable with the former one despite their disjunctive characteristics:

My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great—something one & indivisible—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!—But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity! (CL 1: 349)

Ostensibly the dilemma of “Dejection: an Ode” seems to revolve around “[t]he unsatisfyingness” and “the felt insufficiency” of its natural elements and their failure to evoke “the sense of sublimity” preconditioned by Coleridge to attain the “one & indivisible” level, a condition which, in 1803, he accused Wordsworth of having overlooked. This is, I would argue, the very sense he has frequently claimed to have possessed and which makes him and his thinking seem peculiar and esoteric, namely, instead of totally overthrowing the material aspect of an experience, he adds to it an ennobling role by making it an indispensable factor or a fulcrum, as it were, on which any metaphysical pondering initiates. So, in order to confront the empiricists who took matter as the sole ground “and the final test of truth” (BL 1: 258), Coleridge asserts that “I know no other way of giving the mind a love of ‘the Great’, & ‘the Whole’”, whereas:

[t]hose who have been led to the same truths step by step thro’ the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—They contemplate nothing but parts—and all parts are necessarily little—and the Universe to them is but a mass of little things. (CL 1: 354)

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20 In a letter sent to Thomas Poole in 1801, Coleridge avowedly accuses Locke of establishing a “sect” of “Little-ists” whose main task was to deprive the mind of its innate creativity: “Now Mr Locke was the founder of this sect, himself a perfect Little-ist”, CL 2: 708-9.

21 Coleridge’s advice to Wordsworth came out in a notebook entry he recorded on October 26, 1803: “But surely always to look at the superficies of Objects for the purpose of taking Delight in their Beauty, & sympathy with their real or imagined Life, is as deleterious to the Health & manhood of Intellect, as always to be peering & unravelling Contrivances may be to the simplicity of the affections & the grandeur & unity of the Imagination”, CN 1:1616.
Such an attitude demonstrates a fundamental aspect of Coleridge’s epistemological thinking: “the final test of truth” results from the alliance of the material and ideal factors of an experience. In this alliance, moreover, the material factor of an experience is as vital as the ideal one if the ultimate state of oneness and indivisibility is to be accomplished. Anthony David Nuttall believes that poets are exceptionally known for continually developing a synthesizing faculty because they “have always been the experts on experience in this simple, fundamental sense of the word: on the way the world looks, feels, tastes, smells, sounds” (139). Moreover it is the philosophers as well who could resurrect their minds from the finite domain of matter because, in Coleridge’s own words, “[t]hey know and feel, that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them” because “[t]hey and they alone can acquire the philosophic imagination” (BL 1: 241-42).

The interactive relation between the potential and the actual inevitably indicates one of the many forms in which Coleridge attempts to explain the essence of philosophy. The most recurrent one, which also has strong relevance to the development of his epistemological thought, states that:

philosophy is neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether, its primary ground can be neither merely speculative or merely practical, but both in one. All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject. (BL 1: 252)

I think Coleridge’s concept of philosophy as set forth here was born out of his engagement with German idealism, particularly Kant’s philosophy and his speculations about the origin of matter. For example, in his Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science (1786), Kant rejects the Newtonian “mechanical natural philosophy” which considers particles of matter “as machines, i.e. as mere implements used by external moving forces, i.e. as mere implements used by external moving forces”; instead, Kant suggests to apply “the dynamical natural philosophy” to explain “the variety of kinds of matter […] in terms of […] the moving forces of attraction and repulsion that are inherent in these particles” (45-6). In other words, Kant’s premise attempts to explain any given phenomenon according to two innate forces which are constantly in opposition, attraction and repulsion, governed by the principle of polarity which explains the heterogeneous

22 Cf. “Knowledge without a correspondent reality is no knowledge; if we know, there must be somewhat known by us. To know in its very essence a verb active”. BL 1: 274.
nature of matter, i.e., being composed of two discordant elements. Modiano believes that a postulate like this appealed to a large extent to many Romantic writers because it suggested “a breakdown of hierarchical barriers between man and God, man and animal, the physical and the spiritual forms of life”, and therefore the relationship between matter and idea, object and subject becomes complementary or symbiotic and “the difference between them can no longer be hierarchical but merely functional” (145). This difference corresponds well, I think, to the interdependent relationship between Coleridge’s concepts of primary and secondary imagination and thus to “the corporality of thought—namely, that it is motion—” (CL 1: 137).

This line of thinking, furthermore, bears sure witness to Coleridge’s involvement with Kantian thought. For example, in Biographia Literaria Coleridge proposes an analogous and polar distinction between “the term, subject, [which] is used by me in its scholastic sense as equivalent to mind or sentient being, and [its] […] necessary correlative of object or quicquid objicitur menti [anything within the mind]” (1:253-54). In addition to this classification, Coleridge cautiously tackles the difference between subject and object in a broader and more precise sense:

Now the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE we will henceforth call NATURE, confining the term to its passive and material sense, as compromising all the phenomena by which its existence is made known to us. On the other hand the sum of all that is SUBJECTIVE, we may comprehend in the name of the SELF or INTELLIGENCE. Both conceptions are in necessary antithesis. (BL 1: 254-55)

I would argue here for the extent to which Coleridge was able to maintain the antithetical and yet polar relationship between subject and object, matter and idea. He complains that the natural philosophers have erroneously confounded the two notions in terms of their priority and sequence of occurrence: “[t]he subjective therefore must supervene to the objective”. In other words, a “sentient being” remains inert unless and until affected by an object. So, the error of the “natural philosophy” is in regarding “the objective or unconscious nature as the first”, the predicate, or the ground where any experience starts and terminates (BL 1: 255). Having pointed out this error, Coleridge sees that the role of “the transcendental philosopher” is to prove, nevertheless, that the object “is unconsciously involved” in the subject, or the “exclusively representative” necessarily interpenetrates the “exclusively represented” (BL 1: 255), and once this union is attained the philosopher has not only proved “that this is Idealism” but “it is at
the same time, and on that very account, the truest and most binding realism” where the idealistic thought acquires a corporeal dimension and is set in motion benefiting from the polarity bequeathed by “the dynamical natural philosophy”. In this respect, Perry argues “that the mind does not just concoct a private secondary world, but, more mysteriously, discovers in its creation the world as it really is” (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 106).

IV. “Christabel”

To substantiate this argument, I shall focus on “Christabel” in which Coleridge believed that he “should have more nearly realized my ideal, than I had done in my first attempt [‘The Ancient Mariner’]” (BL 2: 7). “Christabel”, as Karen Swann argues, “can be located in the context of Coleridge’s writings on a variety of ghostly exchanges between observers or readers and representations” (143). This exchange may produce what Coleridge terms as “heterogeneous matter” which seems similar in kind and composition to Perry’s “hybrid creature” (110). I think, therefore, Christabel and the poem itself are presented as a compound object under the Kantian “moving forces of attraction and repulsion” (45-6). Christabel is “The lovely Lady” whose dreams keep her restless and make her wander far away from home attracted to the outer unknown world outside her father’s castle. Ostensibly she seems to lack the insight which makes her see things in actual light and thus she is readily attracted to the forlorn Geraldine, unaware of the latter’s bizarre potential leverage which is immediately detected by the “Mastiff Bitch” and later by Christabel’s “wandering Mother” who both are uneasy and, later, alarmed to the very same menace which Christabel seems to be courting. The force of attraction is finally consummated when Christabel succumbs to Geraldine’s spell:

Quoth Christabel, “So let it be!”
And as the Lady bade, did she.
Her gentle Limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her Loveliness. (Works 490)

Then Christabel reaches the moment of repulsion when the spell retracts: “Sure I have sinn’d!” said Christabel, / “Now heaven be prais’d, if all be well!””. My discussion will focus mainly on how Coleridge manages to synthesize what he terms the “exclusively representative”; thesis, with the “exclusively represented”; antithesis (BL 1: 255) so as to finally produce one cohesive “heterogeneous matter”, a prothesis (BL 2: 8). This blend
of discordant elements crops up in “Christabel” in the image of the transformed heroine: ‘O’ermaster’d by the mighty Spell’ (620) following her congress with Geraldine, her antithesis. Significantly the resulting image has been exclusively comprehended, albeit through a dream, by Bracy the Bard. We would therefore presume here that Coleridge must have been alluding to the poet, most probably to himself being equipped with the “philosophic imagination”, as the only one in Sir Leoline’s household who could provide a prior clue to the result of Christabel-Geraldine meeting for he, the poet, knows and feels “that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them” (BL 1: 241). In other words, the poet in Coleridge’s definition is the one whose insight may not be blurred by the delusive data of the senses mainly because he possesses “a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves” (BL 2: 6). An obvious example of this gift is shown in “Christabel” when Bracy the Bard manages to reveal the disguise of the green snake, “Green as the Herbs”, concealed within the surrounding camouflage of “the green Herbs in the Forest [and] the Grass and green herbs underneath the old Tree” (551, 536, and 540).

Along parallel lines, moreover, Tim Fulford has commented on Bracy’s role in the poem and its significant bearing on Coleridge’s conception of the poet. Fulford argues that Christabel’s name embodies the principal biblical allusion in the poem because it is prefixed by the word Christ. However, it is a trapped Christ because the bearer of the name – Christabel – is so overcome by Geraldine’s spell that she becomes unable to pronounce her name in her father’s presence; instead, “her good name, implicitly containing ‘Christ’ [is] transformed into ‘a hissing sound’, the sound of the serpent Satan”. This distorting exchange of names has not only inflicted spiritual as well as physical paralyses on Christabel, but it erroneously turns Geraldine into a benevolent agent embodied in the figure of the seemingly pure Christabel. Here, we may detect the emergence of Coleridge’s canny employment of the poet’s role as a transcendental agent capable of perceiving the underlying truth behind such an intricacy:

Significantly it is a bard, sent to give the message inspired by Geraldine, who can read this reversed language correctly. Bracy’s dream recognises Christabel as the innocent dove, Geraldine as the serpent which Christabel only seems to have become. Christabel finds her breath held back by the action of evil, and the poet is able so to read her innocent name and nature.

23 Throughout his oeuvre, Coleridge associates snakes with wisdom: “[t]he Serpent by which the ancients emblem’d the Inventive faculty appears to me, in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of Genius”, see CN 1:609 and BL 2:14.
that he can release the Christ in her. (Fulford, *Coleridge’s Figurative Language* 74)

On the other hand, Seamus Perry argues that ‘‘Christabel’’ and its two main heroines are too complicated to be simply cast within a *traditional* interpretation of the kind suggested by Fulford. Perry rightly detects a kind of wobbling ambiguity regarding Geraldine’s ‘‘genuine wickedness’’ and ‘‘her obscure kind of goodness’’, which might be attributed to Coleridge’s reluctance to present Geraldine, contrary to what Coleridge’s contemporaries might have interpreted or expected, as *totally* evil and Christabel as *totally* pure (an argument thoroughly discussed below). Perry observes that ‘‘the word Christabel’’:

amounts to an oxymoron, a semantic indecision between ‘Christ’, whose sufferings are traditionally held to have possessed atoning power, and ‘Abel’, whose innocence led him only to be slaughtered by Cain. It seems as though Coleridge hovered undecided between these two fates for Christabel, the second unbearable, the first emulating that theory of redemption by vicarious suffering which [Coleridge’s] Unitarianism rejected as ‘‘perhaps the most irrational and gloomy Superstition that ever degraded the human mind. (“Coleridge, Kubla Khan, The Ancient Mariner, Christabel” 141)

It seems that in ‘‘Christabel’’ Coleridge was trying to present a kind of poet and poetry incompatible with the dominant literary norms which stipulated that there must be something that connects any ‘‘visionary forms’’ contemplated by the poet ‘‘with the realities of existence, to gain them a momentary credence by the aid of harmonising occurrences, to mix them up with the interest of some great event, or to borrow for them a colour of probability from the surrounding scene’’ (Reiman 1: 239). The ‘‘visionary forms’’ which were predominant in the eighteenth century and at the outset of the nineteenth century mainly centred around, first, the traditional concepts of the picturesque which was expected, in Wordsworth’s case, ‘‘to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by […] directing [the mind’s attention] to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us’’ (BL 2: 14), and, secondly, the satanic lure versus the Christian salvation.25 In this context, Susan

24 It seems that Perry here is echoing the same point previously raised by Hazlitt in 1816, namely, ‘‘semantic’’ indecisiveness: “[Coleridge] is a man of that universality of genius, that his mind hangs suspended between poetry and prose, truth and falsehood, and an infinity of other things, and from an excess of capacity, he does little or nothing”, Reiman 530.

25 Cf. In 1815 Coleridge explained to Wordsworth more avowedly in what way their metaphysical plans differed, namely, “that [Wordsworth’s] object was not to convey recondite or refined truths but to place commonplace Truths in an interesting point of View”, CL 4: 576.
Eilenberg rightly observes that “Coleridge’s poems simply did not belong there. Had he chosen to write about sheep or distressed villagers, his contributions might have fared better” (89). Therefore when “Christabel” was published many of Coleridge’s contemporaries were disturbed by its bizarre language, vagueness, and its implicit stress on the poet’s role as a transcendental agent capable of conjoining the potential and the actual by means of “philosophic imagination”. Hazlitt, for instance, notably derided the poem on this basis: “Mr. Coleridge's style is essentially superficial, pretty, ornamental, and he has forced it into the service of a story which is petrific” (Reiman 1: 531).

Coleridge’s own view of the poet, however, seems peculiarly extreme. For example, the poet in Coleridge’s transcendental understanding is someone whose “endeavours”:

should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (BL 2: 6)

The poet’s role, therefore, as an interpolator of a “heterogeneous matter” made up of the incorporation between the potential (idea) and actual (matter), as Coleridge believed, was considered by Coleridge’s contemporaries as “dim, obscure, and visionary” (Reiman 531) and consequently Coleridge was seen as “one of those poets who if we give him an inch will be sure to take an ell: if we consent to swallow an elf or fairy, we are soon expected not to strain at a witch” (Reiman 1: 239). To a large extent “Christabel” was judged accordingly because it represented the platform for Coleridge’s incorporative scheme. Coleridge’s own view of “Christabel” as “an improper opening Poem” is recorded in a letter sent to Southey in 1799:

My reason is—it cannot be expected to please all that / Those who dislike it will deem it extravagant Ravings, & go on it thro’ the rest of the Collection with the feeling of Disgust— & it is not impossible that

26 Cf. In Biographia Literaria Coleridge indirectly refers to this kind of Poetry: “For the second class, subject were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity [where the mind is directed] […] to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us”, 2: 6-7.

27 Hazlitt accused Coleridge of failing, on purpose, to answer the principal questions especially with respect to Geraldine’s identity, a grave oversight which had contributed to obscuring “Christabel”: “This woman, ———‘beautiful to see, Like a lady of a far countree,’ is a witch. Who she is else, what her business is with Christabel, does not appear at present”. Reiman, 530.
were it liked by any, it would still not harmonise with the real-life Poems that follow. (*CL* 1: 545)

Similar views were expected, particularly among Coleridge’s coterie. Hazlitt’s essay in the *Examiner*, for example, where he pours his contempt on “Christabel”, anticipates related attacks on the poem:

In parts of Christabel there is a great deal of beauty, both of thought, imagery, and versification; but the effect of the general story is dim, obscure, and visionary. It is more like a dream than a reality. The mind, in reading it, is spell-bound. The sorceress seems to act without power—Christabel to yield without resistance. The faculties are thrown into a state of metaphysical suspense and theoretical imbecility.²⁸ (Reiman 531)

Arguably, these derisory comments were indirectly responsible for focusing attention on a strategy habitually adopted by Coleridge, namely, the amalgamation of two discordant poles—matter and idea, body and mind—in order to create a neutral entity that belongs to neither of these poles: an entity that not only arouses bewilderment, but stimulates “disgust” too. Geraldine thus has been judged according to this criterion. In other words, she has been seen as a weird and commonplace *witch* rather than Christabel’s *antithesis* or the fulfilment of her repressed desires which are foregrounded by means of the two ladies’ eccentric interaction. This sounds like a sensation which is philosophically-evoked and therefore it might not appeal to ordinary recipients who considerably believe that poetical composition should derive credibility from “the realities of existence”. “Define Disgust in philosophical Language—.—”, Coleridge asks Humphry Davy, “Is it not, speaking as a materialist, always a stomach-sensation conjoined with an idea?” (*CL* 1: 557). It is hardly surprising, then, that “Christabel” was described as a “strange phantasy, or rambling incoherency of the brain, produced perhaps amidst the vapours of indigestion” (Reiman 2: 239). I think Coleridge’s definition of “Disgust” distills his lifetime philosophy which attempts to associate ideas with their physical counterparts; an intellectual task which requires, in Swann’s words, the “entanglement of physiological and ideational entities” (151) and which yields a critical insight different from the one advanced by most of the critics of “Christabel”. This insight could be the very essential exchange of matter and idea, body and mind which

²⁸ Cf. Having read “Christabel”, Wordsworth realized that his poetry, mainly relying on the depiction of real life, could never concur with Coleridge’s supernatural poetry: “I found that the Style of this Poem was so discordant from my own that it could not be printed along with my poems with any propriety”, quoted in *CL* 1: 643.
Hazlitt, for example, might have overlooked when he misinterpreted Geraldine’s *acting “without power”* and Christabel’s eventual *yielding “without resistance”*. “Christabel”, then, could stand for the mind as a kaleidoscope creating harmony out of conflicting currents each yielding to the other in an open-ended process, and though it seemingly fails to “harmonise with the real-life Poems”, as Coleridge complains, it “both creates an impulse to reconstruct the intimated whole, and also, together with paradox, resists this hypothetical completeness since [its] achievement is precisely in a challenging inachievement” (Jasper 109). Gregory Leadbetter, moreover, has recently remarked that the poem’s inconclusive ending “seals the poem off with a teasing obliquity that refuses conclusion, reproducing [instead] the open-endedness of a deliberate fragment” (205), an effect which Byron recognized in “Christabel” as it “took a hold on my imagination which I never shall wish to shake off” (*Letters* 4: 319).

The effect of “Christabel” on Byron’s imagination, which was then underestimated or misinterpreted by Coleridge’s contemporaries, will be addressed in the next stage of my argument which demonstrates that Geraldine may not be as evil as traditionally understood, and likewise that Christabel may not be as pure. The whole argument will be constructed on the seemingly obvious question: *Why* does Christabel venture outside her father’s enclaves “in the Wood so late”? (*Works* 484). This question also raises the point that, having invited Geraldine into her own chamber, Christabel may not be quite innocent as she traditionally seems.

Before answering this question, a digression into a subsidiary segment of the argument is needed here. There is a consensus among critics that the poem’s main concerns revolve around “demonic possession, ventriloquism, and loss of identity” (Eilenberg 89) or “dissociation and fragmented consciousness” (Miles 179). I argue here that the underlying theme of “Christabel” is far from being traditional in the way that Coleridge’s contemporaries conceived. In my view, “Christabel” embraces Coleridge’s emphasis on the mind as an agent constantly synthesizing conflicting qualities, a psychological process in which, as Edmund Burke observes, “any species of delight can be derived from a cause so apparently contrary to it” (253). Secondly, the resulting

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29 *Cf.* Burke’s opinion on the source of sublime: “WHATEVER is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience”, 60.
truth out of this synthesis may be grasped by those who possess “a meditative and feeling mind” and who could thus operate within their minds “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (BL 2: 6) and which is significantly vital to make the poem’s tacit message more intelligible. I think that unique “poetic faith” might have seemed “dim, obscure, and visionary”: this is what threw Coleridge’s contemporaries “into a state of metaphysical suspense and theoretical imbecility”, as Hazlitt complains (Reiman 531). Coleridge’s uneasiness regarding the reception of such an untraditional “faith” is evinced in his Preface to “Christabel”:

For there is among us a set of critics, who seem to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things a fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would therefore charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man’s tank. (Works 41; italics mine)

Although the quotation given above was intended by Coleridge as a vindication against “charges of plagiarism or servile imitation from myself” (Works 41), it also signifies, I think, that Coleridge did not actually intend “Christabel” to be interpreted according to the traditional “laws and usages of modern poetry” (Reiman 240) where, for instance, Geraldine’s role as a traditional representation of evil and Christabel’s innocence would be immediately taken for granted. Moreover the textual evidence supports the claim that Geraldine’s reputed evil, though predominantly suggestive throughout the whole poem, is by no means conclusive. Jack Stillinger reports that “Christabel” underwent several revisions and deletions before it was finally published.30 The most important of these revisions for my argument are the ones where Coleridge seems reluctant to shroud Geraldine with utter evil. For example, in the early versions of the poem Coleridge described Geraldine as “Hideous, deformed, and pale of hue”, her bosom “was dark and rough as the Sea Wolf’s hide”, and her bosom and side “Are lean and old and foul of Hue”. These lines, as well as many others, were removed by Coleridge himself from the original holographs and, as Stillinger observes, “never got into print, and consequently readers of 1816 and later texts never knew for sure what Christabel saw when Geraldine removed her robe and vest […] Perhaps Coleridge decided that the image was too horrible” (88-9). Hazlitt, who might have been unaware of the poem’s

30 Stillinger uses the term “manuscript agreement” to describe the “most authoritative representative of a large cluster of readings that all (or nearly all) the manuscripts have in common”, 80.
metaphysical aspect and judged it according to dominant poetical norms,31 regarded these lines as necessary in order “to make common sense of the first and second part [sic]. They are ‘the keystone that makes up the arch’” (Reiman 531).

In addition to the textual evidence, Coleridge inhibits Christabel’s voice, and thus he shrewdly silences the sole direct witness to what has previously happened at the wood and in Christabel’s chamber and Geraldine’s assumed evil remains “literally unspeakable” (Eilenberg 104) and insubstantial:

“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;
But vainly thou warrest,
For this is alone in
Thy Power to declare,
That in the dim Forest
Thou heard’st a low Moaning,
And found’st a bright Lady, surpassingly fair.
And didst bring her home with thee in Love and in Charity
To shield her and shelter her from the damp Air.” (267-78)

So, the descriptive nature of these lines does not seem to support the evidence against Geraldine being evil. We are, then, left with the inevitable question: what does Geraldine represent, at least in Coleridge’s thinking, and what is her status in the poem? In the broad sense she is seen by critics as “a creature of Christabel’s unconscious, a figure empowered to enact the fantasies of a girl intent upon preserving her purity” (Eilenberg 100); or she might be “good corrupted, rather than intrinsically wicked” (Perry, “Coleridge, Kubla Khan, The Ancient Mariner, Christabel” 140). I think she falls within the category of Coleridge’s ultimate philosophical outputs. That is to say, she perhaps represents his lifetime postulate of “Extremes meet”. To prove their coexistence is the philosopher’s ultimate goal: “an object is inconceivable without a subject as its antithesis” for “neither in object or subject taken separately” the conceivability of an ideational entity in the mind is reached; “it must be found in that which is neither subject nor object exclusively, but which is the identity of both” (BL 1: 271). Coleridge foregrounds this relationship in a notebook entry in 1824:

31 Those norms also stated that “A witch is no heroine, nor can we read a tale of magic for its own sake. Poetry itself must show some modesty, nor be quiet unforbearing in its exactions”. Reiman, 239.
A very original & pregnant Idea stated and pursued by Mr Gillman afforded me a highly gratifying proof that I had not idly attached so great an importance to the fundamental Schema in the Logic of Trichotomy …

Prothesis

Thesis

Antithesis

Real

+ Actual

– Potential

The + Real or Positive Pole, and the – Real or negative Pole being two forms of the same Reality, the latter no less real than the former—just as negative Electricity is as truly Electricity as Positive Electricity. (CN 4: 5143)

Coleridge here demonstrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of the different poles in nature. It seems that this interaction of opposites is analogous to the reciprocal relationship which takes place in “Christabel”. Geraldine, therefore, may well emerge as Christabel’s indispensable counterpart without which the latter herself remains obscure and her actions unjustifiable. Eilenberg rightly observes that the poem’s two heroines seem inseparable: “neither can be represented, apparently, except in relation to the other. Once they are separated, the poem breaks off, as if it could represent them only through one another” (105). It seems, then, that Geraldine as an ideational entity has been purposefully interpolated into the poem in order to form, along with Christabel as her receptacle, an incorporeal “heterogeneous matter” (BL 2: 8) or a “hybrid creature”, in Perry’s words (Coleridge and the Uses of Division 110), made up of discordant elements. This “logic of trichotomy”, as Coleridge terms (CN 4: 5143), signifies the ultimate end which the fixity of matter and the dynamism of idea could jointly reach. Greg Ellermann argues that this incorporative logic “grounds the opposition between thesis and antithesis in a more primordial term, called the ‘prothesis.’ The prothesis is not a product, but a presupposition, a logical medium making possible the action of thesis and antithesis on each other” (48). Ironically the process of interpolation, I think, does not only require the same Kantian “moving forces of attraction and repulsion” which necessarily happens between two different poles; this process necessitates stripping those involved in it of their own identities, that is to say, turning them inside out in such a way that the “exclusively represented” becomes the “exclusively representative” (BL 1: 255), a process in which the imagination “unsensualizes the mind through the immaterialization of its objects” as Miles argues (180). Geraldine thus, as a supposedly supernatural
character, takes over and becomes Christabel and vice versa; this kind of exchange of roles, I think, may also account for the poem’s dilemma of unspeakableness:

The Maid, alas! her thoughts are gone
She nothing sees—no sight but one!
The Maid, devoid of Guile and Sin,
I know not how, in fearful wise
So deeply had she drunken in
That Look, those shrunken serpent Eyes,
That all her Features were resign’d
To this sole Image in her Mind:
And passively did imitate
That Look of dull and treacherous Hate.
And thus she stood, in dizzy Trance
Still picturing that Look askance
With forc’d unconscious Sympathy
Full before her Father’s View—
As far as such a Look could be
In Eyes so innocent and blue! (597-612)

Moreover, there has recently been further criticism that rejects the view that “Christabel” is a poem in which Christabel’s innocence is promoted at the cost of Geraldine’s putative evil. In his recent book Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination Gregory Leadbetter contends that “Christabel is not merely a passive victim of hostile ophidian powers” and that Geraldine could be “the serpent in the silence of her prayers, and Christabel gives her life”. And, more specifically, Leadbetter wards off the charge of “Christabel” being a poem about the assault of satanic powers on conventional Christian purity and raises thus the question of the poem’s origin (203). The poem’s source has frequently perplexed critics. Richard Holmes, for instance, sees that “[o]f all Coleridge’s major poems, it is most difficult to see what inspired ‘Christabel’, where it came from in his imagination” (Early Visions 288). Leadbetter, in what seems an answer to Holmes’s query, does not regard “Christabel” as a “morality tale”, a “juggling of abstractions on the subject of evil”, not even “a tale of psychological defeat and/ or sentimental redemption”; it is, rather, “the mythopoetic signature of [Coleridge’s] transnatural appetite” (205), that is to say, “Christabel” may serve as a vast arena in which Coleridge freely applies his transcendental musings on the subject of the correlative interaction between opposites as represented through Christabel’s ceaseless quest for her supernatural antithesis.

Furthermore, I have previously referred to Christabel and the poem’s dilemma of unspeakableness as a result of Christabel’s stupor at seeing Geraldine for the first time.
In this respect, Coleridge must have familiarized himself with Edmund Burke’s comments on the effects of terror on the sense organs and how terror could be transformed into delight:

[…] a mode of terror is the exercise of the finer parts of the [nervous] system; and if a certain mode of pain be of such a nature as to act upon the eye or the ear, as they are the most delicate organs, the affection approaches more nearly to that which has a mental cause. In all these cases, if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome encumbrance, they are not capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-preservation, is one of the strongest of all the passions. Its object is the sublime. Its highest degree I call astonishment; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence, and respect, which, by the very etymology of the words, shew from what source they are derived, and how they stand distinguished from positive pleasure. (Philosophical Enquiry 256-7)

So, Christabel’s perceptual faculties seem to be incapacitated, not by the actual terror occasioned by Geraldine’s emergence, but by being temporarily trapped between “astonishment”, “awe”, “reverence”, and “respect” which render her mentally and physically submissive and eventually speechless. Christopher Stokes has rightly observed that “the idea of something dangerous produces a fearful physiological reaction, anything obscure strains the faculties of perception, a grand colonnade subjects the eyes to an agitated repetition, darkness strains the fibres of the iris beyond their natural state, a loud sound strikes the ear forcefully, and so on” (67). On the other hand, Leadbetter believes that it is a mistake to assume that Christabel, prior to meeting Geraldine, “enjoyed relatively free and untroubled self-expression” (206). Christabel has already been restless and had disturbing dreams “Of her own betrothed Knight” (28). Christabel’s silence, uneasiness, and wakefulness indicate an inhibited self-expression, a linguistic aporia which, ironically, she seems to have overcome when she is united with Geraldine. From this moment on she “realizes what she cannot speak, and becomes, literally, the body of her own transnatural knowledge” (Leadbetter 206), a knowledge which she has attained.

32 Cf. the deleted couplet: “—Dreams, that made her [Christabel] moan and leap,/ As on her bed she lay in sleep” which Stillinger believes that it “appeared in 1816 (and never again) at 28/29— [and] could have been cancelled simply because of the ridiculous picture it creates of a person leaping while asleep; but it is also possible that it was read as too overtly sexual, since Christabel is moaning and leaping in bed while dreaming of her lover”, 88.
by uniting with her transnatural counterpart. Only then does her unspeakableness become more revealing than its spoken form. I think this moment of realization could be the one which Coleridge alludes to in *Biographia Literaria* namely, when the poet attempts to present “persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic” from which he is able to reveal or extract “our inward nature” and “a human interest and a semblance of truth” that are evoked through supernatural means initiated, in Christabel’s case, with disturbing dreams and finalized with the epiphany of Geraldine at which the ability to speak becomes redundant: “As with her sight of Geraldine later, the detail of her dream remains unspoken, ‘not to tell’ [...] ; a truth private to Christabel” (Leadbetter 206).

Furthermore, Christabel’s nocturnal journey into the wood and her interaction with its contents make her seem as if she is performing sacred rituals. The wood and the oak tree serve as a hermitage to which Christabel resorts from the confining walls of the castle so that to perform, as Leadbetter notes, “an act of occult contemplation that releases transnatural energies” (207), an act which Coleridge himself is well-known to have practiced and which he outlined in a notebook entry in 1801, after finishing Part I of “Christabel”:

Objects, namely, Fire, Hobs, and Kettle, at the first Look shone apparently upon the green Shrubs opposite to the Parlour, but in a few seconds acquired Ideal Distance, & tho’ there were of course no objects to compare that Distance by, the Shrubbery limiting the view, yet it appeared indefinitely behind the Shrubbery—I found in looking an unpleasant sensation, occasioned as I apprehend from the distinctness of the Shrubbery, & the distinct shadowyness of the Images (CN I: 894)

In “Christabel” a similar scene is witnessed, and is wrapped in carefully-chosen phrases that befit its solemnity:

She stole along, She nothing spoke,
The Sighs she heav’d, were soft and low,
And nought was green upon the Oak,
But Moss and rarest Misletoe:
She kneels beneath the huge Oak Tree,
And in Silence prayeth She. (31-6)

The momentary silence, modified by the phrase “in a few seconds”, breaks off when Christabel’s prayers are answered and the contemplated “acquired Ideal Distance” is transfigured in the form of Geraldine. Her appearance arouses a mixed feeling of fear
and curiosity, “an unpleasant sensation” that reminds us of the concept of “Disgust” which, in Coleridge’s understanding, is that psycho-physiological symptom that the poet experiences when opposite elements aggregate in his mind (CL 1: 545):

The Lady sprang up suddenly,  
The lovely Lady Christabel!  
It moan’d as near, as near can be,  
But what it is, She cannot tell—  
On the other Side it seems to be  
Of the huge broad-breasted old Oak Tree. (37-42)

This particular scene, I would argue, sums up Coleridge’s view of how the poet may well be the nexus between two discordant realms. Christabel could impersonate the poet’s unfenced curiosity which urges him to go beyond “the other Side” of the physical barrier: “the huge broad-breasted old Oak Tree” where the poet reaches the “Ideal Distance” that transcends the sensory limitations; a realm where Geraldine, the obscure visitation, vitally supplements the restless and anxious Christabel who seems, like an inspired poet who craves for infinity, to be well intent upon preserving her transnatural counterpart. Therefore, when Geraldine, supposedly traumatized and overwhelmed by fatigue, passes out and falls down on the ground Christabel brings her back to consciousness with the precious “Wine of virtuous powers” which had been made of “wild Flowers” by Christabel’s dead mother who seems now strangely complacent and her apparition is not as alarmed as when the poem opens in what seems an indication of her contentment with Christabel being united with her transnatural counterpart (192-93).

Significantly, Christabel here could be laying the foundations which are necessary for this kind of unification, that is to say, here she may signify the poet who invokes and nurtures the “characters supernatural” which are essential for his spiritual transcendence beyond the physical world; a scene which Coleridge has concurrently emphasized in “Kubla Khan”, for instance, where “[the poet] on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise” (53-54).33 The scene is further clarified when Geraldine assumes power over Christabel and tells her to undress (stripping off the physical outer layers) to which Christabel succumbs and kneels down. “With her nakedness,” Leadbetter concludes, “Christabel’s exposure to Geraldine’s epiphany is figuratively

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33 Composed and published concurrently with “Christabel”, i.e. between 1797-1816.
complete: it marks her final act in the initiatory pattern of invitation and response that has been ongoing since her first contact with Geraldine’’ (210).
Chapter Three

Sibylline Leaves and Coleridge’s Prophetic Vision

When Coleridge published his *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817 it aroused a number of contrasting views. Most of the criticism was directed, as was often the case with Coleridge’s writings, against “the manifestation of his recondite enigmas”. Moreover, the fragmentation and incoherence of the book’s poems in terms of chronology were partially responsible for the collective perplexed attitude, “i.e. whether it is poetry or drivelling” (*LG* 50). Coleridge’s choice of the volume’s title added further incertitude: the collection “has been entitled Sibylline Leaves”, Coleridge says in the Preface:

> In allusion to the fragmentary and widely scattered state in which [the poems] have been long suffered to remain. It contains the whole of the author’s poetical compositions, from 1793 to the present date, with the exception of a few works not yet finished, and those published in the first edition of his juvenile poems, over which he has no controul [sic] (1)

Most of Coleridge’s critics believed that the acceptability of poetical compositions were to be judged by the “common sense” they communicate to the readership and, accordingly, Coleridge’s poems, particularly those in the *Sibylline Leaves*, were considered as nonsense. For example, in “The Three Graves” Coleridge presented a kind of relationship that was seen not only as bizarre but as implausible as well. Edward is a young farmer who falls in love with Mary whom he meets at Ellen’s house, their mutual friend. Edward proposes to Mary, but the latter’s mother “became herself enamoured of her future Son-in-law” and grew jealous of her own daughter. The good-intentioned Edward then mistakes his mother-in-law’s “increasing fondness for motherly affection”. As Mary’s mother could no longer resist seeing the couple courting under her eyes, she discloses her affections to Edward who rebuffs her and hysterically laughs at her absurd advances. Irritated by his humiliating reaction, Mary’s mother prays “for a Curse both on him and on her own Child” who overhears the entire conversation and who is so enormously shocked by its contents that she faints away. The young couple manage to elope and meet once again at Ellen’s house where they finally get married after several failed attempts to reconcile with Mary’s mother (*SL* 218-19).
The mood of this poem is characteristic of Coleridge’s poems which open in a tranquil manner and the main idea immediately follows. First we have the preliminary and tranquil opening of the poem:

The Grapes upon the Vicar’s wall
Were ripe as ripe could be;
And yellow leaves in Sun and Wind
Were falling from the Tree. (1-4)

Then the main idea follows immediately:

And when the Vicar join’d their hands,
Her limbs did creep and freeze:
But when they pary’d, she thought she saw
Her mother on her knees.

And o’er the church-path they return’d—
I saw poor Mary’s back,
Just as she step beneath the boughs
Into the mossy track.

Her feet upon the mossy track
The married maiden set:
That moment—I have heard her say—
She wish’d she could forget.

The shade o’er-flush’d her limbs with heat—
Then came a chill like death:
And when the merry bells rang out
They seem’d to stop her breath.

Beneath the foulest Mother’s curse
No child could ever thrive:
A Mother is a Mother still,
The holiest thing alive. (24-44)

Coleridge’s characteristic blurring of the distinctions between sensory data and imaginative visions or, more specifically, between the natural elements and the inborn momentum of the human psyche (as represented here by repressed maternal possessiveness) widened the gap between him and the public who had long been satisfied with the superficial interpretations provided by the logic deduced from common sense or tangible things. Accordingly, a curse poured by a mother was considered “a dreadful impression on the minds of the children, and ultimately consigns them to superstition and misery” and the author of such a misery runs the risk of reconciling irreconcilables:
There is that close alliance of beauty and deformity; the union of fine poetical thought with the most trivial commonplace; feeling bound to vulgarity; dignity of language to the vilest doggerel—in fine, it resembles the horrid punishment of barbarism which linked dead and living bodies together, and gave the vital spark to perish with the rotting carcase …the sublime and the ridiculous have not even a step between them; and the pathetic and silly, the sensible and the absurd, are so disgustingly dovetailed together, that we have not patience with the artisan [sic] (LG 50)

Obviously that line of criticism overlooked Coleridge’s inherent and complex philosophical thought,—“fragmentary and widely scattered”—, through which he sought to reach across the boundaries of the physical world and common sense and “over which he has no control [sic]” (Preface to SL, 1). Anticipating derogatory comments against the poem, Coleridge argues in the preface to “The Three Graves” that the poem’s “merits, if any, are exclusively Pschycological [sic]” and that it is not meant to convey entertaining impressions on its readers:

I was not led to choose [sic] this story from any partiality to tragic, much less to monstrous events […] but from finding in it a striking proof of the possible effect on the imagination, from an idea violently and suddenly impressed [sic] on it (SL 218)

Moreover, the composition of “The Three Graves” was actuated by the narratives which Coleridge had read in “Bryan Edward’s account of the effect of the Oby Witchraft on the Negros in the West-Indies, and Hearen’s anecdotes of similar workings on the imagination of the Copper Indians” (218).1 The originality that Coleridge was planning to add to these narratives and anecdotes was to prove that:

instances of this kind [i.e. ‘an idea’ is ‘violently and suddenly’ impressed on the imagination] are not peculiar to savage or barbarous tribes, and of illustrating the mode in which the mind is affected in these cases, and the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning (SL 219)

It seems that Coleridge was preparing the ground to defend his notions concerning the significance of the blend of senses and imagination for the poet who seeks to produce “the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination” (BL 2: 5). He, moreover, appears to have successfully turned the tables on those critics who

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1 Cf. “Kubla Khan” was composed under similar circumstances, i.e., inspired by Coleridge’s reading of Samuel Purchas’s Purchas, his Pilgrimage; or, Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in all Ages, 1614.
accused him of adopting a barbarian style “which linked dead and living bodies […] the sublime and the ridiculous together” (LG 50). To confront his critics, I argue in this chapter that Coleridge’s strategy was to introduce into the philosophical-poetical foreground, perhaps for the first time since David Hartley’s associationism and its physiological theory of vibrations, the possibility of probing into the more sophisticated labyrinths of the human psyche, which were till then not only vague but reservedly approached.²

Hartley’s influence on Coleridge, “the streamy processes of association” in Mays’s words (Works 367), was perhaps reinvigorated when he was working on Sibylline Leaves. Throughout his career Coleridge continued to attach major importance to some of Hartley’s key postulates, especially those which underpin the sensory data in relation to the workings of the mind, such as, to name but a few, Hartley’s definition of sensations as “internal feelings of the mind” (OM I, i), his belief that some ideas “appear to spring up in the Mind of themselves, some are suggested by Words, others arise in other ways” (I, i-ii), the neural vibrations in the mind as “corporeal, Sensations and Ideas of a mental Nature” (I, 34), his definition of the brain as “the Seat of the sensitive Soul” (I, 32), his lifelong attempt to establish an unlimited connection between “the sensations of the soul and the motions of the brain” (Various Conjectures 56), and, more importantly, Hartley’s steadfast belief in the role played by the senses, the eye in particular, as a mediating agent that link the physical (the impressions made by external objects), intellectual, and spiritual development of man:

And thus the Eye approaches more and more, as we advance in Spirituality and Perfection, to an Inlet for mental Pleasure, and an Organ suited to the Exigences of a Being, whose Happiness consists in the Improvement of his Understanding and Affections (OM 1: 216)

This definition of the senses must have strongly appealed to Coleridge because it added a spiritual import to the senses as a “way of moving from the physical to the spiritual and it was a vehicle for the automatic and perpetual achievement of this goal” (Oberg 449).³ For example, in “The Three Graves”, Mary’s Mother’s fascination with

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² Kathleen Coburn seems impressed by Coleridge’s “psychological approach” because of its inclusiveness and the attention it attracted to man’s complicated psyche: “it depends on his acute sense of the experiencing, integrating self, the complex human personality”. Inquiring Spirit, 15.

³ Coleridge has always been known for inveighing against the tyranny of the senses, sight in particular: “[t]o emancipate the mind from the despotism of the eye is the first step towards its emancipation from the influences and intrusions of the senses, sensations, and passions generally”. Logic, 242-4. Moreover, in a letter sent to Wordsworth in 1815, Coleridge expected the latter “to have laid a solid and immoveable
Edward’s physical appearance is a case in point that demonstrates how sensory data may lead to an ecstatic mood.

However, Coleridge developed his own metaphysical views which eventually led to disagreement with Hartley’s line of thinking, particularly about the concepts of the mind and brain. Although Hartley regards the brain as “the Seat of the sensitive Soul”, he views the brain as merely performing physiological functions and, subsequently, his theory of association relegates the mind to the level of “a passive and mechanical depository of neural transmissions”: an organ which ceaselessly performs a “constant process by which simple ideas become abstract, and abstract ideas command man’s moral behaviour” in the total absence of metaphysical expansion. Therefore Hartley “seemed unaware of the metaphysical leap” (Oberg 443, 446) which Coleridge conceives as more dynamic and essential than the contemplated physical object. In other words, Hartley’s associationism confines the mind’s ability within the observed object and its inner associative counterpart, or, as Oberg argues, Hartley “crossed from physical sensation to internal thought without any mediating principle” (46); a categorical undertaking which “led [Hartley]”, as R. T. G. Walsh recently observed in his “David Hartley’s Enlightenment Psychology”, “to reject the dualism of an immaterial mind/soul against a material body. For Hartley, a material mind integrates all physiological, psychological, and religious phenomena” (58). However, in his “Coleridge, Hartley, and the Mystics”, Richard Haven argues that Hartley “was not […] proposing a philosophy of materialism or skepticism. On the contrary, the purpose of his psychological theories was to provide a scientific “proof” of the validity of religious and ethical ideas.” In other words, Hartley was trying to measure abstract ideas by scientific standards. Haven notes that:

By presenting religious and moral ideas as determined in the same manner and with the same necessity as ideas of the physical world, Hartley made it possible to argue that such ideas are as valid as our

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4 Richard Haven observed that Coleridge’s early “devotion to Hartley was something to be explained away rather than explained, a youthful and naïve enthusiasm like his Pantisocracy, something which might be dismissed […] as a brief flirtation with mechanical Associationism, the Behaviorism of his day”, see “Coleridge, Hartley, and the Mystics”, 478. Also J. Shawcross precisely observed that “Hartley’s theory of knowledge (according to which the mind is the mere theatre, or at best the best of spectator, of mechanical processes whose results it somehow comes to regard as its own free acts), if not definitely abandoned by Coleridge before his departure for Germany, was yet doomed in his better judgement. To a mind aching to behold ‘something one and indivisible’ this philosophy, which regards the soul and the universe as a mere conglomeration of particulars, and ‘never sees a whole’, could not fail, sooner or later, to stand revealed in all its bareness”, BL xxv.

5 In this respect, Coleridge regarded Hartley as the “great master of Christian Philosophy”, CL 1:236.
ideas of the trees and rocks which we ‘see’, and that religious and moral laws have an objective existence in ‘reality’ as well as a subjective of existence in the mind (480)

Coleridge seems to have bridged the epistemological gap which Hartley has already extended between the ‘‘objective existence’’ and ‘‘subjective existence’’ of an experience by, first, modifying Hartley’s doctrine of association into ‘‘a definite conception […] to which he was to assign the name of fancy’’ (Shawcross xxv) and, secondly, by introducing the ‘‘mediating principle’’ or the mind’s faculty of the creative imagination which he regarded as being capable of mediating between an object and its abstract counterpart. Coleridge’s modification of the Hartleyean line of thinking and his emphasis on the role of the creative imagination are recorded in a letter he wrote to Southey: “I am a compleat [sic] Necessitarian—and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself—but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought—namely, that it is motion—’’ (CL 1: 137).

By contending with the confining mechanisms imposed on the mind by Hartley’s associationism, Coleridge’s attempt to focus the attention on the human psyche, despite its potential vagueness, was found favourable by the Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine. It praised Coleridge’s original endeavour to probe “the grandest mysteries of the meditative soul”, and regarded his creative imagination – “the native power of his genius” – as a consummate instrument for such a grand undertaking (EM 4). Amidst these cordial sentiments the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, the flagship of Coleridge’s Sibylline Leaves, was received as an original product of Coleridge’s overarching imagination. The poem was seen by the EM’s reviewer as “the wildest of all the creations of genius” because it combined conflicting sensations: “[t]he loveliness and the terror glide before us in turns—with, at one moment, the awful shadowy dimness—at another, the yet more awful distinctness of a majestic dream” (EM 5). The poem, thus, produced that kind of tremendous impact on the mind “from an Idea violently and suddenly impressed [sic] on it” in Coleridge’s words (SL 218).

I argue here that the force of the impact made by the poem occurs in two subsequent main stages: first, in a scene that recalls the meeting of Christabel and Geraldine, the wedding guest runs across a mysterious old man who prevents the guest from attending the merry-making ahead of him. Significantly, the old man, like Geraldine,

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6 Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, 1819, 4.
performs an instant mesmerizing effect on the guest that he becomes spell-bound and unable to avoid listening to the old man’s story:

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The wedding guest stood still
And listens like a three years' child;
The Mariner hath his will.
The wedding-guest sat on a stone,
He cannot chuse but hear:
And thus spake on that ancyent man,
The bright-eyed Mariner. (13-20)

The second stage, on which the poem’s whole idea hinges, is the mariner’s story which revolves around the ascendancy of evil over man’s good. In a manner that evokes the Fall of Man, Coleridge presents a powerful and sudden re-experiencing of Original Sin and the subsequent miseries it has inflicted on man: he tacitly depicts the agonies of the crew as a collective retribution for one man’s wrongdoing, and by allowing the possibility of expiation he seems to have emphasized the “moral sentiment” underlying the poem. Therefore Coleridge was vexed by Anna Laetitia Barbauld's apparent remark that the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” “was improbable, and had no moral”, to which he confidently reacted:  

[… as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgement the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination (TT 1: 155-56)

As discussed above, this chapter addresses Coleridge’s characteristic investigation of the human psyche and the attempts he made to dovetail irreconcilable qualities such as “beauty and deformity […] the sublime and the ridiculous […] [and] the sensible and the absurd” (LG 50) so as to combine them in the crucible of philosophical idealism. As an illustration of Coleridge’s analysis of the human psyche to which he exceptionally adheres in the Sibylline Leaves, “The Destiny of Nations” will

7 Mrs Barbauld (1743–1825) was one of the renowned Bluestockings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British literary and Unitarian milieu. She met Coleridge, a young Unitarian enthusiast, “in August at the Bristol home of their mutual friend, the Unitarian minister John Prior Estlin”, Vargo 2. Coleridge was keen to keep company with her, and during the zenith of his interest in Joseph Priestley and Unitarianism, he was particularly impressed by her “practical Reason”: “[t]he more I see of Mrs Barbauld the more I admire her—that wonderful Propriety of Mind!—She has great acuteness, very great—yet how steadily she keeps it within the bounds of practical Reason. This I almost envy as well as admire”, CL 1: 578.
be investigated in more detail to demonstrate, first, the extent to which Coleridge was successful in fulfilling the objective he set behind the *Sibylline Leaves*, and, secondly, how he managed to incorporate Hartley’s Associationism and Priestley’s Necessitarianism in one poem.

Coleridge originally intended “The Destiny of Nations” as a contribution to Robert Southey’s *Joan of Arc*, which the latter completed on 24 September 1793 (*Works* 205). Coleridge began working on the poem as early as 1795, but its composition witnessed several interruptions occasioned by his travel to Germany in 1797, Lamb’s constant and “unanswerable criticism” (Lamb, *Letters* 1: 94), as well as the frequent decline of his self-confidence. But according to J. C.C. Mays, the main reason behind the delay of publishing the poem in the late 1790s appears to be relevant to the “changing attitudes towards writers like Godwin, Priestley, Hartley, who had inspired the earlier poem” as will be discussed below (*Works* 280). Coleridge explains in what sense these philosophers affected the content and date of publication of “The Destiny of Nations”:

N.B. Within 12 months after the writing of this poem my bold Optimism, and Necessitarianism, together with the Infra, seu plusquan-Socinianism, down to which, step by step, I had unbelieved, gave way to the day-break of a more genial and less shallow System. But I contemplate with pleasure these Phases of my Transition (*Works* 280)

According to Richard Holmes, it is now, along with “Religious Musings”, considered as “huge, rag-bag anthologies of his reading, speculations, and enthusiasm” (*Early Visions* 91) which he began to develop during the fruitful years he spent in Bristol working collaboratively with Southey with the aim to finance the Pantisocracy enterprise. More importantly, the composition of the poem coincided with the French Revolution in which Coleridge and Southey thought they would realize their inspiration of a Pantisocratic “state in which publically shared wealth and equality of political authority would eliminate aggression, and restore the condition of universal benevolence which [they] believed was natural to man and prior to the divisive effects of existing institutions” (Sternbach 248). Altogether, I think, these factors contributed more or less to incorporating the poem in *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817 rather than in 1797.

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8 Coleridge’s contribution seems to have been added in 1795 as his lengthy letter to Southey shows, *CL* 1. 172.

9 The Pantisocracy was planned to be financed by twenty four contributors, the sale of Coleridge’s “Imitations from the Modern Latin Poets”, Southey’s “Joan of Arc”, and other literary publications, “but none of the £2,000 capital had been raised”, see Holmes 64 and 82-3, and Lewis Patton and Peter Mann *Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion*, xxv-xxvi.
“The Destiny of Nations” seems to reflect the two seminal currents which feature in Coleridge’s philosophical thinking, namely, the mechanical philosophy, which he developed through his early acquaintance with Priestley and Hartley, and, secondly, his later metaphysical speculations. In addition to these factors, there seems to be another aspect which interposes itself so vigorously: the psychology of human behaviour which was then not only in its formative stages but was regarded by Coleridge as both stimulating and baffling. In other words, he felt that the intricate synthesis of idealism and empirical rationale he was developing could lead to more complicated and esoteric ends than the ones he might have contemplated. Therefore, in the “The Destiny of Nations” he anticipates a psychological impasse that occurs between, first, the Platonic phase of his thinking:

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
For infant minds; and we in this low world
Placed with our backs to bright reality,
That we may learn with young unwounded ken
The substance from its shadow. Infinite Love,
Whose Latence is the plenitude of All,
Thou with retracted Beams, and Self-eclipse
Veiling revealest thy eternal Sun. (18-26)

and secondly the confining realm of the scientific observation:

But some there are who deem themselves most free
When they within this gross and visible sphere
Chain down the winged thought, scoffing ascent
Proud in their meanness: and themselves they cheat
With noisy emptiness of learned phrase,
Their subtle fluids, impacts, essences,
Self-working tools, uncaused effects, and all
Those blind Omniscentists, those Almighty Slaves,
Untenanting creation of its God. (27-35)

Between these two discordant poles emerge the unexplained and yet potent images of “miscreated life” and “pestful calms”, which Coleridge struggles to decipher in “The Destiny of Nations”:

“When LOVE rose glittering, and his gorgeous wings
Over the abyss flutter’d with such glad noise,
As what time after long and pestful calms,
With slimy shapes and miscreated life
Poisoning the vast Pacific, the fresh breeze
“Wakens the merchant-sail uprising. (276-81)

Coleridge overtly acknowledges the inherent difficulty of rendering these images intelligible because they are outputs of the subconscious mind: “[t]hese are very fine Lines”, he comments, “tho’ I say it, that should not: but, hang me, if I know or ever did know the meaning of them, tho’ my own composition” (Works 140). Charles Lamb, moreover, has had the same uneasiness about the possible lack of symmetry which Coleridge’s poem could add to Southey’s original Joan of Arc:

You cannot surely mean to degrade the Joan of Arc into a pot girl; you are not going, I hope, to annex to that most splendid ornament of Southey’s poem all this cock & a bull story of Joan the Publician’s daughter of Neufchatel, with the lamentable episode of a waggoner, his wife & six children, the texture will be most lamentably disproportionate (Lamb, Letters 1: 94)

However, in the same letter Lamb also reiterates some crucial attributes in Coleridge’s poetry in terms of being capable of handling “loftier” topics than the ones addressed in Southey’s poetry:

Southey certainly has no pretensions to vie with you in the Sublime of poetry, but he tells a plain tale better than you […] The loftier walks of Pindus are your proper region. There you have no compeer, in modern tim[e]s. Leave the lowlands unenvied in possession of Such men as Cowper & Southey. (95)

Therefore Lamb suggests that Coleridge should focus his intellectual energies on a subject that befits his interest in the sublime:

I have a dim recollection, that when in town you were talking of the Origin of Evil as a most prolific subject for a Long Poem—why not adopt it, Coleridge? there would be room for imagination. Or the description (from a vision or dream, suppose) of an Utopia in one of the planets, (the Moon for instance) —. Or a five day’s dream, which shall illustrate in sensible imagery, Hartley[‘]s 5 motives to conduct—sensation, imagination, ambition, sympathy, theopathy […] An imagination like yours from these scanty hints may expand into a thousand great Ideas— (97)

Significantly, the distinction between Southey’s plain storytelling and Coleridge’s “Sublime of poetry” may denote an essential chasm between two cohorts of Romantics: the first is what Graham Davidson terms as “second line Romantics — Southey, Scott and Moore” who seem to be “lacking an internality” that makes their visions and
writings “though well told, seem inconsequential and are tedious to most modern readers”, like, for instance, the superficial handling of Joan’s psychological motives in Southey’s poem (1). The other cohort consists of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats whose creativity, according to Davidson, is “highly internalized, symbolic and psychological” and attempts to investigate “that self the romantics were beginning to discover”, i.e., “man’s truth and destiny” (2, 4). In other words, the poetry of the latter group is characterized by developing an inner faculty which, in Coleridge’s words, is “exclusively Psychological [sic]” and capable of analysing the human consciousness when “an Idea violently and suddenly impressed [sic] on it” (SL 218). This faculty took an exceptional form in Coleridge’s thinking. It denotes the effects of his engagements with diverse philosophical allegiances which were, as he explains to Thomas Poole in 1796, “not sufficiently peculiar to Rousseau [sic], Bishop Taylor, Old Baxter, David Hartley & the Bishop of Cloyne are my men” (CL 1: 245). In another letter sent to John Prior Estin in 1800, he reemphasizes the heterogeneity of his philosophical interests:

My own Subtleties too often lead me into strange (tho’ God be praised) transient Out-of-the-waynesses. Oft like a winged Spider, I am entangled in a new Spun web—but never fear for me, ’tis but the flutter of my wings—& off I am again! — (CL 1: 578)

I. Hartley, “our Greatest Metaphysician”

I would argue here that Coleridge’s philosophical views have often shown signs of discord with Hartley; nevertheless, his exceptional faculty as described above seems to incorporate his own creative mind and Hartley’s psychological system. In other words, despite Coleridge’s “brief flirtation with [Hartley’s] mechanical Associationism, the Behaviorism of his day”, as Kathleen Coburn observes (Inquiring Spirit 27), Coleridge regards Hartley, along with Berkeley and Joseph Butler, as “the three greatest, nay, only three great Metaphysicians which this Country has produced” (CL 2: 703). Coleridge’s respect for Hartley, I think, is obviously not based on the latter’s emphasis on the natural objects as well as ideas and emotions being governed by the same natural laws of attraction and repulsion; rather, it is based on the special importance which Hartley places on the collective benevolence as a religious and social value, or what he more precisely terms as the “perfect self-annihilation, and the pure love of God” (OM 282).10 Therefore,

10 Hartley contends that “since the human body is composed of the same matter as the external world, it is reasonable to expect that its component particles should be subjected to the same subtle laws [of oscillation and vibration]”, OM I, prop. 9, 62.
Hartley’s system, though largely based on scientific and physiological interpretations of human nature, is similarly moral in terms of promoting the ultimate annihilation of the self through the reviving of two major “motives to conduct” namely, “sympathy” and “theopathy” which he conceives of as responsible for establishing robust and evil-free social relations that lead to the union with God. “The present circumstances of the world”, Hartley observes, “are extraordinary and critical, beyond what has ever yet happened” (OM 455), and to encounter this apocalyptic vision, Hartley proposes the employment of his associationism theory which posits that “acts of benevolence, proceeding from A to B, have to excite correspondent ones reciprocally from B to A, and so on indefinitely” (OM 285), and the overarching purpose of this process leads to collective benevolence by directing its participants to “become members of the mystical body of Christ; all have an equal care for each other; all increase in love and come to their full stature, to perfect manhood” (OM 287).

Moreover, Hartley hypothesizes another fundamental postulate out of the associative connectedness, namely, the “Power of obtaining Pleasure, and removing Pain” (OM 112, emphasis in original). Hartley believes that, although associationism operates mechanistically, it establishes the necessary moral and religious platform for any potential societal reformation. This can be achieved through the following mechanisms:

- The motions, “affections” or “passions”, of “[t]he pleasures are much more numerous than the pains. Hence the motions which are subservient to them are much more numerous also”, and; 11
- “the motions subservient to pleasure are of a moderate nature; and therefore, that they can be excited with the more ease, both in an automatic and voluntary manner”
- On the other hand, “[t]he pains, and consequently the motions subservient to them, are few, and of a violent nature”
- According to Hartley the number of these “motions” and the scale of intensity—the rate at which vibration occurs in the cerebral nerves— are the key factors responsible for exciting pleasure or

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11 Hartley defines these “affections” as “our passions or affections can be no more than aggregates of simple ideas united by association. For they are excited by objects, and by the incidence of life. But these, if we except the impressed sensations, can have no power of affecting us, but what they derive from association”, OM I, prop. 89, 368.
pain, i.e., they are the criteria “by which [adults] seek their own pleasure and happiness, both explicitly and implicitly”

- Hartley’s assumptions as set out are supposed to lead to the ultimate conclusion that: “Since God is the source of all good, and consequently must at last appear to be so, i.e., be associated with all our pleasures, it seems to follow, even from this proposition, that the idea of God, and of the ways by which his goodness and happiness are made manifest, must, at last, take place of, and absorb all other ideas, and HE himself become, according to the language of the Scriptures, all in all.”12 (OM II, prop. 22, 112-14; emphasis in original)

   It follows, then, that Hartley’s hypotheses attempt to demonstrate how associationism may serve religious as well as scientific purposes by showing that the physiological and spiritual aspects of the mind may collaborate mechanistically and psychologically “in order to show that humans were so constituted as to enact a divinely preordained moral order” (Danziger 46).

   The subsequent effects of these findings indicate that Coleridge might have found in Hartley something more than a sterile system that operates mechanically. The advantage of Hartley’s hypotheses was that they provided Coleridge with a preliminary, yet essential component of his own philosophy: “All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject […] an object is inconceivable without a subject as its antithesis” (BL 1: 271), that is to say, knowledge could be obtained by reason and argument as well as by intuition. More significantly, Hartley demonstrated to Coleridge that human nonphysical experience could follow the same rules that govern physical nature and, benefiting from these premises and later from Priestley’s, Coleridge “was trying to rationalize the facts of his own experience, to see them in relation to the facts of psychology and physics that his age accepted”, that is to say, to show “that the religious experience of annihilation of self and union with God could be supported by rational analysis”; a synthesis that could construct “the validity of Christian idealism” (Haven 481-82).

12 Cf. Coleridge echoes similar vision in “The Destiny of Nations”: “Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven! / All conscious PRESENCE of the Universe! / Nature’s vast Ever-acting ENERGY! / In Will, in Deed, IMPULSE of All to All!”, Works, 298.
II. Priestley’s Practical Necessitarianism:

The synthesis discussed above, moreover, marks one of the pivotal junctures in Coleridge’s intellectual development: Priestley’s Unitarianism to which he converted during his Cambridge years. Significantly, “The Destiny of Nations” was written between 1795 and 1797 during which time Coleridge and Southey were enthusiastically giving lectures on political, religious, and historical matters. Coleridge at that time, moreover, was still under the influence of Priestley’s Necessitarianism which must have provided the practical grounds for Joan’s psychological reactions to quotidian war atrocities and social injustice as will be discussed below. In the Disquisition Relating to Matter and Spirit, for instance, Priestley argues that man as an object is governed by the laws of “attraction and repulsion […] and of extension, by means of which matter occupies a certain portion of space.” In Priestley’s view, these properties may function in man according to the following manner:

[…] man is possessed of the powers of sensation or perception, and thought [and, by extension], these powers also may belong to the same substance, that has also the properties of attraction, repulsion, and extension, which I, as well as others, call by the name of matter (1: 45-6)

In addition to providing an explanation about the nature of matter, this premise helped Coleridge to better understand the dynamics of human psyche and the way it reacts at a moment of crisis. In other words, by subjecting the human psyche to the same laws of attraction, repulsion, and of extension that govern matter, Priestley shows that the human “powers of sensation or perception, and thought” could be triggered, like matter,

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13 In 1794 whilst Coleridge was a student at Cambridge, he paid homage to Priestley in his short sonnet “To Priestley”: “And from her dark retreat by WISDOM won/ Meek NATURE slowly lifts her matron veil/ To smile with fondness on her gazing son!”, Works, 158.

14 See for instance A Moral and Political Lecture, February 1795; Conscious ad Populum, or Address to the People, November 1795; and “Six Lectures on Revealed Religion, its Corruption, and Political Views”, Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion 2, 22 and 23.

15 Cf. Coleridge’s letter to Southey in December 1794 where he confidently describes himself as “I am a compleat [sic] Necessitarian—”, (CL 1: 137). Also in 1794 he wrote to Southey: “I would ardently, that you were a Necessitarian—and (believing in an all-loving Omnipotence) an Optimist” CL 1:145. However, Coleridge’s attitude towards Priestley changed diametrically in 1805: Priestley’s “objection to the Trinity […] burst upon me at once as an awful Truth […] That Unitarianism in all its Forms is Idolatry”, CN 2: 2448.
by an external stimuli. In “The Destiny of Nations”, it can be argued, the stimuli is inevitably Joan’s interaction with the calamities of war which results in her eventual transcendence beyond the confining limits of selfhood.\textsuperscript{16} To establish this peculiar mixture, that is to say, \textit{actual} agonies which culminate in the elevation of the self to an ideal and divine realm, Coleridge reorientates his religio-metaphysical ponderings in Priestleyean Necessitarianism, or in what William A. Ulmer has recently called “a necessitarian metaphysics”. According to Ulmer, the eighteenth century intellectual milieu defined necessity as “a secularised adaptation of traditional notions of divine Providence to scientific and epistemological models of developmental order. Necessity was above all a theory of unavoidable causation”. As for Priestley, Ulmer argues, necessity was perceived as “the unfolding of God’s benevolent design for humanity through the agencies of natural law and psychological association, complementary elements of an inclusive teleology controlling worldly events” (530). It is possible, therefore, that the Necessitarianism endorsed by Coleridge during his Unitarian years showed him how the laws of nature and the empirical aspects of the mind could effectively coordinate God’s providential workings on mundane life. For example, in his \textit{Aids to Reflection} Coleridge emphasizes that God’s intervention in our life is viable only inasmuch as the mind maintains a practical relationship with the external physical sphere: “[reason’s] presence is always marked by the necessity of the position affirmed: this necessity being conditional, when a truth of reason is applied to facts of experience, or to the rules and maxims of the understanding” (161). In other words, when the material and ideal aspects of an experience are allied, infinite truths, including those of God, become more intelligible: “\textit{Evidences of Christianity!}”, Coleridge wonders, “I am weary of the word. Make a man feel the \textit{want} of it; rouse him, if you can, to the self-knowledge of his need of it; and you may safely trust it to its own Evidence” (272).\textsuperscript{17} Douglas Hedley comments here that “[t]his is the sense in which Coleridge’s theology was deeply

\textsuperscript{16} Joan’s transcendence beyond selfhood echoes, I think, Kant’s postulate of the annihilation of the self which is engendered by the moral law: “Now the moral law, which alone is truly objective (namely, in every respect), entirely excludes the influence of self-love on the supreme practical principle, and indefinitely checks the self-conceit that prescribes the subjective conditions of the former as laws. Now whatever checks our self-conceit in our own judgement humiliates; therefore the moral law inevitably humbles every man when he compares with it the physical propensities of his nature. That, the idea of which as a determining principle of our will humiliates us in our self-consciousness, awakes respect for itself, so far as it is itself positive and a determining principle”, \textit{Reason}, 119.

\textsuperscript{17} Elsewhere in \textit{Aids to Reflection} Coleridge emphasizes that “the mistakes of scientific men have never injured Christianity, while every new truth discovered by them has either added to its evidence, or prepared the mind for its reception”, 184.
existential while deeply Platonic” (491). Arguably, Coleridge presents Joan as the evidence of the human arousal “to the self-knowledge”. As Seamus Perry observes, Joan, “at the depth of her woes, feels that Impulse in the local form of her tutelary spirit, “an inevitable Presence”” (‘‘Coleridge and Wordsworth: Imagination, Accidence, and Inevitability” 172). Furthermore, in his fifth lecture on Revealed Religion—delivered, too, during the zenith of his Unitarian enthusiasm—Coleridge, in a figurative manner, has already reached much the same conclusion when he derided the Trinitarian “‘self-contradiction’” implicit in the “‘strange Union of Father, Son and Holy Ghost in one God’”:

Thus you are told of the wondrous Power of the Cross, yet you find that this wonder working Sacrifice possesses no efficacy unless there be added to it everything that, if God be benevolent, must be sufficient without it. This is the mysterious cookery of the Orthodox—which promises to make Broth out of a Flint, but when you are congratulating yourself on the cheapness of your proposed Diet, requires as necessary ingredients, Beef, Salt and Turnips! But the Layman might say—I can make Broth out of Beef, Salt and Turnips myself. Most true! But the Cook would have no plea for demanding his wages where it not for his merit in dropping in the Flint (207-8)

The analogy suggested here revolves around the deceptiveness inherent in the Trinitarian “‘self-contradiction’” which purports that the Cook could make “‘Broth out of a Flint’” without the “‘necessary ingredients’” of beef, salt, and turnips. Therefore, the practical and Unitarian Coleridge must have regarded the Trinitarian doctrine as lacking the practical measures to which he calls attention in “‘The Destiny of Nations’”: in order to surmount the realities of human evil which lead to human miseries, practical measures, not illusory beliefs, might be employed in the same manner as divine aid is invoked. This kind of rationale sounds firmly empiricist even though the end to which it leads is ultimately spiritual and requires higher levels of thinking than the empirical ones.

The intertwining of divine infinitude with necessity would therefore signify, first, Priestley’s effect on Coleridge’s thinking, in that he becomes “‘a compleat [sic] Necessitarian” and, secondly, he comes to believe in “‘the corporeality of thought—namely, that it is motion” (CL 1: 137). The central point of my reading of “‘The Destiny of Nations’” is, therefore, the extent to which Coleridge succeeds in transforming the corporeality of an experience into an idealized thought.
I think ‘‘The Destiny of Nations’’ may serve as one of the most appropriate grounds where this line of philosophical interaction is fleshed out, i.e., the possibility of achieving spiritual and ‘‘religious experience of annihilation of self and union with God’’ through an actual and calamitous experience. In addition to his early enthusiasm for Hartley and Priestley, ‘‘The Destiny of Nations’’ involves Coleridge’s characteristic personification of abstractions and his scrupulous description of current events, namely, the focus on the havoc of war. In this poem, then, Coleridge seems more down-to-earth and less arcane in delivering its message. Arguably, the poem may well stand out as an attempt to conform to the rational requirements of Coleridge’s age as will be discussed in the following argument.

Through Joan’s traumatic experience with the miseries of war, Coleridge demonstrates how a personal experience could engender a practical and collective impact which addresses moral and ethical issues, a trend that could be traced back to Coleridge’s early acquaintance with the Kantian thought of will, moral law, and practical reason. On the individual level Joan’s experience excites within her the conflicting ‘‘passions’’ of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain through which, Coleridge believes, we might transcend to God the ‘‘All conscious presence of the Universe!’’ (Works 298). This kind of transcendence happens through a psychological process that is motivated by the human instinctive propensity of seeking what is pleasurable and avoiding what is painful. Since the motions of the pleasures, as Hartley posits, ‘‘are of a moderate nature’’, easily excited, and outnumber those of pains which ‘‘are few, and of a violent nature’’, Joan instinctively seeks to maximize the amount of the pleasures by approximating God who is considered by Hartley as ‘‘the source of all good [that is] associated with all our pleasures’’ (OM 112-14). This process happens when Joan, ‘‘Urged by the indwelling angel-guide’’ (Works 289), intuitively transforms herself from the rudimentary level of subjective egotistical inwardness to an objective allocentric level of interest in the welfare

18 Cf. ‘‘Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement’’ where Coleridge seems to have abandoned the fanciful world of words and joined the ‘‘active life’’, ‘‘that of a political activist in Bristol’’; ‘‘Was it right./ While my unnumber’d Brethren toil’d and bled,/ That I should dream away the trusted Hours/ On rose-leaf Beds, pamp’ring the coward Heart/ With feeling all too delicate for use?’’, Works, 260.
19 Coleridge places emphasis on this topic in ‘‘Religious Musings’’: ‘‘Tis the sublime of man, / Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves / Parts and proportions of one wond’rous whole! / This fraternizes man, this constitutes / Our charities and bearings’’, Works, 180.
20 Kant investigates the interaction of the ‘‘will’’ against moral and practical grounds; an interaction that I perceive as having a direct bearing on Joan’s action: ‘‘everything that presents itself as an object of the will prior to the moral law is by that law itself, which is the supreme condition of practical reason, excluded from the determining principles of the will which we have called the unconditionally good’’, Reason, 118.
of others. According to Hartley, once more, the motions “subservient to” the former level, although “few”, they cause pains because they are “of a violent nature”, whereas the ones “subservient” to the latter cause pleasures because they are relatively easier to evoke due to their relative plethora and being “of a moderate nature”. This physio-psychological transformation marks a characteristic phenomenon in the Romantic thought. “In the Romantic construct”, Northrop Frye observes, “there is a center where inward and outward manifestations of a common motion and spirit are unified, where the ego is identified as itself because it is also identified with something which is not itself” (“The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism” 17). Frye’s view, as will be shown below, has been recently challenged from a psychoanalytical perspective conducted by Christopher Stokes. According to Frye’s assumption, then, Joan attains self-affirmation when she manages to deny herself and thus she is not only psychologically intent on dealing with dire human situations but attracted to them as well:

—From her infant days,
With Wisdom, Mother of retired Thoughts,
Her soul had dwelt; and she was quick to mark
The good and evil thing, in human lore
Undisciplin’d. (287-88)

Moreover, in his constant pursuit to synthesize the material and ideal aspects of phenomena to formulate an entity that belongs to neither, Coleridge in “The Destiny of Nations” accentuates the preliminary perceptible aspect of Joan’s experience. To deliver the tenor of the poem, Coleridge, I think, seems to rely more on the historical, that is the actual, ground of Joan’s episode than on any imaginative speculations. It is true that Coleridge presents Joan as the humble—“lowly was her birth”—and the angelic “warrior-maid of France” with whom supernatural powers, “the Spirit”, communicates and assigns to her the task of repelling “the Invader” and, moreover, we later learn that Joan has been chosen for this mission because of her innate purity “for she had liv’d/ In this bad World, as in a place of Tombs/ And touch’d not the pollutions of the Dead” (Works 288). However, Coleridge seems to have endowed the supernatural agent with a

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21 Cf. Kant’s comment on the effect of moral law on our actions and how they can be transcended beyond the limits of the self: “we comprehend how it is possible to perceive a priori that the moral law can produce an effect on feeling, in that it excludes the inclinations and the propensity to make them the supreme practical condition, i.e., self-love, from all participation in the supreme legislation”, *Reason*, 120.
provisional leverage in “The Destiny of Nations”, as will be discussed in the following argument.

During the course of her predicament, Joan undergoes a series of actual ordeals which eventually turn out to be the very means through which Joan transcends to God. One day she wakes to the appalling aftermaths of war. She goes up the surrounding hill and sits beside its beacon where she has a panoramic view of a whole village set on fire and devastated by a “sudden inroad” carried out by the English troops. She comes across “An unattended team” of men killed in action and later she sees “crowded close beneath the coverture”:

A mother and her children—lifeless all,
Yet lovely! not a lineament was marr’d—
Death had put on so slumber-like a form!
It was a piteous sight; and one, a babe,
The crisp milk frozen on its innocent lips,
Lay on the woman's arm, its little hand
Stretch’d on her bosom. (205-11)

As a result of these scenes, Joan becomes overwhelmed with agonies and distress and it is not long before “the tutelary Power exclaimed” that “Of CHAOS the adventurous progeny/ Thou seest; foul missionaries of foul sire” (Works 292). We are thus left with the impression that the role of the “tutelary Spirit” does not get any farther than bringing the atrocities of war to Joan’s attention. In this respect, Ulmer points out that “[the ‘tutelary Spirit’] acts to imaginatively expand Joan’s awareness in precisely the manner in which Coleridge visualises Fancy acting” (541), that is to say, he, as Coleridge personifies the “tutelary Spirit”, performs a primary function, but it is a transitory one nonetheless: like Fancy, he “unsensualizes the dark mind / Giving it new delights; and bids it swell / With wild activity; and peopling air” (Works 285). I think Coleridge here establishes the cornerstone on which the remainder of the poem must be founded: Coleridge is not weaving here an imaginary world that we are to come across in, for instance “Kubla Khan”, nor does he seem here totally immersed in what Graham Davidson calls “endless subjective expansion” (5). Rather he uses a bird’s eye view to describe a potential psychological reaction which might ensue in response to an immediate experience happening to an actual person.

However, Coleridge’s analysis of Joan’s psychological reaction to catastrophe, which results in binding her with war victims through sympathy, has been the subject of recent criticism. For example, in Coleridge, Language and the Sublime: From
Transcendence to Finitude (2011), Christopher Stokes argues that both Coleridge and ‘‘Joan’s immediate reaction, on seeing the last of the family die, is flight to the solitude of a hilltop’’. In other words, Stokes contends that ‘‘[i]nstead of ascent and expansion, there is collapse; far from creating bonds with other selves, the integrity of [Joan’s] own selfhood seems to crumble’’ (75). For Stokes, even Joan’s altruistic sympathy in which Coleridge radically invests throughout the poem is ineffective because its receivers ‘‘are the dead and dying […] The community of sympathy that ‘The Destiny of Nations’ erects is one of ghosts: a distorted counterpart, to some extent, of the ethical community that Unitarian radicalism aimed to create”. In the face of the trauma, Stokes argues, Joan plunges into Freudian ‘‘hypercathexis […] this inhibition and circumscription of the ego [in mourning] is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests’’ (76). Moreover, this state of psychological stagnation, Stokes observes, fails to absorb the impact of the trauma and, instead of stimulating action, it restricts it: ‘‘she toil’d in troublous ecstasy, /An horror of great darkness wrapt her round’’ (Works 291).

Stokes’s argument, however, overlooks a key fact about Coleridge during the period his thinking was oscillating between Hartley and Priestley’s philosophies. That is to say, in ‘‘The Destiny of Nations’’ Coleridge seems to have already taken great pains to assimilate and combine Hartley’s associationism and Priestley’s Necessitarianism in one single ‘‘romantico-politico-religious patch-work of 474 lines in blank verse’’, as Woodring observes (169). So, instead of portraying Joan as ‘‘turning away from reality’’ (Stokes 76), I would argue that Joan manages to overcome the trauma of passive mourning and she becomes actively involved in alleviating the terrors of the scene before her eyes. In Monika Class’s words, Joan ‘‘is meant to draw the cause of her existence out of herself’’ (62, emphasis mine). Her ostensible painful experience triggers within her mind an associationist chain reaction that commences, according to Hartley’s postulate above, with her inborn propensity of avoiding the violently vibrating pains: ‘‘At Tales of cruel Wrong and strange Distress/ [She] Had wept and shiver’d’’, and seeking the moderately vibrating pleasures which are occasioned by being compassionate to others: ‘‘she might wait/ On the poor lab’ring man with kindly looks,/ And minister refreshment to the tir’d/ Way-wanderer’’ (Works 288). So, motivated by ‘‘the indwelling angel-guide’’ and ‘‘With dim inexplicable sympathies’’, Joan begins a passionate race for self-elevation, i.e., a
psychological process of subjugating the *self* to grieving for the miseries of others; the initial phase of “self-annihilation” which climaxes in the union with God:

Here, too, the Maid

Learned more than Schools could teach: Man’s shifting mind,
His Vices and his Sorrows! And full oft
At Tales of cruel Wrong and strange Distress
Had wept and shiver’d. To the tottering Eld
Still as a Daughter would she run: she plac’d
His cold Limbs at the sunny Door, and lov’d
To hear him story, in his garrulous sort,
Of his eventful years, all come and gone. (147-55)

Joan’s allocentric benevolence engenders the precursory stage of self-annihilation which makes her involved in the suffering she is witnessing:

Ah! suffering to the height of what was suffered,
Stung with too keen a sympathy, the Maid
Brooded with moving lips, mute, startful, dark! (247-49)

Then the self reaches the two major “affections”: sympathy and theopathy, which elevate the transformed self to the second and ultimate phase of the “perfect self-annihilation and the pure love of God” (*OM* 282), or the transcendental status where Coleridge’s “the great eternal I AM” is most clearly manifested:

But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality; the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical (*BL*1: 275)

This transcendental process, “For a mighty hand/ Was strong upon her”, begins to transform Joan physically and spiritually:

And now her flush’d tumultuous features shot
Such strange vivacity, as fires the eye
Of misery Fancy-craz’d!
And a voice uttered forth unearthly tones,
Calming her soul,—“O Thou of the Most High
‘Chosen, whom all the perfected in Heaven
‘Behold expectant (250-52, 268-71)

From this moment on we feel that Coleridge turns Joan into a state even more solemn than the one the poem opens with, namely, from that of the mere “warrior-maid

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22 *Cf.* Coleridge’s lecture on Revealed Religion: “While I possess anything exclusively mine, the selfish Passions will have full play, and our hearts will never learn that Great Truth that the good of the whole [is the good of each individual]”, *Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion*, 228.
of France’, she is now uplifted, heightened, and enriched by the divine experience she has undergone, and instead of the ‘‘turn inward’’ state which Stoke criticizes Joan for, we have ‘‘an expansion out of the self’’ (75):

The Maiden paused, musing what this might mean.
But long time passed not, ere that brighter cloud
Returned more bright; along the plain it swept;
And soon from forth its bursting sides emerged
A dazzling form, broad-bosomed, bold of eye,
And wild her hair, save where with laurels bound.
Not more majestic stood the healing God, (422-28)

So, through the sensory inputs of Joan’s experience with terror of war, famine, death, and the succeeding benevolence, Coleridge presents an immediate psychological contact with God and he, moreover, suggests, albeit indirectly, that Hartley’s mechanistic associationism might be applied to explain an ideal state of mind such as the one Joan ascends to. In other words, Hartley’s associationist process operates according to the following cumulative manner:

Simple ideas of sensations’’ (sensory data) → ‘‘complex ideas’’ (the ‘‘vibratiuncles’’ or mind’s reaction) → ‘‘decomplex ideas’’ (formation of sympathy) → a ‘‘hyper-complex idea’’ (knowledge of the divine being) (OM 1:73-79)

Coleridge’s scheme, similarly, presupposes a physical involvement with outer impressions which the mind might process and turn into an ideal state that elevates the involved person to the knowledge of God; ‘‘the great eternal I AM’’ at which the material and ideal overlap and become ‘‘absolutely identical’’. This kind of synthesis features a characteristic trait of Coleridge’s poetry which George H. Gilpin believes ‘‘has the significant form and metaphysical content of a rite’’ (194), that is to say, a devotional meditation in the divinity. Coleridge here, it can be argued, reiterates on practical grounds his belief in the ability of the human act of perception to initiate a creative thought; a fundamental imaginative process that approximates to God’s infinite ‘‘act of creation’’: ‘‘The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’’ (BL 1: 304). According to Frye, in other words, Coleridge here appears to be employing one of most significant devices of poetry: he ‘‘identifies the human with the nonhuman world’’ because he sees himself as ‘‘a part of a total process, engaged with and united to a creative power greater than his own because it includes his own’’ (‘‘The
Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism” 14). This could be the Hartleyean psychological approach which underlies the structure of “The Destiny of Nations”. Danziger precisely describes how the physical impressions could be intertwined with the mental events in a psychological process:

Now, when one of these vibrations [of pleasures or pains] occurred on its own, it would automatically ‘excite’ others with which it had become linked. The psychological result is that, when two sensations have frequently occurred together in the past, the occurrence of just one of them will automatically call the other to mind. Hartley had [thus] provided a physical analogue for what was then becoming known as mental association. (46)

It seems, then, that Coleridge, according to Richard Haven, ‘‘presents the familiar world of sense as turning into the unfamiliar world of spirit’’ (486), and the scheme he applies may be outlined as follows:

Seeking pleasures & avoiding pains → self-annihilation → sympathy & theopathy → knowledge of God in the I AM (God)

Furthermore, I think the philosophical contribution which Coleridge aesthetically presents in “The Destiny of Nations” is that he treats the topics of liberty, freedom, and the martyrdom for noble causes as the products of pure reason, that is, as too immediate and vital to be dealt with through obscure imaginative ruminations. More specifically, Coleridge in “The Destiny of Nations” eschews the use of what Northrop Frye calls the “sentimentalized or rose-colored view of reality” (“The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism” 11) with which Romanticism has been traditionally identified. As Sternbach argues, Coleridge “was uneasy with the representation of ‘preternatural agency’ in a poem predicting the eventual triumph of reason over all forms of superstition” (250). Consequently, the “tutelary Spirit” in the poem does not seem to offer Joan redemption from her predicament as much as to offer her the guidance without which Joan may have been dismayed by the horror of the scene: “Inly she toil’d to flee, and still subdued,/ Felt an inevitable presence near” (Works 291). In fact as readers our attention is not mainly focused on the moral message which the “tutelary Spirit” conveys to Joan: “Much hast thou seen, nor all canst understand—/ But

23 Cf. Hartley’s postulate: “So that these ideas are associated almost synchronically at last, and successively from the first”, OM I, prop. 12, 74.
this be thy best omen—SAVE THY COUNTRY!’’ (Works 298); a message that could have remained no more than an epiphanic vision without Joan’s later concrete action. Rather, what is more significant is what Joan does and how she psychologically reacts to ‘‘an Idea violently and suddenly impressed [sic]’’ on her mind: ‘‘the emphasis shifts from what is prophesied to how the prophecy is expressed’’ (Gary Dyer 151; emphasis in original). Hence the emphasis which Coleridge places on the role of the ‘‘tutelary Spirit’’ may not hold sway over the poem as much as Joan’s concrete experiences do with fear, terror, death, benevolence, and the eventual triumph of freedom which is in itself an ennobling agent that may elevate its proponent to the divine realm:

For what is Freedom, but the unfetter’d use
Of all the powers which God for use had given?
But chiefly this, him First, him Last to view
Through meaner powers and secondary things
Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze. (13-15)

So far the human instinctive disposition to seek pleasures and avoid pain has been discussed from a Hartleyean perspective. However, Coleridge developed his own conception of pleasure which he aesthetically highlights in ‘‘The Destiny of Nations’’. As Coleridge believes, pleasure should play a constitutive role in poetical composition if the ultimate purpose of reading poetry is to be attained:

A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species […] it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part (BL 2: 13)

As representatives of ‘‘the first order of Romantic poets’’ (Davidson 2), Wordsworth and Coleridge were seeking a kind of metaphysical order that is, according to Davidson, ‘‘highly internalized, symbolic and psychological’’ (1). It is true that the Romantic poets habitually resorted to outer physical images as a steady source of inspiration, yet they also sought to establish affinity with their own consciousness, with the constructive mind which was conceived as being able to render the material and ideal aspects of an experience interdependent. Frye argues that ‘‘[t]he sense of identity with a larger power of creative energy meets us everywhere in Romantic culture’’ (‘‘The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism’’ 14). So I argue here that
Wordsworth and Coleridge employ the concept of pleasure as a touchstone or criterion by which this “sense of identity with a larger power of creative energy” is judged.

The two poets already formulated definitions of pleasure which together enormously contributed to shape and define Romantic poetical composition. To a large extent, their definitions seem now analogous. For example, Wordsworth, too, believes that the arousal of pleasure is done mechanistically, that is to say, the sensory interaction with physical objects is responsible for arousing sympathy which in turn prompts pleasure:

“…We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure.”

In this mechanistic process, the poet, according to Wordsworth, plays the role of the key synthesizer who:

[…] considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment (Preface 123)

However, the two poets have their own intrinsic differences over the ends to which the conception of pleasure might lead. First, unlike Coleridge’s view of poetry as conveyor of pleasure not truth, Wordsworth contends that:

[Poetry’s] object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature (Preface 122)

Elsewhere in the Preface Wordsworth adds that “the necessity of giving immediate pleasure” through poetical composition elevates “the poet’s art”:

It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect

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24 Cf. Wordsworth’s elaborate definition of this process in the Preface to The Lyrical Ballads: “it is obvious, that while [the poet] describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical”, 122.
[...] further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves (123)

In this context, Gilpin argues that “as a word acknowledging the ‘beauty of the universe,’ ‘pleasure’ is metaphysical; as a word signifying the ‘grand elementary principle’ in man, it is psychological” (191). Therefore Wordsworth appears to employ pleasure within the domain of man’s relationship with nature and vice versa, or more specifically, within the pantheistic realm in which God’s ultimate supremacy, the divinely sanctioned order of Coleridge’s “I AM” as discussed above, seems to be provisional. In fact Wordsworth, in Coleridge’s own words, “was to propose to himself as his object” two main ends: first “to give the charm of novelty to things of every day”, and secondly “to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural”. These two aims are to be achieved by employing the medium of “awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us” (BL 2: 7; emphasis mine). None of these aims seems to directly and lucidly associate man with the anthropomorphic god, which characterizes Coleridge’s conception of the “I AM” and, therefore, the pleasure derived from these aims, though reflecting a genuine ecstatic vision, seems to lack the psychological depth which Coleridge usually assigns to divine meditation as laid out, for instance, in “The Destiny of Nations”. According to Gilpin “[t]he ‘pleasure’ which Coleridge ascribes to poetry [...] results from these fleeting moments of psychological discovery when through an imaginative act the divine order can be perceived and the cosmos is rendered intelligible again” (192).

This inevitable mirroring of the divine act in the poetic act has been emphasized repeatedly by Coleridge across a large body of his writings. For example, in 1815 he made this connection clear to Joseph Cottle:

Now what the Globe is in Geography, miniaturizing in order to manifest the Truth, such is a Poem to that Image of God, which we were created into, and which still seeks that Unity, or Revelation of the One in and by the Many, which reminds it, that tho’ in order to be an individual Being it must go forth from God, yet as the receding from him is to proceed towards Nothingness and Privation, it must still at every step turn back toward him in order to be at all— (CL 4: 545)\(^25\)

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\(^{25}\) Cf. Coleridge’s lecture on Dante in which he reiterates that the notion of the divine order must permeate art and aesthetics: “The reverse of [changing the ideas into finites by the Greeks] was the natural effect of Christianity; in which finites, even the human form, must, in order to satisfy the mind, be brought into connexion with, and be in fact symbolical of, the infinite; and must be considered in some enduring,
Thus, given the intensity of pleasure drawn from Joan’s radical sympathy with war victims, Coleridge’s conception of pleasure, as far as I see it, seems to a certain extent analogous to Edmund Burke’s hypothesis in which the latter incorporates terror with sublimity. Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) focuses on the sublimity drawn from terror and the interdependent relationship between them:

> WHATEVER is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous [sic] to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling (13)

With regard to the workings of sympathy on the human psyche, Burke’s definition of sympathy seems entirely consonant with Coleridge’s view that sympathy, as already noted, is a criterion of an ethical sublime which transcends the boundaries of the self:

> IT is by [sympathy] that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in a good measure as he is affected (22)

According to Burke, moreover, poetry, as well as other arts, are characteristically privileged for transfusing the pleasure derived from sympathy:

> It is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself. It is a common observation, that objects which in the reality would shock, are in tragical and such like representations the source of a very high species of pleasure. Significantly, the pleasure derived from sympathy affects us most notably when it administers cathartic relief from our own fears and anxieties: This satisfaction has been commonly attributed, first, to the comfort we receive in considering that so melancholy a story is no more than a fiction; and next, to the contemplation of our own freedom from the evils which we see represented. (23)

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however shadowy and indistinct, point of view, as the vehicle or representative of moral truth’’, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, 148.
Although Burke’s treatise by and large emphasizes the inseparability of terror and sublime, it, however, places a rigorous empirical relationship as a prerequisite to make this union possible, that is to say, the sense organs play a role so pivotal in such an alliance that the mind becomes relegated to a mere receptacle of the impact which results from this union; an impact which is represented in “The Destiny of Nations” as sympathy. “The human mind”, Burke argues, “is often, and I think it is for the most part, in a state neither of pain nor pleasure, which I call a state of indifference”. And since the pleasure which is derived from the sense organs “is only pleasure as it is felt” (emphasis mine), therefore the mind is in a state of inertia prior to the interference of any external sensuous stimuli:

If in such a state of indifference, or ease, or tranquillity, or call it what you please, you were to be suddenly entertained with a concert of music; or suppose some object of a fine shape, and bright and lively colours to be presented before you; or imagine your smell is gratified with the fragrance of a rose; or if without any previous thirst you were to drink of some pleasant kind of wine; or to taste of some sweetmeat without being hungry; in all the several senses, of hearing, smelling, and tasting [sic], you undoubtedly find a pleasure (5)

“The Destiny of Nations”, furthermore, may serve as an index to the dichotomy between Coleridge’s understanding of pleasure and Burke’s. The latter’s analysis of pleasure appears to be entirely targeting the empirical and physiological workings of the mind: “Quod latet arcanâ non enarrabile fibrâ”, that is to probe into the very physiological prototype which is responsible for the operation of our minds’ faculties and which controls our passions “which are the organs of the mind” (35). In Burke’s words, “we should pursue [this prototype] and pierce into the inmost, and what might appear inaccessible parts of our nature” so that our minds might be elevated and “admitted […] into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works” (36). More notably, Burke argues that this prototype ought to be the ultimate end of all our rational thinking. He thus places a categorical emphasis on the sense organs and the rational apparatus affiliated with them as the very means by which the deity is known.

The key problem, moreover, that Burke associates with the liberal arts, particularly poetry, is that although in some instances they manage to successfully mirror the divine act, yet they do so with no regard to the rational thinking presupposed by the prototype. Poets, therefore, are like “artificers” who work on “many machines made and even invented without any exact knowledge of the principles they are governed by” (36-7).
The grave mistake of poets, according to Burke, is that their subjective practice is not grounded on an objective regulative foundation: “[t]his is, I believe, the reason why artists in general, and poets principally, have been confined in so narrow a circle; they have been rather imitators of one another than of nature” (37). This system shows that if creative imagination and aesthetics in general vie against the vital role played by the sense organs they would prove ineffective in reaching transcendental realms. Stokes points out that:

Burke’s level of analysis is thus resolutely determined to root itself in the simplest, empirical levels of human existence: basic sensory responses, pain and pleasure, the body. His ultimate datum was physiological, and his final explanations of aesthetic passions refer to the nervous system (67)

Within this reductionist system sympathy as a social value or even a passion, as Burke prefers to label it, becomes confined within an individualistic level with very restricted possibility to become shared with and communicated to others. Therefore, the potential pleasure which is supposed to be drawn from it, as already noted, will be out of the question. Burke thus seems to distance himself from the very societal concerns underlying the schema of “The Destiny of Nations” which appears diametrically opposed to his premise in that the poem elevates sympathy from a mere basic sensory feeling to an ethical and social sublime. In other words, where Burke relegates sympathy and the pleasure derived from it to a localized individualistic passion, Coleridge sees sympathy as an element so central and fundamental to poetry and intellectual growth in general because it may transfer a perceptible and temporal experience, like the one Joan undergoes with war calamities, to a transcendental and perpetual level where the human mind opens up to grander cognitive levels than the ones imposed by empirical thinking. This view was constant in Coleridge’s thinking that he devoted to it a combination of philosophical and theological observation. For example, in 1794 he wrote to Robert Southey that “[m]ind hath a divine Right of Sovereignty over Body”. Another significant segment of the letter is worth quoting at length here because it elaborates on the impact of pleasure that terror could have on us:

There is a feverish distemper of the Brain, during which some horrible phantom threatens our Eyes in every corner, until emboldened by Terror we rush on it—and then—why then we return, the Heart indignant at its own palpitation! Even so will the greater part of our mental Miseries vanish before an Effect. Whatever of mind we will to
do, we can do! What then palsies the Will? The joy of Grief! A mysterious Pleasure broods with dusky Wing over the tumultuous Mind—‘and the Spirit of God moveth on the darkness of the Waters! (CL 1: 122)

The sense organs as represented here in the eyes and the brain receive the impact of a perceptible experience, usually unpleasant. But because of the restrictions imposed on them by their physical and physiological natures, the sense organs and the brain are predisposed to cede preternatural processing of the given experience to the philosophical mind which could transform ostensible miseries into “The joy of Grief”. The “mysterious Pleasure” becomes demystified and “the tumultuous Mind” climaxes to an ecstatic mood once “the Spirit of God” is revealed to them. This is, I argue here, the very same transcendental theophany which lies at the heart of Joan’s experience with sympathy. That is to say, through Joan Coleridge departs from the empirical and physiological level where Burke treats sympathy as a mere neural impulse, to a realm where sympathy becomes a contemplated experience in the form of grieving for others’ collective suffering, or “sym-pathos” (Stokes 74) which lies beyond the domain of Burke’s analysis:

Infinite myriads of self-conscious minds
Are one all-conscious Spirit, which informs
With absolute ubiquity of thought
(His one eternal self-affirming Act!)
All his involved Monads, that yet seem
With various province and apt agency
Each to pursue its own self-centring end. (243-49)

To return to Hartley’s point regarding the origination of pleasure, noted earlier, it follows that Coleridge’s view of sympathy and the infinite pleasure it occasions seems analogous to the one previously laid out by Hartley in his Observations of Man:

[T]he pleasures of sympathy improve those of sensation, imagination, ambition, and self-interest, by limiting and regulating them [...] Their union and entire coincidence with those of theopathy are evident, inasmuch as we are led by the love of good men to that of God, and back again by the love of God to that of all his creatures in and through him [...] In like manner, they may be proved to unite and coincide with the pleasures of the moral sense, both because they are one principal source of the moral sense, and because this, in its turn, approves of and enforces them entirely. (2: 283)

In sum, as has been discussed in this chapter, the deviation from the “common sense” with which Coleridge was accused, becomes more comprehensible when we take
into consideration the attempts Coleridge made to probe into the human psyche and to demonstrate how it could have a tremendous effect on poetical composition. Significantly, Coleridge, as has been shown, managed to arrive at this reasoning by drawing essentially on the neural and theological investigations formerly advanced by David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, therefore he seems to have proven his own originality by fusing the two scientists’ findings into the crucible of his own metaphysical ponderings. In doing so, Coleridge propounds two key factors: first, his belief in the possibility of elevating neural responses to external stimuli from physiological domain to divine realms; and secondly, that knowledge could be obtained by reason and argument as well as by intuition. These two factors, I think, could be employed to measure the extent to which Coleridge was successful in transforming the corporeality of an experience into an idealized thought. So, what Coleridge instances in particular in “The Destiny of Nations” is that sympathy could transcend to an ethical and social sublime where the egocentric self reaches the divine and infinite “I AM”.
Chapter Four

Coleridge’s Philosophy of Nature

Towards the end of his life and his literary and philosophical vocation, Coleridge was still able to argue and maintain that our place in the universe had been contingent on our understanding of *why* and *how* humankind exists. In his view this would normally entail revisiting contemporary epistemology from a *binary* perspective different from the unilateral one introduced by empirical thinking. Coleridge’s reviewers agree to a large extent that Coleridge was enthusiastically striving to formulate a system or *thought* which could tear down, as it were, the supposedly invincible partition which the Enlightenment instituted between science and religion, nature and mind, and matter and idea. In other words, from 1810 until his death, the period of this chapter’s primary interest, Coleridge concluded that scientific discoveries might work collaboratively with philosophic inquiry to introduce a philosophical interpretation of a rationally regulated universe, a system that still resonates today as this chapter attempts to illustrate. Douglas Hedley has recently outlined this argument in terms of its relationship to the Romantic context:

Characteristically the great Romantic thinkers in the British context, and I am thinking particularly of S. T. Coleridge […], [were] figures who all knew the Enlightenment tradition, they had all become figures within it. The young S. T. Coleridge was an enthusiastic Unitarian [which] was a classic form of Enlightenment Christianity. So the Romantics characteristically were figures [and] thinkers who understood the force of the Enlightenment position and their critique of Enlightenment thought was based on a deep sense of its power. When we look at the Romantics we have to bear in mind that they are not rejecting the Enlightenment critique […]; what they are trying to do at their best is to retrieve what the Enlightenment legacy had obscured.¹

Drawing principally on his sheer metaphysical speculations which reached their maturity between 1817 and 1832, largely owing to Dr Gillman’s enormous efforts to control his addiction, Coleridge seems to have been able to employ these speculations in such a way that they supplement the Enlightenment’s strict and literal interpretation of nature.² He inaugurated this system by working jointly with his literary executor the

² The period which I am referring to here is the one known as the Highgate years which witnessed the appearance of the two volumes of *Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves*. For Coleridge’s addiction,
surgeon and idealist J. H. Green on a project called ‘‘physiogony’’ which traces the history of the evolutionary processes responsible for the emergence of the natural world as we identify it today. This project may be regarded as indicative of Coleridge’s incessant attempt not only to synthesize ‘‘discordant qualities’’ within a subjective poetical context, but it signifies also his overarching efforts to philosophically and ontologically trace man’s position in Nature and his relationship with the divinity. So this chapter aims at investigating the extent to which Coleridge was successful in philosophizing nature and naturalizing philosophy, and how man could serve as the link between these two realms.

In the wake of publishing his *Biographia Literaria* in 1817, Coleridge began to raise profound questions about the ability of the mechanistic system to provide *immaterial* answers about the workings of the absolute realm. However, he did not categorically reject science; rather, he was quite sceptical about the limits to which empirical scrutiny could explain our experiences of abstract values like freedom, love, beauty, and, more significantly, divinity. In other words, what Coleridge rejected was the static conception imputed to the world by the natural philosophy. The alternative view which Coleridge envisaged of the world was relatively more dynamic and assigns to it a trace of divine reverence:

> The World, in which I exist … is as present as (if it be at all) the magnetic Planet, of which … the visible Globe that we inverminate,\(^3\) is the Case or travelling Trunk—a neat little world, where Light still exists in statu perfuso as on the third day of the Creation (CL 6: 594)\(^4\)

Starting from the perceptible realm of nature, or the ‘‘inferior Life’’, Coleridge here seems to trace the teleological progression of the whole being and he concludes ‘‘that an other World is inshrined [sic] in the Microcosm’’. The ‘‘other World’’ must be the invisible, in Coleridge’s own words, it is ‘‘the living Stem that will itself expand into the flower, which it now foreshews’’. It is dynamic and ‘‘living’’ in contrast to the static and corporeal Nature which functions as the showcase of this world that partially predicts, ‘‘foreshews’’, the previous, current, and future recondite workings of that absolute realm:

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\(^3\) According to the *OED*, inverminate means ‘‘[t]o infest like worms; to swarm or burrow in’’. The word is attributed to Coleridge and was formally introduced into English in 1830 in his *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (ed. 2): ‘‘The visible globe, that we inverminate’’. 225.

\(^4\) The phrase literally reads: in state of pouring.

see Rosemary Ashton *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 297, 355-56, and 393; Richard Holmes 17 and 426.
How should it not be so, even on the grounds of natural Reason and the Analogy of inferior Life? Is not Nature prophetic up the whole vast Pyramid of organic Being? And in which of her numberless predictions has Nature been convicted of a Lie? Is not every Organ announced by a previous instinct or act? [...] Do not the Eyes, Ears, Lungs of the unborn Babe give notice and furnish proof of a transuterine, visible, audible, atmospheric world? —We have eyes, ears, touch, taste, smell. And have we not an answerable World of Shapes, Colours, Sounds, and sapid and odorous bodies? (CL 6:595)

This line of thinking evinces the importance which Coleridge attaches to the physical world as the ground from which any metaphysical mediation on the Creator should arise. However, Coleridge contends that though nature is an indispensable factor in this system, it is by itself an awkward criterion to judge a world presided over by an intelligent divinity. Therefore Coleridge sees that natural philosophy not only confines itself within the sphere of effect but it blurs the transcendental relationship with its cause:

But likewise—alas for the Man, for whom the one has not the same evidence of Fact as the other!—the Creator has given us spiritual Senses and Sense-organs—Ideas I mean! the Idea of the Good, the Idea of the Beautiful, Ideas of Eternity, Immortality, Freedom, and of that which contemplated relatively to WILL is Holiness, in relation to LIFE is Bliss: and must not these too infer the existence of a world correspondent to them? (CL 6:595)

Philosophically, Coleridge was trying to theorize a system in which he proportionately incorporates contemporary science into metaphysics. Anthony John Harding argues that Coleridge was probing into the possibility of reviving “a centuries-old concept, the scholastic concept of the analogia entis or ‘Analogy of Being’” (“Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 144). Coleridge envisages this system as being essentially incorporative in the sense that it is founded on the interpenetration of two seemingly diverse concepts in a supplementary manner, matter and idea, Nature and absolute, thus proportion is a key word to describe it. According to William L. Reese “analogy” is derived “[f]rom Greek ana (‘according to’) and logos (“ratio, proportion’’). In the broad sense the word signifies “[a] relation of similarity

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5 Coleridge remonstrates with the division made by the empirical thinking between matter and idea at an early stage of his philosophical thinking. He writes to Thomas Poole in 1797: ‘‘Those who have been led to the same truths [i.e. of knowing ‘the Great’, & ‘the Whole’] step by step thro’ the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—They contemplate nothing but parts—and all parts are necessarily little—and the Universe to them is but a mass of little things’’. CL 1: 354. In this respect, Coleridge seems to have regarded John Locke as a typical example of those “Little-ists” and natural philosophers who epitomize the purely mechanistic thinking: “Now Mr Locke was the founder of this sect [of ‘Little-ists’], himself a perfect Little-ist”, CL 2: 708-9.
between two or more things allowing the drawing of probable or necessary conclusions depending on the kind of relation in question”. From a Philosophical perspective, Reese defines “Analogy of Being” in a context that is, I think, most relevant to Coleridge’s incorporative thinking: “In the Analogy of Being of the Scholastics the assumption of grades of excellence provides a means of arguing from one case to another on differing levels of being, and finally to perfect being” (13). Coleridge already reached much the same reasoning and he illustrated it in 1824 through a notebook entry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prothesis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Antithesis</td>
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<td>+ Actual</td>
<td>- Potential</td>
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Identifying two forces constantly at work, Coleridge here seems to delineate these forces as being “two forms of the same Reality” interdependently integrated so that to form one “perfect being” or what he calls the “Actus absolute purus, sine uellâ potentialitate” (CN 4: 5143).

Now, according to Coleridge’s incorporative scheme, the workings of physiology are intertwined with those of transcendental knowledge in a proportionate rate that climaxes in the intermix of “the Actual” into “potential” and vice versa: “Organization, every Organ, and each total Organismus or organized Body is Potential Life: Life Actual has no organ. The act of organizing (as in the Fœtus) is the Transition into the Potential—a vital Fluxion—a becoming potential” (CN 4: 5143). To better “interpret and understand” the symbolic correlation between the “the Actual” and “potential”, we need, as Coleridge points out, to apply a “philosophic consciousness” or “the philosophic imagination” (BL 1: 241-42) which is, in Harding’s words, “a higher, more focused and specialized version of the Secondary Imagination” (‘‘Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 145) and it is, thus, exclusively possessed by the few who consider that “the objects of human knowledge” (BL 1: 236), or “the telos of humankind” (“Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 145) “must be far higher and far inward” than what nature discloses to us (BL 1: 239). In other words, by presenting to us the essence inherent in the natural world, “the philosophic

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6 Literally reads: act absolutely pure, without any potentiality.
imagination” performs an intermediary role and therefore it assists us to understand our status in the universe and the potentialities we are entitled to by the divinity. Coleridge here, I would argue, seems to draw an analogy between the workings of Nature and those of man. That is to say, while Nature works in a pre-emptive manner and prepares its elements for the transformation from a rudimentary phase to a more sophisticated one, man, the most predominate intelligent being, undergoes a more subtle transformation; “a vital Fluxion” from “the Actual” realm of the divine intelligence into the physical sphere. Significantly, the role of “the philosophic imagination” and those who possess it is to reverse this transformation by retrieving man from the domain of matter back to the divinity, i.e., from the “Potential Life” to “the Actual”: 7

They, and they only, can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self intuition, who, within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antenna yet to come. They know and feel, that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them! (BL 1: 241-42)

Here analogy as defined above is manifested most clearly. By employing an innate interpretive faculty, man’s thinking could explore symbolic significance in Nature which might indicate the sublime state intended for man as a being capable of transcending “from one case to another on differing levels of being, and finally to perfect being” (Reese 13). In Coleridge’s metaphysics, therefore, every sensible object found in Nature reflects an idea beyond its physical appearance; an idea whose ultimate purpose is to herald the preeminent state destined for man, to “Behold the Shadow of approaching Humanity”. According to this reasoning, Coleridge propounds that:

[the Metal at its height of Being seems a mute Prophecy of the coming Vegetation, into a mimic semblance of which it crystallizes … the muscular life in the Insect, and the musculo-arterial in the Bird, imitate and typically rehearse the adaptive Understanding, yea, and the moral affections and charities of a man […] Thus all lower Natures find their highest Good in semblances and seekings of that which is higher and

7 The Platonic and Neo-Platonic doctrine seems to be rigorously present in this reasoning: “And if one ought to dare express one’s own view more clearly, contradicting the opinion of others, even our soul does not altogether descend, but there is something of it in the intelligible; but if the part which is in the sensible world gets control, and is thrown into confusion [by the body], it prevents us from perceiving the things which the upper part of soul contemplates”, Enneads IV.8.8, 1-6.
better. All things strive to ascend, and ascend in their striving (AR 74-75)

In this chapter, I focus on Coleridge’s attempts to theorize a philosophy by which he not only demonstrates that Nature and ideas are essentially interconnected by “the philosophic imagination”, but to prove that the result of this synthesis may contribute to returning humankind to the ultimate state from which it has broken away, and thus to re-actualize what has become potential. According to Harding, this alliance “permits one to conceive of Nature (including humankind itself) as a dynamic system, progressive and … always reaching higher and higher levels of organization” than those imposed on it by the empirical thinking (“Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 147). This reasoning, therefore, situates “the philosophic imagination” at the heart of the progression of any moral system. In Coleridge’s words, it involves two “congenial Minds” operating symbiotically:

the one descending from the Supreme Reality, which can never be presented as an Idea (=essentially incomprehensible, deeper than or transcending, all intelligence[]); from the Will, as Actus absolutus sine ullâ potentialitate, down toward Man; and from the Will merely potential sine ullâ actualitate, which … is presentable as Idea exclusively, upward toward Man (quoted in Harding 147)

I. Schelling’s Naturphilosophie:

Significantly, Coleridge’s “dynamic” and “progressive” system can be seen as a dissent from the German idealistic school. For example, as has been shown in chapter one, Coleridge profoundly admired Kant’s philosophies which affected his whole thinking “with a giant’s hand” (BL 1: 153).9 He, nevertheless, eventually considered as highly improbable Kant’s postulate of the impossibility of knowing the absolute act because, to Coleridge, it tends to confine the mind’s creative power within the “[t]he causality of physical necessity” which was already determined “at a certain point of time” (Reason 151). Another significant dissent, moreover, can be observed here, namely, Coleridge’s

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8 Cf. Coleridge’s understanding of what “the transcendental philosopher” should do: “In the same sense [as that of “the construction of the universe intelligible” proposed by Des Cartes] the transcendental philosopher says; grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligence with the whole system of their representations to rise up before me”, BL 1: 297.

9 Coleridge has been well-known for bringing the German philosophy into the English-speaking world: “To me”, he declares, “it will be happiness and honour enough, should I succeed in rendering [Kant’s] system itself intelligible to my countrymen”, BL 1: 163.
repudiation of Friedrich W. J. Schelling’s “PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE” which stipulates that before reaching its final formation, the mind (intermittently termed as “the Self” or “intelligence”) must undergo three main acts which resemble “the three stages in the construction of matter” (STI 90): first, the foundational stage or “the act of self-consciousness” where “it is not free but still unconscious” in that when it is presupposed by the philosopher it “yields the first act of our object, the self”. This act, moreover, marks the point at which the self is “both subject and object at once”, that is to say, the point where “the originally unlimited and the limitant [sic], are still united”. Therefore, it is in this phase of the self’s emanation, Schelling argues, that the objective begins to be subsumed by the subjective which now “must necessarily be thought of as striving out beyond the point of limitation”, a process that Schelling regards as determined by the same principles governing “the construction of matter” (STI 91). The result from the first act, again, combines the object and subject as “a common construction” which provides a better representation of human nature than the concept of the isolated self. In this state, the self seeks to rid itself of the limitations imposed on it by “the first act”, therefore it moves to “a second act, which is a self-intuiting of the self in this state of limitation”. Initially, the self-intuition endowed on the self merely performs the tasks of “finding, or sensing”, and because the self is not entirely free yet, its activity here is mainly associated with sensation. Along with this sensation, we, as human beings, become subject to the fundamental dichotomy of body and mind:

in this second act there is a separation—not for the self, but for us—of the two activities originally united therein [i.e. of the subject and object]

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10 Cf. in Biographia Literaria, Coleridge celebrates Schelling “as the founder of the PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE, and as the most successful improver of the Dynamic System” inherent in Nature. Moreover, Coleridge adds that “[i]n Schelling’s ‘NATUR-PHILOSOPHIE,’ and the ‘SYSTEM DES TRANSCENDENTALEN IDEALISMUS,’ I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do […] We [Schelling and Coleridge] had studied in the same school; been disciplined by the same preparatory philosophy, namely, the writings of Kant”, BL 1: 160-61. Moreover, it seems that Coleridge was in concordance with the general line of Schelling’s philosophy, particularly the one pertaining to the function of “Transcendental philosophy” which is in Schelling’s understanding “nothing else but a constant raising of the self to a higher power; its whole method consists in leading the self from one level of self-intuition to another, until it is posited with all the determinations that are contained in the free and conscious act of self-consciousness”, (System 90). Sara Coleridge, however, exonerated her father from the charge of indiscriminately copying Schelling: “There can be no reasonable doubt, that he was at least in the same line of thought with [Schelling],—was in search of what Schelling discovered—before he met with his writings”, (Works 3: xxviii). More recently, Greg Ellermann points out that Coleridge’s responsiveness to Schelling’s system may be interpreted as a reaction against Fichte’s “boastful and hyperstoic hostility to NATURE, as lifeless, godless, and altogether unholy”, BL 1: 159. Therefore, Coleridge, in Ellermann’s words, “seeks a more robust account of external reality and, for a time, he seeks it in Schelling. But Schelling’s thought is more provocation than solution; […] the materialist and irreligious tendencies of Naturphilosophie are hard to ignore”. 38.
into two entirely different and mutually external activities, namely into that of the self on the one hand, and that of the thing on the other (STI 91)

Schelling’s postulate above, moreover, is followed by a question which he inevitably poses here: “Now what, then, is it that becomes an object to us through sensation?”. What concerns Coleridge in this reasoning is the answer given by Schelling which amounts to saying that through sensation we perceive “Nothing else but quality”:

But all quality is simply electricity, a proposition that is demonstrated in natural philosophy. But electricity is precisely that whereby we designate in nature this second stage in construction. One might therefore say that what sensation is in the realm of intelligence, electricity is in nature.

Schelling rounds off his argument with the third and final act through which “the self as sensing becomes an object to itself” because its construction resembles that of matter:

If the self in the first act is intuited only as object, and in the second only as subject, it now becomes objectified in the third act as both at once—for the philosopher, of course, not for itself … The result of the comparison so far instituted is that the three stages in the construction of matter really do correspond to the three acts in the intelligence (STI 91-92)

Schelling’s “fundamental error” seems to encroach on Coleridge’s transcendental system. Schelling, that is to say, eliminates the contradictoriness between the subjective and objective, the indivisible and many, undermining thus the distinction between “opposite or discordant qualities” (BL 2: 16) by treating matter “merely as mind in a condition of dullness” and the mind “as matter merely in becoming” (STI 92). Schelling, Coleridge observes, “attempts to represent as aboriginal the same idea as I have deduced under the name Multeity” (CN 3: 4449). As outlined above, Schelling’s system, moreover, dispenses with the creative aspect of the mind, that is to say, the mind’s ability to transcend beyond the limitations of the sensible realm. “Matter”, Schelling concludes, “is indeed nothing else but mind viewed in an equilibrium of its activities” (STI 92). This reasoning, namely, “the making Nature absolute”, in Coleridge’s words (CN 3: 4449), tends to confound the ontological hierarchy of Being as outlined above, i.e., to argue “from one case to another on differing levels of being, and finally to perfect being” (Reese 13, emphasis mine), by relegating “the supreme Mind with the total sum of existing things” (“Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 149).
Coleridge’s response to this abnormality, as it were, is recorded in a notebook entry of 1818:

I detect two fundamental errors of Schelling—I. The establishment of Polarity in the Absolute—and 2. the confusion of Ideas, with Theorems on one side, and with Anticipation on the other, so as to make one and the same at once self-evident and yet dependent on empirical Proof (CN 3: 4449)

Coleridge’s disagreement with Schelling’s metaphysical system has engendered a variety of responses among critics. In Coleridge and the Concept of Nature (1985), Raimonda Modiano points out that in the main Coleridge’s objection to Schelling pertains to the latter’s violation of, first, Coleridge’s Christian beliefs: “to Coleridge”, Modiano argues, “Schelling’s claim that nature is a self-subsistent reality was tantamount to the pantheistic equation of God with the world. If, as Schelling asserted, nature is eternal in itself, then ‘God as God’ can no longer be regarded as ‘the one necessary Existence’” (167). In Coleridge’s own words, Schelling and natural philosophy in general tend to jeopardize the very foundations of Christianity: “[i]f they include Man in Nature, they annul all morality: if they exclude him, all science—and how is the latter possible, if Nature be God?” (CN 4: 4648). In this respect, Paul Hamilton rightly points out that Coleridge here “Christianizes Schelling’s ontology, replacing its logic with doctrine” (8) because he, Coleridge, found that Schelling’s religio-philosophical assumptions were untenable. In other words, it is characteristic of Coleridge, I would argue, to passionately embrace and later adapt, or even reject, the corollaries of other philosophers and thinkers as has been discussed in chapter three with Hartley and Priestley’s philosophies. 11

Coleridge was most irritated by the derogation with which Schelling naturalizes the divine Mind, that is to say the degradation of the notion of the “‘infinite I AM’” (BL 1: 304) to the sphere of matter, putting, thus, Coleridge’s essential doctrinal beliefs at stake. Thus, as Hamilton observes:

When Coleridge was confident of imposing his own terminology on Schelling, he drew on the Christian pattern to which he believed that Schelling’s thought, to be correct, must conform. He is, I believe, at his most hostile when he thought Schelling was doing things the other way round, and approving Christian theology when it mirrored philosophical arguments to which, in order to be correct, it must conform (16)

11 Hamilton argues that “it is in his interest in and grasp of the problems of expressing and communicating various philosophical positions that Coleridge could make his own contribution”, 17.
In a letter to J. H. Green in 1818, Coleridge contends that Schelling seemed to have made the conceptual and natural alike:

if [God] be Ens semper *perfectum*, and all-sufficient, the material World cannot be necessary—and if it be, then God as God is not self-sufficient—i.e. he is not God, but a part of the universe, nay, a product of the same (*CL* 4: 873-74)\(^{12}\)

Secondly, Coleridge found a discrepancy between his transcendental thought and Schelling’s. Coleridge’s transcendental system emanates from an inveterate belief in the ubiquity and oneness of the Absolute as ‘‘something great—something one & indivisible—’’ (*CL* 1: 349), whereas Schelling, according to Modiano, ‘‘presents natural science and transcendental philosophy as fully complementary sciences – the former subordinating the ideal to the real, the latter the real to the ideal’’ (168). Using a figurative language that is typical of him, Coleridge delineates the adverse effect which stems from the overlap of two incommensurate realms, ‘‘this up and down in one and the same Sphere’’ (*CN* 3: 4449), that is to say, when Nature becomes equal to the Absolute:

like a Candle placed horizontally and lit at both ends [...] For it will appear to the Learner, in his first perplexity, a mere Trick- viz. that one and the same Thing is called I, or intelligence, or our Intellect (Verstand) at one end, and Nature at the other\(^{13}\)* (*Marginalia* 12, 4:375)

The philosophical impasse, I argue, which might be inherent in a coalition like this could lead to an intellectual vacuum since the mind ‘‘now becomes objectified … as both [object and subject]’’, as Schelling contends (91). ‘‘Thus’’, Modiano rightly observes, ‘‘if one starts with nature, intelligence is the effect; if one starts from the opposite end, intelligence is the cause and nature the effect’’ (169). Edward Caird (1835-1908), one of the Oxfordian British Idealists, precisely illustrates Schelling’s conception of the Absolute as one-dimensional: ‘‘it might with some truth be said that [Schelling’s] absolute is like the lion’s den in the fable; for all the footsteps are directed towards it, but none seem to issue from it’’ (1: 515). Therefore, Schelling’s ‘‘Principle of Natur-philosophie’’ in which he associates nature with ‘‘Physics, and yet notwithstanding this

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\(^{12}\) Cf. a notebook entry of 1820 in which Coleridge further explains where and how Schelling’s natural philosophy errs: ‘‘But these folks forget, that in making Nature God they make God Nature, and fall into all the chaos of Eastern Pantheism. If they include Man in Nature, they annul all morality: if they exclude him, all science—and how is the latter possible, if Nature be God?’’, *CN* 4: 4648.

\(^{13}\) Coleridge reiterates the metaphor of the candle in *CL* 4: 874: ‘‘I was myself taken in by [Schelling’s ‘‘inconsistency’’], retrograding from my own prior and better Lights, and adopted it in the metaphysical chapters of my Literary Life—not aware, that this was putting the Candle horizontally and burning it at both ends’’.
a Principle strictly a priori … an absolute Principle’’ seems to have challenged the very cornerstone of Coleridge’s metaphysics which denies any polarity to ‘‘The divine Unity’’ (CL 4: 874-75). Coleridge’s rejecting attitude was succinctly articulated in a marginal note:

An unconscious activity that acts intelligently without intelligence, an intelligence that is the product of a Sans-intelligence, are positions calculated rather to startle or confuse the mind by their own difficulty, than to prepare it for the reception of other Truths (Marginalia 12, 4:374)

Moreover, in ‘‘Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’’’ (2000), Anthony John Harding argues that the main drawback detected by Coleridge in Schelling’s system is the latter’s attempt ‘‘to reify our human conception of the productive activities of Nature, the ways in which we are able to imagine Nature’s activities, as if they were actions of the mind or intelligence of Nature itself’’ (149). Therefore, it appears that when Schelling regarded matter as both ‘‘the sleeping state of monads’’ and ‘‘congealed mind’’ (STI 92), he ‘‘had turned human thought itself into a mere byproduct of natural processes’’ (‘‘Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’’’ 149). In other words, while philosophy resolves the problem of knowledge by presupposing as inevitable the unity between external objects and our representations of them, Schelling, on the other hand, regards these objects as infinite and denies thus the ability of our minds to reshape them; a philosophical aporia which makes the object-subject unity obscure.14 To surmount this complexity, Coleridge put it the other way around. By probing into its putative infinitude, Coleridge began to ask questions about the teleological ground of Nature. He commenced his religio-philosophical inquisition, or what he calls ‘‘Logosophia’’, by arguing that Schelling’s natural philosophy ends up with ‘‘the most erroneous conclusions’’ because it tends to confound the entire ontological hierarchy which must have necessarily derived its existence from ‘‘two Spheres’’ variant in supremacy, ‘‘or the Plentitude and Nature’’, the former commencing ‘‘with the genesis of Light’’, whereas the latter ‘‘with the Fall from God … with the

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14 Cf. in a notebook entry written in November 1827, Coleridge argues that the object-subject unity seems equivalent to the symbiotic relationship between the mind and the ‘‘I’’: ‘‘The definition of mind by me [?long] adopted & still retained as a Subject that is it’s own Object— but for this reason it may with no less propriety be defined, an object involving its own Subject. But this is not the definition of the ‘‘I’’. — this must be defined, a Subject recognising itself as a Subject. The ‘‘I’’ therefore cannot be conceived as the whole mind; and tho’ it is indeed the mind itself, of which the mind is conscious […] yet it is not of necessity conscious of it as itself’’, Notebook 35, 48-48v.
Chaos and the descent of the Spirit” (CN 3: 4449). In 1818 Coleridge envisioned, through a notebook entry, what it would be like when the cosmos becomes a “bipolar” realm; that is to say, when the phenomenal sphere becomes self-subsistent reality as envisioned by Schelling:

Suppose that we have succeeded in generating intelligibly the Point, the bipolar Line, the surface, the depth and with the circumference the Center — and with these their productive Acts, and the correspondent motions as the Phænomena of these acts— hence too the forces, and their phænomena, Attraction, Contraction, Repulsion, Dilation, the Centripetal, the Centrifugal, Gravity, Light, and lastly, Magnetism, Electricity, Galvanism, Construction — Now where, I say, would the difference be, with what detriment to our purpose would it be followed, if we had begun with these? If we had in the first instance assumed them, as notorious facts (CN 3: 4449)

The main problem with this virtual world, as inferred by Coleridge, is that we, as intelligent beings, are unlikely to comprehend our place in the world and what we are yet to become simply because in this world our interpretative faculties, those by which we seek and trace the first cause of being, would be halted, and, more accurately, our imaginative creativity – the key drive of poetic productivity – would be futile: “If so”, Coleridge concludes, “to what purpose the prior Visions, the shapeless Imagination of a transcendent Epopsy, the verbal Deposition, die unanschaubare productive Producten einer intellectuellen Anschauung? — [the inexpressible productive products of an intellectual intuition]” (CN 3: 4449, my translation). According to Coleridge’s metaphysical speculations, moreover, physical objects, including us, are repetitive and finite acts located in a purposeful pre-appointed course, i.e., the prophetic nature, so that we might “strive to ascend” (AR 75) to the omnipotent causality, or what Coleridge defines as the “first intelligibility”. By way of employing his “suspension of disbelief” (BL 2: 6), Coleridge wonders whether there should be “Nothing” beyond the “bipolar” sphere constituted by Schelling: “But yet I ask—Why, go back so far as to these assumed Powers? Why not in the first instance take the concrete Facts as they are?” (CN 3: 4449). Coleridge arrives at answers to these questions by counting on the deductive faculty of the mind, that is to say, its ability to penetrate matter in order to deduce the Absolute:

15 In Coleridge’s terminology, the word Light often implies a divine and revelational connotation: “I regret nothing that tends to make the Light become the Life of men, even as the Life in the eternal Word is their alone true light”. AR 157-58.
The Moon has hitherto observed such and such motions without any known exception—my nature compels me to anticipate the recurrence—And that is of itself a sufficient argument for all practically useful Belief, where there is no argument at all to the Contrary.—Why do you shrink from this? Is it, because you know that the moon's real motion and its apparent are two different things, the latter of which only can be determined by mere observation? That should you say, the former is deduced from it, you could attach no meaning to the word, deduced? That what is deducible from another is necessarily so and so, and must ever so continue while that continues from which it has been deduced: of course therefore derives its certainty from that other? (CN 3: 4449)

Schelling, on the other hand, already presents, through “the phenomena of Nature”, an entire different reasoning to the one propounded by Coleridge. Schelling argues that the “products” of Nature which “are absolutely opposed to each other” are not bound by the “indifference of gravity”, but rather by a “universal interdependence”, a process which “assails the indifferent element of the PRODUCT, that is, the products themselves dissolve” into one cohesive identity despite the fact that one constituent (the abstract) may be superior to the other (the material). The problem which arises from this postulate, as far as Coleridge is concerned, lies not only in its application to two discordant products of nature, but likewise to two opposed realms, i.e., objective and subjective, material and immaterial whose ontological status presupposes the predominance of the latter over the former. For instance, Schelling considers the sun as the primary mass of matter from which the universe originally emanated. It is, moreover, the first product of nature, or thesis, which is capable of causing its own antitheses, namely, the planets which broke away from it at the early stages of the Creation. The sun necessitates a connection with its planets, a “universal interdependence”, through the phenomena of “light” and “gravity”, the eventual synthesis that makes life possible on earth. Schelling thus, as Modiano notes, “shows the evolution of intelligence from nature, i.e. of a higher power from a lower one” (169). In his First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, Schelling expounds how intelligent life emerged from matter:

For, is not the indifference dissolved at every step, since gravity, as ever active, presupposes a continual canceling of indifference?—It is thus, therefore, that the Sun, by the distribution exercised on the Earth, causes a universal separation of matter into the primary antithesis (and hence gravity). This universal canceling of indifference is what appears to us (who are endowed with life) as light; wherever, therefore, that indifference is dissolved (in the chemical process), there light must appear to us (226)
In this respect, Modiano rightly observes that the “universal interdependence” suggested here extends further to include light and gravity themselves:

While light creates antithesis, gravity presupposes it … Light forms the ideal pole of the universe. It is the direct symbol of the productivity and all continuity in nature. Gravity, on the other hand, represents the real pole of nature, and is the symbol of matter. The two poles of the universe represented by gravity and light control the primary forms of dynamic activity in nature, namely magnetism, electricity and the chemical process (166)

The exposition of the evolution of nature proposed by Schelling seemed to Coleridge as inadequate because it overlooked the role of the mind amidst this evolutionary process, that is to say, “how mind, or intelligence, could still have toward Nature the relation of cause to effect” (Harding, “Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 148). Adhering to his definition of the primary imagination “as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (BL 1: 304), one may infer that Coleridge draws an analogy between God’s act of creation and what the mind does. “God is[es] all things”, that is they act according to God’s will, and likewise, though relatively to a less degree, Coleridge asserts that.  

Your mind, life, will, are at least the grounds of your having any notion of Cause at all—apparently, therefore, they are far more likely to furnish apt illustrations than the Objects of the Senses which, in all systems and on every supposition, are merely effects (SW&F 1: 558)

Coleridge, therefore, counteracts Schelling’s postulate by emphatically arguing that the mind is the divine agency by virtue of which we are elevated and “compelled to recollect, that the greatest, and for the human race as progressive Beings the most useful Discoveries have been derived from applying truths purely intellectual to the objects of sense in order to render them intelligible” (CN 3: 4449). Equally significant, moreover, unlike “the mind of the flesh” (AR 158), the poetic mind is capable of aesthetic representations. W. K. Wimsatt, notes that the second key aspect, after the divine one, that makes the mind distinct from nature is its unique capacity to artistic creativity:

There is at least one respect in which the physical organism, either growing plant or animal, is immeasurably surpassed by the human poetic consciousness. I mean, in its capacity for self-revision,

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16 In a footnote, H. J. Jackson explains the sense in which Coleridge coined this phrase: “Not ‘God is all things [nominative case], God is matter [nominative case]’, but ‘God is[es] all things [accusative case], God is[es] matter [accusative case]’”, SW&F 558.
rearrangement, mending […] there is no action of any physical organism that remotely approaches the power of the human mind to revise and recast itself, constantly to reaffirm or to cancel its own precedent action, in whole or in part. We confront here self-involution, a spiritual power (22).

Nature in Coleridge’s views, on the other hand, though endowed with “potential Will” and “the minimum of Actuality” is subordinate to the mind mainly because it lacks the will which the mind possesses. It rather stands, in Coleridge’s words, “in relation to a Will as that which could not be conceived if the Will were not and had not been” (quoted in Harding, “Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 148, 150). In Coleridge and the Inspired Word (2003), Harding points out that what Coleridge rejected in Schelling’s system, and consequently in the interpretation of Nature as a whole, was its tendency toward pantheism. According to Harding, Coleridge believed that “both the creation and the enjoyment of poetry are activities in which one’s whole being—moral, intellectual, and aesthetic—is freely involved”. Pantheism, however, seemed to Coleridge to be a stumbling block to the freedom of this coalition. More accurately, it shackles the “poet’s individuality” to a unilateral view where the poet’s mind operates in a non-ending circle and is channelled into “a mere hollow chamber in which the Objective was fused as in a crucible with the Subjective” (Inspired Word 60).

Within this philosophical ambivalence, Schelling’s views of artistic production might well fit in as he overtly contends:

The revelation which the natural philosopher makes artificially for himself is original and natural for Art. What we call Nature is a poem that lies enclosed in a wondrous secret scripture. Yet the riddle can be solved […] Each masterly picture originates equally in the annulling of the invisible barrier which separates the actual and ideal worlds, and is simply the opening through which emerge fully those forms and aspects of the ideal world, which glimmer half-seen through the actual world […] It is Art alone […] that is able with universal validity to render objective what the philosopher can only demonstrate subjectively. (Complete Works 628-29)

To the Coleridge of the 1790s, i.e., during the zenith of his enthusiasm for German Idealism, this system sounded most appropriate as it attempted to bridge the epistemological gap between the material and ideal worlds so as to culminate in the state of the “one & indivisible” underlying Coleridge’s transcendental thought (CL 1: 349). Nevertheless, Coleridge’s mature beliefs, particularly those arrived at during his Highgate years, conflicted with Schelling’s line of thinking as outlined above because it, first,
replaced, “the revelations of the Gospel and the Religion of all Christendom”, epitomized by the God-given free will, with “the (falsely so called) Religion of Nature” (AR 158). Secondly, by contending that “Art […] is to the philosopher the highest of things”, supposedly because it perforates “the invisible barrier which separates the actual and ideal worlds”, Schelling exalted art itself at the cost of the divine being to which art seeks to lead. In other words, Coleridge saw that the major flaw of this reasoning lies in making nature, rather than the divine being as the first cause, the ultimate end at which the transcendental philosopher’s meditation terminates, losing thus his individuality which might be scattered across the manifoldness of Nature. He points out and warns against the repercussions which lurk behind confining the “philosophic poet” to a phenomenal sphere: “Ever and anon he seemed to have hold of truth; but when he asked himself what he meant by it, it escaped from him, or resolved itself into meanings, that destroyed each other”. Schelling, moreover, seems to have erred by creating “a Religion of Nature, or a Natural Theology antecedent to Revelation, or superseding its necessity” (AR 158). According to Harding this religion suggests an exchange of the sublime mind with the fluctuations of Nature:

Humanity, in this moment, was Nature arrived at self-consciousness, Nature become aware for the first time of its own existence. That the individual human mind—the impassioned, the high-souled, the heroic—became, in this system, a mere modification of the one existing Substance, possessing no separate identity, did not trouble Schelling, to whom that loss of individuality was a small price to pay for the discovery that knowledge of the thing-in-itself was, after all, possible. (Inspired Word 62)

However, as has been discussed earlier, Coleridge’s transcendental scheme finds in nature something far greater and subtler than an organic and self-subsistent entirety as proposed by Schelling’s Naturphilosophie or any other philosopher of Nature. That is to say, to Coleridge Nature did not stand as a pile of atoms randomly moving without any specific purpose; instead, he must have seen in it something that resembles the act of creation itself; an impetus that stimulates the poet’s creative power so that to elevate him to infinite realms. This analogy and the longing for the infinitude it implies appeared in a notebook entry of March 1810: “I wish much to investigate the connection of the Imagination with the Bildungstrieb—Imaginatio = imitatio vel repetitio Imaginis— per motum? ergo, et motuum—The Variolæ—generation—Is not there a link between physical Imitation & Imagination?” (CN 3: 3744). In Aids to Reflection he adds that “all
lower Natures find their highest Good in semblances and seekings of that which is higher and better. All things strive to ascend, and ascend in their striving” (75). Herein lies, I think, the importance that Coleridge attaches to nature as a prophetic agency through which higher forms are to be sought and investigated. Man as a thing or an object, according to Coleridge, is not an exception in the process of striving towards higher forms, and it is the artist who seems to immensely participate in this process by employing the imaginative creativity he is endowed with as an interpretative tool by which the external world might be viewed with awe knowing that it originates from an ubiquitous deity. In this regard, John Beer argues that Coleridge’s schema was operating “[i]n a society that still liked to live by fixed forms and characters, he was endeavouring both to respect these forms and yet to live as a free spirit” (38). In other words, by applying the poet’s imaginative faculty to the various aspects of nature, Coleridge seems to have contributed to altering the concept of the Deity “from that of a static law-giver into that of a Being which is itself in process … [i.e.] of a Being centred in the Father, of an energy going forth from that Being in the Son and of a returning, formative power in the Spirit” (Beer 40).

As discussed in the introduction, Coleridge attempted in Ernst Cassirer’s words “to poeticize philosophy and to philosophize poetry” (80), thus he deviated from Plato’s denunciation of poetry and art in general as imitative of images, not truth.17 What Coleridge saw as more reasonable, was to modify Plato’s “static, grey world of metaphysics” (Vigus 7), in such a way that it attunes to the needs of early nineteenth century. Therefore, in his essay “On Poesy of Art” he outlines the correlation between the artist’s domain of action and the workings of nature and how the so-called imitation could be purposeful:

The wisdom in nature is distinguished from that in man by the co-constantaneity of the plan and the execution; the thought and the product are one, or are given at once; but there is no reflex act, and hence there is no moral responsibility. In man there is reflexion, freedom, and choice; he is, therefore, the head of the visible creation. In the objects of nature are presented, as in a mirror, all the possible elements, steps, and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness, and therefore to the full development of the intelligential act; and man’s mind is the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the

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17 See, for instance, Republic, book 10: 597c, 595a, 598e, 599b, 599c, and 600c. Elsewhere, Coleridge defines Platonism as “the power by which we become possessed of Principle, (the eternal Verities of Plato and Descartes) and of Ideas, (N.B. not images)”, The Friend 2: 104.
images of nature. Now so to place images, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature,—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts. Dare I add that the other genius must act on the feeling, that body is but a striving to become mind,—that it is mind in its essence! (Shawcross, BL 2: 257-58)\(^{18}\)

In other words, Nature mechanically executes pre-designated operations and thus it must be understood as an addendum involuntarily performing its manifold processes. Man, on the other hand, possesses the mind; the faculty which, unlike a mirror, assimilates the images impressed on it and reshapes them into a cohesive unified whole, underpinned in this by the "freedom, and choice" bestowed upon him by the free will. Coleridge here, moreover, seems to adapt a centuries-old Platonic concept to contemporary understanding of Nature’s works. “In every work of art”, he argues, “there is a reconcilement of the external with the internal; the conscious is so impressed on the unconscious as to appear in it”, and the artist’s role in this coalition, therefore, is to “imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols—the Nature-geist, or spirit of nature” (Shawcross BL 2: 259).\(^{19}\) Significantly, within this process Coleridge sees humankind as the elite of Nature’s objects which, unlike any other objects, possesses “reflexion, freedom, and choice”; the constitutive elements of the imagination, or the “speculative instrument” by virtue of which the artist could “approach the processes of creation as they could be observed not only in the mind of the creative artist, but in the organic process of nature itself” (Beer 40). The partnership of the internal and external realms has been lucidly expressed, for instance, in the “The Eolian Harp” where this unity is conveyed to us “by symbols—the Nature-geist, or spirit of nature”:

And what if all of animated nature  
Be but organic harps diversely framed,  
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,

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\(^{18}\) Cf. “No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language”, BL 2: 25-26.

\(^{19}\) Cf. Coleridge’s definition of Beauty which he saw as a result of the alliance of the mind and Nature: “if the artist copies the mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry! If he proceeds only from a given form, which is supposed to answer to notion of beauty, what an emptiness, what an unreality there always is in his productions […] Believe me, you must master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man”, Shawcross BL 2: 257.
At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (44-48)

The supremacy of man, particularly the poet, among other natural objects is evinced in his capacity for grasping what is divine in ordinary things, specifically what pertains to the Christian God. In this respect, Harding notes that:

Coleridge’s ‘one Life,’ … is a Christian idea, in that it does not confuse or identify God with Nature but demonstrates that Nature, organized as it is according to laws that can be grasped by the human mind, must be grounded in something that is neither mere inchoate Substance nor a mere impersonal First Cause, but a transcendent Being (Inspired Word 68)

Moreover, towards the end of his life in 1834, it had become extremely important for Coleridge to formulate a comprehensive understanding of Nature that concurrently corresponds to his transcendental system and to the explanations of contemporary science. He inaugurated his definition of Nature by, first, redeeming it, as it were, from the “‘hyperousian realizing powers’” to which it was subjected, as he complained, by Schelling’s Naturphilosophie.20 He seems to have been disposed to relocate it in its proper sphere by desynonymizing it with Being. Instead, in his words, it is a “Tendency a Desiderium (= a Missing-and-Desiring) to become One and to produce true Being” (Quoted in Harding’s “Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 150). Without losing sight of his firm belief that “‘God ises all things’” (SW&F 1:558), Coleridge still conceives of nature as “‘bipolar’” and thus it strives to the oneness which it obviously lacks, that is to say, “striving to become mind” (Shawcross, BL 2: 258). Coleridge, therefore, seems to have contrived a combined philosophical system that is heedful of both Nature’s becoming and the eternal order it originates from. In lieu of Schelling’s confining natural philosophy, Coleridge’s presents a natural philosopher who could incorporate in his thinking both the descent of spirit into nature and its subsequent striving to become Being once more:

[Coleridge’s natural philosopher] begins with Nature as the potential Will with the minimum of Actuality, and this too derivative—and climbs upward, conscious the at every grade of Ascent he is meeting the descending Power, the Principle of all Actuality, — and in a less and less obscure form, the higher he ascends in the history of Nature/

20 The term “‘hyperousian’”, according to Harding, “is a Coleridgean neologism meaning ‘above being’” Inspired Word 67.
Coleridge saw in his literary executor, the surgeon and natural historian Joseph Henry Green, a representation of that kind of philosopher who held symmetrical views towards Nature as those endorsed by Coleridge and which they both labelled under the term “Physiogony, or History of Nature” which, according to Green, “regards the facts and appearances of the natural world as a series of actions, and Nature itself as an agent, acting under the analogy of a will and the pursuit of a purpose” (VD 101-102). Green here seems to echo Coleridge’s reluctance to confer will to Nature which he, rather, interprets as “acting under the analogy of a will and the pursuit of a purpose”.

Physiogony too, no less than physiology, investigates the principles of life; but this again principally in reference to the original construction of living bodies, and to the productive powers, or their formative principle. The distinctive aim, then, of physiogony is to present a History of Nature, and, as in all other history, to discover in the past the solution of the present, and in both the anticipation of the future. (102)

Green, furthermore, argues that the principal objective of physiogony is to trace the evolutionary and complicated processes through which Nature has passed and how it continues striving towards the state of self-perfection from which it originally descended. More importantly for Coleridge, physiogony treats man as the culmination of this evolutionary process, a sophisticated status “which Nature alone could not realize”, and, therefore, Green notes that physiogony aims “to exhibit Nature as labouring in birth with man” (102-103). If all other objects of Nature or the “inferior Life” act “under the analogy of a will”, man, Coleridge contends, emerges as the sole object endowed with absolute WILL from which “the whole revenue of his Humanity is derived”. In other words, man is privileged for being the indwelling of the divine light of God: “And from a yet higher authority we know that it is a Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world”. God, therefore, has given us not only the “eyes, ears, touch, taste, smell” which we share with “the Dog and the Ape”, but He has also ascribed to us “spiritual Senses and Sense-organs—Ideas I mean! The Idea of the Good, the Idea of the Beautiful,


21 Cf. Coleridge’s definition: “Physiogony or Natural History […] has for it’s [sic] Subject […] the activity of productive Powers, or the sum and series of Actions having the Facts and Phenomena of Physiography (Description or Display of Nature) and the Products […]”, quoted in Harding “‘Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’”, 151.

22 The alternative mechanism which Coleridge conceives of as regulating Nature’s acts is “a plastic Will, acting in time and of course finitely”, CN 4: 4648.
Ideas of Eternity, Immortality, Freedom”, the elements by which we might probe the “prophetic” Nature to know what lies in store for us (CL 6: 595-96). I would argue here that by ontologically tracing the “inferior Life”, we teleologically are exploring the very reasons why it exists. The key role played by the imagination here is to connect Nature with the “higher authority” that animates Nature, and by doing so man could realize the transcendent position he is entitled to in the whole creation, an entitlement which Nature is striving to reach. Coleridge precisely articulates this sense of striving towards union with the divine when he writes that “to arrive at any understanding of these matters requires a mind gigantic [i.e. because it is associated with “higher authority”] in it’s comprehension and microscopic in it’s [sic] accuracy of detail [as it mainly deals with sensible particulars found in Nature]” (CL 6: 596). Harding rightly observes, in this regard, that:

The imagination here operates in its scientific and philosophic mode at once, crossing the borders of science and ontology to outline a science that informs and is informed by a newly relevant ontology. Through the kind of reflection sketched here, the thinker is empowered to deduce the principle that human beings are not framed purely for life in the natural world, but rather for a higher state, just as all things in Nature appear to live in unceasing preparation for a higher state of existence. (“Coleridge, natural history, and the ‘Analogy of Being’” 151)

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in the status of Nature within Romantic idealism. For example, in “Late Coleridge and the Life of Idealism” (2015), Greg Ellermann believes that contemporary understanding of Romanticism no longer holds idealism “to be indifferent or even hostile, to the external world, idealism is now seen to be at its most daring, and most startlingly prescient, when theorizing nature as a network of nonhuman forces” (33). In his essay Ellermann aims “to question the habitual association of materialism with radical thinking, and idealism with hegemony or reaction” (35), therefore Ellermann chooses the late period of Coleridge’s life, that is to say the 1810s, because it marks the acme of Coleridge’s debates regarding the “status of life” within the Romantic framework in such a way that it demonstrates most clearly the practical aspect of Coleridge’s thinking.

23 Green seems to echo Coleridge when he discusses the advantages extracted from physiogony: “Thus, as the student watches the ascension of nature into mind, he shall learn that, up the whole ascent, nature is a prophetic-hymn, heralding the advent of man, and proclaiming the wisdom and goodness of the Creator”, MD 19.
24 Coleridge calls this process “the habit of contemplating Things abstractly from their relations”, CL 6: 596.
In 1829 Coleridge’s less observed poem “What is Life?” was published. It is one of his shortest poems; nevertheless, it recapitulates the profound questions which have been preoccupying Coleridge for over a decade, namely, those about the reasons behind the existence of living things:

Resembles Life what once was held of Light,
Too simple in itself for human sight?

An absolute Self? an Element ungrounded?
All that we see, all colors of all shade
    By “incroach of Darkness” made?25
Even so, is Life by conscious thought unbounded?
And all the joys and Woes of Mortal Breath
A War-embrace of wrestling Life and Death! (Works 767)

The poem seems to be founded on the two key concepts of “absolute Self” and “Darkness”, therefore they will be investigated in terms of their discrepancy and interconnectedness. Ellermann argues that Coleridge did not intend the poem to be conceived as revolving around the concept of the absolute or what the poem names as the “ungrounded”; rather, it investigates the following questions:

[W]hat is the ontological ground of particular living things? How do living things emerge from or implicate themselves in this ground? Is life distinct from the forces of sickness and disease? If not, is a concept of “life” still adequate to the task of understanding nature as a purposively developing whole? (36)

It seems then that the poem reiterates the theme which has previously been emphasized by Coleridge, namely, “All things strive to ascend, and ascend in their striving” (AR 75). However, in “What is Life?” this strife may be said to have acquired an enlarged modus operandi. Thus, life itself becomes an “absolute self” which cannot be grasped by empirical means, yet it is hardly detached from the real world; it embraces, as Ellermann observes, “the ongoing struggle between an absolute impersonal life and the entities emerging within it … in this poem [life] appears to be a perpetual state of war” (36). This reasoning sounds uncharacteristic of Coleridge who habitually showed bias towards metaphysical speculations, yet it signifies too Coleridge’s growing interest in the new emphasis on Nature’s processes, a topic that would attract increasing attention

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25 J.C.C. May notes that “[t]he substantive derived from the verb (here meaning ‘encroachment’, ‘gradual approach’) is a 17th-century usage rare in [C]oleridge’s time”, Works 767.
in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, it seems that Coleridge’s premise included in the often quoted couplet ‘‘the one life within us and abroad, / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul’’ of ‘‘The Eolian Harp’’ completes a full circle in ‘‘What is Life?’’. That is to say, the ‘‘one life’’ which was in the 1817 an inspiration to yearn for – ‘‘O the one life’’ – becomes now, i.e. in 1829, incorporated in ‘‘An absolute Self’’ which does take into account the dynamic processes taking place in Nature. ‘‘During the act of knowledge itself’’, Coleridge contends in \textit{Biographia Literaria}, ‘‘the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs. There is here no first, and no second; both are constantaneous and one’’ (1: 255). Therefore, as Ellermann rightly comments, ‘‘[f]or Coleridge in 1816, as for modern-day vital materialists, the one life is a powerful notion, with metaphysical and ecological affordances. No longer signifying a threatening indifference, absolute life names the interconnectedness of all things’’ (37).\textsuperscript{27}

As previously noted, ‘‘Darkness’’ forms the other indispensable pillar on which ‘‘What is Life?’’ is founded. The poem’s interest in ‘‘Darkness’’, as far as I can discern, does not reside so much in its lexical connotation as in its philosophic significance. In other words, along with the ‘‘absolute Self’’, the poem presents ‘‘Darkness’’ in order to redefine the old subject-object dualism, but now with the possibility of presenting life as the nexus between these states. In a letter sent to his nephew in 1826, Coleridge explains that ‘‘[w]e have eyes, ears, touch, taste, smell. And have we not an answerable World of Shapes, Colors, Sounds, and sapid and odours bodies?’’. Likewise ‘‘the Creator has given us Spiritual Senses’’ by which we may comprehend the abstraction immanent to the ‘‘Idea of the Good, the Idea of the Beautiful, Ideas of Eternity, Immortality, Freedom’’ (\textit{CL} 6: 595). Such a train of thought, I argue, may be applied here to the interdependence of the absolute and Nature. For Coleridge, in other words, to be comprehensible, it is vital for the absolute system to find its \textit{antithesis} in a corresponding sensible world. This \textit{antithesis} may be represented here by the ‘‘Darkness’’ of materiality: ‘‘All that we see, all colors of all shade’’ which is brought about by the ‘‘incroach of Darkness’’ or the ‘‘gradual

\textsuperscript{26} In his novel \textit{Melincourt}, Thomas Love Peacock calls Coleridge Mr Mystic who resides his ‘‘shadowy abode, Cimmerian Lodge, situated on a small prominence on ‘the Island of Pure Intelligence’ (an obvious reference to Highgate)”, Holmes \textit{Darker Reflections}, 450-51.

\textsuperscript{27} As noted earlier, towards the end of his life it seems that the incorporative scheme which Coleridge had been pursuing since early acquaintance with philosophical speculations would be realized: ‘‘grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligence with the whole system of their representations to rise up before me’’. \textit{BL} 1: 297.
approach” (Mays Works 767). The “Darkness”, moreover, may be reflected in the dynamic processes taking place in Nature through which the absolute may be manifested even though they are both disparate. Materiality immanent to this “Darkness”, moreover, forms the different particulars in which the totality of the universal is unfolded and finds its identity. It follows, then, that even the divine “I AM” requires a material ground for its existence: us, that is to say, the possessors of the consciousness without which the “I AM” may hardly be unfolded: “It is groundless indeed”, in Coleridge’s own words, “but then in the very idea it precludes all ground, and separated from the immediate consciousness loses its whole sense and import” (BL 1: 260). Significantly, this hybrid of the absolute and Nature, of “Light” versus “Darkness”, forms the raw material for the transcendental philosopher who could entwine the loose ends so as to merge in the crucible of life by propounding:

that the former is unconsciously involved in the latter […] [i]f it be said, that this Idealism, let it be remembered that it is only so far idealism, as it is at the same time, and on that very account, the truest and most binding realism (BL 1: 260-61)

From a scientific perspective, furthermore, Green argues that man himself crowns nature’s constant “gradative evolution”; he is “the ultimate aim and consummation of nature” (VD 38-39). Green further sharpens this idea by contending that in the ascending ladder of being, each objective entity and each organic living form are deficient and, therefore, are seeking perfection by developing and striving upward to the subsequent higher one: “the embryo of each higher animal passes rapidly through the forms of the animals inferior to it, in order to attain its maturity and specific rank of being, that of man […] the compendium of all” (39-40). In this evolutionary system, man’s individuality, which is embodied in his peculiar consciousness, seems to be underpinned by a “divine law”, and, paradoxically, man may be regarded as the sole object of nature even though he transcends it. Man, in short, according to Green’s history of nature is:

that being, whom we dare no longer consider merely as a part of nature, over which he is destined to ‘have dominion,’ but rather as its crown and epitome […] in all animated beings below man the body may be said to constitute the animal, in him it is the organ and instrument of mind; in short, the organization of man is no longer the mere perfecting, but the apotheosis, of the animal structure. In him alone the analoga of

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28 Cf. Schelling’s premise in which he regards the sun as the ultimate product of Nature. See First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, 226.
rational mind and of will, — and more we cannot attribute to the most intelligent animals, —cease to be mere analoga (VD 42)

In this race towards perfection, all other ‘‘defective forms’’ are merely evolving from the ‘‘rudimental chaos of life’’ and they eventually become relics or ‘‘abortions’’ whose main task is to herald ‘‘the human frame’’ or ‘‘nature’s mature work’’ (VD 40) at which point, i.e. the advent of man’s consciousness, nature’s role terminates. Therefore, nature is prophetic and purposeful inasmuch as it is successful in labouring and giving birth to man, the ‘‘apotheosis’’ which denotes the stage in which nature departs from earthly life to spiritual one. ‘‘Thus’’, Coleridge asserts, ‘‘Nature attains its highest signficancy [sic] when she appears to us as an inner power … that coerces and subordinates to itself the outward—the conquest of Essence over Form’’ (CN 4: 4648).

Now, for Coleridge ‘‘the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE’’ stands for any organism where rational mind and will are not fused and hence ‘‘without consciousness’’ in that it is ‘‘passive and material’’ (BL 1: 254). Ellermann concisely remarks that ‘‘the unconscious is a material relic of humanity’s evolutionary origins, a ruined monument to thought’s emergence from an unthinking world of animal drives and processes’’ (46). Coleridge seems to have applied this natural-historical approach to moral development. That is to say, he believes in the accountability of man not only as nature’s ‘‘crown and epitome’’, but as a conscious being as well whose ascendance towards natural perfection should be accompanied by a moral one. When ‘‘All things strive to ascend, and ascend in their striving’’ the human should pioneer this strife:

And shall man alone stoop? Shall his pursuits and desires, the reflections of his inward life, be like the reflected image of a tree on the edge of a pool, that grows downward, and seeks a mock heaven in the unstable element beneath it […] No! it must be a higher good to make you happy. While you labour for any thing below your proper Humanity, you seek a happy Life in the region of Death (AR 75)

It follows, then, that since nature’s course is finite and comes to an end with the emergence of the human consciousness, ‘‘the compendium’’ which culminates nature’s strife, man should proceed from where nature ends and pursue his moral development by turning Nature and its phenomena into something intelligible, something that eventually corresponds to the inborne facts of his own consciousness. These facts, Green argues, ‘‘lead us to investigate what the realities are of which the phenomena are the outward signs’’ (VD 9-10). This investigation, i.e. the interpretation of the Supersensuous realities
embedded in Nature, can be implemented through the agency of the ‘‘lux intellectus, the lumen siccum, the pure and impersonal reason’’ which never confounds nature with deity (VD 12). The essence of man’s moral development, as seen by Coleridge, arises from Nature but expands beyond it. Nature, moreover, in Coleridge’s thinking is ‘‘an ignis fatuus’’ (CL 6: 595), or ‘‘vain metaphysical speculation’’ in Green’s words (9), which may hardly be equated with the ‘‘Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world’’ (CL 6: 595). Herein lies the moral essence which Coleridge seems to pursue and has been articulated most clearly in Aids to Reflection where he wagers that if there be any purpose in the corporeal and temporal body and in Nature itself, it is to be thought of as derived from an eternal and divine being:

There is but one Wedding-garment, in which we can sit down at the marriage-feast of Heaven: and that is the Bride-groom’s own Gift, when he gave himself for us that we might live in him and he in us. There is but on robe of Righteousness, even the Spiritual Body, formed by the assimilative power of faith for whoever eateth the flesh of the Son of Man and drinketh his blood (AR 211-13)

In sum, Coleridge’s premise, therefore, assists in our understanding of the efforts he was exerting to theorize an absolute ground that underlies Nature, contrary to what Schelling purports in his natural philosophy. This premise, more importantly, can be regarded as one of the outcomes which he deduced from his scientific involvement with Green and physiogony. He learned, in other words, that spirit is an independent entity operating according to its own rationale, and it is thus distinct from the finite matter which merely functions as the outer manifestation of the spirit. Through this outer manifestation, as has been shown, Coleridge’s idealism seems to have found its necessary counterpart with which it seeks to integrate, namely, ‘‘the truest and most binding realism” (BL 1: 261) which Coleridge conceives of as a prerequisite for his incorporative metaphysics. The other main finding that Coleridge seems to have drawn from his engagement with physiogony is the understanding of ideas as derivations originating from the absolute and, therefore, they are governed by universal ‘‘Laws, which have been appointed by the Creator, and which it is the aim and humble hope of his rational creatures to discover’’, according to Green (VD 10-11). For Coleridge, moreover, ideas are differentiated from matter by their infinite ontological development which further enhances their independence from our finite conception of them. Coleridge views ideas as real in the following sense:
[they are] both in the mind and in nature equally objective (objective in mind and subjective in nature), acting in the world of the senses yet not as an object of sense, and being in the world of the intellect—not as a result of sensation, or product of volition. It must have all the essential attributes of reality: it must be self-actual and having a being [...] it presents itself as law; where not as law, ever as Idea, or that which cannot be conceived of in the subjective other than objective, or in the objective otherwise than as subjective. In the Soul it must exist as a nature, in Nature as a soul (Opus Maximum 301)

However, Coleridge’s ultimate aim was to establish a common philosophic basis where both idea and matter coalesce, his renowned “reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (BL 2: 16). Although he viewed ideas as superior to matter, Coleridge never belittled the latter as the manifestation of the former. He criticized Schelling for failing to reach such a compromise, namely, for “represent[ing] as aboriginal the same idea as I have deduced under the name Multeity” (CN 3: 4449). The alternative solution that Coleridge put forward was to assign an exclusive rationale to ideas as discrete beings and, at the same time, to acknowledge the existence of nature as their foreground. The validity of this solution, however, seems to be fraught with challenges. In other word, as an adamant believer in the interconnectedness between absolute idealism and matter, Coleridge attempted to combine both concepts in one crucible. Theoretically, however, this sounds unachievable because neither the absolute nor Nature seem to be willing to relinquish their domains of action. Coleridge demonstrates this aporia in Opus Maximum: “Darkness; materia prima, indistinction in actu, Multeity in posse = the faces of the waters” (389). The “Multeity”, as has been shown, is defined by Coleridge as “Potential Life” striving to be “Life Actual” by ascending to spiritual levels. On the other hand, ideas, being derivatives from the absolute, resist being diffused over the manifoldness of matter. “Made external to the spirit”, Ellermann observes, “it takes on an independent, absolute reality of its own” (52). Through physiogony, Green offers a way out of this impasse by proposing to render Nature intelligible to the supreme mind. Coleridge’s response, on the other hand, seems to admit the difficulty inherent to the reconciliation of matter and idea. He avowed this in 1832 in the revised version of “Youth and Age”: “O! might Life cease! and selfless

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29 “We demand, and the rational mind cannot be satisfied with less, that the facts, phenomena, and changes, which form the sphere of our sensible experience, and, collectively, are called Nature, shall be rendered intelligible to, and rationally accounted for by, our mind. This cannot be said to have been accomplished, whilst they are phenomena only, mere appearances, or impressions on the senses; nay! they cannot be said to have for us even the dignity of facts, until they have been named, collected, sorted, arranged and classified, or have received some impress of intellectual unity”, VD 9.
Mind, / Whose total Being is Act, alone remain behind! (12-13).\textsuperscript{30} The reasoning implied in these two lines may signify that because both Nature and the absolute have antecedently left a trace on man, the philosophic imagination should be redirected towards investigating the existence of man himself in the world rather than towards attempting to reconcile two distinct realms. Thus, instead of imputing incompetence to Coleridge’s philosophy, Ellermann suggests that Coleridge’s handling of matter and idea is \textit{realistic} in terms of being congruous with the Romantic received wisdom which stipulated that ‘‘if Romantic idealism tells us anything about idea and matter, it is that we need not choose between them’’ (52).

\textsuperscript{30} Earl Leslie Griggs notes that ‘‘[t]hese last two lines were not included in the version of \textit{Youth and Age} published in \textit{Poetical Works}, 1834’’, \textit{CL} 6: 910. Also see \textit{Works}, 1011-12.
In 1801 Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole: “I have not formed opinions without an attentive Perusal of the works of my Predecessors from Aristotle to Kant” (CL 2: 707). This statement suggests that a wide spectrum of philosophies significantly contributed to shaping Coleridge’s creative thinking as we know it today. Coleridge was destined to be posited in an intellectual middle point, and indeed he was able to synthesize the philosophies of both his predecessors and contemporaries despite their apparent differences. This synthesizing scheme is often summarized and labelled under Coleridge’s lifetime philosophic premise “‘Extremes meet’” (Works 845). Throughout his entire literary career, Coleridge chose to remain faithful to this system and insisted that our conception of the entire creation should be based on the amalgamation of “two opposite poles of all human thought, namely the objective and the subjective” (PL 113-6). And what he did in this regard is in fact worth considering and can be said to have been his major achievement not only because he expected it “to solve the process of Life & Consciousness” (CL 2: 706), but also because it can be regarded as his own. In other words, Coleridge was about to remove centuries-old hypothetical barriers established between the seemingly conflicting realms of matter and idea, Nature and the absolute, and poetry and philosophy: “to poeticize philosophy and to philosophize poetry” in Cassirer’s words (80).

As I argue in the first chapter, Coleridge’s literary aspirations, which seek to establish incorporative philosophic and “‘creative Thought’” (CN 3: 3935), put him in a confrontational position with both the established Platonic metaphysics and Aristotle’s experimental school which was rapidly flourishing at the hands of Newton and Locke. For centuries, both schools had been conceived of as irreconcilable. Herein lies Coleridge’s synthesizing efforts. He fervently contends that the mind is a God-given power, the “‘candle of the Lord’” according to Cudworth (Treatise 128), in which the cosmos and all its multiplicities can be merged. As I have shown, having identified the mind with the divine being, Coleridge significantly contributes to altering the image of the mind from tabula rasa to a “‘constructive organizing force’” (Muirhead 27).

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1 BL 1: 114.
As it stands, Coleridge’s metaphysics has been habitually seen as indebted to German idealism, particularly to the Kantian philosophies. The latter seems to have affected Coleridge’s metaphysical ponderings “with a giant’s hand” in the sense that Kant initially furnished a philosophical prerequisite that Coleridge considered as essential, namely the “importance of the distinctions” between two opposed realms: the perceived objects and our subjective representation of them, or Kant’s knowable things versus the unknowable thing-in-itself (*BL* 1: 153). In this process, I elucidate how Kant’s theory of “categories” proved to be erroneous for Coleridge. I provide a reading of Kant’s habitual emphasis on his *forms* as the ultimate ground of any experience, thus he subverts the realm of reality or the noumenal world that Coleridge considers as the vital and constitutive being from which any experience is derived. My analysis has scrutinized this drawback from a Coleridgean metaphysical perspective and concluded that Coleridge was unconvinced by the regulative role assigned to the *forms*, a role that makes them confined within a given experience and unable to transcend beyond it. My analysis, thus, agrees to a large extent with that of Monika Class who has recently redefined the prevalent view regarding Coleridge’s so called pro-Kantian attitude as “a highly crafted piece of myth-making and has wide ramifications” (142). The philosopher I propose as an alternative, and with whom Coleridge was in concordance, is Friedrich A. Nitsch. As I have shown, Coleridge agrees with Nitsch in dividing the mind into three major faculties, “Sense”, “Understanding”, and “Reason”, which symbiotically operate to interpret the data received from the external world. For instance, I highlight Nitsch’s consideration of the “Sense” as “totally passive” because it deals with the manifoldness of the physical matter (Nitsch 74). Understanding and Reason, according to Nitsch, represent the active segment of the mind which might be responsible for transcending us beyond the sphere of matter: “man would be lost in an infinite crowd of particulars [i.e. matter and its manifold shapes] if he had no faculty to reduce them into certain order” (Nitsch 85). I argue that Coleridge’s definition of the primary and secondary imagination and the distinction he makes between the objective and subjective and their eventual “coincidence” (*BL* 1: 252) correspond to a large extent with Nitsch’s metaphysical postulates in that both Coleridge and Nitsch see that the mind is the transcendent agency by which our sensible world is connected to the realm of ideas: the mind, in other words, as seen by Coleridge is:

[...] the power by which we become possessed of Principle, (the eternal Verities of Plato and Descartes) and of Ideas, (N.B. not images)
as the ideas of a point, a line, a circle, in Mathematics; and of Justice, Holiness, Free Will, &c. in Morals (The Friend 2: 104)

With recourse to the distinction of the mind’s faculties which both Coleridge and Nitsch hypothesize, I analyse Kant’s assumption which asserts the impossibility of knowing the absolute through our minds. With this distinction in mind, I also scrutinize the provisional activity which Kant attributes to the mind, arguing that it is an activity that lacks the freedom which Coleridge unconditionally presupposes as an essential factor if the mind is expected to incorporate discordant elements of an experience. Arguably, this is, I think, the main reason behind the retraction of Kant’s effect on Coleridge: “I do not feel this perfect synonymousness in Reason & the Wille [sic]. I am sure, Kant cannot make it out. Again & again, he is a wretched Psychologist” (CN 1: 1717).

I develop the ongoing debate revolving around Coleridge’s incorporative scheme by showing that “the Subject-Object in absolute Identity” significantly results in the fusion which serves religious ends as well as aesthetic ones. According to Coleridge, the mind is a “portion of [God’s] own great attributes” and imagination affords it transcendence by allowing it to permeate tangible objects including the “living Word, who is Christ”, and abstract realities like the “written Word in Scripture”. The integration of these two elements, Coleridge observes, form the Holy Spirit, an absolute manifestation which emanates from the ultimate synthesis of the Father (Engell 365). In doing so, I seek to reconceptualise imagination as an agent that is “ALL-COMBINING, ALL-PENETRATING, ALL-TRANSFORMING SPIRIT OF UNION AND ENNOBLEMENT” (PL 8: 257), rather than a tool serving the poet’s subjective and improbable fantasies.

In chapter two I discuss another radical reading of Coleridge’s synthesizing power during his time at Highgate. As I have shown in chapter one, Coleridge’s literary career in the 1790s was mainly characterized by frequent conversions from one philosophic school to another until he arrived at the philosophic maturity that enabled him to formulate his own views, “my Metaphysics — which were in truth my all” (CL 5: 437). Therefore, my analysis in chapter two traverses Coleridge’s development and transition from the stage of acquiring and interacting with variant philosophies to the one on which he was able to apply them on practical grounds. The chapter thus is twofold: first, I select three less observed poems, namely “Imitations of Du Bartas” 1807, “The Pang More Sharp Than All” 1807, and “Limbo: A Fragment” 1811, and I attempt to link them with major
poems written in the early years of Coleridge’s intellectual growth. These poems are “Frost at Midnight”, “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison”, and “Dejection: An Ode”. By means of comparative analysis, I attempt to demonstrate Coleridge’s unique adaptability to rapidly changing social and literary milieus which necessitate immediate responses to their inconstant occurrences. Secondly, the chapter sharpens this argument by investigating “Christabel” from an adaptive perspective. As one of Coleridge’s major poems which was written in a hectic period of his life, I revisit the poem and scrutinize the relationship between its two heroines and I have concluded that this relationship could be inverted from evil versus good, purity versus profanation, to an interdependent and symbiotic interaction. Thus, I present Christabel as an objectified mind which is restless and uneasy and constantly seeking its supernatural counterpart. This yearning for the absolute is represented by Christabel’s departure from the confining world of matter, her father’s castle, and her eventual meeting with Geraldine, her transcendental self in whose manifestation Christabel is transformed and her physical sense organs are rendered ineffectual. More significantly, I also argue that Christabel could also represent the poet’s insatiable quest for the absolute.

My analysis of Coleridge’s intellectual development is further enhanced in chapter three which focuses on Coleridge’s *Sibylline Leaves* (1817). I begin my argument with a panoramic view of main currents that were supposed to judge Coleridge’s transcendental system, and I have shown that most critical reviews were sardonic and by no means receptive of Coleridge’s metaphysics. I demonstrate that the nature of his poetry along with the obscurity with which he propounded his philosophic investigations were mainly responsible for most of the criticism he incurred. As Charles Lamb said, Coleridge’s main interest is “the Sublime of poetry” which entails utilizing inborn and subconscious faculties that are “exclusively Pschycological [sic]”, in Coleridge’s words, in that they principally deal with the human consciousness when “an Idea violently and suddenly imprest [sic] on it” (*SL* 218). In this process, I explain how Hartley’s physiologic anatomies along with his Christian beliefs helped the formation of Coleridge’s psychological interests. Hartley attempts to make his mechanistic associationism responsible for forming a collective benevolence; a sophisticated form of sympathy which engenders “perfect self-annihilation, and the pure love of God” (*OM* 282). I explore how this reasoning appealed to Coleridge who considered it not only as a perfect synthesis of mechanistic deduction and intuitive thinking, but as moral and
religious. As I discuss in chapter three, ‘‘The Destiny of Nations’’ may serve as an exemplary arena where these trends of thinking are exhibited. My analysis rests on the hypothesis that Coleridge in this poem seems more realistic and less obscure in delivering its message. Benefitting from Hartley’s physiologic and theological views, Coleridge contends that humans instinctively seek pleasure and avoid pain. Thus Joan is presented as a sympathetic figure who could approximate God by virtue of her exemplary allocentrism through which she generates the maximum amount of pleasures by actively and sympathetically critiquing war atrocities. Through this reading of ‘‘The Destiny of Nations’’, I argue against the conventional notion that delineates Coleridge as someone who turns away from reality and prefers to be buried inside his own endless loop of subjectivity. Through Joan, I conclude, Coleridge aims at proving that man, the possessor of the divine mind, could transform any given perceivable experience into a transcendental state.

In chapter four I pay a special attention to this point: the relationship between the divine mind and Nature. As I have shown in chapter one, Coleridge founded his metaphysical system amidst the existence of conflicting philosophies. Coleridge also developed an exceptional tendency towards reconciling science with philosophy and Nature with the absolute; his friendships and frequent collaboration with scientists like Humphry Davy and Joseph Henry Green are instances of this orientation. In this chapter, I attempt to trace the extent to which Coleridge was successful in this endeavour. My discussion begins with physiogony, the collaborative system which Coleridge initiated with Green to trace the history of nature with the aim ‘‘to discover in the past the solution of the present, and in both the anticipation of the future’’ (VD 102). In this regard, I argue that Coleridge’s philosophic system did not totally discard Nature, rather he suspected its ability to reveal to us moral and abstract values like freedom, beauty, and above all the divinity to which Coleridge believed metaphysics should lead. I have chosen to analyse Coleridge’s concept of Nature against the Naturphilosophie promoted by Schelling. My initial reading of Schelling provides another evidence of Coleridge’s development because his rejection of Schelling’s system marks another dissent from German idealism. Coleridge’s alternative explanation of nature was to consider it as an ‘‘inferior Life’’ which reflects to us an absolute realm. More importantly, I discuss Coleridge’s emphasis on the will the lack of which renders Nature ‘‘Potential’’ rather than an ‘‘Actual’’ being. Herein lies, I suggest, the unique role played by ‘‘the philosophic imagination’’ which
intermediates in the process of returning humankind to the sublime being from which we previously descended. By virtue of this alliance Nature and humankind alike are ‘‘dynamic system, progressive and […] always reaching higher and higher levels of organization’’ (Harding, ‘‘Coleridge, Natural History, and the ‘Analogy of Being’’’ 147). Through this premise, I critically differentiate Coleridge from Schelling who considers Nature as an absolute system denying thus the role of imagination as a transcendental power. Finally, I show that towards the end of his life, Coleridge seems to have admitted the difficulty of combining matter with idea, Nature with the absolute because each realm is governed by its own laws which are unlikely to mutually act upon each other. Nevertheless, I argue that since both Nature and the absolute have collaboratively contributed to the making of humankind, man himself should be the ultimate end of the philosophic imagination. With this notion, I think, Coleridge seems to have concluded his metaphysical speculations:

It is wonderful to myself to think how infinitely more profound my views now are, and yet how much clearer they are withal. The circle is completing; the idea is coming round to, and to be, the common sense.  

(*IT 2:335*)
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