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Imaginative Transference in Coleridge's Poetry

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IMAGINATIVE TRANSFERENCE
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IN COLERIDGE'S POETRY

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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

by
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the use of a poetic technique labeled "imaginative transference" in a series of poems written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Imaginative transference is identified as that process through which Coleridge, appearing as a character in each of the poems, transfers emotions or perceptions from himself to another chosen character in the same poem.

The poems selected for this study are drawn from the period in Coleridge's life during which he achieved his most significant poetic triumphs. I have supplemented my discussion of the poetry with Coleridge's critical writings and letters in order to substantiate my claims that he was both aware of and interested in the general phenomenon of imaginative transference. The contributions of modern scholars have also been consulted and their insights are discussed where they illuminate my argument.

It will be seen that Coleridge found the use of imaginative transference congenial to many of his finest poems. Imaginative transference often aids the poet in overcoming a sense of depression or despair. More importantly, it allows Coleridge to express himself eloquently on the themes of friendship, the beneficence of the natural world, and the power of the creative human mind.

IMAGINATIVE TRANSFERENCE IN COLERIDGE'S POETRY

This thesis is concerned with six poems which Samuel Taylor Coleridge composed during 1797-1807 and with a concept I have termed "imaginative transference."¹ This is a device which enables the poet to transfer feelings, images, and associations generated by his imagination to characters present in his poetry. Throughout his life, Coleridge was deeply interested in the function of the human imagination and the scope of imaginative experience. He described the imagination as a "synthetic and magical power"² and devoted much of his critical writing to charting the various courses of this "greatest faculty of the human mind."³ In the poems "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," "The Nightingale," "Kubla Khan," "Dejection: An Ode," and "To William Wordsworth," Coleridge attempts to transfer certain workings of the imaginative faculty into the minds of others. Specifically, the poet desires that these "transferees" experience and perceive the crucial emotional state known as "joy." "Joy," for Coleridge, means a "state of abounding vitality . . . which, by breaking down the boundaries of the isolated consciousness, relates the self both to other human selves and to an outer nature which it has inanimated."⁴ The following discussion considers the poems cited in light of Coleridge's use of the technique of imaginative transference.

Two statements drawn from Coleridge's non-poetic writings serve as important first steps for understanding the phenomenon of imaginative transference. These references demonstrate the poet's interest in the general nature of imaginative transference and his understanding of its validity in poetry. In an unfinished letter to an unknown correspondent, Coleridge defends his poem, "Hymn Before Sunrise in the Vale of Charmouny," from Wordsworth's criticism that it was "strained and unnatural."⁵ Coleridge then describes his "Habit of Mind"⁶ from which the poem was written:

For from my very childhood I have been accustomed to abstract and as it were unrealize whatever of more than common interest my eyes dwelt on; and then by a sort of transference and transmission of my consciousness,⁷ to identify myself with the Object . . .

In the famous and often quoted passage from the fourteenth chapter of Biographia Literaria, we again encounter the poet dealing with the idea of the transposition of the imaginative faculty. Here, Coleridge affirms that such a transposition or transference is an important aspect of his poetic creation:

In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed, that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief⁸ for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.

Coleridge, thus, gives evidence not only of his familiarity with the phenomenon of imaginative transference but also of his awareness of the significance of this process,

which involves the mind of the poet and the minds of those figures which appear in his poems. But Coleridge does not restrict his use of imaginative transference to supernatural and romantic characters. Real persons are also an important focus in his poetry. Patricia Ball characterizes the desire to examine poetry as being the best way to reveal aspects of a poet's imagination. Her words are particularly appropriate for Coleridge when she writes:

Whether the poems seem to be direct personal statements or whether they submerge the poet himself in some way, they are creatures of an imagination willing to admit mystery in the notion of an experiencing mind, and convinced that by exploring this mystery some criteria for evaluating what is experienced can be found. In each Romantic poet, there is the double mode of exploration, the self intensely contemplating and exercising its unifying subjective power, and the self indulging its Ariel-prerogative, entering into forms not its own.⁹

Imaginative transference is the method through which this double mode is exercised simultaneously. Coleridge, meditating upon nature or upon his own thoughts, is led to transfer feelings and emotions to someone else. This process necessarily entails some subjective molding of the potential transferee by the poet. Coleridge is ultimately concerned with the feelings and emotions less as independent qualities than as shaping forces in the life of the individual to whom they are transferred. These forces flow through a channel, opened by the poet, reaching the life of the figure in the poem yet remaining in the poet's consciousness.

The concept of the relocation of the poet's imagination

has previously been a subject of critical commentary and investigation. R. A. Durr's theory of "empathetic identification"¹⁰ provides one notable demonstration that other scholars have dealt with this phenomenon. M. H. Abrams, to cite another example, writes in The Mirror and the Lamp that "animating the inanimate - the transference of the life of the observer to the thing he observes - was eminently the preoccupation of romantic theorists and poets."¹¹ In his Shakespeare criticism, Coleridge himself acknowledges the role of imagination in "impressing the stamp of humanity, of human feeling, over inanimate objects."¹² The spirit of these statements is also woven into the fabric of W. Jackson Bate's study From Classic to Romantic.

Abrams and Bate are concerned with the romantic idea that it is the mind of the poet which co-ordinates the internal operations of the spirit and the external world of objects and events. A subtle, reciprocal relationship is established in which the poet's emotions adjust to and are adjusted by external forces, i.e. nature. Abrams notes that the "habitual reading of passion, life, and physiognomy into the landscape is one of the few salient attributes common to most of the major romantic poets."¹³

Several of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's most significant poems explore a related yet manifestly different concern. Coleridge develops and modifies imaginative transference in each of the poems to which we now turn. People replace objects and landscapes and receive the impress of the poet's

inner world.

"This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," composed in June of 1797, represents Coleridge's first successful implementation of imaginative transference. Critics have characteristically praised the poem as "the perfect blending of thought and feeling"¹⁴ and consider it "a signal achievement in a genial meditative style."¹⁵ Such views accurately assess the surface of the work. But the vital core of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" lies in the figure of Charles Lamb who becomes the focus of the poet's imaginative transference.

The poem opens in a minor key. Coleridge, physically separated from his friends and sunk in depression, begins to chart the course of their hike in the Quantock Hills:

Well, they are gone and here I must remain,
 This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
 Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
 Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
 Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,
 Friends, whom I never more may meet again,
 On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
 Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,¹⁶
 To that still roaring dell, of which I told,

Coleridge knows the sights which the Wordsworths, William and Dorothy, and Charles Lamb will encounter. The poet's preoccupation with his isolation fades as he describes the dell. Coleridge is not satisfied with simply recalling a set of pleasing images to his mind. Somehow he desires to participate in the experience which the others are enjoying. Since Coleridge cannot at this moment "wander in gladness," he envisions an environment in which an imaginative transference with Lamb can be convincingly established:

Now my friends emerge
 Beneath the wide wide Heaven--and view again
 The many steeped tract magnificent
 Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,
 With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up
 The slip of smooth, clear blue betwixt two Isles
 Of purple shadow¹⁷

This setting, which stands in marked contrast to the confined space of the lime-tree bower, has a two-fold significance. It soothes the troubled poet through the representation of the gentle and benevolent aspects of nature and it appears as a novel surrounding for the visiting Charles Lamb. Coleridge now uses the figure of his friend to imaginatively transfer to him the liberating happiness which Coleridge has previously felt in this place. The poet sincerely believes that Lamb could have no reaction other than joy to the spectacle of the country:

Yes! they wander on
 In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
 My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
 And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,
 In the great City pent, winning thy way
 With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
 And strange calamity!¹⁸

The tragedy alluded to in this passage had occurred the previous year. Lamb's sister became temporarily insane and killed their father. Coleridge, sensitive to this misfortune, presents Lamb as having come into the country to be healed by nature and to have the joy of life rekindled in his heart. While it is likely that Charles Lamb found a degree of respite at the Coleridge household, the experience of all-pervading joy may not have been as complete as Coleridge assumes. Rather, it is Coleridge's abiding friendship which

is complete and which is celebrated in the act of the imaginative transference.

In establishing this imaginative transference, Coleridge has altered decisively the figure of Charles Lamb of the India House, London. Historically, Lamb appears as a man to whom the city was of prime importance for both business and leisure. According to Russell Noyes, Lamb "was a Londoner all his days and London was his delight and recreation."¹⁹ Similarly, Reeve Parker describes him as "the notoriously urbane Lamb, who ridiculed rural enthusiasms."²⁰ Thus, the emotional response to nature which Coleridge attributes to Lamb has more to do with the poet's imaginative molding of the immediate situation than it has with Lamb's objective personality:

So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.²¹

Coleridge's underlying view is that Lamb has been spiritually disadvantaged through living in the city. The poet concludes that his friend's return to the natural world must therefore be a rich and satisfying experience. The picture of Charles Lamb, outlined against the sky and bathed in the mystical presence of "the Almighty Spirit," is indeed striking.

Coleridge's use of imaginative transference to accomplish this design is, however, only half of his total purpose.

Although Coleridge's wish for Lamb's happiness in this setting is genuine, the poet's need to reassure himself of the joy in nature is equally pressing. Having guided Lamb away from negative and tragic aspects of life and toward those which are positive and joyful, Coleridge has at last reached a position where he can resolve his own crisis of the soul. Satisfied that Lamb's spirit has been restored, Coleridge perceives that same influx of joy in himself and in the lime-tree bower:

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, Have I not mark'd
Much that has soothed me.

Coleridge has regained the "beauties and feelings" which he lamented losing at the beginning of the poem. The experience of joy has, until this point in the work, existed solely as an imaginatively transferred condition. Now, the poet perceives joy operating as an active force in his own life. It is this perception which commutes his sentence. The door of the lime-tree prison is unlocked and the liberated Coleridge is at peace with his surroundings. R. A. Durr, commenting on this aspect of the poem, writes:

This pattern of initial disharmony between man and nature resolved through the imaginative act of empathetic identification with an "object," whereupon the poem returns to the opening transformed, is of frequent occurrence in Coleridge . . . The transition from isolated despondency to unitive joy, moreover, is often symbolized as a passage out of some enclosing obscuring environment--fog or mist, a dell or thick woods--into a sudden expanse of open country (one thinks of

the Mount Snowdon passage in the fourteenth book of Wordsworth's The Prelude.)²³

After singing the praises of his now congenial lime-tree bower, Coleridge gives the following assessment of his spiritual renovation:

Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes
'Tis good to be bereft of promis'd good,
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate²⁴
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.

Coleridge is admitting that his ordeal has been worthwhile. He looks toward the future with confidence and optimism. But his triumph over despair in the lime-tree bower could not have been achieved without Charles Lamb. Appropriately, Coleridge ends the poem by addressing Lamb:

My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
Had cross'd the mighty Orb's dilated glory,
While thou stood'st gazing;²⁵

Coleridge completes "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" secure in the belief that he and Lamb now share the same outlook. The poem's final image of a bird in flight serves as an emblem of their unification of experience.

This unification of experience represented in the use of imaginative transference next occurs in "Frost at Midnight." This poem, which Coleridge wrote in February 1798, repeats the basic structural design of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." We again encounter an initially despondent Coleridge

who, by enlisting the aid of his imaginative faculty, ends the work with a renewed sense of well-being. But in "Frost at Midnight" the act of imaginative transference cannot be achieved until the poet has explored certain childhood memories. These memories function as a bridge which Coleridge must cross before he can engage in an imaginative transference with his son, Hartley.

Coleridge paints a rather eerie picture at the outset of "Frost at Midnight":

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
 Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
 Came loud--and hark, again! loud as before.
 The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
 Have left me to that solitude, which suits
 Abstruser musings: save that at my side
 My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
 And vexes meditation with its strange
 And extreme silentness.²⁰

In its tone and subtle use of prison imagery, this passage is similar to the beginning of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." But unlike that poem, the poet in "Frost at Midnight" is not technically alone. Although Hartley Coleridge is in close physical proximity to his father, the poet cannot experience any sense of companionship with the boy. The dreaming child is wrapped in a world of sleep which is inaccessible and alien to his restless parent. Coleridge seems to realize this and turns his attention from Hartley to the fire on the hearth:

the thin blue flame
 Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
 Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,

Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
 Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
 Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
 Making it a companionable form,
 Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
 By its own mood interprets, every where
 Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
 And makes a toy of Thought.²⁷

The uncertain flickering of the flame, "the sole unquiet thing," appeals to Coleridge because, like him, it is another anxious presence in the stillness of the night. Coleridge remarks that it is the nature of "the idling Spirit" to explore its dimensions in other forms and in other places. In the earliest published version of "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge's language clearly depicts such exploration as being that of an imaginative transference:

Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
 Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
 Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
 Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
 Making it a companionable form,
 With which I can hold commune. Idle thought!
 But still the living spirit in our frame,
 That loves not to behold a lifeless thing,
 Transfuses into all its own delights,
 Its own volition, sometimes with deep faith
 And sometimes with fantastic playfulness.²⁸

As he meditates on the image of the glowing flame, Coleridge can summon neither "deep faith" nor "playfulness." Instead, he embarks upon a remembrance of things past. The poet recalls his school days. Then, as now, the sight of a fire on the grate stirred his thoughts:

How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
 Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
 To watch that fluttering stranger! and as oft
 With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
 Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,²⁹

The "idling Spirit" of the mature poet is descended from the "most believing mind" of the schoolboy. In both

forms, the need on the part of Coleridge to overcome isolation or despondency is apparent. Coleridge the school-boy attempts to satisfy this need with the aid of dreams:

So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
And so I brooded all the following morn,
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
My playmate when we both were clothed alike!³⁰

At this point in the poem, Coleridge has regressed far into his past. He has moved from his dreaming boyhood to an image of his own infancy. The poet's regression serves to lessen the sense of remoteness which Coleridge initially felt toward Hartley. Coleridge's memory of his earliest childhood now enables him to attempt an imaginative transference with his own child.

According to Harold Bloom, "Frost at Midnight," "shares with 'Tintern Abbey' the distinction of inaugurating the major Wordsworthian myth of the memory as salvation."³¹ It is doubtful that Coleridge would have acknowledged the process of memory as "salvation" in the Christian sense. The memories evoked by the poet have stemmed from his desire to overcome loneliness and despondency. His goal is not transcendent salvation but the creation of a linking bond with another person.

Coleridge now begins the imaginative transference in which he articulates his sincerest hope that Hartley's future will unfold in a serene, natural environment:

My babe so beautiful, it thrills my heart
 With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
 And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
 And in far other scenes! For I was reared
 In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim
 And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
 But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
 By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
 Of ancient mountains, and beneath the clouds,³²

Patricia Ball also believes that "Frost at Midnight" achieves the goal of linking Coleridge's mind with that of Hartley:

By becoming the object of his thoughts and emotions as the poem progresses, the baby serves similarly to bring about a philosophical clarification without supplanting Coleridge as the poem's center. First aware of the child's breathing in the momentary pause of his thought, Coleridge links it with his more objective consciousness of his own presence on the scene: a rhythm of systole and diastole is suggested as he is alternately immersed within his meditations and then emerges to watch himself so occupied.³³

"Frost at Midnight" concludes with Coleridge simultaneously completing the imaginative transference and returning to the poem's opening image of frost:

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
 Whether the summer clothe the general earth
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
 Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
 Smokes in the sun thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,
 Or if the secret ministry of frost
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
 Quietly shining to the quiet moon.³⁴

Coleridge's hope that Hartley will grow up in rural surroundings, which will foster his spiritual development, is a theme heard again in "The Nightingale," written in April, 1798. But in this work, unlike "Frost at Midnight,"

this becomes a secondary theme. Coleridge's primary aim in "The Nightingale" is to refute the traditional poetic association between nightingales and the feeling of melancholy. He reverses the accepted view and finds joy, not sadness, in the songs of these birds. The poet then employs imaginative transference to illustrate his belief.

The natural world is regarded as a beneficent one by Coleridge in the poem's initial lines:

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge!
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,
But hear no murmuring: it flows silently,
O're its soft bed of verdure. All is still,
A balmy night! and though the stars be dim,
Yet let us think on the vernal showers
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.³⁵

In "The Nightingale," Harold Bloom notes that "Coleridge is very content, grateful for the night's peace, and determined to find pleasure in all observable phenomena."³⁶ The phenomenon which captures the poet's attention most fully is the song of the nightingale. As he hears this, Coleridge explains the origin of the poetic conceit which equates the song of the nightingale with a sense of sadness:

But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he
First named these notes a melancholy strain.³⁷

This "poor wretch" is gently but firmly censured by Coleridge for, in effect, attempting to use the technique of

imaginative transference to refer a negative emotional state to the natural world symbolized by the nightingale. Coleridge concludes that this tendency is widespread among contemporary youth. They perpetuate this distorted association of melancholy and the nightingale because they lack Coleridge's understanding and appreciation of the natural world:

And youths and maidens most poetical,
 Who lose the deepening twilights of the spring
 In ball-rooms and hot theatres, they still
 Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs.
 O're Philomela's pity-pleading strains.³⁸

Coleridge's conviction is that nature must be approached in a positive spirit of acceptance. Here, he believes with Wordsworth that, "Nature never did betray/The heart that loved her."³⁹ It is this sentiment which Coleridge will pursue in the remainder of "The Nightingale." The poem is now marked by a transition. Coleridge addresses William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, who will ultimately receive Coleridge's imaginative transference:

My Friend, and thou, our Sister! we have learnt
 A different lore: we may not thus profane
 Nature's sweet voices, always full of love
 And joyance! 'Tis the merry Nightingale
 That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
 With fast thick warble his delicious notes.
 As he were fearful that an April night
 Would be too short for him to utter forth
 His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
 Of all its music!⁴⁰

George Watson argues that Coleridge is reminding his friends and himself that their poetry must express new sentiments concerning the nightingale which are diametrically

opposed to those espoused by "Milton and the Miltonizers."⁴¹ Coleridge wants to do more, however, than merely criticize those poets who condition others to respond to the song of the nightingale with "meek sympathy." He is intent upon showing that when a gentle, unpretentious person encounters the music of the nightingale, the result is infusion of joy into the heart. Coleridge selects Dorothy Wordsworth as his representative of such a person.

While Coleridge could undertake the imaginative transference in the present scene near the mossy bridge, he chooses instead to visualize an alternate setting. He thinks of an area in which a multitude of nightingales dwell in order to heighten the effect of the transference:

And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,
Which the great lord inhabits not; and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.
But never elsewhere in⁴² one place I knew
So many nightingales;

George Harper comments that, "this 'castle huge' mentioned in the poem is a romantic exaggeration for Alfoxden House."⁴³ Coleridge now imaginatively transfers the joy he feels in the presence of the nightingales to the figure of Dorothy envisioned in the vicinity of her home:

A most gentle Maid,
Who dwelleth in her hospitable home
Hard by the castle, and at latest eve
(Even like a Lady vowed and dedicate
To something more than Nature in the grove)
Glides through the pathways; she knows all their notes,
That gentle Maid! and oft, a moment's space,
What time the moon was lost behind a cloud.
Hath heard a pause of silence; till the moon

Emerging, hath awakened earth and sky
 With one sensation, and those wakeful birds
 Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
 As if some sudden gale had swept at once
 A hundred airy harps! And she hath watched
 Many a nightingale perch giddily
 On blossomy twig still swinging from the breeze,
 And to that motion tune his wanton song
 Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head.⁴⁴

The nightingale is thus seen as an intermediate agent which first harmonizes with the pervasive spirit of nature and then transmits that spirit to receptive human auditors. Coleridge, knowing this sequence to be true for himself, has allowed Dorothy Wordsworth to experience it in the poem through the use of imaginative transference.

Coleridge appends a coda to "The Nightingale." In this final section, the poet expresses the hope that Hartley will learn to regard the music of the nightingales as evidence of nature's goodness:

But if that Heaven
 Should give me life, his childhood shall grow up
 Familiar with these songs, that with the night
 He may associate joy.⁴⁵

The series of successes which Coleridge has had in using imaginative transference to share his feelings of joy with others comes to a halt with the composition of "Kubla Khan." The dating of "Kubla Khan" is "one of the most debated problems in literary scholarship."⁴⁶ Estimates range from 1797 to 1799 but "most scholars take the date of 1798 as more likely."⁴⁷ The poem consists of two parts which contrast two figures. The first section traces the fortunes of a remote and idealized potentate, Kubla Khan. The second section is devoted to Coleridge. But this is not the same

poet who takes moonlit walks with friends or sits by a cradle. That poet was concerned with emotionally linking himself with another individual. But in "Kubla Khan," Coleridge becomes utterly absorbed with the process of employing his imaginative visions to set himself apart from the others.

The poem commences with the description of Kubla Khan's world:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
 A stately pleasure-dome decree:
 Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
 Through caverns measureless to man
 Down to a sunless sea.
 So twice five miles of fertile ground
 With walls and towers were girdled round:
 And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
 And here were forests ancient as the hills,
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

Max Schulz characterizes the exotic figure of Kubla Khan as:

the man of commanding genius who strives to realize the ideal. He is also the dreamer who creates, or gives actuality to his reveries - not an unfitting character for an inveterate dreamer like Coleridge to imagine.⁴⁹

Significantly, it is not the actual creations of Kubla Khan which Coleridge most envies. Nor is he especially concerned with the enchanted landscape whose "deep romantic chasm"⁵⁰ gives rise to a "mighty fountain"⁵¹ which flows finally to "the caverns measureless to man."⁵² Rather, the poet is struck by the reflection of Kubla Khan's world:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves;
 Where was heard the mingled measure
 From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!⁵³

Coleridge reserves his highest praise for the image of that which Kubla Khan has created. The poet marvels at the pleasure dome's projection of its appearance onto the receiving medium of the sea. This spectacle, observed by Coleridge, stands as a replica of the process of imaginative transference albeit without human participants. In this case, the "character" of the ocean receives the impress of the dome of pleasure's configuration. This symbolic display of imaginative transference allows the transition to the second section of the poem in which Coleridge describes the following event:

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.⁵⁴

The poet's vision is of a woman engaged in the activity of creating images through song. The song which she produces bears the same momentary relationship to reality as the shadow of Kubla Khan's edifice floating on the waves bears to the reality of the dome, walks, and towers in Xanadu. Coleridge is convinced of the importance of the ability to create visions which become seemingly detached from objective reality. The poet of "Kubla Khan" desires to transcend his condition as an emotionally responsive being by becoming the exponent of a divine capacity both to create art and manipulate that creation through a method such as imaginative transference. The art of creation serves the dual purpose of

distancing reality while allowing the poet the freedom which comes as a result of his ability to inspire awe in others:

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.⁵⁵

Thus, Coleridge postulates what he would do if he could transfer visions from the realm of his idle dreams to the sphere of his poetic activity. He asserts that to do this would fill him with "deep delight." The poet would experience a sense of joy as great as those he has felt before when he has undertaken an imaginative transference. Yet, Elisabeth Schneider argues that this "deep delight" is insincere and lacks human depth and warmth:

The poet, who is half-present in the end, is dehumanized behind his mask of hair and eyes and magic circle and is only present as mirrored in the exclamations of nebulous beholders - or rather, he would be mirrored if he had built his dome and if there had been beholders. Nor is there any human or personal feeling in the poem; the poet's "deep delight", impersonal enough if it were there, exists only to be denied.⁵⁶

When "Kubla Khan" is viewed from the vantage point of Coleridge's previous poems in which the phenomenon of imaginative transference was intimately bound up with a sense of authentic joy, Schneider's indictment is correct. The

overwhelming impression conveyed by "Kubla Khan" is that imaginative transference is an arcane concept which has little relevance for the lives of his friends who appeared in other poems.

Coleridge continues to be preoccupied with thoughts related to the nature of imaginative power in "Dejection: An Ode." In this composition, written in April, 1802, the poet's sense of hope, engendered by his earlier imaginative transferences, has turned to despair. Even his conditional optimism, present in "Kubla Khan," has been replaced by deep-seated doubt. Unlike "Kubla Khan," however, "Dejection: An Ode" reintroduces the figure of a transferee. Coleridge imaginatively transfers to a "Lady" a wish that she may live her life in possession of a spirit which, as it encounters the world, receives and contributes joy.

"Dejection: An Ode" commences with Coleridge appraising the natural scene. He longs for a change in the weather to spark a change in his present mood of despair:

And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
 Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
 And sent my soul abroad,
 Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
 Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!⁵⁷

The poet confesses that what disturbs him now is the inability to perform that act which has previously renewed his spirit. In "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," and "The Nightingale," Coleridge "sent his soul abroad" by the process of imaginative transference. The

severity of his present depression is evident from Coleridge's description of his condition. The poet feels:

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
 A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
 Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
 In word, or sigh, or tear -
 O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
 To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
 All this long eve, so balmy and serene,⁵⁸
 Have I been gazing on the western sky,

Here, the poet is expressing a much greater degree of angst than he did in his more understated laments at the beginnings of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Frost at Midnight." Coleridge hurriedly invokes the figure of his transferee because his distress in "Dejection: An Ode" is extremely serious and he needs to communicate its severity immediately. The identity of the transferee in this poem changed repeatedly during the poem's composition, perhaps indicating that the recipient of the transference was less important to Coleridge than it had been in those earlier poems:

This poem was originally addressed to Sarah Hutchinson. In its first published form, which appeared in the Morning Post on Wordsworth's wedding day, 4 October 1802, 'Sarah' was changed to 'Edmund' (having first changed in MS. to 'William'). In later editions 'Edmund' was changed to 'Lady' and to 'Otway' in l. 120.⁵⁹

Coleridge explains to the Lady that his "genial spirits"⁶⁰ have failed. He has lost not only a feeling of personal happiness but also the ability to feel the gladness which resides in the natural world. In the forth stanza of "Dejection: An Ode," the poet tells the Lady that this

ability exists, or should exist, within the human frame:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
 And in our life alone does Nature live:
 Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud:
 And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
 Than that inanimate cold world allowed
 To the poor, loveless ever anxious crowd,
 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,⁶¹
 Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

In the fifth stanza, Coleridge names that which the human soul must send forth:

Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
 Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
 Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
 Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
 Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
 A new Earth and new Heaven,⁶²

Previously, Coleridge had felt that he was in possession of this power. This was partially reflected by his tendency to engage in imaginative transferences with individuals whom Coleridge considered "pure" (the sleeping Hartley) or "in their purest hour" (Charles Lamb vacationing at Nether Stowey and Dorothy Wordsworth walking near Alfoxden). In addition to this loss of joy, Coleridge says he has lost something else:

But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
 Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
 But oh! each visitation
 Suspends what nature gave me at my₃ birth,
 My shaping spirit of Imagination.⁶³

Coleridge's most complete (and most cryptic) definition of imagination occurs in the Biographia Literaria. In it, the poet states, among other critical pronouncements, that

imagination is an active process which manifests itself organically:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider as either primary or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

When Coleridge successfully uses imaginative transference, he engages this "vital" faculty. To a greater or lesser extent, the poet idealizes the individuals who receive an imaginative transference. But in "Dejection: An Ode" Coleridge is convinced that this "living Power" has escaped him. Coleridge hopes that such a dire consequence as this will not be repeated in the Lady's life. He ends the poem by imaginatively transferring this hope:

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
 Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
 Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
 And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
 May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,
 Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
 With light heart may she rise,
 Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
 Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
 To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
 Their life the eddy of her living soul!
 O simple spirit, guided from above,
 Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,⁶⁵
 Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.

M. H. Abrams writes that "Dejection: An Ode":

constitutes a brief crisis-autobiography which parallels the two books of Wordsworth's Prelude on "Imagination, How Impaired and Restored," except that Coleridge both begins and ends in the state of imagination impaired, and foresees no possibility of recovery from his personal crisis⁶⁶ of isolation, apathy, and creative sterility.

Yet, Coleridge has summoned a modicum of his creativity through reaching out to another by means of imaginative transference. The poet's wish for the Lady that joy "attune her voice," reiterates a sentiment which he expressed in "The Nightingale." In that poem, Coleridge declares that when the wind moves through the trees, the nightingale will, "to that motion tune his wanton song/Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head."⁶⁷ Although the poet of "Dejection: An Ode" realizes that he has lost the power of imagination and can no longer tune his voice to the joyous sounds of nature, he still hopes that the Lady's creativity will continue without interruption.

Coleridge's power of imagination remains in abeyance with the writing of "To William Wordsworth." This piece, which Coleridge wrote as a response after hearing Wordsworth read his completed Prelude in January, 1807, marks the end of Coleridge's significant poetic achievements. Wordsworth, as he appears to Coleridge at this time, is the poet who maintains and augments his creativity. Wordsworth strikes Coleridge as, "an ideal representation of the figure within himself struggling for being."⁶⁸ In "To William Wordsworth,"

one of Coleridge's aims is to transfer to Wordsworth some aspects of the ideal poet. Although Coleridge knows that he has failed to achieve that ideal in his own life, he is determined to see it manifested in Wordsworth's.

In The Prelude, Wordsworth charts the development of his spiritual and intellectual capacities. The poem is dedicated to Coleridge and its composition spans the early years of the two poets' friendship:

For years, from 1797 when Coleridge heard "The Ruined Cottage" at Racedown to the evenings in 1807 when he again listened, this time to a poem he had helped conceive, the intimacy of William's world, which now included Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson, charmed and excluded him. The stimulating friendship with Wordsworth himself cost Coleridge dearly, for he invested Wordsworth with a power destructive of his own self-assurance. The older poet had become to him little less than a father-figure, focus of the ambivalent affection and rivalry such oedipal transferences entail. 69

"To William Wordsworth" is not a poem which exacerbates any sense of rivalry. It does, however, involve a question of transference. Coleridge begins the poem by praising Wordsworth's great poetic achievement, The Prelude, and by bestowing upon Wordsworth two laudatory appellations which Coleridge cannot, in good conscience, claim for himself:

Friend of the wise! and Teacher of the Good!
 Into my heart have I received that Lay
 More than historic, that prophetic Lay
 Wherein (high theme by thee first sung aright)
 Of the foundations and the building up
 Of a Human Spirit thou hast dared to tell
 What may be told, to the understanding mind
 Revealable; and what within the mind
 By vital breathings secret as the soul
 Of vernal growth, oft quickens in the heart
 Thoughts all too deep for words!-- 70

According to Coleridge, one of The Prelude's major themes is that the poet's mind works in accordance with the organic laws of the imagination. Coleridge has already lamented losing this relationship within himself in "Dejection: An Ode." Believing the process of imagination to be at work in someone else becomes, for Coleridge, his sole method of maintaining a small degree of contact with it. Coleridge praises Wordsworth for summoning the imaginative force which was necessary for the creation of The Prelude:

Or by some inner Power; of moments awful,
Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,
When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received
The light reflected, as a light bestowed--
Of fancies fair, and milder hours of youth,
Hyblean murmurs of poetic thought
Industrious in its joy, in vales and glens,⁷¹
Native or outland, lakes and famous hills!

Coleridge asserts that Wordsworth enjoys that precious, reciprocal relationship with nature. Further, Wordsworth's poetic creativity is, "Industrious in its joy." The Prelude has satisfied Coleridge that Wordsworth possesses abundant reserves of imaginative "inner Power." Coleridge no longer sees Wordsworth simply as the ideal poet which he, Coleridge, has failed to emulate. Coleridge now imaginatively transfers to Wordsworth the image of a commanding presence, an immortal poet:

O great Bard!
Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,
With steadfast eye I viewed thee in the choir
Of ever-enduring men. The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence! They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,⁷²
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.

By elevating the figure of his friend to such grandiose proportions, Coleridge has effectively removed any suggestion of rivalry between himself and the author of The Prelude. The latter, one of the "ever-enduring men," is clearly meant to stand beyond comparison with the frail, mortal poet residing in Coleridge. Still, this imaginative transference temporarily lifts Coleridge's spirits:

Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
 The pulses of my being beat anew:
 And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
 Life's joy rekindling roused the throng of pains--
 Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe,
 Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;⁷³

But this momentary burst of joy is not enough to sustain Coleridge for very long. At the conclusion of the poem, instead of feeling the deep current of joy coursing through his veins, Coleridge is poised in meditation:

And when--O Friend! my comforter and guide!
 Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!--
 Thy long sustained Song finally closed,
 And thy deep voice had ceased--yet thou thyself
 Wert still before my eyes, and round us both
 That happy vision of beloved faces--
 Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
 I sate, my being blended in one thought
 (Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)
 Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound,⁷⁴
 And when I rose, I found myself in prayer.

Coleridge comments in the Biographia Literaria that part of the genius of Shakespeare lies in, "the utter aloofness of the poet's own feelings, from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst."⁷⁵ In "To William Wordsworth," Coleridge has succeeded in distancing himself from the high qualities which he depicts in Wordsworth. In this respect, "To William Wordsworth" differs from the other

poems in which Coleridge has employed the technique of imaginative transference. Coleridge's deep involvement with the feeling of joy pervades "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," "Frost at Midnight," and "The Nightingale." The poet's consciousness is earnestly engaged in a theoretical exploration of delight in "Kubla Khan" and in "Dejection: An Ode," Coleridge's perceived loss of joy is the occasion for an emotionally anguished outpouring.

NOTES

¹I owe the term "imaginative transference" to Professor N. Y. Elliott with whom I outlined and developed this paper.

²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Portable Coleridge, ed. I. A. Richards (New York, 1977), p. 524. All citations from Coleridge's poetry and prose are taken from this volume and will hereafter be cited as Coleridge, followed by the page number on which the quoted lines appear.

³Ibid., p. 414.

⁴M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, (New York, 1971), p. 276.

⁵"To An Unknown Correspondent," (1820), Letter 309, Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs, (New Haven, 1933), II, p. 261.

⁶Ibid., p. 262.

⁷Ibid., p. 262.

⁸Coleridge, pp. 517-18.

⁹Patricia Ball, The Central Self, (London, 1968), P. 65.

¹⁰R. A. Durr, "'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' and Recurrent Action in Coleridge," ELH, 26, (December, 1959), p. 519.

¹¹M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, (New York, 1953), p. 55.

¹²Coleridge, p. 415.

¹³The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 55.

¹⁴A. Gerard, "The Systolic Rhythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems," Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Kathleen Coburn, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), p. 86.

¹⁵Reeve Parker, Coleridge's Meditative Art, (Ithaca, 1975), p. 26.

Notes (continued)

- ¹⁶Coleridge, p. 76.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 77.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 77.
- ¹⁹Russell Noyes, English Romantic Poetry and Prose, (New York, 1976), p. 583.
- ²⁰Parker, p. 47.
- ²¹Coleridge, p. 77.
- ²²Ibid., pp. 77-78.
- ²³Durr, pp. 519-520.
- ²⁴Coleridge, p. 78.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 78.
- ²⁶Ibid., p. 128.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 128.
- ²⁸The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge, (Oxford, 1912), I, pp. 240-241.
- ²⁹Coleridge, p. 128.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 129.
- ³¹Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, (Garden City, 1961), p. 196.
- ³²Coleridge, p. 129.
- ³³Ball, p. 91.
- ³⁴Coleridge, p. 130.
- ³⁵Ibid., pp. 144-145.
- ³⁶Bloom, p. 200.
- ³⁷Coleridge, p. 145.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 145.
- ³⁹William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes, (New York, 1976), p. 260.

Notes (continued)

- ⁴⁰Coleridge, pp. 145-146.
- ⁴¹George Watson, Coleridge The Poet, (New York, 1966), p. 72.
- ⁴²Coleridge, p. 146.
- ⁴³George Harper, "Coleridge's Conversation Poems," English Romantic Poets, (London, 1975), pp. 196-197.
- ⁴⁴Coleridge, pp. 146-147.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 147-148.
- ⁴⁶Norman Fruman, Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel, (New York, 1971), n. 38, p. 543.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 544.
- ⁴⁸Coleridge, p. 157.
- ⁴⁹Max Schulz, The Poetic Voices of Coleridge, (Detroit, 1964), p. 115.
- ⁵⁰Coleridge, p. 157.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 157.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 157.
- ⁵³Ibid., pp. 157-158.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 158.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 158.
- ⁵⁶Elisabeth Schneider, "Kubla Khan," A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Kathleen Coburn, (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), p. 92.
- ⁵⁷Coleridge, p. 169.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 170.
- ⁵⁹Noyes, p. 417.
- ⁶⁰Coleridge, p. 170.
- ⁶¹Ibid., pp. 170-171.
- ⁶²Ibid., p. 171.

Notes (continued)

- ⁶³Ibid., p. 172.
- ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 516.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 173.
- ⁶⁶Natural Supernaturalism, p. 275.
- ⁶⁷Coleridge, p. 147.
- ⁶⁸Parker, p. 220.
- ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 218.
- ⁷⁰Coleridge, p. 189.
- ⁷¹Ibid., p. 190.
- ⁷²Ibid., p. 191.
- ⁷³Ibid., p. 191.
- ⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 192-193.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 528.

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