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## The Genesis, Reception, and Form of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*

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THE GENESIS, RECEPTION, AND FORM OF COLERIDGE'S  
BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

By

Mary McGoohan Price

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

June

1969

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## ABBREVIATIONS OF PRINCIPAL REFERENCES

### Aids to Reflection

Aids to Reflection, ed. H. N. Coleridge. The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Edited by W. G. T. Shedd. Vol. I. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853.

### Biographia

Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross. 2 vols. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1907.

### Biographia (1847)

Biographia Literaria, ed. H. N. and Sara Coleridge. The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Edited by W. G. T. Shedd. Vol. III. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853.

### Biographia (Sampson)

Biographia Literaria, Chapters I-IV and XIV-XXII; Wordsworth, Prefaces and Essays on Poetry 1800-1825, ed. George Sampson. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1920.

### Biographia (Watson)

Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1956.

### The Friend

The Friend, ed. H. N. Coleridge. The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Edited by W. G. T. Shedd. Vol. II. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853.

### Inquiring Spirit

Inquiring Spirit, ed. Kathleen Coburn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1951.

### Letters

Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1956-1968.



## Letters (E. H. Coleridge)

Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge.  
2 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1895.

## Miscellaneous Criticism

Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas M. Raysor.  
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936.

## Notebooks

The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Kathleen  
Coburn. 2 vols. in 4. New York: Pantheon Books, 1957-1961.

## Poems

The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge.  
London: Oxford University Press, 1912.

## Shakespearean Criticism

Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas M. Raysor. 2 vols.  
London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1960.

## Statesman's Manual

The Statesman's Manual, ed. H. N. Coleridge. The Complete  
Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Edited by W. G. T. Shedd.  
Vol. I. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853.

## Table Talk

Table Talk and Omniana, ed. T. Ashe. London: George Bell  
and Sons, 1888.

## Treatise on Method

S. T. Coleridge's Treatise on Method, ed. Alice D. Snyder.  
London: Constable & Company, Ltd., 1934.

## Unpublished Letters

Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L.  
Griggs. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933.

## Wordsworth, Later Years

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later  
Years, 1821-1850, ed. Ernest De Selincourt. 3 vols.  
Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1939.

Wordsworth, Middle Years

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, 1806-1820, ed. Ernest De Selincourt. 2 vols.  
Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1937.

Wordsworth, Poetical Works

The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, ed. Thomas Hutchinson.  
Revised by Ernest De Selincourt. London: Oxford University  
Press, 1936.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over a century and a half after the publication of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, response to the work remains divided and uncertain. One reviewer, in 1833, remarked that he was unable to cite "a more doubtful problem in criticism";<sup>1</sup> and the statement could be voiced with equal justification today. A recent literary history, for example, uses the Biographia to illustrate the "published prose of the second half" of Coleridge's life. These writings are said to consist of "fragments and digressions wrenched from him by the occasion."<sup>2</sup> But one can easily find extremes of praise to weigh against such a judgment. Coleridge is also viewed as "the first really great modern critic":

The Biographia Literaria, published in 1817, is almost the bible of modern criticism, and contemporary critics have tended to see it, with Arthur Symons, as 'the greatest book of criticism in English,' and, with Herbert Read, as 'the most

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<sup>1</sup>"Coleridge's Literary Character," The Christian Examiner, XIV (March, 1833), 109.

<sup>2</sup>L. G. Salinger, "Coleridge: Poet and Philosopher," in From Blake to Byron, Vol. V of The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. by Boris Ford (7 vols.; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 186.

considerable.' On the first page it announces the manifesto for modern criticism: the application of Coleridge's political, philosophic (including psychological), and religious principles to poetry and criticism. The Biographia was thus a century in advance of its time, and only the inadequacy of the knowledge available to him kept Coleridge from founding modern criticism then and there. He is, however, with the exception of Aristotle, certainly its most important progenitor.<sup>1</sup>

This sharp division of opinion may be traced to the first readers of the Biographia. Thus Hazlitt's suspicion, that the Biographia did not prove Coleridge to be "a writer of any weight,"<sup>2</sup> is echoed in F. R. Leavis' protests against the "scandal" of its "currency as an academic classic."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, many present-day readers would agree with Wordsworth who was "contented . . . with skimming parts of it."<sup>4</sup>

The immediate reaction to the Biographia Literaria--a conviction that it was a contemptible, or at best slight, performance--may be traced to several causes. Personal and political bias led a number of reviewers to seriously misrepresent the work. Others, perhaps reflecting the fact that Coleridge was "a century in advance" of his time, could understand

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<sup>1</sup>Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 101.

<sup>2</sup>"Coleridge's Literary Life," The Edinburgh Review, XXVIII (August, 1817), 494.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridge in Criticism," Scrutiny, IX (September, 1940), 65.

<sup>4</sup>Wordsworth, Middle Years, II, 791.

neither the content nor the form of the Biographia. "From the start," as George Whalley points out, the Biographia "was doomed to be misinterpreted; for a superstition about its obscurity and fragmentariness was immediately circulated and has never been dispelled. That prejudice has worked steadily against Coleridge's reputation as thinker and critic."<sup>1</sup> The ideas and critical method employed by Coleridge in the Bio-graphia did come to be appreciated, however, in the later nineteenth century. A typical judgment is expressed by Edwin T. Whipple, who praises Coleridge as "the first who made criticism interpretative both of the spirit and form of works of genius, the first who founded his principles in the nature of things." But such praise cannot be extended to the literary quality of the Biographia: "tried by his own critical principles, it wants unity, clearness and proportion. . . . There is no subordination of parts to the whole, but a splendid confusion."<sup>2</sup> By these standards--"unity, clearness and proportion"--the Biographia continued, with few exceptions, to be found lacking. Leslie Stephen insisted that it was "put together with a pitchfork."<sup>3</sup> Arthur Symons, though admitting the value of

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<sup>1</sup>"The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 101.

<sup>2</sup>Essays and Reviews (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848), II, 183, 189.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridge," Hours in a Library (3 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), III, 335.

Coleridge's thought, found his style "rarely of the finest quality as prose writing" and "never quite reduced to order from its tumultuous amplitude or its snake-like involution."<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary criticism, on the whole, tends to follow a similar line of argument concerning the form of the Biographia. Its "padding" and "lack of plan" are deplored;<sup>2</sup> "disorderliness" and an absence of "sustained development" are said to characterize Coleridge's work.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, however, a number of attempts have been made to understand the "plan" and "development" of the Biographia. Humphrey House, in the first of his Clark Lectures (1951-52), called for a sympathetic, critical appraisal of Coleridge's prose.<sup>4</sup> An article by George Whalley in Essays and Studies (1953) applies such a viewpoint to the Biographia. Whalley opposes the notion that the work "was a whimsical and absent-minded improvisation, a mushroom growth in which toughness of fibre is scarcely to be expected." A brief review of the background of Biographia attempts to answer certain questions: "How long had Coleridge contemplated the theme of the Biographia? . . . how clearly did

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<sup>1</sup>The Romantic Movement in English Poetry (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1909), pp. 136-137.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Potter, "On Editing Coleridge," The Bookman, LXXXV (February, 1934), 435.

<sup>3</sup>F. R. Leavis, "Coleridge in Criticism," p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>Coleridge: The Clark Lectures (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1953).

Coleridge announce his theme and how steadily prosecute it?" By examining its structure Whalley intends to contradict the "general impression" that the Biographia "is incorrigibly diffuse, fragmentary, and obscure."<sup>1</sup>

George Watson's re-editing of the Biographia for "Everyman's Library" follows a similar approach. In omitting Chapter XXIII and "Satyrane's Letters" (which Coleridge was forced to insert because of a printer's error), Watson intends to "present the Biographia as nearly as possible according to the author's intentions." His "Introduction" argues for the unity and coherence of the work: although "design and purpose have been denied" the Biographia, "its greatest originality is its design."<sup>2</sup> In addition to the essays by Whalley and Watson, only one major study of the problem has appeared. A 1963 dissertation examines "the Structures of Coordination" in eight chapters of the Biographia. The writer finds parallelism-- "lexical, syntactic, accentual, and semantic"--to be a "constant feature" in the work."<sup>3</sup> Apart from these studies, no attempt has been made to understand or describe the form of the Biographia Literaria. The charges brought against it--that

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<sup>1</sup>"The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 87-89.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia Literaria, ed. by George Watson (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1956), xviii-xix.

<sup>3</sup>Sister M. Lucille Osinski, "A Study of the Structures of Coordination in a Representative Sample of the Biographia Literaria" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1963).

Coleridge failed in matters of style, structure, and the ability to "focus on an audience"<sup>1</sup>--are charges of a rhetorical nature. Working from the point of view that the Biographia does, in fact, possess "design and purpose," this dissertation attempts to submit such criticisms to the test of rhetorical analysis. The principles relating to argumentation, arrangement, and style, primarily as expressed in Aristotle's Rhetoric, will be applied to the work.

Chapters II-IV form an introduction to the rhetorical analysis of the Biographia Literaria contained in Chapters V-VII. Chapter II traces the genesis and design of the Biographia in Coleridge's letters, notebooks, and other writings from approximately 1800 until final publication in 1817. A number of topics, which came to be closely related in his literary plans, absorbed Coleridge for many years before he came to write the Biographia. His response to the poetry of Wordsworth and his study of poetic diction were of primary importance. Coleridge is led by these questions to formulate his own theory of poetry--a theory encompassing theology, metaphysics, and politics. From the attacks upon his poetry and that of Wordsworth, Coleridge is moved to answer all false critics and to set forth principles grounded "on the two-fold

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<sup>1</sup>Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes (eds.), Coleridge the Talker (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1940), p. 28.



basis of universal morals and philosophic reason."<sup>1</sup> Finally, Coleridge's long-contemplated autobiographical work would provide a framework for these subjects:

Seem to have made up my mind to write my metaphysical works, as my Life, & in my Life-- intermixed with all the other events / or history of the mind and fortunes of S. T. Coleridge.<sup>2</sup>

An account of the printing of the Biographia, with the additions to the original text that Coleridge was forced to make, raises problems of unity and structure. Coleridge attempts to relate these additions to his basic aims, but the Biographia was to suffer for its "padding" and "make-weights."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the work is found to be the culmination of many years of thought and effort--the achievement of "prolonged, patient, and mature consideration."<sup>4</sup>

Chapter III recounts the critical reception of the Biographia. Condemned in the reviews--by some, like Hazlitt, out of personal antagonism--the Biographia was a financial failure and never reprinted in Coleridge's lifetime. The immediate reactions of Coleridge's contemporaries are seen to contain the mistakes and prejudices of later criticism. Among

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, II, 88.

<sup>2</sup>Notebooks, I, i, 1515.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia (Watson), xviii.

<sup>4</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," p. 92.

the principal difficulties was the relationship between author and readers; Coleridge was viewed as egotistical, pedantic, and incompetent. The form of the Biographia was also problematic. Its miscellaneous contents and unique structure were considered beyond analysis or understanding. The 1847 edition of the Biographia went almost unnoticed by critics, and little attention was paid the work throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Its current reputation, as noted above, fluctuates between extremes of praise and blame, continuing to provoke questions of style, structure, and tone.

Chapter IV considers Coleridge's general opinions on style and rhetoric, and shows that he was as conscious of form as of content. Coleridge frequently analyzes his own style. He recognizes his love for words--reflected in the range of his vocabulary--and the intricacy of his sentence structure. Similarly, he comments on his characteristic use of parentheses, epigraphs, and quotations. Coleridge also analyzes the prose style of that period he most admired and imitated: "the vigour and felicity" of the age "from Edward VI to the Restoration."<sup>1</sup> His criticism of pre-Restoration writers often provides the best gloss on his own work.

Coleridge has relatively little to say on the theory of rhetoric and the works of classical rhetoricians. He was aware, however, of their concerns: logic and methods of

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<sup>1</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 413.

argumentation; the arrangement or structure of discourse; the need to evaluate one's audience; and the value of stylistic devices, especially metaphor and simile, balance and antithesis. Although Coleridge's remarks on prose style and rhetoric do not form a fully developed theory, they are useful in clarifying his own aims and methods.

Chapter V discusses the structure of the Biographia. The problem is reflected by the fact that no later edition reprinted the work in quite its original form. Coleridge's notions concerning the unity of a literary work are examined in relation to the Biographia, and a structural outline for the work is suggested. Part I (Chapters I-IV) provides a general introduction. Part II (Chapters V-IX), an essay in the history of association, lays the groundwork for Coleridge's definition of the imagination. In Part III (Chapters X-XI), an interlude of digressions and anecdotes is offered for "the reader's amusement, as a voluntary before a sermon."<sup>1</sup> The results of Coleridge's study, recorded in Part II, are given in the final chapters of Volume I--Part IV (Chapters XII-XIII). Part V (Chapters XIV-XVI) may be viewed as an introduction to the analysis of Wordsworth's poetry. Coleridge recalls the controversy over the Lyrical Ballads, defines his terms, and applies and illustrates his conclusions. Part VI (Chapters XVII-XXII)

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 105.

examines Wordsworth's "tenets," his "real object," and the "characteristics of his poetry."<sup>1</sup> The material contained in Part VII (Satyrane's Letters and Chapter XXIII) is intended to present Coleridge in the early years of his literary life, and to exhibit the continuity of his critical principles. Part VIII (Chapter XXIX) concludes the work. Also taken into account are Coleridge's unifying devices: transitions, connectives, repetition of words and phrases, and enumeration of the points and order of discussion. In conclusion, the work is found to possess a greater degree of design and order than have generally been accorded it.

Chapter VI studies the methods of argument employed in the Biographia. The "means of persuasion"<sup>2</sup> proper to deliberative rhetoric appear most frequently, for Coleridge intends that the reader accept his opinions on poetry and philosophy. The Biographia makes use of forensic or judicial rhetoric in defending the character and actions of Coleridge himself, of Wordsworth and Southey, and of all literary "men of Genius";<sup>3</sup> critics and reviews, on the other hand, are tried and condemned. Epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric, concerned with the "objects

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, II, 28, 69, 95.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 1.2, trans. Cooper, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, II, 28.

of praise and blame,"<sup>1</sup> appears in Coleridge's homage to Wordsworth's "intellect and genius,"<sup>2</sup> as well as in various encomiastic passages on Kant, Burke, Shakespeare, and Milton. The Biographia also illustrates the three persuasive means common to all subjects: the ethical, rational, and emotional appeals. For purposes of analysis, Coleridge's principal arguments are considered separately, as they were developed in the course of the work. The longest and most complex line of argument concerns Coleridge's disagreement with--and evaluation of--the poetical theory and poems of Wordsworth. Of secondary importance are Coleridge's self-defense and his attack on reviews and reviewers. A final argument in the Biographia is found in Chapter XXIII, the review of Bertram. The essay enables the reader to compare Coleridge's practice of this form of criticism with the tenets he professed elsewhere in the Biographia. Through an examination of these arguments, one finds that Coleridge did consider the reactions of his audience and the means of persuasion suited to his aims. Examples and analogies are his most frequently used persuasive devices. Also prominent are definition, testimony, and the ethical appeal.

Finally, Chapter VII attempts to describe Coleridge's prose style. The Biographia illustrates both the flexible

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 1.9, trans. Cooper, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, II, 28.

quality of his style and its two most notable characteristics: metaphorical language and a loose, "Senecan" sentence structure. Metaphors and images are taken primarily from external nature and architecture, reflecting the principles of growth and construction seen in Coleridge's critical theory. A typical sentence in the Biographia is found to be lengthy rather than short and concise; to contain qualifying clauses or parenthetical expressions; and to employ parallelism or antithesis, though without exact or fully symmetrical balance. The functional variety of sentences and the levels of diction in the Biographia are also discussed. For Coleridge's purposes--his own "apology" and his critique of Wordsworth's poetry and theory--the style of the Biographia appears to be well-suited.

As a literary critic, Coleridge's reputation must rest on the Biographia Literaria, his only full-length work conceived and published as such. The fragments, notes, lecture reports, and "table talk" may contain brilliant passages and insights, but remain scattered and unfinished. Coleridge himself regarded the significance of the Biographia in this light. A year and a half after its publication, Coleridge made a retrospective review of his writings in which Volume II of the Biographia, parts of The Friend, and certain poems were judged those works that should endure. This study of the Biographia Literaria, it is hoped, may contribute something toward the understanding of one aspect of Coleridge's achievement.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA: BEFORE 1817

Although the main part of the Biographia Literaria was composed during a fairly brief period--from approximately March to September of 1815--the work incorporated, as did many of Coleridge's writings, earlier ideas and phrases from notes, letters, lectures, and various published materials. These previous expressions of passages in the Biographia, as well as hints of plans for such a work and the difficulties involved in its completion, can be traced through a span of about two decades before its publication in 1817. And, in many cases, such references contribute to an understanding of the finished work: its aims, substance, and structure.

In his later Aids to Reflection, Coleridge lists three points or questions of rhetoric which an author must determine before embarking upon composition: "to what sort his work belongs, for what description of readers it is intended, and the specific end or object, which it is to answer."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's letters and notes pertaining to the Biographia

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<sup>1</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 113.

Literaria suggest that the questions of genre and audience may not have been consciously predetermined; however, much thought was given to "ends or objects." A number of interrelated aims absorbed Coleridge for many years before their inclusion in the Biographia. Among his frequent discussions of projected works, one finds certain ideas repeated. Of primary importance are the examination of Wordsworth's poetry and the investigation of the subject of poetic diction. In addition, Coleridge intends some time to present his own theory of poetry--a theory which is to be so inclusive as to encompass metaphysics, politics, and religion. He looks forward to answering the attacks against him in periodical reviews, and to set forth the principles of true criticism. Finally, Coleridge alludes to an autobiographical work, the emphasis of which is to be internal--a mental history rather than a "multitude of particulars."<sup>1</sup> These five subjects are contained in Chapter IV of the Biographia, which, instead of Chapter I, is the true introduction to the work. In Chapter IV Coleridge best indicates his plan and brings together its various parts. Here, the "excellence, which . . . is more or less predominant, and which constitutes the character"<sup>2</sup> of Wordsworth's mind is attested to. The topic of poetic diction arises from Wordsworth's "critical remarks" as

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<sup>1</sup>The Friend, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, I, 60.



"prefixed and annexed to the 'Lyrical Ballads,'" in which "colloquial phrases, or the imitations of them, . . . [were] announced as intentional, as the result of choice after full deliberation."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's own literary philosophy, as deduced "from established premises," is to be advanced; another of Wordsworth's prefatory statements--that on fancy and imagination--leads Coleridge to the essence of his belief, the "seminal principle" "concerning the powers and privileges of the imagination."<sup>2</sup> The topic of reviews is joined with speculation on the reasons for Wordsworth's critical reception. Autobiography, lastly, provides a framework--Coleridge's personal reactions to Wordsworth's poems and prefaces and their reception are to be analyzed in terms of his "hobby-horse" of "metaphysics and psychology."<sup>3</sup>

The opening paragraph of the Biographia Literaria states that the settlement, "as far as possible," of "the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction," and the definition, "with the utmost impartiality," of Wordsworth's "real poetic character," are among Coleridge's chief objects in the work to follow.<sup>4</sup> As noted, other

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 51-52.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, I, 64-65, 202.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, I, 62.

<sup>4</sup>Biographia, I, 1.

questions are to be taken up in the Biographia; however, these two may properly be credited with giving rise to the work and providing Coleridge with a needed impetus to assemble his notions on poetry, philosophy, and his own "literary life." For the histories of the Biographia Literaria and Wordsworth's several prefaces are closely related. Indeed, as one critic has remarked, "though it would be an exaggeration to call the Preface [to the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads] a first draft of the Biographia, the exaggeration would be of the slightest."<sup>1</sup> And according to Coleridge, "it was at first intended, that the Preface should be written by me."<sup>2</sup> In the same year as the publication of this preface, Coleridge confides to Humphrey Davy that

the works which I gird myself up to attack as soon as money concerns will permit me, are the Life of Lessing--& the Essay on Poetry. The latter is still more at my heart than the former--it's Title would be an Essay on the Elements of Poetry/ it would in reality be a disguised System of Morals & Politics--.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, (Watson), ix.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 810. Wordsworth commented on this point many years later. "'I never cared a straw about the theory,' he wrote impatiently . . . 'and the Preface was written at the request of Mr. Coleridge out of sheer good nature. . . . he pressed the thing upon me, and but for that it would never have been thought of'" [ Biographia (Watson), ix ].

<sup>3</sup>Letters, I, 632.

And to the same correspondent, about four months later, Coleridge laments the fact that illness is preventing him from accomplishing

what my heart within me burns to do--that is concenter my free mind to the affinities of the Feelings with Words and Ideas under the title of 'Concerning Poetry & the nature of the Pleasures derived from it.'--I have faith, that I do understand this subject/ and I am sure, that if I write what I ought to do on it, the Work would supersede all the Books of Metaphysics hitherto written/ and all the Books of Morals too.<sup>1</sup>

But no essay was written by Coleridge at this time; his ideas, however, were discussed with Wordsworth. In a letter to Southey, Coleridge calls the 1800 Preface "half a child of my own Brain/ & so arose out of Conversation, so frequent, that with few exceptions we could scarcely either of us perhaps positively say, which first started any particular Thought."<sup>2</sup> Yet by July of 1802, Coleridge was already in sharp (though undeveloped) disagreement with Wordsworth's "half":

I rather suspect that some where or other there is a radical Difference in our theoretical opinions respecting Poetry--/ this I shall endeavor to go to the Bottom of--and acting the arbitrator between the old School & the New School hope to lay down some plain & perspicuous, tho' not superficial, Canans of Criticism respecting Poetry.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 671.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 830.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Coleridge's "Canons of Criticism" were joined, at this period and throughout his writings, with the poetical theory and practice of Wordsworth. Poetic diction and the nature of fancy and imagination were the subjects of Wordsworth's prefaces particularly opposed by Coleridge. The phrase from the 1800 Preface--"that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition"<sup>1</sup>--is criticized by Coleridge in a long passage, the first evidence in his letters of disagreement with Wordsworth on this point.

In my opinion, every phrase, every metaphor, every personification, should have it's justifying cause in some passion either of the Poet's mind, or of the Characters described by the poet--But metre itself implies a passion, i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader--and tho' I stated this to Wordsworth, & he has in some sort stated it in his preface, yet he has [not] done justice to it, nor has he in my opinion sufficiently answered it. In my opinion, Poetry justifies, as Poetry independent of any other Passion, some new combinations of Language, & commands the omission of many others allowable in other compositions/ Now Wordsworth, me saltem judice, has in his system not sufficiently admitted the former, & in his practice has too frequently sinned against the latter.-- Indeed, we have had lately some little controversy on this subject--& we begin to suspect, that there is, somewhere or other, a radical Difference [in our] opinions--Dulce est inter amicos rarissima Dissensione condiri plurimas consensiones, saith St. Augustine . . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 736.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 812.

Differences between the two were, of course, not to remain similarly "dulce" on a personal level; however, Coleridge continued in his high regard for what he considered to be the best in Wordsworth's work. His assessment of his fellow-poet's genius grew during the years of their closest relationship and, in 1804, although a clash with the personality of Wordsworth the man is evident in Coleridge's letters, he pays this tribute to the originality and distinction of Wordsworth the poet:

he no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespere--no more resembles Shakespere than Shakespere resembles Milton--he is himself: and I dare affirm that he will hereafter be admitted as the first and greatest philosophical Poet--the only man who has effected a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought & Feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the modifying Power in that highest sense of the word in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the aggregating power--in that sense in which it is a dim Analogue of Creation, not all that we can believe but all that we can conceive of creation.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge's belief in Wordsworth's singularity, together with his claim to the power of imagination and his analogy with Milton and Shakespeare, is developed in the twenty-second chapter of the Biographia. Wordsworth's faults, too, were quickly perceived and analyzed. Upon reading some of his poems in the summer of 1802, Coleridge notices their occasional "daring Humbleness of Language & Versification, and a strict adherence

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 1034.

to matter of fact, even to prolixity"<sup>1</sup>--statements repeated, of course, even to phrasing, in the Biographia, Chapter XXII.

The 1802 edition of Lyrical Ballads (which reprinted the 1800 Preface, with certain changes, and added an "Appendix" on poetic diction) again moved Coleridge to state wherein he approved and disapproved of his co-author's statements:

there is a valuable appendix, which I am sure you [Southey] must like/ & in the Preface itself considerable additions, one on the Dignity & nature of the office & character of a Poet, that is very grand, . . . but it is, in parts, (and this is the fault, me judice, of all the latter half of that Preface) obscure beyond any necessity--& the extreme elaboration & almost constrainedness of the Diction contrasted (to my feelings) somewhat harshly with the general style of the Poems, to which the Preface is an Introduction.<sup>2</sup>

This is Coleridge's first objection to the prose style of the "Preface"; it is understandable, however, for unlike Coleridge's best prose and that of stylists he admired (such as Donne, Milton, and Jeremy Taylor), Wordsworth does not exhibit perspicuousness of "logical structure,"<sup>3</sup> "fertility of . . . invention,"<sup>4</sup> or richness of metaphor. In addition, the subject of prose style was on Coleridge's mind at this time. He reveals to Thomas Wedgwood:

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 830.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 830.

<sup>3</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 413.

<sup>4</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 432.

I am now busy on the subject--& shall in a few weeks go to the Press with a Volume of the Prose writings of Hall, Milton, & Taylor--& shall immediately follow it up with an Essay on the writings of Dr. Johnson, & Gibbon--. And in these two Volumes I flatter myself, that I shall present a fair History of English Prose.<sup>1</sup>

Although these volumes did not materialize, the ideas developed were to be useful in explaining and illustrating the Biographia's distinction between prose and poetry.

What Coleridge means by the "value" of the 1802 "Appendix" is less obvious than his point about Wordsworth's style, for in it, Wordsworth repeats the idea contained in the "Preface" itself: that is, "in works of imagination and sentiment, . . . whether the composition be in prose or in verse, they require and exact one and the same language."<sup>2</sup> Coleridge soon reiterated his beliefs that the poet must distinguish between the two and that "the real language of men in any situation"<sup>3</sup> is not necessarily the proper language of poetry. However, despite Wordsworth's conclusions on the singularity of language, his "Appendix" concentrates on the distortions of "extravagant and absurd diction."<sup>4</sup> The contrast he draws between Johnson's "poetic" rendering of a passage from

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 877.

<sup>2</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 743.

<sup>3</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 741.

<sup>4</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 742.

Proverbs 6 and that of the King James version prose ("Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard, . . .") would have been acceptable to Coleridge as proof that "poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contra-distinguishing objects of a poem."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, during the time of the second and third editions of Lyrical Ballads (1800, 1802), the foundations were being laid for many of Coleridge's ideas concerning Wordsworth's poems and poetry in general. But these opinions were not to be gathered, developed, and published for over a decade. Why Coleridge did not write the "Preface" as he apparently had intended, or why he did not soon compose his planned "Essay" explaining the differences with Wordsworth, are questions that cannot be answered with certitude. One critic suggests that Coleridge, in addition to financial and family problems, "was experiencing creative sterility"<sup>2</sup> following his work at German translation. For during this period, Coleridge, proceeding with his omnivorous reading, was becoming more deeply absorbed in theory, philosophy, abstractions--his "darling Studies."<sup>3</sup> The degree of this immersion is well illustrated in a letter to his friend, William

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, II, 11.

<sup>2</sup>Max F. Schulz, "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, V (Autumn, 1965), 626.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, I, 260.



Sotheby (19 July 1802). Coleridge explains that he has been working at a translation of Gessner's Der erste Schiffer, partly in order to force himself

out of metaphysical trains of thought--which, when I trusted myself to my own Ideas, came upon me uncalled--& when I wished to write a poem, beat up Game of far other kind--instead of a Covey of poetic Partridges with whirring wings of music, or wild Ducks shaping their rapid flights in forms always regular (a still better image of Verse) up came a metaphysical Bustard, urging it's slow laborious, earth-skimming Flight, over dreary & level Wastes.<sup>1</sup>

And just three months earlier, Coleridge had composed "Dejection: An Ode" (a draft of which he includes in the letter to Sotheby), also telling of the eclipse of his "shaping spirit of Imagination" (l.86). Part of the same poem is quoted to Southey (29 July 1802) as an image of Coleridge's despondency:

all my poetic Genius, if ever I really possessed any Genius, & it was not rather a mere general aptitude of Talent, & quickness in Imitation/ is gone--and I have been fool enough to suffer deeply in my mind, regretting the loss--which I attribute to my long & exceedingly severe Metaphysical Investigations--& these partly to Ill-health, and partly to private afflictions which rendered any subject, immediately connected with Feeling, a source of pain & disquiet to me.<sup>2</sup>

These passages contain the same paradox one finds in "Dejection: An Ode": though one of Coleridge's best poems, it tells of experiencing the lack or suspension of imagination, the

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 814.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 831.

"inanimate cold world" (l. 51) that exists when "joy" is not present. Similarly, images (the sorts of "Game" in the first passage) and ideas (the genius versus talent distinction to be developed in Chapter II of the Biographia) are not denied to Coleridge in his "dejection."

Yet, as seen in his letters, both internal and external causes frustrated Coleridge's progress. Doubts over his poetic ability, unhappiness in his marriage, financial difficulties, illness, and his self-confessed "habits of Procrastination"<sup>1</sup> were to delay the realization of his literary aims. The stay in Malta and journey to Rome (April 1804 - May 1806), undertaken for reasons of health, failed to effect an improvement. In the years between Coleridge's return to England and the start of the Biographia Literaria, he was occupied with the lecture series in London (1808, 1811-1812) and Bristol (1813-1814), work on his periodical The Friend, and revision and production of the tragedy Remorse. This was also the time of definite separation from his wife, the break with Wordsworth, his growing dependence upon opium, and search for a permanent "home." Coleridge's thoughts and plans germinated during the years of association with Wordsworth (1796-1804) were, however, continually expanded, as is evidenced by the notebooks kept at Malta and by reports of his lecture series. The first three topics incorporated in

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 875.

the Biographia Literaria (Wordsworth's poetry, poetic diction, and a poetic philosophy based upon Coleridge's theory of the imagination), expressed briefly and tentatively in early notes and letters, are extended and strengthened with arguments, illustrations, and recourse to philosophical principles.

The fourth topic Coleridge included in the Biographia Literaria, his reaction to the criticism of the time especially as found in periodical reviews, was a long-contemplated subject also. His opinion of the journals was largely negative; their influence was judged harmful to the reading public and authors alike. Even those reviews not unfavorable toward his writings were mentioned with disdain. "My poems [Poems on Various Subjects, 1796] have been reviewed," Coleridge reports to Thomas Poole. "The Monthly has cataracted panegyric on me--the Critical cascaed it--& the Analytical dribbled it with civility: as to the British Critic, they durst not condemn and they would not praise--so contented themselves with 'commending me', as a Poet--and allowed me 'tenderness of sentiment & elegance of diction.'"<sup>1</sup> In the same year, a notebook entry tells of Coleridge's plans for a satire "in the manner of Donne" on "Monthly Reviewers."<sup>2</sup>

Although Coleridge later acknowledged the "commencement" of the Edinburgh Review to be "an important epoch in periodical

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, I, 226.

<sup>2</sup>Notebooks, I, i, 171.

criticism,"<sup>1</sup> he writes to Southey (12 March 1803), "is altogether despicable--the hum-drum of pert attorneys' Clerks, very pert & yet prolix & dull as a superannuated Judge." One article is described as "below all Criticism"; another contains "impudent & senseless Babble."<sup>2</sup> And in praising Southey's contributions to the Annual Register, Coleridge observes that "Reviews would be a Blessing, spite even of the necessary Evil involved in their Essence, of breeding a crumbliness of mind in the Readers, if they were executed as those were."<sup>3</sup> The realization of such a "Blessing"--an ideal review which would "administer judgement according to a constitution and code of laws"<sup>4</sup>--was among Coleridge's schemes. He suggested to the publisher Murray

that there might be set on foot a Review of old Books (i.e. of all works important or remarkable the Authors of which are deceased) with a probability of a tolerable Sale--if only the original Plan were a good one; and if no articles were admitted but from men who understood and recognized the Principles and Rules of Criticism which should form the first Number.<sup>5</sup>

Coleridge's opposition to existing reviews and the formulation of his own positive standards (developed in Chapters

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, II, 86.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 936.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, II, 1039.

<sup>4</sup>Biographia, II, 88.

<sup>5</sup>Letters, IV, 648.

II, III, XXI, and XXIV of the Biographia Literaria) formed an important part of the 1811-1812 lectures. Delivered in London, this series on Shakespeare and Milton included "an introductory Lecture on False Criticism, (especially in Poetry,) and on its Causes."<sup>1</sup> According to J. P. Collier's report of the first lecture, Coleridge distinguished between "accidental" and "permanent" causes of false criticism. One of the former is "the prevalence of reviews, magazines, newspapers, novels, &c." His reasons are the following:

Reviews are generally pernicious, because the writers determine without reference to fixed principles--because reviews are usually filled with personalities; and, above all, because they teach people rather to judge than to consider, to decide than to reflect: thus they encourage superficiality, and induce the thoughtless and the idle to adopt sentiments conveyed under the authoritative WE, and not, by the working and subsequent clearing of their own minds, to form just original opinions.<sup>2</sup>

One of the "permanent" causes, those "flowing out of the general principles of our nature," is similarly connected with reviews--"the habit of not taking the trouble to think." Men employ reviews as they "employ servants, to spare them the nuisance of rising from their seats and walking across a room."<sup>3</sup>

In the fifth lecture of the series, ostensibly on Love's Labour's Lost, Coleridge returns to the subject of

<sup>1</sup>Shakespearean Criticism, II, 23.

<sup>2</sup>Shakespearean Criticism, II, 33.

<sup>3</sup>Shakespearean Criticism, II, 36.

modern criticism. "He deemed the business degrading from the beginning," notes J. Tomalin, a contemporary who reported the lecture; "and he was convinced that to be connected with a review was below a gentleman and a man of honour." Reviewers are described as those who

attempted to pass the bridge of Literary Reputation; they were thrown into the stream of Oblivion, which in its buffeting against piers produced a coarse imitation of laughter; then they were dragged out by some reanimating power, restored to their senses (not to their wits), and were appointed a sort of literary toll-gatherers from all who afterwards attempted to pass.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge's antipathy toward reviews and reviewers was not without very tangible reasons. Although his early work was "noticed appreciatively, it was a long time before the poems on which his poetic reputation now chiefly rests elicited more than bafflement, or even contempt."<sup>2</sup> Nor were his prose works received with sympathy or even objectivity. This "contempt" was directed more against the man than against the work. For example, the volume containing Christabel, Kubla Khan, and The Pains of Sleep (1816) was reviewed savagely, with Hazlitt's

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespearean Criticism, II, 75. Coleridge himself, of course, contributed anonymous articles to journals and newspapers. However, he often spoke regretfully of the time thus spent. And, in a number of instances, Coleridge expressed his disapproval in principle of what he found necessary (for financial or other reasons) to practice. For example, in the same lecture series, he deplores the "practice of public speaking, which encourages a too great desire to be understood at once."

<sup>2</sup>Patricia Hodgart and Theodore Redpath, eds., Romantic Perspectives (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964), p. 82.

article in the Examiner, an attack on Coleridge's personal character, leading a "veritable campaign of hate."<sup>1</sup> The Statesman's Manual, published later in the same year, was met with similar hostility. As it seemed to Coleridge,

I have no friends that defend me, publicly at least--and if I am not abused in the Quarterly, as well as in the Edinburgh, it is from no want of good disposition on the part of the Editor--but certain accidental Circumstances make it not quite decent or politic . . . my being thought well of by some of the main supporters,<sup>2</sup> of the Quarterly--Southey's writing in it--&c.

The extent of the enmity vented against Coleridge is indicated by the later praise of his work; when recognition finally came, it was often framed as defense to counter such accusations as "moral weakness," "potential infidelity," and "inveterate and diseased egotism." Political animus--"the too manifest and too frequent interference of NATIONAL, [ and ] PARTY, . . . predilection or aversion"<sup>3</sup>--also contributed to the reviewers' attitude. By several, he was scorned as a "reformed Antijacobin." On the other hand, "Coleridge, like Wordsworth, grew in the estimation of the Quarterly reviewers as he became older and more orthodox."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 668n.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 700. It was these reviews (of 1816) that Coleridge was to answer in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Biographia, a section added to the main body of the work. Chapter XXI was primarily occasioned by reviews of Wordsworth's Excursion, published in 1814.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, II, 89.

<sup>4</sup>Walter James Graham, Tory Criticism in the Quarterly Review, 1809-1853 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), p. 26.

In the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge makes light of the reviews' effect upon him:

the original sin of my character consists in a careless indifference to public opinion, and to the attacks of those who influence it; . . . it is difficult and distressing to me, to think with any interest even about the sale and profit of my works, important as, in my present circumstances, such considerations must needs be.<sup>1</sup>

Although his letters show more concern, both for "opinion" and for "sale and profit," Coleridge's quarrel with reviews was not solely a personal one. The aversion and invective of his earlier lectures are considerably suppressed in the Biographia. In its place, recommendations are made for what a critical review should be: founded upon rational and philosophical principles; attempting to reveal the merits of a work rather than dwell on its faults; proceeding by "legitimate deduction"; and supporting all conclusions with quotations, showing "that the qualities are attributable to the passage extracted."<sup>2</sup> Nor does Coleridge limit rebuttal to his own character and writings. Southey is praised in opposition to critics, in Chapter III; and disagreement with the reception of Wordsworth's Excursion was to be an important influence on the "design and scope"<sup>3</sup> of the Biographia.

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 31.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, II, 90.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 579n.



An exception to Coleridge's moderating of self-defense is found in the final chapter (XXIV) of the Biographia, a clearly apologetic section. Although autobiography, the final topic included in the work, appears prominently here, it is assigned little importance by Coleridge in other places. "It will be found," he states in Chapter I, "that the least of what I have written concerns myself personally."<sup>1</sup> Yet biography and autobiography were subjects which had occupied him from time to time over several decades. The trip to Germany (1798-1799) was undertaken, in part, to gather materials for a life of Lessing. Although this work was never published, Coleridge had given some consideration to the genre of biography. One of the essays in The Friend is devoted to this theme, and Coleridge's ideas here presented are not without relevance to the Biographia.

The main point of The Friend essay may be summarized in this observation: "the spirit of genuine biography is in nothing more conspicuous, than in the firmness with which it withstands the cravings of worthless curiosity, as distinguished from the thirst after useful knowledge." Coleridge views with disfavor the prevalence of those "huge volumes of biographical minutiae, which render the real character almost invisible," comparing their record of "minutest circumstances" to "clouds

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 1.

of dust on a portrait, or the counterfeit frankincense which smoke-blacks the favorite idol of a Roman Catholic village."<sup>1</sup>  
 In conclusions similar to those on contemporary criticism, Coleridge perceptively analyzes the biographical tendencies of his time:

In the present age (emphatically the age of personality) there are more than ordinary motives for withholding all encouragement from this mania of busying ourselves with the names of others, which is still more alarming as a symptom, than it is troublesome as a disease. . . . there are men, who trading in the silliest anecdotes, in unprovoked abuse and senseless eulogy, think themselves nevertheless employed both worthily and honorably, if only all this be done in good set terms, and from the press, and of public characters,--a class which has increased so rapidly of late, that it becomes difficult to discover what characters are to be considered as private.<sup>2</sup>

As a recent critic of early nineteenth-century biography notes, the "publication of anecdote had moved so far in development, independent of the other genres it customarily supported, that it was on the verge of becoming a genre itself."<sup>3</sup> Numerous biographies--frequently concerned with external details of their subjects' lives, and largely of second and third rank--were published. Coleridge's complaint that all "characters" were

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<sup>1</sup>The Friend, pp. 326-327.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, p. 328. Cf. Biographia, I, 27n-28n.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph W. Reed, Jr., English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century, 1801-1838 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 12.

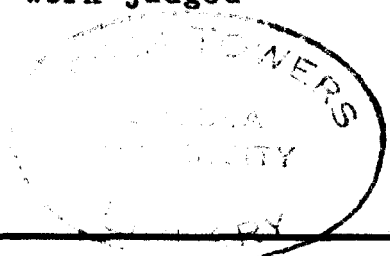
then considered "public" is verified by listing some of the biographers' choices: "the notably obscure," such as "worthy curates and rectors"; "peddlers, maniacs, and eccentrics"; even "horses and donkeys, dogs and monkeys."<sup>1</sup> All of these might satisfy the public's "worthless curiosity," but not necessarily Coleridge's criterion of "useful knowledge." As an example of the sort of biography Coleridge would have one write, he concludes The Friend essay with an extract from Roger North's "Life of his brother, the Lord Keeper Guilford"--a passage chosen for its "kindly good-tempered spirit." The selection gives, in "the genuine idioms of our mother-tongue," a faithful picture of its subject's person and character, his faults and merits. Although North, in Coleridge's analysis, does not proceed with a "sparing or very delicate hand . . . the final impression is that of kindness."<sup>2</sup>

In application to the Biographia, it may be pointed out that a compilation of "biographical minutiae" is far from Coleridge's intent. Details of his early life are found only in the five letters written (1797-1798) at the request of Thomas Poole. Even here, Coleridge condenses facts and selects those details that illustrate the development of his mind and character. As Coleridge would have a literary work judged

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<sup>1</sup>Reed, pp. 22-23.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, p. 330.



sympathetically--according to its "beauties" rather than its "defects"<sup>1</sup>--so, too, ought a man's life be treated by the biographer. Brief examples of the "kindly good-tempered spirit" Coleridge requires may be seen in his sketch of the Rev. Bowyer (Chapter I) and the praise of Southey (Chapter III) in the Biographia Literaria.<sup>2</sup> Coleridge's comment on "useful knowledge" is also relevant. The very publication of the Biographia he hoped, would silence charges of idleness--"the Regrets of many concerning 'the want of Inclination and Exertion which prevented me from giving full scope to my mind.'"<sup>3</sup> Chapter XI ("An affectionate exhortation to those who in early life feel themselves disposed to become authors") is several times cited by Coleridge as being of practical value to the reader. To a nephew, he writes: "I suffered myself to be seduced from a path of Duty laid down for me, and in which I alone was qualified to have been truly useful--In my Literary Life, Chapt. XI . . . . I have endeavored to make some small compensation."<sup>4</sup> The critique of Wordsworth and discussion of poetic diction were similarly viewed by Coleridge; both were profitable in their attempt to elucidate and settle disputed questions.

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 43.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge's most extended biographical work is found in The Friend essays on Sir Alexander Ball, Governor of Malta.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 603.

<sup>4</sup>Letters, IV, 810.

Finally, Coleridge's reference to "anecdotes" in The Friend essay may be applied to certain parts of the Biographia. Chapter X ("A chapter of digressions and anecdotes, . . .") and "Satyrane's Letters" were accounted a legitimate use of such material, as interludes of "rational entertainment."<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge has less to say on the subject of autobiography. In an early letter, however, he remarks that the life of any author, and his own in particular, would provide a likely topic:

I could inform the dullest author how he might write an interesting book--let him relate the events of his own Life with honesty, not disguising the feelings that accompanied them. . . . As to my Life, it has all the charms of variety: high Life, & low Life, Vice & Virtue, great Folly & some Wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

And Coleridge frequently expressed himself as a figure in such a work. Throughout his letters are references to his "Literary Life," by which he meant not the Biographia (though Coleridge more often mentioned the work by this phrase than by its published title) but his own history and progress, his plans and writings in general. In addition, Coleridge's letters and notebooks are highly autobiographical; that is, aside from the usual details of life to be found in anyone's correspondence, they are closely analytical of all aspects of his existence:

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, III, 281.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, I, 302.

his opinions and beliefs, his physical health, his financial state, his relationships with others, his surroundings. Similarly, in a characteristically Romantic manner, Coleridge's work as a whole bears strong marks of his personality and experience, both in style and in substance.

Yet autobiography is not a continually repeated aim in Coleridge's preparation for the Biographia Literaria as, for example, are Wordsworth's writings and the theory of poetry. It is suggested, however, in an early notebook entry (September-October, 1803). Here, Coleridge records one purpose to which his autobiography might be put:

Seem to have made up my mind to write my metaphysical works, as my Life, & in my Life-- intermixed with all the other events / or history of the mind & fortunes of S. T. Coleridge.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening paragraph of the Biographia, Coleridge repeats this idea of autobiography as a framework:

I have used the narrative chiefly for the purpose of giving a continuity to the work, in part for the sake of the miscellaneous reflections suggested to me by the particular events, but still more as introductory to the statement of my principles in Politics, Religion, and Philosophy, and an application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism.<sup>2</sup>

Although Coleridge placed these explicit limitations on the role of "narrative" in the Biographia, it was criticized at

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<sup>1</sup>Notebooks, I, i, 1515.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, I, 1.

the time of its publication for a lack of sufficient autobiographical material. Wordsworth is reported to have found "fault with Coleridge for professing to write about himself and writing merely about Southey and Wordsworth."<sup>1</sup> H. N. Coleridge thought it necessary to append a "Biographical Supplement" (including some of Coleridge's letters and a brief account of his life and writings) to the 1847 edition. Nor have later critics considered the work a specimen of autobiography. George Watson cites a passage from Chapter XXIV of the Biographia to illustrate his belief that Coleridge himself did not so view the work:

I remember the ludicrous effect of the first sentence of an autobiography, which, happily for the writer, was as meagre in incidents as it is well possible for the Life of an Individual to be--"The eventful Life which I am about to record, from the hour in which I rose into existence on this Planet, &c." Yet when, notwithstanding this warning example of Self-importance before me, I review my own life, I cannot refrain from applying the same epithet to it, and with more than ordinary emphasis--and no private feeling, that affected myself only, should prevent me from publishing the same (for write it I assuredly shall, should life and leisure be granted me). . . .<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Gillman's incompleted life of Coleridge suggests a similar distinction between the published Biographia Literaria and a projected autobiography:

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley (3 vols.; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1938), I, 213.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, II, 210.

Coleridge's *Biographia* contains the history and development of his mind till 1816, . . . he called it his *Literary Life*, but of necessity it is intermixed with his biography, as he must have found it impossible to separate them. He had even half promised himself to write his own autobiography, but the want of success in his literary labours, and the state of his health, caused him to think seriously that his life was diminishing too fast, to permit him to finish those great works, of which he had long planned the execution.<sup>1</sup>

As Gillman indicates, the term "*Literaria*" narrows the focus of the *Biographia* as a personal narrative--though not necessarily to a great extent, for Coleridge's life was largely a literary one. And Coleridge continually stressed the fact that much of his thought and "dear-bought experience"<sup>2</sup> was distilled in the work. Even such an impersonal section as the chapters on philosophy is presented in terms of the impact of various theories upon Coleridge. Also autobiographical are "Satyrane's Letters," the chapters discussing reviews and reviewers, the "affectionate exhortation" to young authors, and most of the "digressions and anecdotes."

The very fact, of course, of its autobiographical framework characterizes the *Biographia Literaria* as a typically Romantic production, one of self-expression and subjective exploration. H. N. Coleridge recognized this aspect of the *Biographia* in describing its "course of mental struggle and

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<sup>1</sup>James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: William Pickering, 1838), I, 145-146.

<sup>2</sup>*Letters*, IV, 633.



self-evolvement."<sup>1</sup> Acknowledged as a "counterpart"<sup>2</sup> of Wordsworth's Prelude when the latter was published in 1850, the Biographia may be numbered among a whole series of mental histories recorded in the nineteenth century. Its publication occurs exactly midway during the years termed by one critic the "'age' of great autobiography."<sup>3</sup>

This short period, stretching roughly from Rousseau's Confessions (1782) to Goethe's Poetry and Truth (the last volume of which was completed in 1831), seems decisive in the history of autobiography. Its ground plan was now laid and subsequent writers have had little<sup>4</sup> more than modifications to contribute-- . . .

The essential mark of such works is their "striking discovery" that "a man is not a state of being but a process of development, and that he can be known only in the story of his life."<sup>5</sup> In this aspect, the Biographia--in part, Coleridge's account of "the progress of his opinions"--has affinities with the Confessions of Rousseau (a comparison drawn in several early reviews), The Prelude; Or Growth of a Poet's Mind, Confessions

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<sup>1</sup>"The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge," The Quarterly Review, LII (August, 1834), 14.

<sup>2</sup>"Review of The Prelude," The Examiner, No. 2,217 (July 27, 1850), 478.

<sup>3</sup>Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

of an English Opium-Eater, Sartor Resartus: the Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh, Apologia Pro Vita Sua: History of my Religious Opinions, John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, and others.

Thus, when Coleridge came to write the Biographia, certain subjects--closely interrelated, with each leading into another--had been introduced, reflected upon, and developed. A number of events occurring during the spring of 1815 led Coleridge to join these various strands of thought: the merit of Wordsworth as a poet; the nature of poetic diction; a philosophical theory of poetry in general; a proper "mode of conducting critical journals"; and an autobiographical framework to lend "continuity" to the whole.

Another statement by Wordsworth (the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" included in his Poems of 1815) provided Coleridge with a second start on the enthusiastic plans of the 1800-1804 period. And once again, Coleridge viewed his health and financial situation as obstacles to his literary aims. On March 7, 1815, he wrote to Joseph Cottle of his "yet fluctuating"<sup>1</sup> health and his lack of funds: both exigencies were forcing Coleridge to neglect work on a collection of "scattered" and "Manuscript Poems" in order to support himself

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<sup>1</sup>Sara Coleridge notes that the Biographia was "composed at that period of his life when his health was most deranged, and his mind most subjected to the influences of bodily disorder" / Biographia (1847), xxii /.

by laboring at "some mean Subject for the Newspapers."<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of the same month, the first reference to what will become the Biographia Literaria appeared in a long letter of "'petitionary' solemnity" to Byron. Coleridge told of his desire to publish a two-volume edition of his poems, "the better Half" previously unpublished; the remainder having appeared before in newspapers, the Lyrical Ballads, and in an edition of juvenile poems. In addition, the revised version of Remorse is to be included. Together with these,

a general Preface will be pre-fixed, on the Principles of philosophic and genial criticism relatively to the Fine Arts in general; but especially to poetry: . . . Both volumes will be ready for the Press by the first week in June.<sup>2</sup>

The following week, in a letter to Lady Beaumont (8 April 1815), Coleridge revealed his anger upon reading the "infamous" article on The Excursion in the Edinburgh Review: "If ever Guilt lay upon a Writer's head, and if malignity, slander, hypocrisy, and self-contradicting Baseness can constitute Guilt, I dare openly, and openly (please God!) I will, impeach the Writer of that Article of it." Coleridge confided, however, that he found The Excursion inferior to The Prelude or "Work on on the Growth of his own spirit."<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth learned of the

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 546.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 560-561.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 564.

contents of this letter, and sent a brief note (22 May 1815) to Coleridge in which he admitted to being rather "perplexed than enlightened" at this "comparative censure."<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's polite request for further criticism was answered by a several-page letter. Coleridge explained what he had expected The Excursion to be--"the first and only true Phil. Poem in existence." He promised Wordsworth that when he completed his Preface

which I shall have done in two or at farthest three days-- . . . I will then, dismissing all comparison either with the Poem on the Growth of your own Support [ sic ], or with the imagined Plan of the Recluse, state fairly my main Objections to the Excursion as it is--.<sup>2</sup>

No further letter to Wordsworth on The Excursion is extant; however, Coleridge's criticisms of the poem are contained in Chapters XXI and XXII of the Biographia. The expansion of the "Preface" referred to be Coleridge was, then, at least in part, caused by the "unsatisfactory exchange of letters with Wordsworth,"<sup>3</sup> as well as his reading "of The Excursion, . . . and particularly the 1815 edition of Wordsworth's Poems and the prefaces to them."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Middle Years, II, 670.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 574, 576.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 579n.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. Wordsworth's 1815 Poems included an "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," as well as the previously published "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads and its "Appendix" on poetic diction.

By the time of the next reference in Coleridge's letters to his "Preface," about two months later, the change in its conception has taken place. An account is given to Dr. Brabant (29 July 1815):

The necessity of extending, what I first intended as a preface, to an *Autobiographia literaria*, or Sketches of my literary Life & opinions, as far as Poetry and poetical Criticism is concerned, has confined me to my Study from 11 to 4, and from 6 to 10, . . . I have just finished it, having only the correction of the Mss. to go, thro'.--I have given a full account (raisonné) of the Controversy concerning Wordsworth's Poems and Theory, in which my name has been so constantly included--I have no doubt, that Wordsworth will be displeased--but I have done my Duty to myself and to the Public, in (as I believe) compleatly subverting the Theory & in proving that the Poet himself has never acted on it except in particular Stanzas which are the Blots of his Compositions.--One long passage--a disquisition on the powers of association, with the History of the Opinions on this subject from Aristotle to Hartley, and on the generic difference between the faculties of Fancy and Imagination--I did not indeed altogether insert, but I certainly extended and elaborated, with a view to your perusal--as laying the foundation Stones of the Constructive of Dynamic Philosophy in opposition to the merely mechanic--.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the "Preface" on the "Principles of philosophic and genial criticism" had been expanded to include--within an

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 578-579. George Watson, following the copy of this letter published in the April, 1870, Westminster Review (in which the clause "what I first intended as a preface" is not set off by commas), concludes that Chapters XIV to XXII were written as a "preface" to Chapters I to XIII of the Biographia (Watson, xiii-xiv). But as Griggs indicates in his corrected version of the letter, "at no time did Coleridge propose a preface to his autobiography" (Letters, IV, 578n).

"Autobiographia"--a discussion of Wordsworth's poetry, his theory of poetic diction, and the controversy over these. By August 10, J. J. Morgan, Coleridge's "literary Counsellor and Amanuensis,"<sup>1</sup> had sent "the first instalment of the 'copy' of the Biographia Literaria . . . to the printer."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 630.

<sup>2</sup>J. D. Campbell, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a Narrative of the Events of His Life (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894), p. 213. The account of the difficulties involved in the printing and publication of the Biographia is a complicated one; a brief summary will be given here. Beset by financial worries, Coleridge decided, early in 1815, to publish a collection of his poems. He received advances from printers in Bristol (his friends, Gutch, LeBreton, and Hood), who planned to sell the work to a London publisher. When Coleridge's plans changed to include a literary autobiography, this manuscript, too, was sent to Bristol. The printing of the Biographia (Chapters I-XXII) and the poems (the Sibylline Leaves) began in the fall of 1815. By May of 1816, nearly all of the poems had been printed, as well as the first twelve chapters of the Biographia. Because of the length of the latter, Gutch suggested that it be made into two volumes. In the meantime, Coleridge offered Gale and Fenner, publishers of the 1812 Friend, a revised edition of this work. The firm, in accepting it, asked also to publish "all Coleridge's present and future works" (Letters, III, 1). Coleridge agreed, and a settlement was made for the Biographia and Sibylline Leaves between the Bristol printers and the London publishers. The additional material required for the Biographia as a result of Gutch's mistaken estimation was printed by Gale and Fenner, beginning in May of 1817. But Coleridge's difficulties were not to end with the final publication of the three volumes in July, 1817. When Gale and Fenner became bankrupt in 1819, Coleridge borrowed money to buy Fenner's rights to his works--"with the exception of the Sibylline Leaves and Literary Life, the few remaining copies of which were bought . . . by a bookseller" (Letters, IV, 949). According to Griggs, "Fenner's records revealed that false returns had been made, the number of copies printed and sold greatly exceeding the sales reported to Coleridge" (Letters, IV, 947n).

In the following month, Coleridge suggests an additional cause for his enlargement of the "Preface." He explains, too, in an important letter to Gutch, that the preface has taken precedence over the poems:

in consequence of information received from various quarters I concluded, that a detailed publication of my opinions concerning Poetry & Poets, would excite more curiosity and a more immediate Interest than even my Poems.--Therefore, instead of Poems and a Preface I resolved to publish 'Biographical Sketches of my LITERARY LIFE, Principles, and Opinions, chiefly on the Subjects of Poetry and Philosophy, and the Differences at present prevailing concerning both: by S. T. Coleridge. To which are added, SIBYLLINE LEAVES, or a Collection of Poems, by the same Author.'--The Autobiography I regard as the main work: tho the Sibylline Leaves will contain every poem, I have written, except the Christabel which is not finished--both because I think that my Life &c will be more generally interesting, and because it will be an important Pioneer to the great Work on the Logos, Divine and Human, on which I have set my Heart and hope to ground my ultimate reputation--.<sup>1</sup>

Of the section sent to Gutch on August 10, Coleridge notes that this was but a part "tho' the whole was written, excepting only the philosophical Part which I at that time meant to comprize in a few Pages.--This has now become not only a sizeable Proportion of the whole, not only the most interesting to a certain class, but with the exception of four or five Pages of which due warning is given, the most entertaining to the general Reader, from the variety both of information and of

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 584-585.

personal Anecdotes--."1 And ten days later (27 September 1815), Coleridge writes of having "delivered compleat to my printer"<sup>2</sup> both volumes (that is, the first twenty-two chapters of the Biographia and Sibylline Leaves). Thus, what Coleridge assumed at this time to be the entire work was finished; within a few weeks, he had received the first proofs of the Biographia.

In a letter to Byron (15 October 1815), Coleridge asks to "take the liberty of forwarding" him copies of the Biographia and Sibylline Leaves "previously to the Publication." Coleridge describes the Biographia's aim:

to reduce criticism to a system, by the deduction of the Causes from Principles involved in our faculties. The Chapter on the Teveois and Functions of the Imagination, its contra-distinction from the Fancy (as to which I unexpectedly find my conviction widely different from that of Mr Wordsworth as explained in the new Preface to his collection of his poems) and the conditional necessity of the Fine Arts.<sup>3</sup>

The following week, again to Byron, Coleridge reveals another topic to be found in the Biographia--his defense against attacks published in periodical reviews on his "'want of Inclination and Exertion . . . .'"

The Report had done me such exceeding Injury, such substantial Wrong--and had besides been published in the broadest language in the Ed. Annual Register, the Ed. Review, the Quarterly

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 585-586.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 588.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 597-598.



Review, and other minors of the same family, that I felt myself bound in duty to myself and my children to notice & prove it's falsehood. This I have done at full in the Autobiography now in the Press: as far as delicacy permitted.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge views the Biographia not only as settling several disputes, but as proof of "intense and continued effort"<sup>2</sup> to counter charges of indolence. To William Sotheby, he expresses hope that his "literary Life, and Principles, were printed off," especially in reference to "the first Half of the Volume, as containing a fair statement of the Facts, on which I deemed myself to have a claim to the temporary assistance of the Friends of Literature--." <sup>3</sup>

During the next few months, Coleridge works at correcting the proof sheets, confidently awaiting the publication of his books. By April of 1816 he had settled with Dr. Gillman at Highgate, desiring to be "restored to . . . moral and bodily Health."<sup>4</sup> Here Coleridge continues reading the proof sheets, plans a revised edition of The Friend, and composes The Statesman's Manual. In May, the printers in Bristol had decided that the Biographia and Sibylline Leaves would fill three volumes

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 603-604.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 604.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 620. With Sotheby's aid, Coleridge received thirty pounds from the Royal Literary Fund.

<sup>4</sup>Letters, IV, 630.

instead of the two originally planned; the first volume of the Biographia would end with Chapter XIII. Because of the length of the copy printed thus far, Gutch estimated that the remaining chapters would fill a second volume of equal size. Early in July, Coleridge sends J. H. Frere sheets "which consist of a 1st Volume and part of a Second of my literary Life." He asks Frere for his comments, and states his "chief purposes" in the work: a self-defense against "public denunciation of having wasted my time in idleness," and a settlement "with all men of sense the controversy concerning the nature and claims of poetic Diction."<sup>1</sup> On July 8, Coleridge reports to the publisher Gale (intending to interest him in the new edition of The Friend) that the volumes of his poems and literary life "are printed and have passed the revision of the first Critics of this country."<sup>2</sup> However, about a week later Coleridge has received news which will necessitate a number of alterations in the text of the Biographia and a considerable delay in its publication:

Gutch has informed me that there was a mistake about the quantity of the Manuscript: and that the second volume won't make 200 pages. I was incredulous, you may remember, when the contrary was affirmed, but yielded to his positive assurance . . . .<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 646.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 650.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 660.

Coleridge's displeasure is shown to Gutch, the printer, who had issued a "Threat" when Coleridge delayed in returning some proof sheets. In answering, Coleridge insists that it is he who has "the right to complain," for "by this very step [the division of the Biographia into two volumes as recommended by Gutch] the disproportion has been made so great, that (it being too late to recur to the original plan) I have no way to remedy it, but by writing a hundred and fifty pages additional-on what, I am left to discover--."<sup>1</sup> Thus, as anxious as Coleridge was to see the Biographia in print, its appearance was to be postponed for a full year. Not until May of 1817 is he able to send to the printer "the finale of the Literary Life."<sup>2</sup>

After receiving word of Gutch's mistake, Coleridge completed negotiations with the firm of Gale and Fenner to publish the Biographia and Sibylline Leaves. The remaining material needed to fill the Biographia's second volume (and the end of Chapter XXII) was to be printed by Gale and Fenner. On September 22, Coleridge writes to Rest Fenner that he will start the following week "with the matter which I have been forced by the blunder and false assurance of the printer to add to the 'Literary Life,' in order to render the volumes of

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 661. The "additional" material comes to at least eighty-six pages in the Shawcross edition; this is equal to about one-fifth of the published Biographia.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 729.

something like the same size."<sup>1</sup> But Coleridge, having thought of the Biographia as complete, was impatient at having to return to the work. Absorbed with other projects--such as a "Prospectus" for Fenner's Encyclopaedia Metropolitana--and still hopeful of realizing his "greater Work on Christianity, considered as Philosophy and as the only Philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Coleridge no longer had the Biographia foremost in mind. As he explains to Josiah Wedgwood,

My Literary Life, and Sibylline Leaves . . . ought to have been published a year and a half ago: for so long has it been since the Printer received the last Sheet of the Manuscript . . . . At the end of the Biographia. . . you will find the particulars of the great Work, to the acquiring and preparing the materials of which I have devoted all the Time and Thought in my power for the last fifteen years.<sup>3</sup>

It was clearly a time of frustration for Coleridge, who found Gale and Fenner as unsympathetic and inefficient as were the printers in Bristol. In April, he indicates that progress is being made on the additional material--but not without difficulty:

with regard to the Life and Opinions--The moment any thing occurs which is of more interest to the House, and which it is imagined that I can do, the language is 'We must suspend it--

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 679.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 546.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 702-703. The "particulars" Coleridge mentions were printed, but not published.

it will be but a few days.' Instantly after this delay is spoken of recriminatively.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than compose entirely "new" material for the Biographia, Coleridge looked to his previously published writings. However, in the correspondence remaining from this period, there is little discussion of what additions and alterations were to be made, or why they were chosen.

The first change occurs in the conclusion of Chapter XXII, in which the last paragraph forms a transition into "Satyrane's Letters":

ere I speak of myself in the tones, which are alone natural to me under the circumstances of late years, I would fain present myself to the Reader as I was in the first dawn of my literary life: . . . For this purpose I have selected from the letters, which I wrote home from Germany, those which appeared likely to be most interesting, and at the same time most pertinent to the title of this work.<sup>2</sup>

Watson suggests that the alterations in Chapter XXII were more extensive, for "Fenner's printing begins in mid-chapter, at p. 145 of volume ii<sup>3</sup> and not at the beginning of 'Satyrane's Letters.'" Although no "certain evidence" exists that Coleridge rewrote the remainder of Chapter XXII "and padded out his examination of Wordsworth's characteristic defects and

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 726. Gale and Fenner were pressing Coleridge to work on their Encyclopaedia Metropolitana.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, II, 131.

<sup>3</sup>This occurs early in the discussion of Wordsworth's second "defect" Biographia, II, 104, end of l. 33.

excellences, . . . there is a natural presumption that he did so." Coleridge "avails himself here even more liberally than usual of long quotations, and the Fenner section of the chapter is nearly three times as long as the Gutch, which surely suggests it more than replaces the original ending."<sup>1</sup>

The next addition is the only one definitely mentioned in Coleridge's letters. He "reluctantly" consented that his play Zapolya "should fill the Gap"; however, as the result of further consultation with the publishers, decided that "Satyrane's Letters" (written to his wife in 1798-1799, and earlier revised and published in The Friend for November and December, 1809) were "in every respect more appropriate."<sup>2</sup> Both autobiographical and literary in their subject-matter, the three letters were pronounced "interesting" and "pertinent."<sup>3</sup>

Chapter XXIII, a review (first published as letters in the Courier, 29 August - 11 September, 1816) of C. R. Maturin's play Bertram, is not discussed by Coleridge as a possible filler. On the contrary, he denied authorship of the criticism a number of times. The letters were attributed by Coleridge to Morgan, his secretary: "that many of the Thoughts were mine, is a fact; but they were Thoughts, that had been collected from my

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia (Watson), xvi.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 703.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, II, 131.

conversation years before the Bertram was in existence."<sup>1</sup> But as Bertram was selected over his Zapolya for production at Drury Lane, Coleridge may have wished to avoid the charge of personal motives in his criticism. And shortly after their publication, Coleridge has assumed a larger share of credit for the articles. "The Essays on Bertram were in great measure dictated by me," he writes on September 17, 1816, "but I was not able to revise them or correct the style."<sup>2</sup> The rationale for including this critique opens Chapter XXIII. Coleridge's newly revised Friend was to contain an early political essay as proof that his "principles of politics have sustained no change." Similarly,

I have annexed to my Letters from Germany, with particular reference to that, which contains a disquisition on the modern drama [Letter II], a critique on the Tragedy of Bertram, written within the last twelve months: in proof, that I have been as falsely charged with any fickleness in my principles of taste.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Chapter XXIV, a defense of Coleridge's religious principles and an answer to Hazlitt's attacks of 1816, provides a conclusion to the Biographia. Watson believes that the end of this chapter, the statement of Coleridge's religious belief, "was probably the conclusion of the Biographia of the

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 720.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 670.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, II, 180-181.

1815 manuscript, . . . its first pages rewritten to include the complaint against Hazlitt."<sup>1</sup> Watson bases his surmise on a letter to Thomas Curtis (29 April 1817) in which Coleridge states: "The introductory pages for the Life and Opinions I am now employed on, and if I can finish it before I go to bed I will."<sup>2</sup> Griggs feels that since "the Biographia contains no 'introductory pages', Coleridge probably refers to the preliminary matter inserted at the beginning of Sibylline Leaves."<sup>3</sup> Watson interprets Coleridge's "introductory pages" as the reply to Hazlitt, "introductory to the religious apologia"<sup>4</sup> which would have directly followed the criticism of Wordsworth. Coleridge's religious orthodoxy was especially attacked, however, in Hazlitt's review of The Statesman's Manual, which did not appear until the fall of 1816. And the heading of Chapter XXII, part of the Bristol printing, does not mention such a topic. But again, no definite evidence can be given for the amount of writing or rewriting done for Chapter XXIV.

Coleridge attempted, therefore, to relate these additions to the topics of the original twenty-two chapters. The subject of Wordsworth's poetry was probably lengthened;

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia (Watson), xvii-xviii.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 727.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 727n.

<sup>4</sup>Biographia (Watson), xvii.



"Satyrane's Letters" combined autobiography and criticism; the review of Bertram was connected with Coleridge's general theory or "principles of taste"; and Chapter XXIV returns to two persistent themes--Coleridge's mental history and the errors of critical journals. By May 22, Coleridge had completed the above material; he wrote then of his intention to meet with Fenner "the day after tomorrow" and "bring with me all that remains for me to do with regard to the Literary Life & the Sibylline Leaves--Errata &c."<sup>1</sup> And on July 22, he sent Thomas Poole "a corrected copy"<sup>2</sup> of the three volumes. Thus, after much delay, confusion, and anxiety for Coleridge, the Biographia was published in the middle of July, 1817.<sup>3</sup> As Watson remarks,

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 734.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 754.

<sup>3</sup>Griggs corrects T. J. Wise's statement [A Biography <sup>ble-</sup> of the Writings in Prose and Verse of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London, 1913), pp. 96-97, 102 / that the Biographia was published in July, and Sibylline Leaves in August, for "the present letter / to Poole, quoted above / indicates that both works had been issued before 22 July. The Biographia appeared first and contains among the advertisements an announcement of Sibylline Leaves as 'nearly ready'" (Letters, IV, 754n). A review of Sibylline Leaves in The Literary Gazette / I (26 July 1817), 49-52 /, not mentioned in any discussion of dating the Biographia, states that in the "late period" of "this week" Coleridge had "bequeathed to the public" the three volumes. The article was written according to a note, for the previous Saturday (that is, July 19). If this is correct, the Biographia was issued between the 16th and 18th of July. Griggs says that Sibylline Leaves "was published later in the same month" (Letters, III, lii). However, there would seem to have been little time, no more than a day or two, between the publication of the Biographia and the poems.

it must have been "a dreary enough occasion."<sup>1</sup> The time spent in completing the Biographia was a very trying one for Coleridge; again, his health and finances were the main obstacles. As he had written to Southey at the end of April:

I have been so ill from a violent cold in my Limbs and a sore throat & so bewildered by the importunacy of the Booksellers [Gale and Fenner]. . . that I was half out of my senses.<sup>2</sup>

Nor was the Biographia to prove a financial or critical success. It was never reprinted during Coleridge's lifetime, and its immediate reception was one of hostility and ridicule.

"Seldom have I written that in a day," declares Coleridge in answer to his critics, "the acquisition or investigation of which has not cost me the previous labour of a month."<sup>3</sup> This statement can well be applied to the Biographia Literaria; for by tracing the growth of its main ideas, it is evident that the work was the culmination of many years of thought and effort--the achievement of "prolonged, patient, and mature consideration."<sup>4</sup> All five of its major themes were originated and developed at least fifteen years prior to publication. A time of "acquisition" and "investigation" provided Coleridge

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia (Watson), xviii.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 725.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, I, 149.

<sup>4</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 92.

with the means to unify his aims and discover the arguments best suited for his presentation. These topics--the merits and faults of Wordsworth's poetry, the question of poetic diction, the nature of poetry and the poetic imagination, and the defects of critical journals--would be discussed, therefore, within a loose, autobiographical framework.

A study of Coleridge's long-term aims throws light on the subject-matter of the Biographia, and helps to explain the manner in which various topics became associated in his mind. The more immediate background of the work (its actual composition and publication, 1815-1817) is relevant to questions of structure and design as well as purpose. Problems of genre ("to what sort his work belongs") and audience ("for what description of readers it is intended"),<sup>1</sup> to which less explicit attention is given by Coleridge, may be examined in relation to the critical reception of the Biographia Literaria.

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<sup>1</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 113.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA: 1817 AND AFTER

After the publication of the Biographia Literaria in July of 1817, Coleridge himself had little further comment on the work. The many frustrations endured at the hands of printer and publisher, the attacks upon the book in critical journals, and his pressing financial need to continue immediately with other writings and lectures, must have seemed, from previous experience, all too familiar to Coleridge. In addition, the printing of the Biographia had proved unsatisfactory, as he indicated in a letter to Thomas Poole (22 July 1817):

I intreat your acceptance of a corrected copy of my Sibylline Leaves & Literary Life--and so wildly have they been printed, that a corrected Copy is of some value to those, to whom the works themselves are of any. I would, that the misprinting had been the worst of the delusions and ill-usage, to which, my credulity exposed me, from the . . . Printer.<sup>1</sup>

As noted earlier, the Biographia was never to be reprinted during Coleridge's lifetime. The causes of the Biographia's lack of success were both real and accidental--the genuine

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 754.

difficulties inherent in the work, and the largely imagined problems manufactured by unsympathetic reviewers. As Mill was later to point out, "the class of thinkers has scarcely yet arisen by whom he [Coleridge] is to be judged."<sup>1</sup> But more than Coleridge's ideas caused dispute. The aspects of the Biographia most objected to were those of structure, style, and tone--an alleged formlessness and obscurity in Coleridge's manner of expression, and a lack of ability to communicate effectively with his reader. Many of the criticisms that are still current originated in the reaction of Coleridge's contemporaries to the Biographia Literaria.

Shortly after receiving the completed Biographia, Coleridge inscribed a copy of the second volume for his son Derwent. Here, Coleridge repeats his aims and expresses doubt that certain of his readers will be pleased:

In this volume, my dear Derwent, I have compressed all that I know of the principles of a sober yet not ungenial Criticism; and most anxiously have I avoided all mere assertion--all opinion not followed or preceded by the reasons, on which it had been grounded. Of one thing I am distinctly conscious, viz. that my main motive and continued impulse was to secure, as far as in me lay, an intelligent admiration to Mr. Wordsworth's Poems--and while I frankly avowed what I deemed defects, and why I deemed them so, yet to evince how very trifling they were not only in importance but even in the proportional space occupied by them; . . . If in doing so I

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<sup>1</sup>"Coleridge and His Works," The London and Westminster Review, XXXIII (March, 1840), 260.

have offended where I should most wish and did most expect to please, it is but one of many proofs that I have been too apt to judge of the feelings of others by my own.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge's prediction proved correct, for Wordsworth seemed offended by this form of "intelligent admiration." Although Wordsworth's poems and prefaces were essential to the development of the Biographia, he took little interest in the work. According to Henry Crabb Robinson, "Coleridge's book has given him no pleasure, and he finds fault with Coleridge for professing to write about himself and writing merely about Southey and Wordsworth." Further, "with the criticism on the poetry too he is not satisfied. The praise is extravagant and the censure inconsiderate."<sup>2</sup> While their quarrel had concluded with "a kind of reconciliation"<sup>3</sup> in 1812, relations between Wordsworth and Coleridge continued to be strained. Wordsworth had also taken exception to Coleridge's "comparative censure"<sup>4</sup> of The Excursion, despite the fact that Coleridge defended the poem against the "malignity, slander, hypocrisy and self-contradicting Baseness"<sup>5</sup> of the Edinburgh Review's article. In

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 756-757.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), I, 213.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, III, 296n.

<sup>4</sup>Wordsworth, Middle Years, II, 669.

<sup>5</sup>Letters, IV, 564.

Wordsworth's collected letters of this period, there is but one mention of the Biographia. He writes that he has "not read Mr. Coleridge's 'Biographia', having contented myself with skimming parts of it; . . . I shall never read a syllable of Mr. Jefferson [sic] Critique. Indeed I am heartily sick of even the best criticism."<sup>1</sup> This lack of interest on the part of Wordsworth, though regrettable, was not unexpected. Before publication of the Biographia, Coleridge had written to Sotheby: "I anticipate, that my Criticisms will not please or satisfy Wordsworth, or Wordsworth's Detractors."<sup>2</sup> Ironically, in stating his objections to Wordsworth's views on fancy and imagination (Chapter XII), Coleridge had envisioned Wordsworth as a thoughtful and interested audience--"Would to Heaven, I might meet with many such readers."<sup>3</sup> But Wordsworth, with his expressed aversion to criticism in general, and his apparent sensitivity where his own works were concerned, was hardly the ideal reader.

Nor did the reviewers, on the whole, attempt to understand the Biographia Literaria. The reception of the work provides many illustrations of Coleridge's charges against critical journals: "the substitution of assertion for

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Middle Years, II, 791.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 620.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, I, 194.

argument"; and "the frequency of arbitrary and sometimes petulant verdicts, not seldom unsupported even by a single quotation from the work condemned."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Coleridge's report to Thomas Poole on the reaction to the Lyrical Ballads--"laughed at and disliked by all with very few exceptions"<sup>2</sup>--might have also been applied to the Biographia.

An anonymous article in The Literary Gazette is the first critical notice of the Biographia. The reviewer, in discussing Sibylline Leaves, notes that he "only had time to dip so cursorily into the . . . [Biographia] as to discover, that it is, where not metaphysical, an entertaining production." However, he is uncertain as to whether the entertainment is "with reference to what is to be laughed with or to be laughed at in its contents."<sup>3</sup> Two weeks later, in evaluating the Biographia, the reviewer is less doubtful. Coleridge is attacked on his matter ("a medley of incoherent jargon") and form ("there is . . . none of that discretion in blotting, which has been deemed the highest praise of the greatest authors"). The Biographia, a "curious intermixture of the amusing and the absurd," is acknowledged to contain "some

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, II, 90.

<sup>2</sup>Minnow Among Tritons, ed. Stephen Potter (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch Press, 1934), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>"Review of Sibylline Leaves," The Literary Gazette, I (26 July 1817), 49-52.



entertaining anecdotes introduced among the subtle disquisitions." However, the final verdict is a negative one. Coleridge is accused of madness and inconsistency; an example of the latter is Chapter XXIII, pronounced "astonishing from the same pen which so warmly deprecates the severity of criticism exercised towards its own productions."<sup>1</sup>

From Hazlitt--following his attacks on Christabel and The Statesman's Manual, and Coleridge's rebuttal to these in Chapter XXIV--only animosity could be expected. An unsigned article, continuing his series of "rancor and rabies,"<sup>2</sup> appeared in the Edinburgh Review for August. Hazlitt opens with a complaint that the Biographia's title is misleading, for Coleridge has written an apology rather than an account "of his Life and Opinions."<sup>3</sup> The article then takes issue with most of Coleridge's opinions, beginning with those on philosophy, and intersperses this with personal abuse.

Hazlitt's often-repeated mockery of Coleridge's philosophical interests ("Fichte and Schelling and Lessing, and God knows who"<sup>4</sup>) is in evidence; he describes Coleridge as "going

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<sup>1</sup>"Review of Biographia Literaria," The Literary Gazette, I (9 August 1817), 83-85.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 831.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridge's Literary Life," The Edinburgh Review, XXVIII (August, 1817), 488.

<sup>4</sup>The Spirit of the Age (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1910), p. 200.

up in an air-balloon filled with fetid gas from the writings of Jacob Behmen and the mystics" (p. 491). The "great German oracle Kant" is said to possess a system which "appears . . . the most wilful and monstrous absurdity that was ever invented" (p. 494). Those praised by Coleridge are inevitably condemned by Hazlitt. For example, finding Coleridge's defense of Southey irrelevant, he then offers his own digression on Southey's faults--his lack of humor and of depth. "On practical and political matters, we cannot think him a writer of any weight" (p. 494). Similarly, a lengthy discussion of Burke opposes Coleridge's position, with Hazlitt dismissing the former's ideas as insignificant: "Burke's literary talents, were, after all, his chief excellence" (p. 506). Hazlitt's bias in both cases is political; in the same manner he slightly refers to Coleridge as "one of our reformed, Antijacobin poets" (p. 515).

The chapters on Wordsworth, which Hazlitt does "not think very remarkable either for clearness or candour" (p. 507), are passed over entirely. Nor will he deal with Coleridge's section "on the imagination, or esemplastic power": "As Mr C. has suppressed his Disquisition on the Imagination as unintelligible, we do not think it fair to make any remarks on the 200 pages of prefatory matter" (p. 514). The only merit Hazlitt can discover in the Biographia lies in Chapter X--a "chapter of digressions and anecdotes." Coleridge's account of his early

years, including The Watchman venture, the trip to Germany, and his work for the Morning Post, is judged to be "pleasingly written," "an easy, gossipping, garrulous account" (pp. 498-499). But unwilling to give unmixed praise, Hazlitt adds that Coleridge is "disposed to magnify small matters into ideal importance" (p. 499).

Hazlitt again wanders from his subject at the conclusion of the review, contemptuously depicting poets in general, who "live in an ideal world of their own; and it would be, perhaps, as well if they were confined to it. . . . They are dangerous leaders and treacherous followers" (p. 514). Another long aside is found in Francis Jeffrey's five page "footnote" to Hazlitt's review. Jeffrey cites Coleridge's "charges" against him in the Biographia Literaria (Vol. I, 36n-37n; Vol. II, 299, 302), and "begs leave to answer distinctly" (p. 508n). The visit to Keswick is described from Jeffrey's point of view: he recalls "the eloquence and poetical warmth" (p. 509n) of Coleridge's conversation, his compliments on the poem "Love," Coleridge's complaints at being linked with the "Lake" school, and his urging of Coleridge to publish "Christabel"--though he had heard but "four or five lines" (p. 510n) of the poem. Jeffrey then denies the accusation that he had borrowed from Coleridge's letter to him on "our older prose writers" (p. 510n); nor did he specify "Messrs Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, as injudicious imitators of these writers" (p. 510n). "As to

the review of the Lay Sermon," writes Jeffrey, "I have only to say, in one word, that I never employed or suborned any body to abuse or extol it or any other publication" (pp. 511n-512n). This controversy between Coleridge and Jeffrey was of interest to their contemporaries, with several reviewers of the Biographia stating their position. If Jeffrey did not instigate Hazlitt's attack on "the Lay Sermon," he did indeed retaliate against Coleridge's remarks by "commissioning Hazlitt to review the Biographia."<sup>1</sup>

Ending on the same note of personal antagonism, Hazlitt describes Coleridge, in the Biographia, as "indulging his maudlin egotism and his mawkish spleen in fulsome eulogies of his own virtues, and nauseous abuse of his contemporaries . . . making excuses for doing nothing himself, and assigning bad motives for what others have done.--Till he can do something better, we would rather hear no more of him" (p. 515). Hazlitt therefore, makes no real attempt to evaluate the Biographia Literaria, and the review remains a disappointment from one now termed "the most representative critic in English romanticism."<sup>2</sup> The causes for this failure were mainly personal: his disagreement with Coleridge's more conservative outlook--"a bad philosopher and a worse politician" (p. 514); a feeling that he had

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 668n.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Jackson Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1952), p. 282.

been slighted by Coleridge; and finally, a belief that Coleridge had not lived up to his earlier promise. Just a year later, in his lecture "On the Living Poets," Hazlitt was to call Coleridge "the only person from whom I ever learnt any thing." However, he regrets, "that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more."<sup>1</sup> And although Hazlitt does make an attempt to criticize Coleridge's ideas on poetry and philosophy, his reading of the Biographia is superficial; by his own admission, the work's greatest interest is to be found in one of its lesser parts (Chapter X).

In Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for October of 1817, John Wilson surpasses Hazlitt in a condemnation of Coleridge's character and literary achievement. The review opens with a lengthy and inflated pronouncement on the folly of writing one's memoirs. "What good to mankind has ever flowed from the confessions of Rousseau, or the autobiographical sketch of Hume?"<sup>2</sup> The Biographia Literaria is equally worthless: "it strengthens every argument against the composition" (p. 5) of such. Hazlitt's charge of conceit is echoed by Wilson, who characterizes the Biographia as a product of "inveterate and diseased egotism" (p. 5). "It seems impossible that Mr. Coleridge can be greatly respected either by the Public or himself" (p. 5).

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<sup>1</sup>Lectures on the English Poets (London: Printed for Taylor and Hessey, 1818), pp. 329-330.

<sup>2</sup>"Some Observations on the 'Biographia Literaria' of S. T. Coleridge, Esq.--1817," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, II (October, 1817), 4.

Wilson's sole favorable remark, here showing more perception than Hazlitt, concerns the "many acute, ingenious, and even sensible observations" (p. 16) in the chapters on Wordsworth. The remainder of the article, however, is merely a catalogue of insults. Wilson finds fault with Coleridge's wit--"most execrable and disgusting" (p. 10), his politics--"multitudinous . . . inconsistency" (p. 13), his religious and philosophical beliefs--"fluctuates from theory to theory" (p. 18), and his learning--"he has done nothing in any one department of human knowledge" (p. 5).

The form of the Biographia is strongly censured:

Considered merely in a literary point of view, the work is most execrable. . . . he has never in one single instance finished a discussion; and while he darkens what was dark before into tenfold obscurity, he so treats the most ordinary common-places as to give them the air of mysteries (p. 5).

Wilson finds the work lacking in merit from start to finish:

"the very first sentence . . . shows how incompetent Mr Coleridge is for the task he has undertaken. . . . [and] the concluding chapter of the Biography is perhaps the most pitiful of the whole . . . a most surprising mixture of the pathetic and the ludicrous" (pp. 8, 15). Especially criticized are the references to Jeffrey, and Chapters XIII and XXIII. According to Wilson, the "whole second volume [of the Biographia] is interspersed with mysterious innuendoes" (p. 14) against Jeffrey. But Coleridge's efforts are futile; "in his angry ravings [he]

collects together all the fond trash of literary gossip to fling at his adversary, but which is blown . . . back upon himself with odium and infamy" (p. 14). Chapter XIII, a "laughable non-performance unequalled in the annals of literary history" (p. 16), is cited as one of Coleridge's vain efforts to elucidate that "of which he knows less than nothing" (p. 17). The "diatribe" on Bertram (Chapter XXIII) is interpreted as an "envious persecution": "there is more malignity, and envy, and jealousy, and misrepresentation, and bad wit, in this Critical Essay, than in all the Reviews now existing, from the Edinburgh down to the Lady's Magazine" (p. 17).

In its general evaluation of Coleridge, the review is similarly positive and hostile. "Mr Coleridge," who is "but an obscure name in English literature," stands "on much lower ground" (p. 6) than do Southey and Wordsworth. Finally, Wilson alludes to Coleridge's relationship with his wife and assumes a righteous position:

We have done. We have felt it our duty to speak with severity of this book and its author, . . . We have not been speaking in the cause of Literature only, but, as we conceive, in the cause of Morality and Religion. For it is not fitting that he should be held up as an example to the rising generation (but, on the contrary, he should be exposed as a most dangerous model), who has alternately embraced, defended, and thrown aside all systems of Philosophy, and all creeds of Religion; . . . according as he is impelled by vanity, envy, or diseased desire of change (p. 18).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This part of Wilson's review so disturbed Coleridge that he asked Crabb Robinson for his "private and confidential

Wilson's review, like Hazlitt's, turns from a consideration of the Biographia itself to extra-literary questions. Since the idea of a mind growing and changing seems repugnant to him, Coleridge's "inconsistency" is deemed a major fault. What might have been legitimate criticisms are not substantiated and developed. Complaints are issued against Coleridge both for providing too few details of his life, and for arrogantly offering any at all. Wilson's motivations for this attack are less clear than Hazlitt's, though one critic has noted that the former was "handicapped by a very unstable temperament, and would sometimes behave in a way that was almost idiotic in its maliciousness."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Blackwood's and the Edinburgh, The British Critic claims that it will examine the Biographia Literaria quite "simply as a literary performance."<sup>2</sup> And although the reviewer does not altogether avoid personality, he does furnish

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advice and opinion concerning the practicability and the expediency of bringing to legal Justice the Publisher of the atrocious Calumny therein contained." The old charge that Coleridge had left "his wife destitute" (Biographia, I, 49n) is again denied: "beyond my absolute necessities . . . I have held myself accountable to her for every shilling" (Letters, IV, 785-786). Robinson thought it unadvisable to bring suit, and nothing came of the idea.

<sup>2</sup>John Wain, Contemporary Reviews of Romantic Poetry (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1953), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridge's Sibylline Leaves, and Biographia Literaria," The British Critic, VIII (November, 1817), 462.



a more satisfying critique than either Hazlitt or Wilson. The Biographia is termed "an able, and . . . upon the whole, an entertaining performance" (p. 463); although it is acknowledged to be complex and uneven, an attempt is made to understand Coleridge's intentions. For example, the work's subtitle ("Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions") is accepted as signifying "very accurately the real nature of his publication," and the reviewer does not call for additional "circumstances . . . [of] personal history" (p. 462).

The review examines both the subject-matter (which is divided into three main topics: philosophy, poetry, and "anonymous critics") and form of the Biographia. Coleridge's philosophy--"a bottomless discussion" (p. 477)--is judged the least valuable part of the work. The reviewer warns:

In justice to our readers it is necessary to state, that a very large proportion of the two volumes . . . is filled up with matter, which our author calls Philosophy; but it is philosophy of so very heteroclitic a description, that we really hardly know how to allude to the subject, . . . Had we met with the metaphysical disquisitions . . . in an anonymous publication, we should have unquestionably laid them aside, as the production of a very ordinary writer indeed (p. 480).

But the remainder of the Biographia, when Coleridge "walks upon the earth like other men," shows him to possess "an amiable, cultivated, and original mind" (p. 462). Coleridge is advised to forgo the publication of philosophical writings, for "we know so much of the present state of feeling in this country . . . as emboldens us to prophecy, that . . . he will draw down

upon his head such a tempest of ridicule and derision, as he may probably live long enough to repent of" (p. 481).

The second topic, poetry, "to which, (in subordination to a critical review of Mr. Wordsworth's productions,) a very considerable portion of the two volumes is devoted" (p. 463), is more to the reviewer's liking:

We coincide with our author for the most part, in the substance of the opinions which he expresses upon this controverted subject, . . . Mr. Coleridge's observations upon the diction of Mr. Wordsworth; contain many just and striking thoughts; and the analytical criticisms which occur in various parts of the discussion, upon one or two of the poems contained in the "Lyrical Ballads," impressed us with a very favourable opinion of his good taste and discrimination (p. 478).

Several pages from Chapter XXII of the Biographia are quoted as "a specimen" of Coleridge's "impartiality" (p. 478).

The subject of "anonymous critics" is of greatest interest to the writer in The British Critic; "reviews and reviewers," he claims, "seem to have been uppermost in our author's mind, when he projected the work before us, as they are scarcely ever lost sight of by him in the progress of it" (p. 471). It is in this section that the reviewer deviates from his purpose of viewing the Biographia solely as a "literary performance." The judicial position of critics is upheld in opposition to Coleridge's disapproval of the methods they employ

An author has no better right to complain . . . of the injury done to his private interests, by anonymous criticism, than a statesman to complain

of being turned out of office, in consequence of his measures being proved to be prejudicial to the public. Authors are just as much public characters as secretaries of state are; . . . they must expect that . . . their opinions and principles will become a subject of discussion; misrepresentation and misconception . . . are matters of course (pp. 467-468).

Even a critic's use of "slander and calumny and personal invective" is less harmful than Coleridge would have it, for "if one party condemn in excess, another will generally be found to praise in an equal excess; and . . . the real truth gradually separates itself from the errors, with which it had been mixed" (p. 468).

The dispute with Jeffrey occupies several pages in The British Critic, with Coleridge's footnote on the subject (Chapter III) quoted in its entirety. The reviewer finds Coleridge's mention of his "hospitable attention"<sup>1</sup> towards Jeffrey to be "rather of a ridiculous nature": as he explains, "a man is not called upon to flatter another, merely because he has been in his house and received no unfriendly treatment; yet it would surely be still more strange to give this as a reason for abusing him" (p. 474). Yet the writer sympathizes with the "anti-jacobin poets"--Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. If they "are really and truly the sort of persons whom he [Jeffrey] describes them to be . . . we shall be forced to admire the moderation, with which he has expressed himself, when

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 36n.

speaking of them and their works" (p. 474). That the three are not "always violent and vulgar in their opinions" (p. 474) as Jeffrey had claimed, is implied in the reviewer's agreement with the remarks on Southey (Chapter III). Coleridge's "eloquent and well-deserved panegyric" (p. 477) is greatly admired; furthermore, particular attention is called to Southey's "clearness, purity, . . . and simplicity" of style and his "chastest delicacy" of thought (pp. 475-476).

The style and structure of the Biographia Literaria are also discussed, though rather briefly. Coleridge's prose is said to be

certainly expressive, but it does not seem to be constructed upon any settled principles of composition, farther than are implied in an apparent preference of our early writers, not only over those upon whose style the taste of the present day seems to be chiefly modelled, but over Addison and Dryden, and the writers of what we cannot but think the Augustan age of our prose literature (p. 463).

The reviewer feels that Coleridge should have sought a middle way rather than attempting to imitate the "early writers," whose faults "proceed from affectation and pretension" (p. 463). The lengthy sentences, "learned phrases," and "obsolete forms of expression" (p. 463) in the Biographia are objected to; however, in much of the work, Coleridge writes

with an air of truth and simplicity, which is plainly natural to him; and his language, though sometimes pedantic, and often by no means free from that philosophical jargon which is almost the characteristic affectation of the

present race of writers, is nevertheless, that of a scholar; . . . although a little innocent vanity is every now and then making its appearance, yet in general it merely gives an air of naiveté and quaintness to his expressions, and never assumes the form of arrogance and self-conceit (p. 464).

A lack of structure or "arrangement" in the Biographia is excused: "a work, which professes to give an account of opinions, that are linked to each other by no other connection, than that which arises from their having belonged to the same individual, cannot be supposed to be arranged upon any method founded on the nature of things" (p. 464). Although the reviewer had pointed out "three prominent topics" (p. 462) in the Biographia Literaria, he is unable to discover any unifying element or relationship among them. A thoughtful and fairly objective review, The British Critic is, nevertheless, more absorbed in current controversy than in the "literary performance." Important problems in the Biographia are at times recognized, but are only superficially investigated.

The Biographia Literaria became, at this time, a subject of some debate in Blackwood's. Several articles followed Wilson's review and generally disputed it. In the December issue, a letter signed "J. S." engages in a defense of Coleridge's character. The writer, who professes to be an impartial outsider, answers Wilson's attack--"that ungenerous piece of laboured criticism--that coarse exertion of individual opinion" which neglected "the work for the purpose of vilifying

the man."<sup>1</sup> A plea is made to overlook the Biographia's faults, because "Mr C. in judgment and wisdom is but in his first age" (p. 286). The biographical aspects of the work are useful, the writer believes, for "many will slight the warnings of the good, and yet be awed by the conversion of the frail" (p. 287).

About a year later, a brief note in Blackwood's questions Coleridge's attribution of an idea found in "Hume's Essay on association"<sup>2</sup> to St. Thomas Aquinas (Chapter V). The writer maintains that "Mr Coleridge's dislike to Hume has betrayed him into a most unjust charge."<sup>3</sup> In addition to this disagreement, the Biographia is criticized as "rambling" and "confused" in form; its content, however, is valued--"there is . . . to be found a vast quantity of singularly acute metaphysical disquisition; and there occur many very amusing illustrations and anecdotes (pp. 653-654).

One in a series of "Essays on the Lake School of Poetry" takes up the subjects of Coleridge's reputation and his relationship with his audience. The writer describes Coleridge's "misfortunes" at the hand of critics who "could not possibly

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<sup>1</sup>J. S., "To the Reviewer of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for October," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, II (December, 1817), 286-287.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, I, 73.

<sup>3</sup>"David Hume Charged by Mr Coleridge with Plagiarism from St Thomas Aquinas," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, III (September, 1818), 656.

have . . . written from any motives but those of malice, or with any purposes but those of misrepresentation."<sup>1</sup> While deploring this impropriety of . . . treatment," the reviewer insists that the blame "should be divided between himself [Coleridge] and his countrymen" (pp. 3-4). The complaint that Coleridge is "a most eccentric author" refers specifically here to his poems, but is also typical of the reaction--frequent in later criticism--to his prose:

The true subject for regret is, that the unfavorable reception he has met with, seems to have led him to throw aside almost all regard for the associations of the multitude--and to think, that nothing could be so worthy of a great genius, so unworthily despised, as to reject in his subsequent compositions every standard save that of his own private whims (p. 4).

In this way, Coleridge "widened the breach every day between himself and the public" (p. 4). The reviewer concludes, in acknowledging Coleridge's poetic gifts, with regret for another often-repeated "fault"--that of his "strange and unworthy indolence" (p. 12).

On similar topics is Coleridge's own "Letter to Peter Morris, M. D. on the Sorts and Uses of Literary Praise," published in Blackwood's without his permission.<sup>2</sup> Coleridge

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<sup>1</sup>"Essays on the Lake School of Poetry, No III.--Coleridge," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, VI (October, 1819), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, VII (September, 1820), 629-631. Quoted from Letters, IV, 966-971. The letter, written in November of 1819, thanked Peter Morris /John G. Lockhart/

acknowledges the worth of true praise; for "without its support, the hopes and purposes of genius sink back on the heart, like a sigh on the tightened chest of a sick man" (p. 966). He then distinguishes several types of critics. One of these, "Atticus," possesses the traits that Coleridge had found in Wordsworth: "comfortless discretion" in his judgments; comparisons brought forth in order to "wither and dry up"; desirous of sympathy, but not disposed to "radicate the same" (p. 968). In a "whimsical medley of similes and metaphors" (p. 969), Coleridge describes that "quarrelsome company," his "unfriends, the Edinburgh Reviewers"; their attacks, however, are less cutting than "the silence of a supposed friend" (pp. 968-969). He is not inclined to wait, as The British Critic would have one, for excesses of praise and blame to balance out: "It were hard indeed, if strangers may take upon them the public office of a man's judges and biographers, and the man himself be condemned for furnishing a table of errata" (p. 970). A lack of ability for self-criticism and a failure to anticipate one's audience (both of which Coleridge accuses himself on other occasions) are alluded to in the passage on "Atticus." "There are," he points out, "different tempers in genius; and there are men richly

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who had defended the Biographia in his Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk (3 vols.; Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1819), II, 218-221. Coleridge was "sorely vexed" when the letter appeared; "so many persons," he feared, "would know that it alluded in part to Wordsworth" (Unpublished Letters, II, 276).



gifted, who yet, after each successive effort of composition, lose the inward courage that should enable them to decide rightly on the degree of their success" (p. 967). But if Coleridge could not always please his audience, he was often able to anticipate its capabilities and preferences. For example, he predicts in the Biographia Literaria that but few readers will assimilate certain parts of the work:

It is neither possible or necessary for all men, or for many, to be PHILOSOPHERS. . . . The first range of hills, that encircles the scanty vale of human life, is the horizon for the majority of its inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the tenth and eleventh chapters contain more popular material which, Coleridge expected, might amuse that "majority."

That such expectations were frequently correct may be illustrated by an article in The Monthly Review. The writer ignores the chapters leading to the definition of "the imagination, or esemplastic power": "with the metaphysics, indeed, and the rest of the 'omne scibile' of the work, saving the extraordinary criticisms on Mr. Wordsworth, we shall not interfere."<sup>2</sup> And Coleridge's philosophical interests are ridiculed; he is termed "an itinerant philosopher. . . . the very prince of the British Peripatetics" (p. 129). Much admired, however, were

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 164-165.

<sup>2</sup>"Coleridge's Biographia Literaria," The Monthly Review, LXXXVIII (February, 1819), 129.

the digressions and anecdotes, and the "affectionate exhortation" to young authors. The reviewer admits that sections of Vol. I are "very lively and laughable; and we offer our thanks to Mr. Coleridge for much good-humoured and rational exposure of his own follies" (p. 131). Coleridge's advice to aspiring authors is "seriously" recommended "to the careful perusal of those who are concerned" (p. 129).

The particular criticisms of Wordsworth are found to be valid, but not Coleridge's conclusions on the poet's greatness:

Mr. Coleridge has . . . pointed out so many errors of design and execution in this very moderate writer, (as we must ever consider him,) and has furnished a clue to the exposure of so many more absurdities, that we cannot but here rank Mr. C. among the unintentional defenders of good taste and good sense in poetry (p. 132).

The reviewer agrees with Coleridge's distinction between "the language of prose and of metrical composition"--"so self-evident a matter as scarcely worth a dispute in the 19th century" (p. 135). Coleridge's remarks on this subject are interpreted as an "exposure of the hollowness of Mr. W.'s poetical reputation" (p. 137).

Except for a brief remark on prose style, no comment is made on the form of the Biographia. Coleridge's preference for "older writers" is traced to his schooling at Christ's Hospital:

Here is the origin of that spirit which has been so idly at work for many years, and especially among the scribblers of the Lake-school, to depreciate the writings of the aeras of William, Anne, and the Georges; and to extol far beyond

their due degree (with all their faults and all their follies included in the gross panegyric) the productions of the reigns of Elizabeth and the Stuarts (p. 126).

Unlike other critics, the writer for The Monthly Review praises Chapter XXIII--"a masterly, spirited, and moral critique on that reproach to the tragic muse of England, the tragedy of 'Bertram'" (p. 138). He concludes with an apology for omitting "so much . . . of Mr. C. himself as a biographer and metaphysician"; what the reviewer has examined of the Biographia Literaria leads him to interpret it as a "volume of triple admiration: dedicated to that trio, whose mutual puffs have so often linked them in harmonies of applause" (pp. 137-138).

One of the more select few who could follow Coleridge through the ten theses, and who, perhaps, was "prepared . . . for the study of so abstruse a subject so abstrusely treated,"<sup>1</sup> reviewed the Biographia Literaria for The Christian Examiner. Although the essay is concerned with several of Coleridge's publications, the reviewer focuses on the Biographia as "by far the most entertaining, and . . . the most instructive of his works."<sup>2</sup>

Having some knowledge of Coleridge's philosophical background, and no cause for personal animosity, the reviewer

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 200.

<sup>2</sup>"Coleridge's Literary Character," The Christian Examiner, XIV (March, 1833), 109-110.

accepts his "marked fondness for metaphysics" (p. 118) and devotes nearly half of the essay to explaining the principles of Kant, Schelling, and Fichte. In contrast to those reviewers who found "the labors of Kant and his followers" (p. 125) to be absurd and incomprehensible, the writer for The Christian Examiner calls their work invaluable:

More than metaphysics ever before accomplished, these men have done for the advancement of the human intellect. . . . A philosophy which has given such an impulse to mental culture and scientific research, which has done so much to establish and to extend the spiritual in man, and the ideal in nature, needs no apology; it commends itself by its fruits, and must ever live (pp. 125-127).

But Coleridge's exposition of Kant is disappointing, a "meagre sketch." That commonplace of Coleridgean criticism--that his performance fell beneath his potential--is introduced: "from his vigorous understanding, his acute dialectic powers, his complete knowledge of the subject, his historical research, and power of expression, something more might have been expected" (p. 118). The reviewer assigns the cause of this failure to Coleridge's lack of architectonic skill, the "inability to collect, and embody in systematic forms, the results of his inquiries" (p. 118).

This weakness is applied to the Biographia as a whole: "of substance Mr. Coleridge has enough, but in respect to form he is strikingly deficient" (p. 112). An attempt is made to discover the origin of this deficiency in Coleridge's

"desultory and patch-work business of journal composition and essay writing" (p. 111). What the reviewer finds here may apply, in general, to the "habit of small writing (under which name we include essays, reviews, and critiques of all kinds)," but is hardly applicable to Coleridge's method in the

Biographia:

That species of talent which leads to fragmentary composition, will generally be found to be the offspring of a mind which loves to dwell on particulars than to contemplate universals, and is more accustomed to consider things in their special relations and minutest bearings, than to expatiate in large and comprehensive views (p. 111).

Coleridge's composition, though criticized for its "loose and disjointed character" (p. 116), is defended against "the charge of obscurity, so often and so obstinately urged" (p. 116). The reviewer praises the "variety of collateral and illustrative matter" which Coleridge gathers around his topic; although such examples may obscure his theme, the reader must learn to expend "a little more study than . . . [he is] compelled to bestow upon a novel or a tract" (pp. 116-117).

Coleridge is admired despite the customary accusations of "unbounded" egotism, "oppressive" pedantry, and strong prejudices: "we can never read a chapter in any one of his prose works, without feeling ourselves intellectually exalted and refined" (p. 128). The yet uncertain nature of Coleridge's achievement may account for this seeming contradiction of opinion. As the reviewer admits, "there is no writer of our

times whose literary rank appears so ill-defined"; "we know not a more doubtful problem in criticism than this author and his works present" (p. 109). In the American periodical's viewpoint, Coleridge's entire literary career presented a paradox:

As a prose-writer he has never been popular, though skilled beyond most men in the use of language, and writing on subjects of the deepest interest. As a poet, though gifted in no common degree with the essentials of the poetic character, he has not been successful. As a philosopher, though at once both subtle and profound, and deeply versed in all the mysteries of the inner man, he has gained little else than smiles of compassion and ominous shaking of heads by his metaphysical speculations (p. 109).

Appreciation was to come first to the poet. The two reviews often cited as the best contemporary criticisms of Coleridge are devoted primarily to his poetry, but comment on the prose as well. John Sterling, answering the attacks on "Christabel" with a sympathetic reading of the poem, refers to the general condemnation of Coleridge's writings:

His poems are called extravagant; and his prose works (poems too, and of the noblest breed,) are pronounced to be mystical, obscure, metaphysical, theoretical, unintelligible, and so forth, --just as the same phrases have over and over been applied, with as much sagacity, to Plato, St. Paul, Cudworth, and Kant.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge's nephew and son-in-law, H. N. Coleridge, used the publication of the three-volume Poetical Works (1834) as an

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<sup>1</sup> [John Sterling], "An Appeal Apologetic, From Philip Drunk to Philip Sober," The Athenaeum, No. 36 (2 July 1828), 567.

occasion to speak on the man, the work, and the reputation. He points out that Coleridge's significance has yet to be assessed by his contemporaries, to whom he is "but little truly known."<sup>1</sup> The article discusses Coleridge's method of prose composition and, in relating the Biographia Literaria to the poems, indicates an important aspect of the former--the "progress of opinions" slighted by the earlier reviewers.

It is in his apt and novel illustrations, his indications of analogies, his explanation of anomalies, that he enables the . . . reader to get a glimpse of the extent of his practical knowledge. . . . With a little trouble, the zealous reader of the 'Biographia Literaria' may trace in the volumes [ of the poems ] the whole course of mental struggle and self-evolution narrated in that odd but interesting work; but he will see . . . the notions become images, . . . and not unfrequently the abstruse position stamped clearer (pp. 12-14).

Although the Quarterly had ignored the Biographia at the time of its publication, H. N. Coleridge's essay contains many "appreciative sentences . . . now regarded as the commonplace of English literary criticism."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the immediate reception of the Biographia Literaria was, at its worst, one of hostility and derision; even at best, reviewers combined misunderstanding with faint praise.

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<sup>1</sup>[H. N. Coleridge], "The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge," The Quarterly Review, LII (August, 1834), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Walter James Graham, Tory Criticism in the Quarterly Review, 1809-1853 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), p. 26.

Preconceptions regarding Coleridge's political and philosophical views, his reputation for incoherency and inconsistency, and his link with the taunted "water-poets"<sup>1</sup> all conspired against an objective evaluation. The relationship between Coleridge and his audience was among the principal difficulties: he was viewed as egotistical, pedantic, and incompetent. And with its outspoken treatment of critical journals and reviewers, the Biographia was hardly calculated to win their praise. Since Coleridge himself introduced personality and apologetics (as in the footnote on Jeffrey and in Chapter XXIV), such topics were used against him, at the cost of more significant criticism. Many pages, for example, were expended on the quarrel with Jeffrey; the review of Bertram, as Coleridge perhaps anticipated, was interpreted as an ill-natured retaliation prompted by Zapolya's failure; and the "Conclusion" (Chapter XXIV) was judged entirely unbecoming.

Questions of form also caused perplexity. Of uncertain genre, the Biographia combined autobiography, criticism, and philosophy. Its subtitle--"Biographical Sketches"--was misleading; the work was not primarily a personal narrative in the conventional sense. No standards existed which might be applied to the Biographia; it was difficult, therefore, to draw analogies--indeed, no review used comparison as a means of

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<sup>1</sup>"Coleridge's Sibylline Leaves," The Monthly Review, LXXXVIII (January, 1819), 24.



criticism. Neither a philosophical treatise nor a collection of anecdotes, the work yet contained enough of each to cause adherents of the one to regret the inclusion of the other. And because neo-classical standards in prose, just as in poetry, were still adhered to by many arbiters of taste, few approved Coleridge's imitation and preference of seventeenth-century writers. The "unfinished" "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan" had already given evidence of Coleridge's inability to create a whole, integral work; unity in the Biographia, then, was not to be expected. None of these questions (of form, tone, style, and structure) were fully investigated in the early reviews, the importance of which lies in their suggestion of the problems posed by the Biographia. In addition, they contain the origins of much in later criticism: "from the start the Biographia Literaria was doomed to be misinterpreted; for a superstition about its obscurity and fragmentariness was immediately circulated and has never been dispelled."<sup>1</sup>

A second edition of the Biographia (prepared by Coleridge's daughter Sara, who completed the work initiated by her husband, H. N. Coleridge), published in 1847, went almost unnoticed by critics. The likelihood of personal attacks decreased with the years following Coleridge's death; however, there was to be no corresponding rise in interest in the work itself.

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<sup>1</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 101.

The Edinburgh, reviewing the 1847 Biographia and the second edition of Joseph Cottle's Early Recollections, Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, refers but briefly to the former: "we are glad to have a new edition, though we should have preferred it less burdened with commentary."<sup>1</sup> The North American Review also combined its notices of the two works. The Biographia, intended as a statement of Coleridge's "principles in politics, religion, and philosophy, and an application of the rules deduced from philosophical principles of poetry and criticism," fell "far short of his mark."<sup>2</sup> Sara Coleridge's deletions from the 1817 Biographia (which included the footnote on Jeffrey and a paragraph on Wordsworth's detractors at the end of Chapter XXII) are approved by the reviewer, who finds the criticism of Wordsworth the most valuable section of the Biographia.

The 1847 Biographia was reprinted in The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1853) edited by W. G. T. Shedd. The uncertainty of Coleridge's literary reputation still persists:

He failed in his own, and partially, he has failed in this generation, to secure even an approach to an unanimous verdict upon the merit of his works,

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<sup>1</sup> W. D. Christie, "Coleridge and Southey," The Edinburgh Review, LXXXVII (April, 1848), 371.

<sup>2</sup> "Review of Cottle's Recollections and the Biographia Literaria (1847)," North American Review, LXV (October, 1847), 435.

or upon the quality and degree of influence which they are destined to exert.<sup>1</sup>

But if the precise nature of his achievement cannot be defined, his merit is at least acknowledged. As a critic, Coleridge is seen to have "distanced competition, not only in the gifts which so eminently qualified him for the . . . task, but in the intrinsic worth of his contributions to the science as well as the art of criticism."<sup>2</sup> The "weaknesses" of Coleridge's character are still enumerated, but with regret rather than blame; and the attacks of Hazlitt, DeQuincey, and others are deplored. Coleridge's prose works, though not gaining "that wide acceptance which may be called popularity,"<sup>3</sup> are undoubtedly of value: "The 'Biographia Literaria' abounds in irreversible verdicts on the most important questions in literature."<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the reviewers, favorable comments are to be found in the writings of several of Coleridge's contemporaries. Henry Crabb Robinson, who saw parts of the Biographia before its publication, reported (6 April 1816) that the "metaphysical passages . . . will be laughed at by nine out of ten readers,

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<sup>1</sup>"Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge," The Church Review, VI (January, 1854), 489.

<sup>2</sup>The Church Review, p. 499.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridgiana," The Literary World, XII (2 April 1853), 263.

<sup>4</sup>The Church Review, p. 495.

but I am told he has written popularly and about himself."<sup>1</sup> Like Wordsworth, he appears to have merely skimmed the book: "the little I read of Coleridge on the nature of poetry in the second volume of his Memoirs pleased me much" (I, 210). Robinson also "dissented from everything" (II, 499) in Hazlitt's review, and felt that Jeffrey's note showed the latter's "gross flattery and insincerity towards Coleridge" (I, 209). Later, when rereading the Biographia in its 1847 edition, Robinson found his "impression of the great talent and even philosophical genius of Coleridge" (II, 667) to be renewed.

Mary Russell Mitford, a minor writer of the early 1800's, wrote of the Biographia:

The best estimate I ever met with of Wordsworth's powers is in Coleridge's very out-of-the-way, but very amusing 'Biographia Literaria' . . . . It has, to be sure, rather more absurdities than ever were collected together in a printed book before; but there are passages written with sunbeams.<sup>2</sup>

The usual difficulties with form and meaning were discovered by Miss Mitford; the Biographia's "every page gives you reason to suspect that the author has forgotten the page that preceded it" (II, 12). John G. Lockhart, under the pseudonym of "Peter Morris, M. D.," defended Coleridge and the Biographia against

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers, I, 182.

<sup>2</sup>The Life of Mary Russell Mitford, ed. Rev. A. G. L'Es-trange (3 vols.; London: Richard Bentley, 1870), II, 11-12.

Blackwood's and attempted to explain Coleridge's lack of popular success:

If there be any man of grand and original genius alive at this moment in Europe, such a man is Mr Coleridge. A certain rambling discursive style of writing, and a habit of mixing up, with ideas of great originality, the products of extensive observation and meditation, others of a very fantastic and mystical sort, . . . these things have been sufficient to prevent his prose writings from becoming popular beyond a certain narrow class of readers.<sup>1</sup>

Lockhart professed himself "unable to solve the mystery" of the motive behind Wilson's attack, concluding that "the result is bad--and, in truth, very pitiable" (II, 221).

The younger generation of Romantic poets often viewed Coleridge's "obscurity" in a humorous manner. A short time after the publication of the Biographia, Byron refers to Coleridge in the now well-known lines from Don Juan: "Explaining metaphysics to the nation--/ I wish he would explain his Explanation" ("Dedication," ll. 15-16). Shelley, too, in "Peter Bell the Third" (1819) reflects the accepted fact of Coleridge's inscrutability:

All things he seem'd to understand,  
Of old or new--of sea or land--  
But His own mind--which was a mist  
(V, ii, 3-5).

And in his "letter to Maria Gisborne," written in 1820, Shelley describes Coleridge as "A cloud encircled meteor of the air, /

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<sup>1</sup>Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk (3 vols.; Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1819), II, 218-219.

A hooded eagle among blinking owls" (ll. 207-208). Shelley was to discover more than amusement; for he read the Biographia soon after it appeared and borrowed a phrase from Chapter XIV in his "A Defence of Poetry."<sup>1</sup> Keats, too, may have been an early admirer of the Biographia. Although there is no factual evidence that he read the work, it is suggested that the famous pronouncement on "negative capability" is indebted to Coleridge's twenty-second chapter.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge himself continued to think well of the Bio-graphia Literaria, especially for its criticism of Shakespeare and Wordsworth in the second volume, and its advice to young authors in the first. Although his statement to Lord Liverpool --"In my 'literary life,' . . . there are a few opinions which better information and more reflection would now annul"<sup>3</sup>--has been quoted to the contrary, the passage is used rhetorically to win a sympathetic hearing from his correspondent. And even these ill-formed opinions, Coleridge hopes, will "be found only in the lesser branches, as knotts and scars that may exist without implying either canker at the root, or malignant quality in the general sap of the tree."<sup>4</sup> Coleridge frequently referred

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Shelley's Journal, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947), p. 90; Biographia (Watson), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia (Watson), p. 256.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 758.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

with pride to the chapters on Wordsworth--"the first Critique which acknowledging and explaining his faults (as a Poet) weighed them firmly against his merits."<sup>1</sup> And in his 1818-1819 lectures, he drew upon Chapter XV to illustrate "Shakespeare's poems as prophetic of his drama."<sup>2</sup> Chapter XI was recommended to his correspondents a number of times; Coleridge thought of it as "some small compensation" for having been "seduced from a path of Duty."<sup>3</sup> In a retrospective study of his publications, Coleridge writes to J. Britton (28 February 1819): "were it in my power, my works should be confined to the second volume of my 'Literary Life,' . . . [certain sections of The Friend], and some half-dozen of my poems."<sup>4</sup> That his principal dissatisfaction with the Biographia was in parts of Volume I is expressed again by Coleridge in later years, when he is reported to have said (28 June 1834):

The metaphysical disquisition at the end of the first volume of the 'Biographia Literaria' is unformed and immature;--it contains fragments of the truth, but is not fully thought out.<sup>5</sup>

The value of such "fragments" was attested to by John Stuart Mill in his evaluation of Coleridge's importance to the

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 938.

<sup>2</sup>Shakespearean Criticism, I, 212.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 810.

<sup>4</sup>Letters, IV, 925.

<sup>5</sup>Table Talk, p. 293.

age. Comparing Coleridge with Bentham, Mill notes that neither enjoyed widespread popularity--"their readers have been few"; their significance, however, lies in their mode of influence--"they have been the teachers of the teachers."<sup>1</sup> Mill's assessment of Coleridge's reputation places him pre-eminent as a poet, but yet to be understood as a thinker:

The time is yet far distant when, in the estimation of Coleridge, and of his influence upon the intellect of our time, anything like unanimity can be looked for. As a poet, Coleridge has taken his place. The healthier taste and more intelligent canons of poetic criticism, which he was himself mainly instrumental in diffusing, have at length assigned to him his proper rank, as one among the great, and (if we look to the powers shown rather than to the amount of actual achievement) among the greatest, names in our literature. But as a philosopher, the class of thinkers has scarcely yet arisen by whom he is to be judged.<sup>2</sup>

Nor were the judgments of Coleridge as a prose-writer and critic to reach a consensus. Later nineteenth-century criticism continues to remark on Coleridge's uncertain status, and to provide a variety of estimations.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Works of Jeremy Bentham," The London and Westminster Review, XXXI (August, 1838), 467. Wordsworth had made a similar comment early in the same year: "There are obviously, even in criticism, two ways of affecting the minds of men: the one by treating the matter so as to carry it immediately to the sympathies of the many, and the other by aiming at a few selected and superior minds, that might each become a centre for illustrating it in a popular way. Mr. Coleridge . . . acted upon the world . . . through the latter of these processes" (Later Years, II, 911).

<sup>2</sup>"Coleridge and His Works," The London and Westminster Review, p. 260.



The Biographia Literaria itself received little critical attention during the remainder of the century. General essays, however, comment on such related topics as the qualities and position of Coleridge as a critic, and the characteristics of his prose style. Other topics still of interest are his "indolence" and "plagiarisms." To some, he was a critic of signal merit: "the first who made criticism interpretative both of the spirit and form of works of genius, the first who founded his principles in the nature of things."<sup>1</sup> "Coleridge must share with Goethe the honour of having founded our modern literary criticism."<sup>2</sup> But an opposite viewpoint can be found as often. "How little," said Arnold of his criticism, "can we expect permanently to stand."<sup>3</sup> Carlyle accounted Coleridge's "express contribution to . . . any specific province of human literature or enlightenment to have been 'small and sadly intermittent.'"<sup>4</sup> Similarly, his prose was subject to extremes of praise or blame. Saintsbury, including selections from the Biographia in his Specimens of English Prose Style, noted that "Coleridge's prose, less unique than his verse, is more uniformly excellent, and has an almost

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin P. Whipple, Essays and Reviews (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848), II, 183.

<sup>2</sup>"Coleridge as Thinker and Critic," The Spectator, LVI (29 December 1883), 1701.

<sup>3</sup>"Joubert," Essays in Criticism, First Series (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1896), 274.

<sup>4</sup>The Life of John Sterling (London: Chapman and Hall, 1897), p. 53.

unparalleled range of application to subjects grave and gay, easy and abstruse."<sup>1</sup> But to the aesthetic critics, Coleridge's prose was "rarely of the finest quality."<sup>2</sup> Pater found it dull -- "those grey volumes" which contain "the impress of a somewhat inferior theological literature."<sup>3</sup> And Swinburne extravagantly described Coleridge's

style that stammers and rambles and stumbles, that stagnates here and there overflows into waste marsh relieved only by . . . such bright flowerage of barren blossom as is bred of the fog and the fens--such a style gives no warrant of depth or soundness in the matter thus arrayed and set forth.<sup>4</sup>

De Quincey's charges of plagiarism<sup>5</sup> (answered at length by Sara Coleridge in the 1847 Biographia) remained a topic for consideration, as did Coleridge's "infinite indolence and weakness of will."<sup>6</sup> His contemporaries' accusations were echoed by later critics: "his career was one of those . . . that can

<sup>1</sup>Specimens of English Prose Style (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Company, 1886), p. 288.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Symons, The Romantic Movement in English Poetry (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1909), p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridge," Appreciations (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1889), pp. 68-69.

<sup>4</sup>"Coleridge," Essays and Studies (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), p. 273.

<sup>5</sup>"The Plagiarisms of S. T. Coleridge," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XLVII (March, 1840), 287-299.

<sup>6</sup>F. J. A. Hort, "Coleridge," Cambridge Essays 1856 (London: Parker and Son, n. d.), p. 299.

never be told, so marred by disease and by moral feebleness, so full of shame and supineness and waste, that it must be kept out of sight."<sup>1</sup> As to the Biographia, critics were most struck by its unevenness in form and matter. No design on Coleridge's part was apparent: "the book, of course, is put together with a pitchfork";<sup>2</sup> "tried by his own critical principles, it wants unity, clearness and proportion. . . . There is no subordination of parts to the whole, but a splendid confusion."<sup>3</sup> Coleridge "is always turning aside" from his subject "to lecture the reading public, or the critics, or some philosopher or poet."<sup>4</sup> Yet with all these faults, the Biographia was acknowledged to be a valuable work which no one could study "without being enriched"<sup>5</sup>—"one of the most readable books in the language."<sup>6</sup>

Critical divergence has also characterized twentieth-century discussions of the Biographia Literaria and its author.

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<sup>1</sup>"Traill's Coleridge," The Nation, XXXIX (25 December 1844), 549.

<sup>2</sup>Leslie Stephen, "Coleridge," Hours in a Library (3 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), III, 335.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin P. Whipple, Essays and Reviews, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup>Nowell C. Smith, "Coleridge and His Critics," The Fortnightly Review, LXIV (September, 1895), 346.

<sup>5</sup>Edwin P. Whipple, Essays and Reviews, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup>Nowell C. Smith, "Coleridge and His Critics," p. 346.

Although the fact of Coleridge's achievement is generally attested to, its exact nature remains subject to debate. To some, for example, Coleridge's theoretical statements are most important and lasting: "He succeeds for the first and (so far) for the last time in English criticism in marrying the twin studies of philosophy and literature."<sup>1</sup> Others prefer the more specific pages of the work, its remarks by the way and its particular insights. The questions of Coleridge's literary integrity ("it seems impossible to give Coleridge credit for ideas simply quoted literally"<sup>2</sup>) and moral character ("no sadder spectacle in English literature"<sup>3</sup>) are not entirely laid to rest. But even more controversial are certain rhetorical qualities of the Biographia: its tone, structure, and style.

Coleridge's relationship to his reader is said to be ineffective, especially in his lack of success at forming an ethical appeal. The Biographia indicates Coleridge's inability "to focus on an audience. Sometimes he seems to be speaking to the contemporary public at large, sometimes to a group of close friends, sometimes to posterity, and sometimes to himself

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia (Watson), xix.

<sup>2</sup>Rene Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, Vol. II: The Romantic Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>H. N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, Vol. III: 1780-1830--Romantic Faith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 301.

alone."<sup>1</sup> In addition to this want of concentration, Coleridge does not emerge as a sympathetic figure from his "Biographical Sketches." "The book is distasteful because, as Coleridge says on the first page, it is an exculpation; it is soaked in the atmosphere of self-defence, . . . This, much more than the padding, or the lack of plan, destroys the book."<sup>2</sup>

Structurally, the Biographia fares no better; it lacks "the cardinal qualities of unity and coherence."<sup>3</sup> F. R. Leavis, revealing the "scandal" of Coleridge's "currency as an academic classic," protests the Biographia's "disorderliness" and "lack of all organization or sustained development."<sup>4</sup> Few critics have sought to defend Coleridge on this count, or to find a "coherent thread of thought or purpose."<sup>5</sup> The prose of the Biographia is assumed to be similarly erratic: "he manages to be clumsy and illuminating in the same sentence."<sup>6</sup> Throughout

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<sup>1</sup>Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes, eds., Coleridge the Talker (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1940), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Potter, "On Editing Coleridge," The Bookman, LXXXV (February, 1934), 435.

<sup>3</sup>Raymond F. Howes, "Importance of Coleridge's Talk," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XIV (November, 1928), 569.

<sup>4</sup>"Coleridge in Criticism," Scrutiny, IX (September, 1940), 65.

<sup>5</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria" p. 88.

<sup>6</sup>Humphrey House, Coleridge: The Clark Lectures (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1953), p. 23.

Coleridge's prose writings, several styles are distinguished; and the more informal manner of his letters and notebooks is often preferred to the "weighty, pontifical, and . . . circumlocutory" one of such works as The Friend and Aids to Reflection.<sup>1</sup> Though the Biographia is generally considered to unite the two, its style has not been closely examined.

This "uncharted" aspect of Coleridge's work (the first complete edition of his writings is now underway) is frequently pointed out. His prose, for example, is said to "constitute one of the most challenging unexplored territories in the history of critical thinking."<sup>2</sup> Such a statement may be applied, not only to the significance and influence of Coleridge's ideas, but to the qualities of his form: style, tone, structure, and the discovery and presentation of arguments. The bewildered and divided response to the Biographia illustrates the need for further exploration of its thought and expression. And as Coleridge's statements concerning his aims help to clarify the purposes of the Biographia, so, too, his comments on style and rhetoric may be applied to the work in order to determine the extent to which he was conscious of design, of style, or argumentation, and of his audience.

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia L. Radley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Jackson Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts, p. 358.

## CHAPTER IV

### COLERIDGE ON PROSE STYLE AND RHETORIC: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Coleridge's projected history of English prose style, like his philosophical magnum opus, was never realized. Yet throughout his letters, notebooks, marginalia, and published works are scattered a number of passages related to the subject: Coleridge analyzes his own style; he discusses characteristics of seventeenth and eighteenth century prose; he formulates "rules for writing a good style";<sup>1</sup> and finally, he comments upon various topics which were of concern to the classical rhetoricians.

Although he has been accused of neglecting to "blot," and much is made of the superiority of his oral discourse to his printed work, Coleridge was very conscious of his own prose style. Whatever the subject, both Coleridge's public and private writings contain a large proportion of self-analysis. In the same way, many qualities of his style pointed out by later critics are noted by Coleridge himself. His interest in

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 227.

expression may also be judged by his revisions and by the repetition of phrases and passages from one work to another.

"Of this be assured," writes Coleridge to Thomas Wedgwood (20 October 1802), "that I will never give any thing to the world in propriâ personâ, in my own name, which I have not tormented with the File."<sup>1</sup> David Erdman has shown that Coleridge, even in his early anonymous articles for the Morning Post, is interested in composition and word choice. His parliamentary reports display inventiveness and skill, and the political essays indicate that "Coleridge himself was acutely sensitive to the difference in kind between good writing, in which 'every phrase, every metaphor, every personification should have it's justifying cause,' and writing 'vicious in the figures and contexture of its style.'"<sup>2</sup> And later, in the 1818 Friend, Coleridge includes among his objects certain alterations in "arrangement," as well as "the cutting up and rounding of the long sentences, & the reduction of the Parentheses"<sup>3</sup> from the previous edition. A study of the several versions of The Friend shows that Coleridge did in fact concentrate on "grammatical and rhetorical problems"<sup>4</sup> in reworking the essays.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 877.

<sup>2</sup>"The Signature of Style," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXIII (February, 1959), 102.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 701.

<sup>4</sup>Dudley Bailey, "Coleridge's Revisions of The Friend," Modern Philology, LIX (November, 1961), 97.



Coleridge's own writings provided the source from which he "plagiarized" most frequently. H. N. Coleridge attempts to account for this practice in the following way:

Mr. Coleridge's prose works had so very limited a sale, that although published in a technical sense, they could scarcely be said to have ever become publici juris. He did not think them such himself . . . and generally made a particular remark if he met any person who professed or showed that he had read the 'Friend,' or any of his other books. . . . Hence in every one of his prose writings there are repetitions, either literal or substantial, of passages to be found in some other of those writings; and there are several particular positions and reasonings, which he considered of vital importance, reiterated in . . . [several places]. He was always deepening and widening the foundation, and cared not how often he used the same stone.<sup>1</sup>

Not only do Coleridge's predominant ideas, his "positions and reasonings," continually recur, but the means of communicating them as well. Coleridge looked upon his writings and notes as something in the nature of a commonplace book, re-using whatever seemed effective and appropriate. For this reason, certain phrases, illustrations, metaphors, and similes become familiar to the reader of his prose. Sara Coleridge finds this method of composition prevalent in the Biographia Literaria:

Up to a certain point the author pursues his plan of writing his literary life, but, in no long time his 'slack hand' abandons its grasp of the subject, and the book is filled out to a certain size, with such miscellaneous contents of his desk as seem least remote from it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Preface," Table Talk, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia (1847), xxii.

In the Biographia, however, as in many of Coleridge's works, the "miscellaneous contents of his desk" are often integrated with the aims and qualities of the whole.

Coleridge viewed his prose style both critically and apologetically, seeking to relate its peculiarities to the character and mode of his thought. The complexity of his style was that quality which absorbed him most. In 1804, Coleridge distinguishes two sorts of loquacity: in the first, the writer will "use five hundred words more than needs to express an idea"; in the second, he will include "five hundred more ideas, images, reasons &c than there is any need of to arrive at . . . [his] object." The reader is left with a "vague impression that there has been a great Blaze of colours all about something." According to Coleridge, his own method is the latter-- "my illustrations swallow up my thesis." This he attributes to the workings of his mind, pursuing the similarities and differences of things "from circle to circle till I break against the shore of my Hearer's patience."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge later insists upon the superiority of such copiousness to the epigrammatic and "fashionable Anglo-Gallican Taste"; the reader must learn to expend that "effort of thought" without which "no real information can be conveyed, no important errors rectified, no widely injurious prejudices rooted up."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Notebooks, II, 1, 2372.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, pp. 31-32.

Coleridge also recognized the abstruse nature of his vocabulary and the intricacy of his sentence structure. Again, he traces these characteristics to his habits of reflection and study:

A man long accustomed to silent and solitary meditation, in proportion as he increases the power of thinking in long and connected trains, is apt to lose or lessen the talent of communicating his thoughts with grace and perspicuity. Doubtless too, I have in some measure injured my style, in respect to its facility and popularity, from having almost confined my reading . . . to the works of the ancients and those of the elder writers in the modern languages. We insensibly imitate what we habitually admire.

Although he admits that "the stately march and difficult evolutions, which characterize the eloquence of Hooker, Bacon, Milton, and Jeremy Taylor" are not suitable to all subjects, Coleridge refuses to sacrifice his "judgment to the desire of being immediately popular."<sup>1</sup> A similar explanation is offered for his vocabulary: "the acquaintance with so many languages has . . . made me too often polysyllabic--for these are the words which are possessed in common by the English with the Latin and its south European offspring, & those into which, with the least looking round about, one can translate the full words of the Greek, German &c." For Coleridge, word choice should be dictated, not by simplicity alone, but by the appropriateness of meaning and connotation. He points out, however,

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<sup>1</sup>The Friend, pp. 30-31.

that the function of unusual or lengthy terms is not to create "a feeling of self-importance on the part of the Author or that of wonderment on the part of the Readers."<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge comments, too, on his use of parentheses, footnotes, mottos or epigraphs, and quotations. He confesses to being perhaps "too fond" of parenthetical expressions, but will not forego them: "I am certain that no work of empasioned & eloquent reasoning ever did or could subsist without . . . [parentheses]--They are the drama of Reason--& present the thought growing, . . . The aversion to them is one of the numberless symptoms of a feeble Frenchified Public."<sup>2</sup> The frequent footnotes which provide a sort of marginalia to his own work are justified in Aids to Reflection; in such a book of "aphorisms and detached comments," it is "understood beforehand that the sauce and the garnish are to occupy the greater part of the dish."<sup>3</sup> He inserted footnotes liberally elsewhere as well--at times to elaborate on points in the text, but in other instances to digress from his topic.

Coleridge was deliberate also in his selection of mottos. "You know," he writes to John Prior Estlin (30 December 1796), "I am a mottophilist, and almost a mottomanist--I

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 685.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, III, 282.

<sup>3</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 250n.

love an apt motto to my Heart."<sup>1</sup> And in one of The Friend essays, he explains how he is guided in choosing an epigraph: "I have always taken more than common pains . . . and of two . . . equally appropriate prefer always that from the book which is least likely to have come into my readers' hands." In this way, Coleridge hoped to "have attracted notice to a writer undeservedly forgotten."<sup>2</sup>

Equally conspicuous in Coleridge's writings are quotations taken from an extensive range of sources. The device is discussed in The Friend, where Coleridge calls upon writers to observe moderation:

That our elder writers to Jeremy Taylor inclusively quoted to excess, it would be the very blindness of partiality to deny. More than one might be mentioned, whose works are well characterized in the words of Milton, as a paroxysm of citations, pampered metaphors, and aphorising pedantry. On the other hand, it seems to me that we now avoid quotations with an anxiety that offends in the contrary extreme.<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge himself, of course, would tend toward the former course. In his early reviews, Coleridge is far from the practice of those critics who fail to support their arguments "even by a single quotation";<sup>4</sup> at times, passages from the work under

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, I, 293.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Biographia, II, 90.

consideration form the major portion of his essay. The Aids to Reflection consists entirely of extracts from others' works, together with Coleridge's own commentary. His letters are filled with quoted lines and passages, generally given from memory. And in his notebooks, Coleridge often copies out long sections of prose and poetry for future use in support and illustration of his ideas. Rarely are Coleridge's quotations wholly accurate. "He occasionally substituted words of his own, and a sense of his own, for the original, and sometimes even added words to his author's, as pieces of new cloth in an old garment."<sup>1</sup> Neither is Coleridge conscientious in acknowledgment of sources. This habit provoked the charges of plagiarism, to which he responded in disdain: "I have ever held parallelisms adduced in proof of plagiarism or even of intentional imitation, in the utmost contempt."<sup>2</sup> Some of Coleridge's unidentified quotations may be of his own authorship--forgotten or confounded with the work of others. Sara Coleridge was perplexed by "such confusion . . . in a man of sound mind." It seemed to her "as if the door betwixt his memory and imagination was always open, and though the former was a large, strong room, its contents were perpetually mingling with those of the adjoining chamber."<sup>3</sup> Other anonymous "quotations," written by

<sup>1</sup>J. C. Campbell, "Coleridge's Quotations," The Athenaeum, No. 3,382 (20 August 1892), 259.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, III, 355.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia (1847), xxxvi.

Coleridge himself, were calculated devices; an example is the letter from a "friend" in Chapter XIII of the Biographia Literaria.

The "elder writers" of the later sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries occasioned many of Coleridge's prose analyses. Also discussed, for purposes of contrast, are writers of the eighteenth century. Following this method, a work was planned "on the Prose . . . of Hall, Milton, & Taylor," which was to be succeeded "with an Essay on . . . Dr Johnson & Gibbon."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's preference was clearly for the former-- "the vigour and felicity of style characteristic of the age, from Edward VI to the Restoration."<sup>2</sup> Within this period, Coleridge found the style he most admired; and in one of the 1818 lectures, he summarizes its characteristics:

The language is dignified but plain, genuine English although elevated and brightened by superiority of intellect in the writer. Individual words . . . are always used . . . in their precise meaning, without either affectation or slipslop. In Jeremy Taylor the sentences are often extremely long, and yet are generally so perspicuous in consequence of their logical structure, that they require no reperusal to be understood; and it is for the most part the same in Milton and Hooker. . . . The unity in these writers is produced by the unity of the subject, and the perpetual growth and evolution of the thoughts, one generating, and explaining, and justifying, the place of another, . . . and it

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 877.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 413.

is the existence of an individual idiom in each, that makes the principal writers before the Restoration the great patterns . . . of English style.<sup>1</sup>

Milton, Taylor, and others are valued for their thought equally as for their expression, for the seventeenth century-- Coleridge's "spiritual home"--reflected his own tastes "and his intellectual bent."<sup>2</sup> Coleridge emphasizes the close connection between these writers' style and habits of mind, noting that "he who thinks loosely will write loosely."<sup>3</sup> Such terms as "copiousness," "accumulative," and "agglomerative" are among Coleridge's favorite words of praise for the type of organically structured prose he sought to imitate. "Richness of language," "fertility of fancy," "majesty of sentiment," and "grace of imagery" are all desirable qualities. In a sentence from "An Apologetic Preface" to the poem "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," Coleridge describes the impression created by this style:

Here [in the writings of Taylor] words that convey feelings, and words that flash images, and words of abstract notion, flow together, and whirl and rush onward like a stream, at once rapid and full of eddies; and yet still, interfused here and there, we see a tongue or islet of smooth water, with some picture in it of earth or sky, landscape or living group of quiet beauty.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 216-218.

<sup>2</sup>Louis I. Bredvold, "Introduction," Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, xxiii.

<sup>3</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 315.



Thus, Coleridge opposes the Senecan influence in prose style, primarily for its lack of a unifying principle: "the thoughts, striking as they are, are merely strung together like beads, without any causation or progression."<sup>1</sup> Such writers as Bishop Hall, called the "English Seneca," are viewed as "corrupters and epigrammatizers of our English Prose Style." Eighteenth-century stylists are deficient insofar as they exemplify these qualities. Johnson, for example, is said to have followed Hall "in the balance and construction of his periods . . . as any intelligent reader will discover by an attentive Comparison."<sup>2</sup> Both the Senecan and the Ciceronian, which "define the extremes of style"<sup>3</sup> during the periods in question, are to be avoided. The mode of the Restoration ("a mock antithesis, that is, an opposition of mere sounds,"<sup>4</sup> and skipping, unconnected, short-winded, asthmatic sentences") is opposed to that of the eighteenth century ("strolling and rounded periods, in which the emptiest truisms are blown up into illustrious bubbles"),<sup>5</sup> with Coleridge seeking a mean:

A good lecture upon style might be composed, by taking on the one hand, the slang of L'Estrange, and perhaps even of Roger North, which became

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, pp. 371-372.

<sup>3</sup>George Williamson, The Senecan Amble (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 57.

<sup>4</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 220.

<sup>5</sup>The Friend, p. 36.

so fashionable after the Restoration . . . ; and on the other, the Johnsonian magniloquence or the balanced metre of Junius; and then showing how each extreme is faulty, upon different grounds.<sup>1</sup>

In a manner similar to his criticism of eighteenth-century poetic diction, Coleridge charges the vocabulary of neo-classical prose with a substitution of "soiled and over-worn finery"<sup>2</sup> for individuality and precision: "in the later writers as especially in Pope, the use of words is for the most part purely arbitrary, so that the context will rarely show the true specific sense, but only that something of the sort is designed."<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge's marginal notes to the Letters of Junius are representative of his criticisms of eighteenth-century prose: antitheses more verbal than real; "inelegant" and awkward sentences; and "vapid" composition ("an Isocratic correctness--when it should have had the force and drama of an oration of Demosthenes"). Coleridge admits, however, that such a style is effective when handled well. Of Letter III, he notes: "Its short sentences, its witty perversions and deductions, its questions, and its omissions of connectives, are all in their proper places--are dramatically good." Junius's antitheses are

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<sup>1</sup>Table Talk, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, II, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 218.

found to "stand the test of analysis much better than Johnson's."<sup>1</sup> This latter comment was repeated often by Coleridge, who felt that vacuity was a predominant feature of Johnson's writings--"sentence after sentence in the Rambler may be pointed out to which you cannot attach any definite meaning whatever."<sup>2</sup> But his harshest censure is reserved for Gibbon, whose "manner is the worst of all; it has every fault of which this peculiar style is capable."<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge's prose clearly reflects his partiality for the manner of the "elder writers," and his remarks on their style may be considered a gloss upon his own work. That care in word-choice which Coleridge so often praised is apparent in his writings--in the use of uncommon, obsolete, and technical words, in the formulation of neologisms, and in the definition and distinction of terms. Coleridge defends an author's right to a vocabulary which employs terms other than those occurring "in common conversation,"<sup>4</sup> and avails himself of this privilege on many occasions. The OED cites hundreds of words as first appearing in Coleridge's works; among these are anachronism, bathetic, greenery, mannerism, phobia, statuesque, and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 313-319.

<sup>2</sup>Table Talk, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>Biographia, I, 107.

uniqueness.<sup>1</sup> Other phrases were initially applied to literary criticism by Coleridge: aesthetic, atmosphere, idealize, organization, undercurrent of feeling.<sup>2</sup> His notebooks contain many word-lists, ranging from scientific and philosophical terms to the common names of English flowers.

Coleridge's interest in words extended beyond literary usage, to their origin and their influence upon men's lives. He enjoyed speculating on etymology, though he often "made wild guesses"<sup>3</sup> in his derivations. The wider significance of language is attested to in a notebook entry:

The high importance of 'Words, and the incalculable moral and practical advantages attached to the habit of using them definitely and appropriately, the ill consequence of the contrary not confined to Individuals, but extending even to national Character and Conduct.<sup>4</sup>

Coleridge's concern with the relation of language to religious conviction is evident in such works as The Statesman's Manual and Aids to Reflection. Here, he defines, and indicates the place in scripture and theological writings, of various uses of language: analogy, metaphor, simile, and allegory. The

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<sup>1</sup>Joshua H. Neumann, "Coleridge on the English Language," PMLA, LXIII (June, 1948), 659.

<sup>2</sup>J. Isaacs, "Coleridge's Critical Terminology," Essays and Studies, XXI (1936), 103.

<sup>3</sup>L. A. Willoughby, "Coleridge as Philologist," Modern Language Review, XXXI (April, 1936), 194.

<sup>4</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 115.

dependence of correct thought upon correct terms is again stressed:

We should accustom ourselves to think, and reason in precise and steadfast terms, even when custom, or the deficiency, or the corruption of the language will not permit the same strictness in speaking. . . . let distinctness in expression advance side by side with distinctness in thought.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant, too, that Coleridge's major work--the climax of his study and reflection--was to be entitled "Logosophia."

Finally, a number of Coleridge's principal ideas rest upon the distinction of terms: imagination and fancy; reason and understanding; talent and genius. And with lesser points, the same care is taken; in Chapter X of the Biographia, for example, Coleridge claims the merit

of having first explicitly defined and analyzed the nature of Jacobinism; and that in distinguishing the Jacobin from the republican, the democrat, and the mere demagogue, . . . rescued the word from remaining a mere term of abuse.<sup>2</sup>

"It is indeed," writes Coleridge, "never harmless to confound terms: for words are no passive Tools, but organized Instruments, re-acting on the Power which inspirits them."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to this emphasis on vocabulary, Coleridge echoes seventeenth-century prose in its method of sentence structure. The prevalence of connectives in the writings of

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<sup>1</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, I, 146.

<sup>3</sup>Inquiring Spirit, pp. 101-102.

Taylor and others (the absence of which Coleridge criticizes in the Senecans) is also a characteristic of Coleridge. One statistical study notes that "of 300 sentences in the 'Friend,' 100 are formally connected--up to that day a higher proportion than that of any man after Walton."<sup>1</sup> The exact parallelisms and balance disliked in Johnson are, on the whole, avoided; Coleridge secures coherence largely by means of connectives--"the cements of language."<sup>2</sup> He often repeats the necessity for "the correct use of conjunctions, and other exponents of the connecting acts in the mind."<sup>3</sup> This device, though "in . . . active force in the earliest periods" of English prose, is the exception in Coleridge's time.<sup>4</sup> And in sentence length, his averages have been found to correspond "consistently . . . with those of the seventeenth century writers and earlier, rather than with those of his contemporaries." Although numerous parallelisms in words, phrases, and sentence units are evident in Coleridge's works, he tends more toward an evolving, "accumulative" structure than toward the symmetrical and finished one of eighteenth-century prose: "one type of balance . . . is

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin H. Lewis, The History of the English Paragraph (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1894), p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, III, 234.

<sup>3</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 413.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis, The History of the English Paragraph, p. 176.

often accompanied by another type of imbalance."<sup>1</sup> Because of this quality, Coleridge praises a sentence of Richard Baxter as "most beautiful . . . to a true taste for the seeming carelessness of its construction, like the happily dishevelled hair of a lovely woman."<sup>2</sup> An illustration may be given from the first chapter of the Biographia. In describing his education under the Rev. James Bowyer, Coleridge attacks false "modes of teaching":

Instead of storing the memory, during the period when the memory is the predominant faculty, with facts for the after exercise of the judgement; and instead of awakening by the noblest models the fond and unmixed LOVE and ADMIRATION, which is the natural and graceful temper of early youth; these nurslings of improved pedagogy are taught to dispute and decide; to suspect all, but their own and their lecturer's wisdom; and to hold nothing sacred from their contempt, but their own contemptible arrogance; boy-graduates in all the technicals, and in all the dirty passions and impudence of anonymous criticism.<sup>3</sup>

The sentence exemplifies what Coleridge referred to as his "piled up"<sup>4</sup> method of construction. Beginning with a distinct periodic structure--the parallel "instead of" clauses followed by a clearly marked main clause--the sentence then becomes

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<sup>1</sup>Sister M. Lucille Osinski, O.S.F., "A Study of the Structures of Coordination in a Representative Sample of the Biographia Literaria" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1963), pp. 87n, 115.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 328.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, I, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup>Letters, III, 237.

loose or "accumulative" by its enlargement of "to dispute and decide" and its final epitomization of the "nurslings" as "boy-graduates." Even in more concise sentences of this type, Coleridge often qualifies the balanced effect by means of parentheses and after-thoughts:

Now that the hand of providence has disciplined all Europe into sobriety, as men tame wild elephants, by alternate blows and caresses; now that Englishmen of all classes are restored to their old English notions and feelings; it will with difficulty be credited, how great an influence was at that time possessed and exerted by the spirit of secret defamation, (the too constant attendant on party zeal!) during the restless interim from 1793 to the commencement of the Addington administration, or the year before the truce of Amiens.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge also resembles certain writers of the seventeenth century in having "words that convey feelings, and words that flash images, and words of abstract notion, flow together."<sup>2</sup> Close observations of physical and psychological life, the outer and inner worlds, join with philosophical ideas. As in his discussion of Hartley, Coleridge frequently turns to the level of common experience:

Conceive, for instance, a broad stream, winding through a mountainous country with an indefinite number of currents, varying and running into each other according as the gusts chance to blow from the opening of the mountains. The temporary

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 122-123.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 315.



union of several currents in one, so as to force the main current of the moment, would present an accurate image of Hartley's theory of the will.<sup>1</sup>

Such analogies were part of Coleridge's habitual way of thinking. In his notebooks, one finds many similar expressions:

Seeing a nice bed of glowing Embers with one Junk of firewood well placed, like the remains of an old Edifice, and another well nigh mouldered one, corresponding to it, I felt an impulse to put on three pieces of Wood, that exactly completed this perishable architecture, . . . Hence I seem . . . to suspect, that this desire of totalizing, of perfecting, may be the bottom-impulse of many, many actions, in which it is never brought forward as an avowed, or even agnized <anerkennt> as a conscious motive/ --thence I proceed to think of restlessness in general, its fragmentary nature, and its connection if not identification with the <pains correlative to the> pleasures derived from Wholeness--i.e. plurality in unity--& the yearning left behind by those pleasures ~~exee~~ often experienced.<sup>2</sup>

Seemingly insignificant sights and events of everyday occurrence often prompted, or were used to illustrate, the "abstract notion" in Coleridge.

Coleridge's affinity, then, to the prose of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was by reason both of preference and of practice. However, in giving rules or theory of style, he advocated a more conservative, less ornate manner. The "main practical caution" he would give a writer was this:

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 76-77.

<sup>2</sup>Notebooks, II, 1, 2414. < > signifies words later added by Coleridge.

"never deviate from the common mode of expression without being able to adduce an adequate and distinct justifying reason."

His "three rules for writing a good style" are similarly framed. Expression should be logical, grammatical, and proportionate--the most "correspondent and appropriate" medium to convey thoughts.<sup>1</sup> The ideal prose style that Coleridge describes differs somewhat from his own:

The words . . . ought to express the intended meaning, and no more; if they attract attention to themselves, it is, in general, a fault. In the very best styles . . . you read page after page, understanding the author perfectly, without once taking notice of the medium of communication.<sup>2</sup>

And in spite of his own freedom with words, Coleridge objected to certain terms. Of "talented," he complained:

Why not shillinged, farthinged, tenpenced, &c? The formation of a participle passive from a noun, is a licence that nothing but a very particular felicity can excuse. If mere convenience is to justify such attempts upon the idiom, you cannot stop till the language becomes . . . corrupt. Most of these pieces of slang come from America."<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge also warned against converting "mere abstractions into persons"--using "the possessive case of an inanimate noun . . . instead of the dependent case, as 'the watch's hand,' for

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 227-228.

<sup>2</sup>Table Talk, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup>Table Talk, p. 167.

'the hand of the watch.'"<sup>1</sup> One sign of a man of superior powers is said to be his vocabulary: "unless where new things necessitate new terms, he will avoid an unusual word as a rock."<sup>2</sup>

Although Coleridge made a number of statements such as these, claiming that the best prose called least attention to itself, his sympathies remained with another mode. In 1804, he annotated a volume of Sir Thomas Browne--among his "first Favorites." Coleridge explained his marginal symbols to Sara Hutchinson:

⊙ points out a profound or at least a solid and judicious observation; = signifies that the sentence or passage . . . contains majesty of conception or Style; || signifies Sublimity; \* brilliance or ingenuity; <sup>2</sup> signifies characteristic Quaintness; and † that it contains an error in fact or philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to preferring the striking idiom and vocabulary of pre-Restoration writers, Coleridge deviated from common practice in his method of punctuation. The stroke, or virgule, which he called an "expression of the indefinite or fragmentary," is characteristic of Coleridge's writings. He found the usual forms of punctuation too restrictive, for they could "never be made to represent all the . . . subtle distinctions of connection, accumulation, disjunction, and completion of

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, p. 408.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, II, 1083.

sense. . . . all the moods of passion."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge attempted to compensate by frequent recourse to capitalization, parentheses, underlining, and distinctive symbols.

This contradiction between theoretical pronouncements or general rules and Coleridge's actual inclination and practice is reflected in his self-criticism. He was often apprehensive of the reception his writings might gain, readying defenses in his letters and in several "apologetic" prefaces. A similar disparity results when Coleridge evaluates or ranks his prose. After insisting that his work would be "tormented with the File," Coleridge suggests that his "foul Copy would often appear to general Readers more polished" than his "fair Copy--many of the feeble & colloquial Expressions have been industriously substituted for others, . . . neither the language of passion nor distinct Conceptions."<sup>2</sup> His "effortless" compositions are deemed superior to more labored pieces:

A collection of my letters written before my mind was so much oppressed would, in the opinion of all who have ever seen any number of them, be thrice the value of my set publications. Take as a specimen ----'s [Satyrane's] Letters, which never received a single correction, or that letter addressed to myself as from a friend, at the close of the first volume of the Literary Life, which was written without my taking my pen off the paper except to dip it in the inkstand.

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<sup>1</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 377.

You will feel how much more ease and felicity there are in these, compared with the more elaborate pages of the Sermon, etc.<sup>1</sup>

"Satyrane's Letters," however, as published in The Friend and the Biographia Literaria, were revised and made more literary in tone. In their original version, the letters to Mrs. Coleridge and Thomas Poole lack the conscious structure, the generalizations and reflections, and the refinements in vocabulary of later accounts. A comparison may be made between "Letter I" of the Biographia and the actual correspondence. The original reads as follows:

Sunday Sept 16th 1798--Eleven o'clock--the Packet set sail, & for the first time in my life I beheld my native land retiring from me--my native Land to which I am convinced I shall return with an intenser affection--with a proud Nationality made rational by my own experience of its Superiority.<sup>2</sup>

In the Biographia, Coleridge has recast the journal sentence-forms and expanded his reflections:

On Sunday morning, September 16, 1798, the Hamburg Pacquet set sail from Yarmouth; and I, for the first time in my life, beheld my native land retiring from me. At the moment of its disappearance--in all the kirks, churches, chapels, and meeting-houses, in which the greater number, I hope, of my countrymen were at that time assembled, I will dare question whether there was one more ardent prayer offered up to heaven, than that which I then preferred for my country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 728.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, I, 420.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, II, 132.

The names of Coleridge's friends are deleted in the Biographia; but more importantly, the later version handles description in a "wittier," though less vivid manner. To his wife, Coleridge wrote:

Chester began to look Frog-coloured and doleful-- Miss Wordsworth retired in confusion to the Cabin--Wordsworth soon followed--I was giddy, but not sick, and in about half an hour the giddiness went away, & left only a feverish Inappetence of Food, arising I believe, from the accursed stink of the Bilge water, & certainly not decreased by the Sight of the Basons from the Cabin containing green and yellow specimens of the inner Man & brought up by the Cabin-boy every three minutes-- . . .<sup>1</sup>

The alterations belie Coleridge's claim to "never . . . a single correction":

The lady retired to the cabin in some confusion, and many of the faces round me assumed a very doleful and frog-coloured appearance; and within an hour the number of those on deck was lessened by one half. I was giddy, but not sick, and the giddiness soon went away, but left a feverishness and want of appetite, which I attributed, in great measure, to the saeva Mephitis of the bilge-water; and it was certainly not decreased by the exportations from the cabin. However, I was well enough to join the able-bodied passengers, one of whom observed not inaptly, that Momus might have discovered an easier way to see a man's inside, than by placing a window in his breast. He need only have taken a salt-water trip in a packet-boat.<sup>2</sup>

Nor is the letter in Chapter XIII of the Biographia a sample of Coleridge's spontaneity. Contrasted with his notebooks,

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, I, 420-421.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, II, 132-133.

marginalia, and letters, it would have to be included instead among his "set publications."

In his biography of Coleridge, Stephen Potter speaks of the two sides of his subject: one he calls simply "Coleridge," the "developing personality" or true self; the other is "S.T.C.," or the "fixed character." Coleridge's prose is similarly divided. The "best" Coleridge is said to be found in the "unpremeditated, irrelevant, unsuitably situated, almost illegible note." "S.T.C." appears "in his MS. corrections, his prefaces, his method of publishing, his walk, his way of taking snuff, his . . . advice to his son, [and] his tendency to lecture."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge himself seemed to recognize the merit of his "unpremeditated" writings. However, he then cited as examples several disappointing or unremarkable pieces. One of the "estecean" prefaces was ranked as his "happiest performance in respect of Style."<sup>2</sup> To the modern reader, the aspect of Coleridge's personality revealed in such essays is not an engaging one. In the "performance" referred to, "An Apologetic Preface" to "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter,"<sup>3</sup> Coleridge gives what purports to be the account of an extempore speech delivered at a dinner party. The essay is obviously not without revisions, and Coleridge admits

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<sup>1</sup>Coleridge and S.T.C. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), pp. 20, 82, 123.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 885.

<sup>3</sup>Sibylline Leaves (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), pp. 89-109.

that his written version is "diluted and in language less colloquial." Using analogy and comparison, he defends a youthful poem against charges of "atrocious" sentiments. Dante, Milton, and Jeremy Taylor are cited for their evocation of horror and wrath in judging the evil. Their descriptions, however, exhibit imagination, not a lack of "humanity, or goodness of heart." It is in such a context that Coleridge would have his poem evaluated. As one of his listeners justly observes, the "defence is too good for the cause." In his twenty-page preface to a poem of five pages (and of little merit), Coleridge examines the nature of expressions of passion and revenge, draws an extended comparison between Milton and Taylor, praises the Church of England, and interjects "a puff for the value and importance of both poem and poet."<sup>1</sup>

It is the final, self-eulogizing aim that makes the preface less than Coleridge's "happiest performance." He appears both arrogant and servile, insisting that his purpose is not "to justify the publication," yet following that very course:

It was written some years ago. I do not attempt to justify my past self, young as I then was; but as little as I would now write a similar poem, so far was I even then from imagining that the lines would be taken as more or less than a sport of fancy. At all events, if I know my own heart, there was never a moment in my existence

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<sup>1</sup>Max F. Schulz, "Coleridge's 'Apologetic' Prefaces," Tulane Studies in English, XI (1961), 62.



in which I should have been more ready, had Mr. Pitt's person been in hazard, to interpose my own body, and defend his life at the risk of my own.<sup>1</sup>

The placing of "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter" with the quotations from Milton and Taylor is somewhat incongruous in itself, and excusable only in that Coleridge is defending a principle applicable to each. One critic attributes the "emotional and stylistic excesses" of this preface to Coleridge's propensity for "over-dramatizing his misfortunes, . . . the delight he took in exercising his literary powers. . . . [and] his concern for the reviewers."<sup>2</sup> Similar "excesses" appear in his letters and in other published writings, indicating Coleridge's uncertainty in presenting himself favorably before an audience. That he was unaware of the effect of such tactics is demonstrated in a marginal note to the preface, dated May of 1829:

I, yet, after a reperusal of the preceding Apol. Preface, now some 20 years since its first publication, dare deliver it as my own judgment that both in style and thought it is a work creditable to the head and heart of the Author.<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge's criticism of pre-Restoration writers, then, rather than explicit self-analysis, often provides the best comment on his own style. He was correct in valuing the

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<sup>1</sup>The poem, first published in 1798, attacks Pitt: "Letters four do form his name./ He let me [Fire] loose, . . . They shall tear him from limb to limb" (ll. 63-64, 72).

<sup>2</sup>Schulz, "Coleridge's 'Apologetic' Prefaces," p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>Poems, p. 606n.

spontaneous quality found in some of his writings, but did not always select appropriate passages as illustration. More accurate and telling guides are the descriptions and anecdotes Coleridge chooses to repeat. A favorite image for his efforts was the following:

I have laid too many eggs in the hot sands of this wilderness, the world, with ostrich carelessness and ostrich oblivion. The greater part indeed have been trod under foot, and are forgotten; but yet no small number have crept forth into life, some to furnish feathers for the caps of others, and still more to plume the shafts in the quivers of my enemies, of them that unprovoked have lain in wait against my soul.

'Sic vos, non vobis, mellificatis, apes!'<sup>1</sup>

The passage, an example of the use Coleridge made of his readings, is indebted to George Sandys [A Relation of a Journey begun An: Dom: 1610 (4th ed., 1632)]:

They [ostriches] are the simplest of fowles and symbols of folly. What they find they swallow, thought without delight, euen stones & iron. When they haue laid their eggs . . . they leaue them; and unmindful where, sit on those they next meete with.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge takes the desertion of the ostrich eggs as an apt figure for his own ideas. The first version of the Biographia Literaria passage, probably written soon after his reading of Sandys, occurs in the notebooks during the fall of 1802. About a year later, the image is reworked in a letter to Thomas

<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 32.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Notebooks, I, ii, 1248n.

Poole. Here, it enforces Coleridge's claim that he cannot recollect an opinion attributed to him: "I talk so much & so variously, that doubtless I say a thousand Things that exist in the minds of others, when to my own consciousness they are as if they had never been."<sup>1</sup> The passage appears several times in letters of 1808, at the start of The Friend's publication. In this context, Coleridge indicates that it is "high Time"<sup>2</sup> for him to come out in print. The form in each case remains much the same, though the variations are interesting. The image of the world as a "wilderness," inserted later in the notebook passage, does not appear in these letters. Although the figure remains basically the same, Coleridge alters certain words for the occasion (the "quivers" belong, in different instances, to "Calumniators," "enemies," and "Slanderers"). The sentences in the Biographia Literaria are more rhythmically expressed, with phrases added for a careful balance of pairs. Many years later (1821), Coleridge repeated the figure, apparently from memory, in a letter to Thomas Allsop. The bird image is expanded in this variation:

I must be my own scribe, and not done by myself, they [ his planned and half-finished works ] will all be lost; or perhaps (as has been too often the case already) furnish feathers for the caps of others; some for this purpose, and

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 1011.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, III, 145. See also pp. 126 and 133.

some to plume the arrows of detraction, to be let to fly against the luckless bird from whom they had been plucked or moulted.<sup>1</sup>

In its use of metaphor, its self-analysis, its several recurrences, and its origin in his readings, the example is characteristic of Coleridge's prose.

On the specific topic of rhetoric and the works of major rhetoricians, Coleridge had relatively little to say. He was, however, quite aware of a number of the concerns of classical rhetoric: logic and the methods of argumentation; the arrangement or structure of oral and written discourse; the importance of judging one's audience; and the value and place of stylistic devices, especially metaphor and simile, balance and antithesis.

Only one listing for a rhetoric text is given in the several studies of Coleridge's readings. Early in 1798 (29 January-26 February), he borrowed Vol. II of Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (the 1783 edition) from the library at Bristol. Coleridge may have looked also at Vol. I of Ogilvie on Composition, loaned to his friend Joseph Cottle by the same library (August, 1799).<sup>2</sup> Yet neither is discussed in the letters and notebooks for this period. Blair is

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Allsop, Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge (2 vols.; London: Edward Moxon, 1836), I, 153.

<sup>2</sup>George Whalley, "The Bristol Library Borrowings of Southey and Coleridge, 1793-98," The Library, 5th ser., IV (September, 1949), 125, 129.

mentioned but briefly, and in a slighting manner: "Spence, Blackwell & Blair, the Damon, Mopsus, & Menalcus of Criticism."<sup>1</sup> Nor does Coleridge cite the works of classical rhetoricians. He was more interested, for example, in Aristotle's writings on logic and metaphysics than in the Poetics or Rhetoric, and had planned "a philosophical Examination of the Truth, and of the Value, of the Aristotelean System of Logic." To be added was his "own Organum verè Organum" on

all possible modes of true, probable, & false reasoning, arranged philosophically, i.e. on a strict analysis of those operations & passions of the mind, in which they originate, & by which they act, with one or more striking instances annexed to each from authors of high Estimation-- and to each instance of false reasoning, the manner in which the Sophistry is to be detected, & the words, in which it may be exposed.<sup>2</sup>

Coleridge's attention to "reasoning" was closely connected with his stress on the importance of precise terms, discussed earlier in reference to his prose style. Logical reasoning and clear expression were mutually dependent. In a notebook entry for December, 1803, Coleridge points out the need for each:

Of Logic & its neglect, & the consequent strange Illogicality of many even of our principal writers--hence our Crumbly friable Stile/ each Author

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<sup>1</sup>Notebooks, I, i, 532. The entry was probably occasioned by a reading of Vicesimus Knox, Elegant Extracts . . . in Prose (2nd ed., 1784) which quotes the three at length (Notebooks, I, ii, 532n).

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 947-948.

a mere Hour-Glass/--& if we go on in this way, we shall soon have undone all that Aristotle did for the human Race, & come back to Proverbs & Apologues--/ The multitude of Maxims, Aphorisms, & Sentences & their popularity among the French, the beginners<sup>1</sup> of this Style, is it some proof & omen of this?

Coleridge repeats this complaint on many occasions, and praises Oxford for retaining the study of logic: "It is a great mistake to suppose geometry any substitute for it."<sup>2</sup>

"The love of truth conjoined with a keen delight in a strict, skilful, yet impassioned argumentation," wrote Coleridge, "is my master-passion."<sup>3</sup> Although he never established his own method or series of rules for "impassioned argumentation," Coleridge did classify its sources according to a philosophical basis:

There are three distinct sources from one or other of which we must derive our arguments whatever the position may be that we wish to support or overthrow, . . . 1. transcendental, or anterior to experience, as the grounds without which experience itself could not have been. 2. Subjective, or the experience acquirable by self-observation and composed of facts of inward consciousness, which may be appealed to as assumed to have a place in the minds of others but cannot be demonstrated. Each man's experience is a single and insulated Whole. 3. Common and simultaneous Experience, collectively forming History in its widest sense, civil, and natural.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Notebooks, I, i, 1759.

<sup>2</sup>Table Talk, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 315.

<sup>4</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 124.

In connection with the third source, analogy is cited as an important "aid" in conviction. Coleridge's own use of historical analogy is pointed out in the Biographia Literaria. In describing his method in the political articles for the Morning Post, he tells of relating contemporary events to similar ones in past history. If one is "armed with the two-fold knowledge of history and the human mind," he can judge accurately "concerning the sum total of any future national event." In addition to factual information, it is necessary that one "have a philosophic tact for what is truly important" in details.<sup>1</sup>

Closely related to the subject of logic and argumentation is that of "method"--implied in Coleridge's many references to the reconciliation of opposites, the unification of the many in the one, the subordination of parts to the whole. Coleridge finds this faculty, method, to be a distinguishing sign of an educated man of superior powers; his mind, "has been accustomed to contemplate not things only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the relations of things." In the conversation and thoughts--"however irregular and desultory"--of such a person, some unifying principle is discernible.<sup>2</sup> Coleridge urged that this principle be sought when examining a writer's dialectic or premises: "In reading a work,

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 147-148.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, pp. 409-411.

especially is critical, controversial, or historical," it is necessary "to notice what the Writer evidently takes for granted throughout, tho' perhaps he has no where expressed it."<sup>1</sup>

So, too, Coleridge desired to attain this unity or method in his own works--in form as well as in thought. He hoped, for example, that "each essay" of The Friend "be found complete in itself, yet an organic part of the whole considered as one disquisition."<sup>2</sup> And he impatiently defended the unity of his writings against those who would denounce him as "the wild eccentric Genius that has published nothing but fragments and splendid Tirades":

Now surely a series of Essays, the contents and purposes of which are capable of being faithfully and completely enumerated in a sentence of 7 or 8 lines, and where all the points treated off [sic] tend [to] a common result, cannot justly be regarded as a motley, Patch-work or Farrago of heterogeneous Effusions!

Coleridge then applies the "same test" to a number of his works, including the Statesman's Manual, several sections of The Friend, political articles for the Morning Post, certain lectures, and "two distinct treatises, in the Literary Life, besides the Essay on authorship as a Trade."<sup>3</sup> In these, the

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<sup>1</sup>Coleridge on Logic and Learning, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>The Friend, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 201.



tending of "all points" to a "common result" would be effected by "the habit of method."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his works, Coleridge showed an awareness of his audience. Among the "three points" he enumerated for authors to bear in mind was the "description of readers" at which the composition aimed.<sup>2</sup> Coleridge often imagined a specific type of reader, and stated this within the work. The Statesman's Manual, for example, is directed toward "men of clerkly acquirements of whatever profession."<sup>3</sup> Aids to Reflection, in which Coleridge addresses his "Fellow-Christian," is "especially designed for the studious young at the close of their education or on their first entrance into the duties of manhood and the rights of self-government."<sup>4</sup> And it was his wish that "the greater part of our publications could be thus directed, each to its appropriate class of readers." Coleridge's opinion, however, of the popular audience was not high:

Among other odd burs and kecksies, the misgrowth of our luxuriant activity, we now have a Reading Public--as strange a phrase, methinks, as ever forced a splenetic smile on the staid countenance of meditation; and yet no fiction. . . . From a popular philosophy and<sup>5</sup> a philosophic populace, Good Sense deliver us!

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<sup>1</sup>The Friend, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>Statesman's Manual, p. 441.

<sup>4</sup>Aids to Reflection, pp. 111, 114.

<sup>5</sup>Statesman's Manual, pp. 441-442.

In The Friend, parts of which Coleridge viewed as concessions to a wider audience, it is still not the "Reading Public" he would pursue. "I shall be on my guard," he notes, "to make the essays as few as possible, which would require from a well-educated reader any energy of thought and voluntary abstraction."<sup>1</sup>

The "apologetic" prefaces were framed in order to elicit sympathy from a more critical audience. Excuses were made to reviewers and other authors for publishing his lesser efforts; such writings were to be forgiven either as youthful compositions, unrevised, extemporaneous, or circulated without his knowledge. In these prefaces, Coleridge presents himself as an unassuming, conscientious author: "what I had dared beget, I thought it neither manly nor honorable not to dare father."<sup>2</sup> This concern for his relationship with his audience is often illustrated in the titles of Coleridge's works. A number of roles were adopted: he was a "friend," a "watchman," a pastor (as in the two "lay sermons"--one addressed to the "higher classes," the other to both "higher and middle classes" of society), a mentor (as in Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character), and an "inquiring spirit."

Whether Coleridge reached a successful rapport with his audience is uncertain. Judging from the reaction of many of

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<sup>1</sup>The Friend, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Sibylline Leaves, pp. 97-98.

his contemporaries and the verdict of some modern critics, it would appear that he failed: Coleridge "either could not or would not let his audience govern the form, content, and style of his written works."<sup>1</sup> Not completely unaware of this weakness Coleridge was sympathetic toward his reader or listener. He tells of feeling "remorseful pity" for an audience upon whom he had inflicted "an hour and twenty-five minutes' essay," "full of Greek and superannuated Metaphysics."<sup>2</sup> At times, however, he is intentionally more accessible to the general reader; The Friend essays, for example, are adapted to a wider audience than the philosophical sections of the Biographia Literaria or the Statesman's Manual.

Finally, Coleridge stresses the importance of several stylistic devices discussed by the rhetoricians--especially metaphor and simile, and balance (or parallelism) and antithesis. For Aristotle, metaphor is a primary concern: "in prose all the more attention must be devoted to metaphors because here the resources of the writer are less abundant than in verse. It is metaphor above all else that gives clearness, charm, and distinction to the style."<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, too, both in practice and

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<sup>1</sup> Armour, Coleridge the Talker, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Letters (E. H. Coleridge), II, 739-740. "On the Prometheus of Aeschylus" is the essay referred to.

<sup>3</sup> The Rhetoric of Aristotle, ed. and trans. Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1932), p. 187.

in principle, testifies to the value of metaphor. In a note-book entry, he explains the functions of metaphor and simile:

Judiciously used [they] serve not only for illustration and refreshment. To inventive and thoughtful minds they are often the suggestions of actual analogies--the apparent likeness being referred to a common Principle, ex. gr. the likeness between animal life and flame to the vital air present for both. But they have a third use--namely, that on many occasions they present a far more perfect, both a fuller and a more precise and accurate language than that of abstract or general words.<sup>1</sup>

As does Aristotle, Coleridge warns that "inappropriate metaphors" may be a cause of ineffective style and thought. In a suitably figurative manner, Coleridge points out that

Metaphors are tricky comparisons--Will O' the Wisp that often lead a man to say what he never meant; or call them fire-flies, that (on all momentous subjects) should be examined by the stronger light of the lamps of reflection before they are let loose to ornament the twilight.<sup>2</sup>

In his own prose, from the very start, Coleridge showed his predilection for this figure. His authorship of anonymous political essays, for example, has been established by detecting the "signature of inimitable Coleridgean metaphor."<sup>3</sup>

"Antithesis" in Aristotle's Rhetoric, together with metaphor and "actuality," are the three essential points of

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<sup>1</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 388.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>3</sup>Erdman, "The Signature of Style," p. 91.

style. Parallelism in expression is "pleasing, because things are best known by opposition, and are all the better known when the opposites are put side by side; and is pleasing also because of its resemblance to logic."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's primary ideas and his critical method follows a similar assumption, the result of "many years' continued reflection on . . . the source of our pleasures in the fine Arts in the antithetical balance-loving nature of man."<sup>2</sup> And his prose style, as well, is characterized by parallelism in ideas, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

In summarizing Coleridge's contributions to the principles and criticism of prose style and rhetoric, it might be noted that his remarks are of interest in themselves, though they do not form a definite and consciously developed theory. Perhaps they are most significant and useful in clarifying Coleridge's own aims and practice--in examining his writings in terms of those ideas and preferences he expressed.

Raymond F. Howes concludes from Coleridge's "incidental references" that he "thought of rhetorical theory as a body of empty rules for making trivial ideas impressive and persuasive."<sup>3</sup> But such a statement is applicable only to Coleridge's

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.9, trans. Cooper, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, III, 30.

<sup>3</sup>"Coleridge and Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech Education, XII (June, 1926), 148.

attitude toward eighteenth-century manuals of style. In reacting against the philosophy and expression of much in the eighteenth century, Coleridge found the work of Blair, Blackwell, and others uncongenial. He did not agree, for example, with their judgments on the superiority of eighteenth-century prose style, or with their principles of aesthetics or taste. Coleridge was aware, however, of the importance of persuasion, argumentation, a knowledge of the passions or emotions, and attention to style. A recent collection of rhetorical studies (divided into "The Great Tradition" and "Coleridge and After") places Coleridge at the start of modern theory,<sup>1</sup> indicating that his contribution, though small in extent, was of consequence.

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<sup>1</sup>Dudley Bailey, ed., Essays on Rhetoric (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

## CHAPTER V

### THE RHETORIC OF THE BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

#### THE ARRANGEMENT

Of all the questions raised by the Biographia Literaria, that of its structure is among the most puzzling. Coleridge himself, in labeling chapters "digressions" and referring to the work as an "immethodical . . . miscellany," a "semi-narrative,"<sup>1</sup> discouraged the likelihood of finding a careful plan. And an examination of his correspondence, as indicated in Chapter II of this study, reveals that the Biographia, in its final, published form, was not conceived and executed as a "whole." Coleridge's contemporaries pronounced the work lacking in method and order, and modern critics, as a rule, have concurred: the Biographia resembles a "shapeless haystack"<sup>2</sup> or --in James's term--a "fluid pudding"--a formless substance to be organized, shaped, and molded.

It is interesting to note, too, that none of the later editors of the Biographia have reprinted the work in quite its

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 64, 110.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Read, English Prose Style (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1949), p. 83

original form. Coleridge initiated this concept of an "ideal" Biographia by claiming only its second volume for a list of the writings with which he was satisfied.<sup>1</sup> Early reviewers, in protesting the "metaphysical" sections, were explicit as to what Coleridge should retain: "one volume expunged,--the other would be highly instructive and entertaining."<sup>2</sup> In the second edition of the Biographia Literaria (London, 1847), prepared and annotated by H. N. and Sara Coleridge, a number of textual changes are made. The footnote on Jeffrey in Chapter III is omitted, and "a paragraph concerning the detractors from . . . [Wordsworth's] merits" is deleted from the end of Chapter XXII. "As these passages contain personal remarks, right or wrong," explains Sara, "they were anomalies in my Father's writings, unworthy of them and of him, and such as I feel sure he would not himself have reprinted." In addition to slight alterations and corrections, the 1847 edition contains a "Biographical Supplement" and copious notes; again, these are said to reflect Coleridge's intentions "had he republished the work at all in its present form."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 925.

<sup>2</sup>"Review of Biographia Literaria," The Literary Gazette, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia (1847), cxix. Coleridge did not, however (as far as it is known), prepare or give instructions for a revision of the Biographia.



The next edition of the Biographia was published in 1907 by Oxford University Press. John Shawcross reprinted the 1817 text, and based his notes on the 1847 edition. As a supplement to the Biographia, Shawcross includes Coleridge's essays "On the Principles of Genial Criticism," fragments of essays on taste and on beauty, and notes "On Poesy or Art." The editor's introduction points out the "fragmentary" nature of Coleridge's work: "the very qualities in his genius, to which his writings owe their vitality, were antagonistic to complete and systematic exposition."<sup>1</sup> In discussing the Biographia, however, Shawcross finds a unifying motive--"the desire, on Coleridge's part, to state clearly, and defend adequately, his own poetic creed." An attempt is made to subsume various aspects of the work under this aim:

It is with this end in view that, in the autobiographical portion of the book, he describes the growth of his own literary convictions; that, in the philosophical, he seeks to refer them to first principles; and that, in the criticism of Wordsworth's poetry and poetic theory, he emphasizes the differences which, as he imagines, exist between Wordsworth and himself. Regarded in this light, even Satyrane's letters and the 'Critique on Bertram' are not wholly out of place; for they illustrate the continuity of his opinions.<sup>2</sup>

Shawcross does not believe, however, that Coleridge achieved a synthesis between the two volumes of the Biographia: "the

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, iii.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia, I, xcii.

poetical criticism of the second part is based, not on the deductions of the metaphysician, but on the intuitive insight of the poet." Coleridge is indebted, in Volume II, not to the German philosophers, but "to the teaching of his own inward experience, long ripened into settled convictions."<sup>1</sup>

Cambridge University Press published the third annotated edition of the Biographia in 1920. Its editor, George Sampson, omitted Chapters V-XVIII, XXIII-XXIV, and "Satyrane's Letters." Wordsworth's relevant prefaces and essays (1800-1815) are provided in this edition, and the contents of those chapters not reprinted are summarized in an appendix. The form of the Biographia is criticized, both in Sampson's notes and in the "Introductory Essay" by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Stressing the fact that "the Biographia grew out of the necessities of the moment," Sampson describes the work in this way: "It begins, as an autobiography should, with Coleridge himself; but, after uttering a protest against Reviewers, it digresses into barren regions of Germanized philosophy, and ends by being all about Wordsworth."<sup>2</sup> The work is merely "fragmentary and discontinuous--a series of beginnings, with a conclusion that fits none of them."<sup>3</sup> Neither are individual parts of the Biographia

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, lxxxvi.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia (Sampson), pp. 258, 252.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, (Sampson), v.

credited with a relationship to the whole: the chapters on associationism, for example, are ignored as a "mass of imported metaphysic . . . dumped in the middle"; "Satyrane's Letters" are disposed of as foreign matter, merely "tossed in" as an afterthought.<sup>1</sup>

The most recent edition of the Biographia Literaria, that published in the "Everyman's Library" series (1956, revised 1960), claims to be "the first to present the Biographia as nearly as possible according to the author's intentions." To this end, George Watson omits "Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII; added by Coleridge "when desperately in search of make-weights," they contribute "nothing to the substance of the book."<sup>2</sup> Watson grants the Biographia those qualities most often denied it--design and unity. The latter he attributes to Coleridge's "marrying" of "the twin studies of philosophy and literature," with the "link . . . forged" in Chapters XII and XIII. According to Watson, the "greatest originality" of the Biographia is to be found in its design. Although "unorthodox" and "obscured by adventures in the press," a definite purpose "does exist and demands to be understood." But Watson does not specify exactly wherein this originality of design lies. His opinion of Coleridge's framework is similar in its praise,

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia (Sampson), v, xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia (Sampson), xviii.

though again not fully explained: "no one can deny that the form of the Biographia, eccentric (indeed unique) as it is, is perfectly suited to what Coleridge has to offer, . . . a plan neither narrative nor logical but a disconcerting combination of the two."<sup>1</sup> Watson, however, finds fault with much of Volume I, and minimizes the autobiographical aspect of the work. Coleridge's advance toward Chapters XII and XIII

is effected without modesty, and more than enough appeals to authority and much heralding and hesitation, none of which is defensible by strict standards. Chapters 10 and 11, in particular, are a lamentable exhibition of cold feet. . . . He was not writing an autobiography, nor even an account of his literary life, and any sort of biographical approach is certain to be disappointed.<sup>2</sup>

Nor would Watson agree that Coleridge addressed a popular audience in certain sections of the Biographia: "He did not even care about being entertaining, and shrugged off the charge of obscurity with the retort that 'my severest critics have not pretended to have found in my compositions triviality, or traces of a mind that shrunk from the toil of thinking.'"<sup>3</sup>

Each of these divergent editorial attitudes is understandable, for the design of the Biographia is complex and, indeed, unique. A work sui generis, it falls into no category

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia (Watson), xii.

<sup>2</sup>Biographia (Watson), xix-xx.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia (Watson), xx.

or genre to which accepted standards may be applied. Coleridge's reputation for the fragmentary and unfinished, the confusion surrounding publication of the Biographia, and the "superstition about its obscurity . . . [which] was immediately circulated"<sup>1</sup> all contribute to its current standing: recent criticism provides a whole series of objections to the structural incoherence of the Biographia. There are, however, few actual demonstrations for either side of the argument. In order to determine whether unity and design do, in fact, exist in the Biographia, in what these consist, and how they are made evident, an examination of Coleridge's earlier works and of his concept of literary structure may prove helpful. The term structure will be taken to include the inner unity of a work, its external framework, and Coleridge's principle of the organic relationship of parts to the whole in a work of art.

For a writer supposedly lacking in a sense of unity and architectonic skill, Coleridge places a notable stress on these very qualities in his criticism of others. For example, a 1794 review of The Mysteries of Udolpho points out that "four volumes cannot depend entirely on terrific incidents and intricacy of story. They require . . . unity of design."<sup>2</sup> An essay on The Monk (1797) praises the novel's "underplot" as "skilfully

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<sup>1</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 101.

<sup>2</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 356.

and closely connected with the main story, and . . . subservient to its development."<sup>1</sup> In a marginal note to Donne's "The Canonization," Coleridge records his "delight . . . in tracing the leading thought thro' out the whole," describing this process as the merging of "yourself in the author"--"you become He."<sup>2</sup> The lectures and notes on Shakespeare revolve on the question of unity--of the many in the one, the particular in the universal. Other dramatists fail insofar as they are deficient in this quality. Of Massinger, Coleridge writes:

the Dramatis Personae were all planned, each by itself but in Sh./akespeare/ the Play is a syngenesia--each has indeed a life of it's own, & is an individuum of itself: but yet an organ to the whole--as the Heart & the Brain, &c.--the Heart &c. of that particular Whole. Sh./akespeare was/ a comparative anatomist.<sup>3</sup>

A recent study of Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism shows him to be the most sensitive "of all the romantic critics . . . to the formal aspect of the plays," remarking often "on the interrelation of the parts, be they incidents, characters, images or odd phrases."<sup>4</sup> In the Biographia itself, Coleridge emphasizes the conscious purpose of the poet's art: "I did not hesitate to declare my full conviction, that the consummate judgement of

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 523.

<sup>3</sup>Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, p. 674.

<sup>4</sup>M. M. Badawi, "Coleridge's Formal Criticism of Shakespeare's Plays," Essays in Criticism, X (April, 1960), 153, 158.

Shakespeare, not only in the general construction, but in all the detail, of his dramas, impressed me with greater wonder, than even the might of his genius, or the depth of his philosophy."<sup>1</sup>

The concept of "method" is significant as a foundation for Coleridge's literary criticism as well as for his philosophy:

The great principles of all Method we have shown to be two, viz. Union and Progression. The relations of things cannot be united by accident: they are united by an Idea either definite or instinctive. Their union, in proportion as it is clear, is also progressive. . . . Those who tread the enchanted ground of POETRY, oftentimes do not even suspect that there is such a thing as Method to guide their steps. Yet even here we undertake to show that it not only has a necessary existence, but the strictest Philosophical application; . . .<sup>2</sup>

Several essays in The Friend also contain important statements on the topic. As pointed out in Chapter IV of this study, the mind possessing the faculty of method is able to see relationships, to bring together opposites, to seek unifying principles: "where the habit of method is present and effective, things the most remote and diverse in time, place, and outward circumstance, are brought into mental contiguity and succession, the more striking as the less expected."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Biographia, I, 22n.

<sup>2</sup>Treatise on Method, pp. 11, 25.

<sup>3</sup>The Friend, p. 414.

Coleridge often applied such criteria to his own work. The Friend, for example, contains numerous divisions--into volumes, sections, introductions, essays, and "landing places"; judging by its table of contents, the book appears fragmentary and chaotic. It was Coleridge's intention, however, that each part be organically related to the whole. And his marginal notations in a copy of the Statesman's Manual (see above, Ch. IV) claim unity for "from 14 to 18 entire and distinct works." Because his "contents and purposes" are "capable of being faithfully and completely enumerated in a sentence of 7 or 8 lines," and all the points discussed have a common aim, the writings listed, Coleridge believes, are unified.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge was accustomed to composing in relatively small sections rather than in large continuous works. His series of lectures, in which a topic is extended over a period of several weeks, illustrate this tendency. So, too, his many unfinished works, marginal notes, periodical writings, and large number of letters (six volumes in the recently completed edition) may be viewed as parts or fragments. Yet several of the lectures and articles for the Morning Post and Courier satisfy Coleridge's requirements for unity.<sup>2</sup> In his lectures, Coleridge was notorious for departing from the announced topic,

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<sup>1</sup> Inquiring Spirit, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



filling the larger part of the evening with impulsive digressions. However, "things the most remote and diverse" are enabled, in Coleridge's analysis, to be "brought into mental contiguity"; seemingly disparate subjects, when related by the methodical mind, can attain integration.

Coleridge's idea of unity, then, cannot be described as something "single" or "linear," but is best expressed by certain terms which recur in his writings--"agglomerative" and "progressive." An unfolding, associative structure is advocated. "You will find this a good gage or criterion of genius," Coleridge once remarked, "--whether it progresses and evolves, . . ."<sup>1</sup> Dryden's "genius" is portrayed as "that sort which catches fire by its own motion; his chariot wheels get hot by driving fast."<sup>2</sup> As has often been noted, Coleridge's mind is of this nature. He likened his own thoughts to "Surinam Toads--as they crawl on, little Toads vegetate out from back & side, grow quickly, & draw off the attention from the mother Toad."<sup>3</sup> That self-analysis of Coleridge's mode of thought, used to explain his prose style, may also be applied to his notions of unity and structure: "my illustrations swallow up my thesis." He accounts himself among those "who use

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<sup>1</sup>Table Talk, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>Table Talk, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, III, 95.

five hundred more ideas, images, reasons &c than there is any need of to arrive of at their object."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Coleridge's sentence forms reflect his method of reasoning. The many parentheses and asides correspond to his digressions and associations; his propensity for connectives, the "cements of language," may be related to his frequent transitional phrases and comments to the reader on his aims and progress.

Briefly, then, Coleridge's pronouncements on unity and structure in a literary work are these. If the "contents and purposes" of a composition can be summarized with perspicuity, and each of the separate parts tends toward a common end, the requirement of inner unity has been fulfilled. Eternal structure, or framework, receives less attention. Coleridge's own works often contain explicit divisions, and he has a propensity for antitheses, triadic groupings, and numbered listings. His arrangement, however, is frequently dictated by circumstances of composition and publication rather than by a predetermined plan or outline. The relationship of parts to the whole is the fundamental consideration for Coleridge. Not solely a literary question, the concept of organic unity is basic to his world-view: "Coleridge's central preoccupation was with the antithesis between a living whole or organism on the one hand and a mechanical juxtaposition of parts on the other."<sup>2</sup> A literary

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<sup>1</sup>Notebooks, II, i, 2372.

<sup>2</sup>Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), 30.

work, as a "living whole," encompasses and reconciles the remote and diverse, with each element "generating, and explaining, and justifying, the place of another."<sup>1</sup>

Before examining the Biographia Literaria in light of the above standards, a review of the origin and growth of the work will indicate several of its structural aspects and problems. As detailed in Chapter II of this study, the Biographia began as a "general Preface . . . on the Principles of philosophical and genial criticism,"<sup>2</sup> developed into a separate volume "Autobiographia literaria" (which was to include a discussion of Wordsworth's poems and theory and the controversy occasioned by them, as well as an essay on the "faculties of Fancy and Imagination"), and was completed, "a Work per se," as two volumes of "Biographical Sketches" of Coleridge's "Literary Life and Opinions."<sup>3</sup> Its division into two volumes was, as noted, the work of Coleridge's printer rather than a natural or intended break. Yet Volume I does end at a climactic point, with the definition of "the imagination, or esemplastic power." Coleridge himself accepted this structure, referring in later years to "two distinct Treatises"<sup>4</sup> within the Biographia--the

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 561.

<sup>3</sup>Letters, IV, 578-589, 584-585.

<sup>4</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 201.

"metaphysical disquisition"<sup>1</sup> and the critique of Wordsworth.

Nor were the chapter divisions part of Coleridge's original plan. The first four chapters were apparently composed as a single unit. In a letter to Gutch, Coleridge refers to these as "the first part of the Work" which he has completed and sent to the printer. This "first part," now that the work is no longer to be a "preface," can be broken into "three or four chapters"; Coleridge then speaks, a few sentences later, of "two or three Chapters" and provides their headings:

[Chapter I]

Occasion of the Work, Volume of Juvenile Poems.  
The discipline of my Understanding at School.--

Chapter II

Are Authors an especially irritable Race? and  
what Authors? Of Reviewers and Reviews--.

Chapter III

Neither the Writer's, nor Mr Southey's Publications the true cause or occasion of the charge,  
that there has risen a new School of Poets.--

At this time (17 September 1815) "the whole" of the work, according to Coleridge, was written "excepting only the philosophical Part." The latter, first "meant to comprize in a few Pages," was then extended to "a sizeable Proportion of the whole."<sup>2</sup> Coleridge's allusion here to a "whole" is somewhat

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<sup>1</sup>Table Talk, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 585-586.

confusing. It would appear to refer to the first thirteen chapters, but Griggs concludes (based on printing bills and unpublished correspondence) that "during August and September 1815 the manuscript comprising the first 22 chapters of the Biographia was delivered to Gutch in Bristol."<sup>1</sup> And Coleridge writes soon after (7 October 1815) that his "Biographical sketches" are to include a discussion of Wordsworth: "the detection of the faults in his Poetry is indispensable to a rational appreciation of his Merits."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, between September 1816 and May 1817, these additions were made to the original twenty-two chapters of the Biographia: a possible extension and definite alterations at the end of Chapter XXII; the previously published "Satyrane's Letters" and review of Maturin's Bertram; and the "Conclusion" (Chapter XXIV), part of which may have been included earlier in Chapter XXII.

When such shifts in aim and interruptions are recounted, it is not difficult to see why the Biographia Literaria has been called "a standing example of confusion due to the lack of logical ordering or preliminary disposition of material."<sup>3</sup> And in addition to a want of consistent execution, the work was

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 657n.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 591.

<sup>3</sup>Herbert Read, English Prose Style, p. 81.

projected as part of a larger endeavor. Originally intended as a preface to *Sibylline Leaves* (as Wordsworth's theory had preceded his poetical works), the Biographia Literaria was also declared by Coleridge to be "an important Pioneer to the great Work on the Logos, Divine and Human."<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, the Biographia may be compared with Wordsworth's Prelude, designed "to be introductory to the 'Recluse'"<sup>2</sup>: neither "great work" was realized. Thus, in a certain sense a "fragment," the Biographia can be placed among those unfinished works which were characteristic and "especially plentiful" during the Romantic period.<sup>3</sup>

The Biographia stands, however, a separate and distinct composition, as Coleridge's most extensive single work in prose. Yet few attempts have been made to accept the Biographia as such, and to search for its principles of order and composition. Notable is George Whalley's article, which opposes the notion that the Biographia Literaria

was a whimsical and absent-minded improvisation, a mushroom growth in which toughness of fibre is scarcely to be expected. . . . in Coleridge's case improvisation does not necessarily mean chaos. . . . Was it credible . . . that, with his capacity for sustained reflection, with his poetic and critical insight, with his 'capacious

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 583.

<sup>2</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 494.

<sup>3</sup>G. B. Tennyson, Sartor Called Resartus (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 223.

and systematizing memory, Coleridge could have written--no matter what the state of his health --a book in which no coherent thread of thought or purpose could be distinguished?<sup>1</sup>

Whalley suggests a framework for the book, finds its "centre of gravity" to lie in Chapter XII, and stresses Coleridge's reactions to Wordsworth's statements as its unifying motive.

"Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII, "flaccid interpolations" for which Coleridge "is not wholly responsible,"<sup>2</sup> are not discussed. Details of Whalley's argument will be noted in examining the structural aspects of the Biographia Literaria.

In Chapter X of the Biographia Coleridge tells of criticizing this fault in Cowper's "The Task": "the subject, which gives the title to the work, was not, and indeed could not be, carried on beyond the three or four first pages." Further, "throughout the poem, the connections are frequently awkward, and the transitions abrupt and arbitrary." Coleridge then searched for a subject that would allow "equal room and freedom for description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature, and society, yet supply in itself a natural connection to the parts, and unity to the whole." He decided upon a stream as his subject, and planned a poem (never completed) to be known as "The Brook."<sup>3</sup> This method of unity may be applied to

<sup>1</sup>"The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>"The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," pp. 96, 99.

<sup>3</sup>Biographia, I, 128-29. Later references to the Shaw-cross edition will be included within the text.

the Biographia itself, in which the strands of several topics and styles are joined within a single work. Coleridge's various descriptions of the contents of the Biographia, for example, are similarly all-inclusive; politics, religion, philosophy, poetry, criticism, and biography are among the subjects he intends to cover. In looking for a parallel to "The Brook," perhaps the most accurate title among those Coleridge gave the Biographia occurs in a letter to R. H. Brabant (29 July 1815): "an Autobiographia literaria, or Sketches of my literary Life & opinions, as far as Poetry and poetical Criticism is [are] concerned."<sup>1</sup> While it is difficult to settle upon a single aim in the Biographia, all of Coleridge's interests can be subsumed under the terms of "Autobiographia," "Poetry," or "poetical Criticism." The topics developed over several decades before publication of the Biographia (see above, Chapter II)--Wordsworth's poetry, poetic diction, reviews, biography, and the theory of poetry--fall under the same headings.

In examining a literary work for a statement or indication of its structure and main ideas, one generally turns to the introductory and concluding sections. Coleridge's final chapter, not a summary in the usual sense, can be discounted first. Chapter I does give several of the Biographia's aims: personal narrative is to be of little significance; Wordsworth's

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, IV, 579.



poetry and the controversy over poetic diction are "not the least important" of Coleridge's objects (I, 1). An introductory paragraph, however, is followed by pages of reminiscence, continued throughout Chapters II and III. Coleridge takes notes of his digressions in the opening sentence of the fourth chapter--"I have wandered far from the object in view" (I, 50)-- and in returning to his theme, provides an epitome for the whole of the Biographia Literaria. Within the biographical framework of his early acquaintance with Wordsworth, Coleridge ascribes the "true origin" of his friend's critical reception to the remarks, especially those concerning poetic diction, "prefixed and annexed to the 'Lyrical Ballads'" (I, 51). The errors of contemporary reviews are exposed, and Wordsworth's true merits and poetic character are defended. In meditating upon Wordsworth's excellence as a poet, Coleridge is led to consider the distinction between Fancy and Imagination. Coleridge held this explanation to be his most important contribution to literary criticism: "I took some little credit to myself, in the belief that I had been the first of my countrymen, who had pointed out the diverse meaning of which the two terms were capable, and analyzed the faculties to which they should be appropriated" (I, 63). Coleridge's response to Wordsworth's poems ("which made so unusual an impression on my feelings immediately, and subsequently on my judgement. . . . I no sooner felt, than I sought to understand") suggests a critical method he is to

employ later in the work (I, 59-60). Finally, Coleridge states wherein he differs from Wordsworth--in object and in procedure. Wordsworth is praised for his "masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage," but Coleridge proposes to "investigate the seminal principle," to offer an "intelligible statement" on poetry and the creative imagination. This statement will be presented, not as his "opinions, which weigh for nothing but as deductions from established premises conveyed in such a form, as is calculated either to effect a fundamental conviction, or to receive a fundamental confutation" (I, 64-65). Coleridge thus prepares the groundwork for his theory and analysis, while demonstrating the interrelationship of "things the most . . . diverse" in the Biographia Literaria.

The first part of Coleridge's subject, "Autobiographia," figures prominently in eight chapters of the Biographia. Chapters I, III, X, and XXIV are largely personal; II, IV, XI, and XIV all make use of Coleridge's experiences. In addition, "I" appears often throughout the chapters on associationism, in which the impact of various theories upon Coleridge is recorded. Similarly, the analysis of Wordsworth the poet draws upon his knowledge of Wordsworth the man.

The chapters on Wordsworth (primarily IV, XIV, XVII-XX, and XXII), those on poetical theory in general (I, IV, XII-XXXX), and analyses of other writers and styles (I, XV-XXIII) may be considered under the heading of "Poetry." A lack of strict

divisions, of course, causes much overlapping of themes within chapters. Coleridge's section on the "law of association," leading to his definition of the imagination, may also be considered as poetical theory. "Poetical criticism," too, is applicable to much of the Biographia. Not unimportant in Coleridge's design, reviews and reviewers are the subject of II, III, and XXI. His quarrels with critical journals also appear in I, IV, X, XIV, XXII, and XXIV. The criticism of Wordsworth, as well as remarks on poetry in general, are related to the heading of "poetical criticism." Thus, although some chapter divisions indicate actual breaks in thought, none are devoted solely to one topic. Coleridge points this out himself in his summaries of the chapters' contents, few of which are able to be expressed in a single sentence.

In this way, Coleridge's first requirement for unity in a literary work--that separate parts tend toward a common end or ends--is fulfilled in his Biographia Literaria. Yet as in his projected poem "The Brook," the organic principle is so broad as to exclude little; nor are all the parts equally justifiable. A closer examination of the relationship of parts to the whole will illustrate the ways in which Coleridge attempts to achieve unity. Before taking up this question, however, a possible framework for the Biographia will be suggested.

Coleridge was fond of creating titles and descriptions of projected works, but did not provide outlines for the same.

The Biographia, as noted before, was not originally conceived as a two-volume work containing twenty-four chapters. The printers determined the number of volumes, and Coleridge added chapter headings after composing in unbroken sections. Whether larger divisions in the Biographia were predetermined is nowhere suggested by Coleridge in his letters or other comments on the work, though he does refer to "two distinct Treatises"<sup>1</sup> and an essay within the work. A seven-part structure for the Biographia is proposed by George Whalley. The first volume contains two sections: in Chapters I-IV Coleridge presents his poetic credentials; in Chapters V-XIII he hopes to supply "an adequate theory of association." Whalley analyzes the second volume in this way:

His purpose is to set forth what he and Wordsworth had discovered to be the true nature of poetry, and to reinstate it against the attacks of meretricious criticism. In an introductory chapter he states his doctrine; two chapters provide historical perspective; four chapters examine his disagreements with Wordsworth's theory; two chapters . . . is given up to 'fair and philosophical inquisition into the character of Wordsworth, as a poet'. The Conclusion . . . reaffirms his reason for vindicating himself in public, and rests his hopes upon Christian belief and the goodness of God.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the miscellaneous nature of many of Coleridge's chapters and the absence of clear divisions, it is

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<sup>1</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>"The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," pp. 97-99.

difficult to settle with certainty upon a framework. In Whalley's theory, for example, the subject-matter of Chapters X and XI is not accounted for; nor is Coleridge's "doctrine" limited to Chapter XIV. Although "Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII were not part of his original intention, Coleridge does attempt to relate these to the whole; they should, therefore, be taken into consideration when discussing the structure of the Biographia. In examining the work for an indication of its main parts, one finds no explicit list or signs given by Coleridge. But in noting his transitions at the opening and close of chapters, the following breaks seem to occur.

Part I (Chapters I-IV): Introduction. Coleridge provides a personal and general background, states his aims, and illustrates some of his methods and topics. Chapter I records the origin and development of certain ideas on poetry, especially poetic diction. Chapter II's defense of "men of genius" prepares for his own self-apology and his tribute to Wordsworth. The fallibility of reviewers is a theme continued in Coleridge's praise of Southey (Chapter III). Chapter IV, returning to "the object in view" (I, 50), joins the strands introduced thus far and anticipates both the philosophical section and the analysis of Wordsworth's poetry and prefaces.

Part II (Chapters V-IX). One of the "two distinct Treatises" mentioned by Coleridge, this essay in the history

of association lays the groundwork for his definition of the "seminal principle" (I, 64), the distinction between Fancy and Imagination. Coleridge's own mental history appears prominently in his exposition of the errors of various systems and in his acknowledgement of indebtedness to the "revolution in philosophy" (I, 104) effected by Kant and his followers. In the final paragraph of Chapter V, Coleridge gives a brief summary of his plan:

It remains then for me, first to state wherein Hartley differs from Aristotle; then, to exhibit the grounds of my conviction, that he differed only to err; and next as the result, to shew, by what influences of the choice and judgement the associative power becomes either memory or fancy; and, in conclusion, to appropriate the remaining offices of the mind to the reason, and the imagination (I, 73).

Shawcross points out that Coleridge fails in these chapters "to carry out more than the preliminary stage," and calls Chapter XII "a fresh start" (I, 233n). Although a break does occur, the two parts are closely related.

Part III (Chapters X-XI). These chapters of "digression," which may be compared with the "landing-places" in The Friend, are provided as an interlude--to "contribute to the reader's amusement, as a voluntary before a sermon" (I, 105); although serious matters are not excluded, Coleridge clearly intends to be entertaining. Drawing upon his own experience, Coleridge offers advice, through both precept and example, to young authors. The section is connected to Part II by

continuing, in other areas, Coleridge's mental history, while his insistence upon the proper use of terms and the importance of method anticipates Part IV. Placed between the most abstract passages in the Biographia, Chapters X and XI investigate some of the practical aspects of authorship. The difficulties here portrayed lend persuasive force to Coleridge's self-defense: "By what I have effected, am I to be judged by my fellow men; what I could have done, is a question for my own conscience" (I, 151).

Part IV (Chapters XII-XIII). The results of Coleridge's study, recorded in Part II, are given in the final chapters of Volume I. Chapter XII is described as merely "concerning the perusal or omission" (I, 160) of Chapter XIII, yet it provides the philosophical background for Coleridge's concept of the poetic imagination. The results of the ten Theses are to "be applied to the deduction of the Imagination, and with it the principles of production and of genial criticism in the fine arts" (I, 180). Coleridge's view of the creative act appears in his explanation of the "intimate coalition" of nature and self, finite and infinite, during the act of knowledge: "In the existence, in the reconciling, and the recurrence of this contradiction consists the process and mystery of production and life" (I, 174, 185). Chapter XIII, to have continued the argument in "a long treatise on ideal Realism," is cut short by a "very judicious letter" from a "friend," and concludes with

"the main result"--the definitions of imagination and fancy (I, 201-202). These conclusions introduce both the method and substance of Coleridge's analysis of Wordsworth (and of Shakespeare) in Volume II.

Part V (Chapters XIV-XVI). Introductory to his analysis of Wordsworth's poetry, Coleridge reviews the controversy over the Lyrical Ballads, defines his terms (poem, poetry, and poet), and applies and illustrates his conclusions. Chapter XIV states the end to be accomplished in Part VI: "I think it expedient to declare once for all, in what points I coincide with his opinions [Wordsworth's views on poetic diction], and in what points I altogether differ" (II, 8). To this end, Coleridge clarifies certain phrases, noting that "controversy is not seldom excited in consequence of the disputants attaching each a different meaning to the same word; and in few instances has this been more striking than in disputes concerning the present subject" (II, 10). Chapters XV and XVI employ these principles in appraising Shakespeare (especially his Venus and Adonis) and his Italian contemporaries in contrast to the "present age" (II, 21).

Part VI (Chapters XVII-XXII). Wordsworth's "tenets," his "real object," and the "characteristics of his poetry" (II, 28, 69, 95) are examined at length. The first two chapters of this section contain Coleridge's arguments against Wordsworth's "choice of characters" and of language, and his assertion that



no "essential difference" exists between prose and poetical composition (II, 38, 45). Chapters XIX and XX maintain that Wordsworth, in his essays, was expressing a preference for "the poetry of the milder muse" (II, 71), a style having a long tradition in English literature. Further, Wordsworth's own excellence lies not in this "neutral" manner, but in his highly "individualized and characteristic" diction (II, 69, 77). Finally, Coleridge attempts to provide

a fair and philosophical inquisition into the character of Wordsworth, as a poet, on the evidence of his published works; and a positive, not a comparative, appreciation of their characteristic excellencies, deficiencies, and defects (II, 85).

"Canons of criticism" (II, 85) proposed in Chapter XXI serve both as an answer to Wordsworth's detractors and as guidelines for the judging of poetry. The method recommended--an establishment of principles to be applied to "striking passages" (II, 85)--is then followed by Coleridge in his analysis (Chapter XXII) of Wordsworth's faults and merits.

Part VII ("Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII). Much less to the point than the "digressions" of Part III, "Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII are meant to present Coleridge in "the first dawn" (II, 131) of his literary life and to illustrate the continuity of his "principles of taste" (II, 181). This section and Part III are parallel, however, in providing an interlude of "entertainment" near the end of each

volume. Since Letter II contains a discussion of "the pantomimic tragedies and weeping comedies of Kotzebue and his imitators" (II, 158), Coleridge follows "Satyrane's Letters" with his review of Maturin's Bertram--another example of "the modern Jacobinical drama" (II, 192).

Part VIII (Chapter XXIV): Conclusion. The final pages of the Biographia Literaria fulfill the promise made by Coleridge at the end of Chapter XXII--to "speak of myself in the tones, which are alone natural to me under the circumstances of late years" (II, 131). In this apologetic chapter, Coleridge returns to the subject of critical journals, defending himself against the recent attacks on the Christabel volume and The Statesman's Manual. His remarks on Christabel lead to further warnings for young authors; charges brought against The Statesman's Manual prompt Coleridge to state his religious convictions, especially "concerning the true evidences of Christianity" (II, 215). Although personal narrative is secondary and discontinuous in the Biographia, the work does move, in a general way, from youth (about the age of ten in Chapter I) to age (though not yet an old man, Coleridge writes with a manner of retrospection and finality in Chapter XXIV): Coleridge is brought from "the first dawn" of his "literary life" (II, 131) to the "Night, sacred Night" (II, 218) of his concluding lines.

Although these divisions were apparently not predetermined, nor stated in the Biographia itself, they do seem to

follow a certain pattern. Each of the eight parts opens rather abruptly, while the chapters within the major divisions tend to have clearly marked transitions. In this way, the start of a new subject is indicated. In Chapter V, for example, Coleridge begins his history of the conjectures "concerning the mode in which our perceptions originated" (I, 66) without any reference to the preceding chapter, or suggestion of its relationship to the whole. After disclaiming charges of plagiarism at the end of Chapter IX, Coleridge introduces his "digressive" chapters with a passage on the importance of precise terminology:

"'Esemplastic. The word is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere.' Neither have I!" (I, 107). A quotation from Herder on the perils of authorship (Chapter XI) is followed by advice to the reader on approaching "philosophical works" (I, 160). The interrupted essay "On the imagination, or esemplastic power" precedes Coleridge's recollections of the occasion and origin of Lyrical Ballads. Similarly, Chapter XVII's transitional opening--"As far then as Mr. Wordsworth in his preface contended, . . ." (II, 28)--refers to Chapter XIV rather than to its immediate antecedent, a discussion of the "polished poets of the 15th and 16th century" (II, 23). "Satyrane's Letters," though prepared for at the end of Chapter XXII, contains no introductory section. Finally, no connection is made between the review and summary of Bertram (Chapter XXIII) and Coleridge's apologetic "Conclusion."

On the other hand, transitions within these eight parts are often quite explicitly stated. Several of Coleridge's chapter headings, for example, contain direct references: "the chapter that follows"; "Continuation"; and "The former subject continued" (Chapters XII, XIX, and XX). And Hartley's name in the headings join three chapters in Part II (Chapters V-VII). Other transitions and linking devices are used in the introductory paragraphs of chapters. Coleridge's summary statement, provided at the start of Chapter IX, introduces his later speculations: "After I had successively studied in the schools of Locke, Berkeley, Leibnitz, and Hartley, and could find in neither of them an abiding place for my reason, I began to ask myself; is a system of philosophy, as different from mere history and historic classification, possible?" (I, 93). The connection between Chapters X and XI is pointed out in the first sentence of the latter, by a reference to "the preceding reflections and anecdotes" (I, 152). Chapter XII is filled with remarks and directions for "the following Chapter" (I, 180), and both are intended as part of the same argument. In Part V, Coleridge points out that Chapters XV and XVI are deduced from the "Philosophic definitions of a poem and poetry with scholia" (II, 5) given in Chapter XIV. His analysis of Venus and Adonis then applies "these principles to purposes of practical criticism"; the "study of Shakespeare's poems" leads to "a more careful examination of the contemporary poets both in this and

in other countries" (II, 13, 20). Chapter XVIII is clearly part of the argument initiated in the opening chapter of Part VI; Coleridge reviews his opposition to Wordsworth's views on the language of rustics: "I conclude, therefore, that the attempt is impracticable; . . . For the very power of making the selection implies the previous possession of the language selected" (II, 43). As noted above, Chapters XIX and XX are labeled "continuations" by Coleridge. Although Chapter XXI is entitled "Remarks on the present mode of conducting critical journals," it is dependent upon Coleridge's evaluation of Wordsworth and his determination that the poet deserves "a fair and philosophical inquisition" (II, 85). And it is just such an "inquisition" that Coleridge undertakes in Chapter XXII of the Biographia: "The result of such a trial would evince beyond a doubt, . . . "the real characteristics of his poetry" (II, 95). Finally, a paragraph of transition is inserted in order to relate Chapter XXIII to "Satyrane's Letters": "In the present chapter, I have annexed to my Letters from Germany, with particular reference to that, which contains a disquisition on the modern drama, a critique on the Tragedy of Bertram" (II, 180-181).

Thus, while this eight-part structure was not consciously constructed by Coleridge, his use of transitions seems to indicate that such breaks occur. An overlapping of subject-matter and frequent digressions and asides tend to obscure the

efforts Coleridge made to relate parts to one another and to the whole. The space allotted various topics is not always proportional, nor are all matters discussed equally justifiable on grounds of unity. Yet even with these qualifications, one cannot deny that the Biographia Literaria does possess a definite sense of order and purpose.

In Coleridge's view, however, the organic, inner unity of a work--the reconciliation of a number of elements, each "generating, and explaining, and justifying, the place of another"<sup>1</sup>--is more important than its external framework. Parts are arranged with a view to their function, singly and together, as well as with a care for their rhetorical effectiveness. The many footnotes which appear in the Biographia are one example of the efforts to avoid disjunction in the text:

A blessing, I say, on the inventors of Notes!  
 . . . the Writer may digress, like Harris, the  
 Historian, from Dan to Beersheba and from Beer-  
 sheba in hunt after the last Comet, without any  
 break of continuity.<sup>2</sup>

Other ordering devices in the Biographia include Coleridge's enumerations of his points of argument, the several listings of his aims, and frequent use of transitional phrases. A study of these methods reveals Coleridge's own intent to diffuse "a tone and spirit of unity" (II, 12).

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<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Inquiring Spirit, p. 203.

"A good style," said Aristotle, "is, first of all, clear."<sup>1</sup> Lucidity in prose is dependent upon an orderly arrangement of ideas as well as precision in word choice. Coleridge provides, "in order to render" himself "intelligible" (II, 8), many directions for the reader--by explicitly numbering his purposes, premises, and conclusions. His liking for antithetical structures, opposing terms, and contrasting ideas is evident in the repeated two-part expressions found in the Biographia Literaria. Such groupings abound, from the "two critical aphorisms" (I, 14) of Coleridge's early literary life (Chapter I) to Chapter XXIV with its discussion of Before and After, Cause and Effect, Time and Eternity, Present and Past (II, 207). The number three is also of theoretical significance, its use corresponding to the "tertium aliquid" or synthesis of the two "counteracting powers" (I, 198) in the act of imagination.

In the opening chapter of the Biographia Coleridge tells of the two "advantages" he derived from an "early perusal" of Bowles's poems: he was withdrawn from his youthful "preposterous pursuit" of metaphysics and led to the conjectures on eighteenth-century poetry from which his opinions on poetic diction were formulated (I, 10). This, in turn, enabled Coleridge to abstract "two critical aphorisms": first, that "essential poetry" is "that to which we return"; second, that

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.2, trans. Cooper, p. 185.

the words in poetry should not be capable of translation into any "other words of the same language, without diminution of their significance, . ." (I, 14). Three possible reasons are offered in Chapter III for the "merciless and long-continued . . . cannonading" against his reputation. An apparent solution --that Coleridge "was in habits of intimacy with Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Southey" is then examined. "First . . . with regard to Mr. Southey" is covered in Chapter III, while Wordsworth's role in the "cannonading" is discussed in Chapter IV (I, 35, 39).

Chapter VIII, in which the systems of dualism, hylozoism, materialism, "or any possible theory of association" are questioned, concludes with three observations designed to help the reader in understanding Coleridge's argument (I, 88). The remainder of Volume I of the Biographia is filled with pairings of terms and ideas. Coleridge lists two "caveats" for young authors who might "be preparing or intending a periodical work" (I, 110). His period of religious doubt is resolved with the acceptance of two "philosophic principles" which eventually led to Coleridge's "final re-conversion to the whole truth in Christ" (I, 137). Preliminary to the statement of his ten theses (Chapter XII), Coleridge divides "all the objects of human knowledge into those on this side, and those on the other side of the spontaneous consciousness"; the distinction between object and subject, dissolved "during the act of knowledge itself," is emphasized in order to "explain this intimate coalition" (I, 164).



174). Chapter XIII climaxes the study of these two opposing forces which, first, "counteract each other by their essential nature"; secondly, they are "assumed to be both alike infinite, both alike indestructible." The "friend's" letter gives two sorts of reasons--personal and "public"--for discontinuing the chapter: the public's objections are further listed as two. Finally, Coleridge states the distinction between Imagination and Fancy, and distinguishes between the "primary" and "secondary" imagination (I, 197-202).

The same pattern is continued in Volume II of the Bio-graphia Literaria. Its opening sentence, for example, tells of "the two cardinal points of poetry" discussed by Wordsworth and Coleridge. The latter's argument is divided between the points in which the two "coincide" and "differ." In order that his position be "intelligible," Coleridge explains his ideas "first, of a POEM; and secondly, of POETRY itself, in kind, and in essence" (II, 5, 8). The series of comparisons and contrasts in the following chapters utilize pairs: Venus and Adonis and Lucrece; Shakespeare and Milton; contemporary poets and those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; painting and poetry. Chapters XVII and XVIII include a three-part reply to Wordsworth's theory of poetry as stated in his prefaces. Three objections are listed against Wordsworth's view "that the proper diction for poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken . . . from the mouths of men in real life"

(II, 29). Coleridge traces to "three exciting causes" that pleasure "which persons of elevated rank . . . derive from a happy imitation of the rude unpolished manners and discourse of their inferiors" (II, 30).

In Chapter XVIII Coleridge answers that point of disagreement which was his "chief inducement for the preceding inquisition": the distinction between the languages of prose and of poetry. The "true question" is framed in two parts. There is, says Coleridge, "an order of sentences" natural to prose, but which "would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry"; similarly, there exists "a use and selection of . . . figures of speech," well suited to "the language of a serious poem," which would appear "vicious and alien in correct and manly prose" (II, 45, 49). And in arguing this distinction "from the origin of metre" Coleridge lists two conditions which "must be reconciled and co-present" in any metrical work: passion or emotion--"the natural language of excitement"; and will or design--"the traces of present volition" (II, 49-50).

Further examples of pairs and groups of three occur in Chapters XX--the "three specimens" (II, 80) of Wordsworth's style; XXI--"the two principal objects and occasions" which Coleridge criticizes "in the conduct of" the Edinburgh Review (II, 89); and XXII--the "three species" into which language can be divided, and the two types of "matter-of-factness" found in

Wordsworth (II, 97, 101). Finally, as noted above, Chapter XXIV opens with a number of terms opposed "like the two poles of the magnet" (II, 207). And in his last word of advice to young authors, Coleridge lists three sorts of "allowances" which, when made, explain the contrast between the reception of a work prior to and following publication (II, 211-212).

In addition to his "typical triadic and antithetic"<sup>1</sup> arrangements, Coleridge employs longer catalogues at important points. Notable are the ten theses of Chapter XII, the four characteristics which give promise of "original poetic genius" (II, 14) in Shakespeare's early poems, the five arguments for meter (Chapter XVIII), the merits and defects of Wordsworth's poetry (Chapter XXII), and the four "true evidences of Christianity" (II, 215) stated in denial of the Edinburgh Review's charge of "potential infidelity" (Chapter XXIV). Nor are these lists without an ordering principle. The ten "theses" have been divided in this way: I-IV are "the philosophical groundwork of the system"; V-VII contain "a revealing summary of Coleridge's view of the creative act"; and IX-X provide "a religious superstructure."<sup>2</sup> In analyzing the qualities found in Venus and Adonis and Lucrece, Coleridge progresses from

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<sup>1</sup>Richard H. Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>George Watson, The Literary Critics (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 119.

external to internal, or from form to matter: "sweetness of . . . versification"; choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself"; images "modified by a predominant passion"; and "DEPTH and ENERGY OF THOUGHT" (II, 14-19). Coleridge's argument that "there may be, is, and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition" (II, 57) contains five parts. The movement here appears to be from the general or the universal to the specific--from "the origin of metre" to "the practice of the best poets, of all countries and in all ages" (II, 49, 56).

In a "contrary arrangement," Coleridge's discussion of the five "prominent defects" of Wordsworth's poems is followed by six "(for the most part correspondent) excellences" (II, 97, 115). On the whole, the two lists proceed (as does the analysis of Shakespeare in Chapter XV) from questions of style to those of content or thought. The "occasional defect" of "INCONSTANCY of the style"--an "awkwardness" in word choice--is balanced by Wordsworth's "austere purity of language . . . a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning" (II, 97-98, 115).

"Matter-of-factness," the second defect, includes style as well as subject, and contrasts with both the first excellence and the fourth--"the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions" (II, 101, 121). A lack of skill in the "dramatic form" is somewhat offset by the fifth excellence, "a meditative

pathos"; Coleridge notes, however, that Wordsworth's sympathy with other men is that "of a contemplator, rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate" (II, 109, 122-23). Wordsworth's two final faults, in which the "feeling" and the "thoughts and images" presented are "too great for the subject," seem to be redeemed in part by the first merit (that "perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning") and by the second--his "weight and sanity of the Thoughts and Sentiments" (II, 109, 115, 118). As the last defect is one "of which none but a man of genius is capable," so the final excellence, "the gift of IMAGINATION," places Wordsworth "nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton" (II, 109, 124).

The four points of Coleridge's belief "concerning the true evidences of Christianity" (II, 215) are arranged according to a building metaphor, in order of importance. "Its consistence with right Reason" is compared to "the outer Court of the Temple"; miracles correspond to "the steps, the vestibule, and the portal"; one's sense of inner need is "the true FOUNDATION of the spiritual Edifice"; and finally, "the actual Trial of the Faith in Christ . . . must form the arched ROOF, and the Faith itself is the completing KEYSTONE" (II, 215-216).

Thus, Coleridge's partiality for two and three part divisions and his habit of enumerating the steps of an argument indicate several things. Although not every instance is of special significance, the prevalence of such expressions in the

Biographia Literaria illustrates Coleridge's typical mode of reasoning. The reconciliation of two opposing forces, for example, is "an application in the province of aesthetics of the generative principle which underlies Coleridge's metaphysical system in its totality."<sup>1</sup> It becomes evident, too, that Coleridge was consciously attempting to give a plan and purpose to his thoughts and experiences. The lack of these ordering devices in "Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII emphasizes their accidental relationship to the whole.

Coleridge employs other devices as well to gain unity and coherence in the Biographia Literaria. As noted above, he often clearly draws the connection between related chapters and sections. Although transitional phrases, connectives, repetitions of words and phrases, and parallel expressions are too frequent to be listed for the entire work, Chapter IV may be analyzed in illustration of Coleridge's method. The chapter is divided, by its heading, into four parts, each explicitly indicated by the opening sentences of a paragraph. For example, the second topic ("Mr. Wordsworth's earlier poems") is plainly introduced by a statement which also prepares for the third point ("On fancy and imagination"):

During the last year of my residence at Cambridge, I became acquainted with Mr. Wordsworth's first publication entitled 'Descriptive Sketches'; and

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<sup>1</sup>Meyer H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958), p. 118.

seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced (I, 56).

Within each section of Chapter IV, similar attention is given to the order and connection of sentences and ideas. An introductory paragraph recalls that Coleridge has "wandered far from the object in view" and summarizes the result in Chapter III:

At present it will be sufficient for my purpose if I have proved that Mr. Southey's writings no more than my own furnished the original occasion to this fiction of a new school of poetry, and to the clamors against its supposed founders and proselytes (I, 50).

The opening sentence of the next paragraph excludes another possibility: "As little do I believe that 'Mr. WORDSWORTH's Lyrical Ballads' were in themselves the cause" (I, 50). Coleridge's "belief"--that relatively few lines prompted criticisms of the work--is declared, "however, on the supposition" that readers approached the Lyrical Ballads without any particular prejudices. The remainder of the paragraph traces the reactions of these readers: the "general taste"; "men of business"; "all those who, reading but little poetry, are most stimulated with that species of it, which seems most distant from prose"; "others more catholic in their taste"; "not a few perhaps" who might admire the poems "holding a middle place between" the "highest" and "humblest" styles (I, 50-51).

Having demonstrated that such readers would have passed over "colloquial phrases, or the imitations of them," Coleridge

settles upon Wordsworth's "critical remarks" to the Lyrical Ballads "as the true origin of the unexampled opposition" they "have since been doomed to encounter" (I, 51). Wordsworth's "imperfections" were announced "as the result of choice after full deliberation"; thus, even the better poems "gave wind and fuel to the animosity against both the poems and the poet." The readers, perplexed and angered by the preface, "had been all their lives admiring without judgement, and were now about to censure without reason" (I, 52).

The following paragraph then attempts to prove "this conjecture" by example. Coleridge finds that there was no consensus among readers: "the composition which one cited as execrable, another quoted as his favorite" (I, 53). "However this may be," he continues, even the weaker poems "could only be regarded as so many light or inferior coins in a rouleau of gold." Coleridge is then led, by the readers' strong disagreement, to observe "the strange contrast of the heat and long continuance of the opposition, with the nature of the faults stated as justifying it" (I, 54). Paradoxically, the faults cited ("a downright simpleness," "prosaic words in feeble metre, silly thoughts in childish phrases, and a preference of mean, degrading, or at best trivial associations and characters") served both in "forming a school of imitators, a company of almost religious admirers" and in engrossing criticism "for nearly twenty years" (I, 55).



To account for this contradiction, Coleridge examines Wordsworth's early poems and his own reactions as an "admirer." Those "faults" listed above are excused as the faults of genius;

faults which, in its earliest compositions, are the more obtrusive and confluent, because as heterogeneous elements, which had only a temporary use, they constitute the very ferment, by which themselves are carried off (I, 57).

Coleridge then describes the rapid growth of Wordsworth's genius; not only had "false taste" been eliminated, but he had achieved a "union of deep feeling with profound thought," an ability for observation both accurate and imaginative, and "above all the original gift of spreading . . . the atmosphere . . . of the ideal world" about the world of the common and familiar (I, 59).

Finally, reflections on "this excellence" in Wordsworth's poetry lead Coleridge to the conviction "that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties." He then recounts the way in which his "appropriation" of these terms came about, and asserts the use of this distinction: "It would in its immediate effects furnish a torch of guidance to the philosophical critic; and ultimately to the poet himself" (I, 60-62). Coleridge's differences with Wordsworth on this point conclude the chapter. The summary of these differences illustrates Coleridge's use of devices of coherence:

The explanation which Mr. Wordsworth has himself given will be found to differ from mine, chiefly perhaps, as our objects are different. . . . But

it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness (I, 64).

By means of parallelisms, contrasts, repetitions, and conjunctions, Coleridge defines and orders his aims. The last paragraph of this chapter examines difficulties which might arise in pursuing his object: "Yet even in this attempt I am aware, that I shall be obliged to draw more largely on the reader's attention, than so immethodical a miscellany can authorize." But, "let me be permitted to add," says Coleridge, those who have ridiculed him before should now not

refuse their attention to my own statement of the theory, which I do acknowledge; or shrink from the trouble of examining the grounds on which I rest it, or the arguments which I offer in its justification (I, 64-65).

In this way, Coleridge prepares for his theory of the imagination and his analysis of Wordsworth's prefaces and poetry.

And finally, in studying the "arrangement" of the Bio-graphia Literaria, one should note the rhetorical effectiveness of Coleridge's plan. The ordering of his statements, proofs, and refutations will be considered in the following chapter on argument, but the functions of his introduction and conclusion may be mentioned here. Aristotle, in his Rhetoric, offers the

speaker a number of profitable ways to introduce a topic: one may "start off on the note of advice"; "he may appeal to the hearers for indulgence if his subject shall seem strange, or difficult, or hackneyed"; he should "make clear the end and object" of his work, secure the "good will" of the hearer, and dispel prejudice against himself; and he should provoke the audience's interest.<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's use of some of these devices in the Biographia has been pointed out earlier. In the first four chapters, for example, he lists his objects and issues advice to the reader on several occasions. The ethical appeal, or attempt to gain the "good will" and respect of the audience, is also present. In the opening paragraph of the work, Coleridge modestly refers to "the fewness, unimportance, and limited circulation" of his writings; and in the next chapter, he avows that "a tried experience of twenty years" has taught him that the "original sin" of his character "consists in a careless indifference to public opinion, and to the attacks of those who influence it" (I, 1, 31). By this course, Coleridge attempts to avoid charges of self-interest.

Similarly, the account of Coleridge's training under the Rev. Bowyer and his reading of Bowles lends evidence to the fact that his critical opinions developed over a number of years-- that he reflected long and thoroughly upon his topic. Coleridge

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.14, trans. Cooper, pp. 221-226.

also arouses hostility against his opponents--the reviewers--in Chapters II and III, by charging them with "arbitrary dictation and petulant sneers" (I, 44). And by establishing the error in their judgment of Southey and Wordsworth, Coleridge casts further doubt upon the reviewers' competence. Finally, these introductory chapters gain the reader's interest in several ways: by Coleridge's biographical reminiscences; by the indication that controversy, both personal and philosophical, will form part of his subject; and by a style which, in contrast to the following chapters on association, is informal and concrete, interspersed with anecdotes and examples.

Four functions of the epilogue or conclusion are given in the Rhetoric:

- (1) You must render the audience well-disposed to yourself, and ill-disposed to your opponent;
- (2) you must magnify and depreciate; (3) you must put the audience into the right state of emotion; and (4) you must refresh their memories.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge is less successful rhetorically here than in the introduction, for he gives no summary review of what has been undertaken and accomplished in the Biographia Literaria. Chapter XXIV is almost wholly apologetic, pleading with the reader that a delay in publication was "not connected with any neglect" on Coleridge's part (II, 209). By answering criticism of Christabel and The Statesman's Manual, Coleridge again places

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.19, trans. Cooper, p. 240.

the reviewers in a bad light and "magnifies" their faults. The Statesman's Manual, for example, is said to have been reviewed

by anticipation with a malignity so avowedly and exclusively personal, as is, I believe, unprecedented even in the present contempt of all common humanity that disgraces and endangers the liberty of the press (II, 214).

Coleridge's subsequent defense of his religious opinions opens a new subject, though it may be justified as a means of gaining his audience's sympathy. The final paragraph of the Biographia is similarly framed, emphasizing the seriousness of Coleridge's theme and the disinterestedness of his intentions. As a closing passage, it has been criticized as inappropriate; in a sense, however, Coleridge is following a pattern set in the conclusions of other chapters. Often, Coleridge provides--instead of a logical summary--a quotation or apostrophe designed more to move the emotions than to satisfy the reason.

An analysis of the structure of the Biographia Literaria indicates, then, that the work possesses a greater degree of design and order than have generally been accorded it. Despite the confusion surrounding the composition and printing of the Biographia, Coleridge cannot be said to have proceeded without a plan, or with complete disregard for his reader. As detailed above, the concept of organic unity is the foundation of Coleridge's critical theory. His practice, though not always attaining the perfection of his ideal, does show a striving after unity and coherence. This is apparent in Coleridge's

desire to summarize the contents of the Biographia under several terms, in the statements of his aims, the use of chapter headings and transitions to signify breaks and continuity, his frequent antithetic and triadic expressions, the numbering of his points of argument, and his use of traditional devices to gain the reader's interest, attention, and sympathy. But because "Coleridge was blazing a trail when he wrote Biographia Literaria,"<sup>1</sup> the reader is often placed in his position when "re-perusing . . . the Timaeus of PLATO. Whatever I comprehend, impresses me with a reverential sense of the author's genius; but there is a considerable portion of the work, to which I can attach no consistent meaning" (I, 161). The difficulty in the Biographia is one of form as well as content, and it is a problem which Coleridge himself--in his search for order and intelligibility--tries to overcome.

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<sup>1</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," p. 100.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RHETORIC OF THE BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

#### THE ARGUMENT

The Biographia Literaria, despite its unassuming subtitle of "Biographical Sketches," is intended as a persuasive discourse, a work of argumentation. This purpose is explicit and continuous throughout the work. Coleridge frequently refers, for example, to his desire to "settle" certain questions: the Biographia is to testify to the true nature of Wordsworth's poetical achievement; it is to advance reasoned conclusions on the subjects of associationist theory, poetry, and the creative imagination; finally, the work is to serve as Coleridge's personal and literary self-defense.

In carrying out his polemical aims, Coleridge employs many of "the available means of persuasion"<sup>1</sup> classified by Aristotle in the Rhetoric. There are, the Rhetoric points out, three "provinces of study which concern the making of a speech." The speaker or writer must attend primarily to "Examples, Maxims, and Enthymemes, and the element of thought in general--

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 1.2, trans. Cooper, p. 7.

the way to invent and refute arguments."<sup>1</sup> Arrangement and style remain secondary to the discovery or "invention" of suitable and effective proofs.

Although Coleridge does not refer specifically to the Rhetoric or to rhetorical theory in general, one can assume from the range of his interests and readings that he was not unfamiliar with the study. Further, any persuasive writing will naturally illustrate the characteristics and techniques observed by Aristotle. In keeping with its eclectic, "miscellaneous" quality, the Biographia Literaria contains each of the three kinds of rhetoric--deliberative, forensic, and epideitic.

Coleridge's arguments are principally those belonging to deliberative rhetoric, for he is seeking to persuade the reader to accept his opinions on poetry and philosophy. The Biographia makes use of forensic or judicial rhetoric in defending the character and actions of Coleridge himself, of Wordsworth, of Southey, and of all literary "men of Genius" (I, 19); critics and reviews, on the other hand, are tried and condemned. Epideitic or ceremonial rhetoric, concerned with "the objects of praise and blame,"<sup>2</sup> appears in Coleridge's homage to Wordsworth's "intellect and genius" (II, 128), as well as in various encomiastic passages describing Bowles, Kant, Burke, Shakespeare, and Milton.

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.26, trans. Cooper, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 1.9, trans. Cooper, p. 46.



The Biographia also illustrates the three "means of persuasion supplied by the speech itself": the ethical, rational, and emotional appeals. The ethos or character of the speaker is termed by Aristotle "the most potent of all the means to persuasion."<sup>1</sup> It is particularly effective in deliberative rhetoric, for the audience or reader will more readily give assent to a person of "intelligence, character, and good will."<sup>2</sup> And Coleridge is careful, throughout the Biographia, to gain the confidence of his reader. He stresses, for example, his desire to be objective and factual--to present reasoned arguments rather than mere "opinions, which weigh for nothing" (I, 65). Phrases indicating his modesty, earnestness, and disinterestedness are often prefaced to arguments and statements of conviction. In addition, the credentials enabling him to discuss his subject are not omitted.

The rational or logical appeal relies upon two modes of proof or demonstration: these are the rhetorical syllogism--the "enthymeme"--and the rhetorical induction--the example.<sup>3</sup> Both are essential to Coleridge's method in the Biographia Literaria. Apart from the attempt in Chapter XII to render the act of knowledge "intelligible" (I, 180), Coleridge relies on

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 1.2, trans. Cooper, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 2.1, trans. Cooper, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>Rhetoric, 1.2, trans. Cooper, p. 10.

the enthymeme rather than the syllogism for deductive proof. The "friend" who warns Coleridge against following such an "abstruse" (I, 200) and lengthy form of argument echoes Aristotle's caution: "you must not begin the chain of reasoning too far back, or its length will render the argument obscure; and you must not put in every single link, or the statement of what is obvious will render it prolix."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Coleridge exploits the example as an aid to conviction. Such a form of persuasion draws upon his large fund of factual information, his skill at observation, and his ability to point out relationships. Maxims, general principles, and the "results" of Coleridge's "own judgement" (II, 97) are followed and explained by specific instances; in this manner, "Examples function like witnesses-- and there is always a tendency to believe a witness."<sup>2</sup>

A lack of rapport with the reader has often been cited as a major fault in Coleridge's writing. Coleridge is said to ignore that means of persuasion that produces "a certain [the right] attitude"<sup>3</sup> in the audience. Although this emotional appeal figures least prominently in the Biographia, several passages explicitly consider the reader's feelings and attitudes. Coleridge attempts to understand, for example, the mood

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.22, trans. Cooper, pp. 155-156.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 2.20, trans. Cooper, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup>Rhetoric, 1.2, trans. Cooper, p. 8.

of those who read and were angered by the "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads: "In opinions of long continuance, and in which we have never before been molested by a single doubt, to be suddenly convinced of an error, is almost like being convicted of a fault" (I, 52). In several instances, he implies that acceptance of his arguments is the sign of a "candid and intelligent mind" (II, 96). An analysis of types of readers in Chapter XII also courts a sympathetic hearing; those who would pass over or ridicule the section are burdened with an "unenlivened and stagnant understanding" (I, 169). More obvious plays upon the emotions occur in Coleridge's descriptions of the domestic virtues of Southey (Chapter III), of the "blessings of christianity" (I, 154) as evidenced in the clergyman's life, and of Shakespeare and Milton as types of English genius: "two glory-smitten summits of the poetic mountain" (II, 20). Further examples of Coleridge's psychological insight, his knowledge of "the means by which the several emotions are produced or are dissipated,"<sup>1</sup> accompany the principal arguments of the work.

Thus the Biographia Literaria, as a persuasive work comprising a series of reasoned statements, may be profitably analyzed from a rhetorical point of view. Such an approach helps to reveal something of Coleridge's purposes, of the origin of his arguments, and of the general characteristics of his

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.11, trans. Cooper, p. 131.

critical method. In order to examine the types of rhetoric and means of appeal in the Biographia, each of the main arguments will be considered separately, as it is developed in the course of the work.

The most lengthy and complex line of argument in the Biographia concerns Coleridge's disagreement with--and evaluation of--the poetical theory and poems of Wordsworth. This subject is the primary purpose and justification of the work; and although Coleridge frequently wanders to other topics, his main force is directed to "a settlement of the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction" and a definition "with the utmost impartiality [of] the real poetic character of the poet, by whose writings this controversy was first kindled, and has since been fuelled and fanned" (I, 1-2). Coleridge continually stresses the "controversy" of the situation, keeping in mind both his opponents and his "admirers and advocates" (II, 130). Various appeals are brought forth in hopes of gaining a favorable judgment from both sides. In describing the audience of the Biographia, George Whalley notes that it was not "a sympathetic élite. Coleridge was speaking to people who had shown themselves incapable of the most rudimentary critical discrimination."<sup>1</sup> However, Coleridge seems to refer to several types of reader. There is the professional

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<sup>1</sup>"The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 89.

critic, at times hostile, unjust, and guilty of "insupportable despotism" (II, 88); second, the potentially unbiased reader, unfortunately alienated by the "perverseness" (I, 52) of Wordsworth's preface; finally, the undiscerning admirer who, though well-meaning, confuses the "supposed characteristics of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry" with its "real characteristics" (II, 95). In addition to these, of course, Coleridge himself is in opposition to Wordsworth on certain points; thus his arguments and conclusions must counter a number of misconceptions: those of the critics, the readers, and the poet.

The "controversy" in question is introduced in Chapter I of the Biographia; Coleridge, however, to provide evidence of his authority, soon turns to other topics. A description of his schooling furthers this aim. Coleridge is shown to have long been concerned with the subject of poetic diction. As a poet whose own youthful efforts were flawed, he gradually learned judgment and discipline from his teachers and models. Writings of Shakespeare and Milton are cited as parallels to his "parasite plants of youthful poetry" (I, 3). Here, an a fortiori argument is implied: both Coleridge and Wordsworth may similarly be forgiven their faults as beginners. Also useful in later discussion is the contrast drawn between eighteenth century imitations and "their original in Shakespeare and Milton" (I, 12). Coleridge agrees with Wordsworth that the former are inferior, and offers proof by both example and

enthymeme. Artificiality, he notes, is to be found in the Latin poets and in the "moderns," while the "natural and real" (I, 10) is characteristic of "the Greek Poets from Homer to Theocritus inclusive; and still more of our elder English poets from Chaucer to Milton" (I, 14). A certain premise about poetry has been formulated in the course of the chapter. Poetry of the highest rank will conform to standards of "truth and nativeness, both of . . . thoughts and diction" (I, 4), together with "LOGIC, and the LAWS OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR" (I, 14). The opposite style is represented as "translations of prose thoughts into poetic language" (I, 13). Following this premise, Coleridge will later conclude that Wordsworth was partially right in his preface (in condemning "falsity" and calling for a "reformation" in poetic diction); his best poems, however, illustrate Coleridge's criteria rather than those of the "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads.

The subject is not resumed until Chapter IV, where Coleridge argues that Wordsworth's theory--not the poems themselves--caused the "still . . . undecided" (I, 55) controversy over the Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge also indicates that he is in disagreement with the discussion of fancy and imagination in Wordsworth's most recent preface (1815). Both for the sake of his own theoretical differences with Wordsworth, and in order to defend Wordsworth's poems against the frequently harsh criticism they had received, Coleridge disputes the 1800 "Preface."

But he does this indirectly at first, recording the opinions of readers rather than advancing his own. Several methods of proof are used. By the topic of conflicting facts, Coleridge points out that no consensus was reached on the merits of many poems. He reports to "have heard at different times, and from different individuals every single poem extolled and reprobated with the exception of those of loftier kind, which . . . seem to have won universal praise" (I, 54). A further argument is found in the discrepancy between cause and effect: the "faults" cited in Wordsworth's poems could in no way account for "the heat and long continuance of the opposition" (I, 54). To add persuasive force to this conclusion, Coleridge magnifies the nature of such opposition. Protests against the poetry of Wordsworth are said to "have well-nigh engrossed criticism" for almost twenty years, "as the main, if not the only, butt of review, magazine, pamphlet, poem, and paragraph" (I, 55). On the other hand, the defects of the poems are deemed insignificant--"the faults and errors" of youthful genius (I, 57). Weaknesses Coleridge will later (Chapter XXII) criticize more seriously are ignored here, for his aim is to indict the theories of the "Preface."

Invented examples drawing upon a knowledge of readers' emotions offer evidence for this indictment. Among several groups of readers, those "habituated to be most pleased when most excited" would have accounted poems of "the humblest

style" as "but an inconsiderable subtraction from the merit of the whole" (I, 51), had not Wordsworth, in his "Preface," announced such as "the result of choice after full deliberation" (I, 52). "A man is angered by a result that runs counter to his expectations";<sup>1</sup> hence, had Wordsworth apologized for colloquial phrases rather than attempting to justify them, the readers' reactions might have proved quite different.

Coleridge then presents a brief evaluation of Wordsworth as a poet, noting that he was led to speculate on the distinction between fancy and imagination in seeking to understand the "character of his [Wordsworth's] mind" (I, 60). Although Coleridge had described the two distinct "powers" as early as 1804,<sup>2</sup> he was moved by Wordsworth's statements in the "Preface" of 1815 to reiterate his own analysis. The topics of definition and divisions are used by Coleridge to introduce his argument. The commonly accepted belief that fancy and imagination are "either two names with one meaning, or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power" (I, 60-61) is discarded. Wordsworth is credited with having refuted the meaning offered in Taylor's British Synonymes Discriminated; however, the "explanation which Mr. Wordsworth has himself given" (I, 64) is also insufficient. The deliberative

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.2. trans. Cooper, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, II, 1034.



rhetorician appeals to what is useful or expedient; Coleridge, therefore, does well to point out the practical good to follow from "establishing the actual existences of two faculties generally different" (I, 62). His investigation will be more than an exercise, for it will benefit "the theory of the fine arts," the "philosophical critic," and the "poet himself" (I, 62). Finally, Coleridge explains his opposition to Wordsworth in a diplomatic manner: the two differ, "chiefly perhaps," as their "objects are different." Coleridge divides and contrasts these objects, using metaphor for clarity--"My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots . . ." (I, 64).

Not until the end of Chapter XII is the subject of Wordsworth's theory and poetry again alluded to specifically. (The intervening chapters, of course, are meant to provide the "trunk" and "roots" of which Coleridge speaks.) Coleridge reports that he has read Wordsworth's "remarks on the imagination" in the 1815 "Preface" with more care, and has found their conclusions to be farther apart than he earlier suspected. Again, the difference is one of terms and their significance:

if, by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination; and I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of fancy with imagination for the operation of the latter singly (I, 194).

Coleridge will thus refute Wordsworth by showing how the terms were confused and simplified. Wordsworth had entered into the discussion of fancy and imagination largely to explain his own method of classifying poems in the 1815 volume; to Coleridge, however, the distinction is one upon which his entire critical theory is based. Fancy, to Wordsworth, was "under her own laws and in her own spirit, a creative faculty."<sup>1</sup> But to Coleridge, often relying on opposing terms in argument, fancy is "the contrary" of the creative faculty: it is "no other than a mode of Memory" which "must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association" (I, 202).

The definitions of imagination and fancy given at the conclusion of Volume I of the Biographia are stated rather than proved. In an attempt to convince the reader that these definitions are, however, the result of a lengthy process of reasoning, Coleridge composes a letter from a "friend" who comments favorably on the "hundred pages" of evidence here suppressed. Coleridge again presents the reactions of hypothetical readers as part of his argument. The "friend" is overwhelmed by the iconoclastic nature of the chapter: "what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while everywhere

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 755. "To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine," according to Wordsworth, "belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials . . . are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose."

shadows were deepened into substances" (I, 199). The average reader would be angered at having his expectations thwarted, for the title page of the Biographia gives no hint of "a long treatise on ideal Realism" (I, 201). Finally, the "friend" argues from the topic of goodness and expediency, noting that Coleridge's self-interest may be advanced in rendering the book less abstruse. But he immediately points to Coleridge's integrity: "pecuniary motives" are admitted to carry little weight with him (I, 201). Thus, the emotional and ethical appeals prevail in this chapter. Considering the significance of these two concepts in Coleridge's scheme, the decision to reserve his evidence for "future publication" (I, 202) would appear mistaken. Yet despite the contrast between Wordsworth's aims (the "poetic fruitage") and his own (the "roots"), Coleridge is interested in application as much as theory. Without further delay, he will proceed to a specific analysis of Wordsworth's poetry.

In Volume I of the Biographia, one notices that a certain distance, in this particular line of argument, is maintained between Coleridge and Wordsworth. Coleridge's objections are presented as those of the general reader rather than his own; he merely views the controversy as an almost disinterested observer. Coleridge had already started work on the Biographia when he exchanged letters with Wordsworth (the first in many years) concerning The Excursion and its critics. One can

assume that his differences with Wordsworth were only strengthened and clarified by this exchange, during the course of which Coleridge reviewed Wordsworth's poems and prefaces. For in Volume II, the previously oblique methods are discarded, and Coleridge openly declares "once and for all, in what points I coincide with his opinions, and in what points I altogether differ" (II, 8). From a rhetorical point of view, the reserve of the early chapters is effective as an ethical mode of appeal: Coleridge gives "the right impression of himself"<sup>1</sup> by evincing his objectivity and good will. In addition, the reviewers and their tactics were in sight, a warning against "arbitrary dictation and petulant sneers" (I, 44). But even in his most fundamental and earnest disputation with Wordsworth in later chapters, Coleridge is careful to bear in mind his dicta of "rational" premises, "legitimate" deductions, and "conclusions justly applied" (II, 85).

Chapter XIV recapitulates material from the first volume on the publication of Lyrical Ballads. What was proved in Chapter IV is stated here as fact: the "controversy" is attributed to Wordsworth's 1800 "Preface"; the poems, themselves, however, are undoubtedly of merit--though they produced an "eddy of criticism" (II, 7) as well as fervent admirers. Coleridge, therefore, to throw some light upon the matter, will demonstrate that "many parts" of the "Preface" are "erroneous

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.1, trans. Cooper, p. 91.

in principle" and "contradictory (in appearance at least) both to other parts of the same preface, and to the author's own practice in the greater number of the poems themselves" (II, 8).

As in the case of fancy and imagination, an argument is developed from the topic of ambiguous terms. Since the concepts of "poem" and "poetry" are not used by Wordsworth and Coleridge in the same sense, Coleridge defines each "and then proceeds to reason from . . . [them] on the point at issue."<sup>1</sup> Following the method expressed in his premise that the "office of philosophical disquisition consists in just distinction" (II, 6), Coleridge deduces the essentials of a poem. It is the objects of a poem which distinguish it from science and from other literary works: a poem's "immediate object" is pleasure, such "delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part" (II, 10). Other characteristics are dismissed as non-essential. As aids to persuasion, Coleridge cites authority and employs figurative language. "The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgement in all countries" (II, 10) in reaching similar conclusions. The reader's pleasure, derived from the harmony of parts within a whole, is compared to the "motion of a serpent"-- "at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward" (II, 11).

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.23, trans. Cooper, p. 163.

Coleridge follows a similar method in attempting to define "poetry," for he first eliminates what is extraneous. His proof is by example: the writings of Plato, though not composed in meter, may be considered poetry; poetical sections of Isaiah do not have pleasure as their immediate object. "Poem and "poetry," therefore, are not equivalent terms. This distinction is at the heart of Coleridge's refutation of Wordsworth. Poetry, it is evident from these examples, is a qualitative term, synonymous with the imaginative power. Wordsworth, in finding "that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems" will contain "strictly the language of prose when prose is well written,"<sup>1</sup> drew erroneous conclusions. As Coleridge indicates, works not composed in meter, not having pleasure as their immediate object, may still fulfill the requirements for poetry. What is necessary is that the writer bring "the whole soul of man into activity" and diffuse "a tone and spirit of unity" (II, 12). Both a poem and a prose work may thus contain the "quality" of poetry; but a poem has its own additional requirements.

With these preliminary definitions completed, Coleridge (in Chapter XVII) lists the merits of Wordsworth's "Preface." His disagreements with the essay, being more fundamental and of greater length, will follow. This reverses the order taken in

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 736.

Coleridge's analysis of Wordsworth's poetry; there, with "the proportion of the defects . . . to the beauties" small, the positive criticism is given a climactic position. Coleridge "magnifies" the value of the "Preface" by pointing to its useful effects. The writings of both Wordsworth's admirers and detractors show the influence or "impressions of his principles" (II, 29). Coleridge accounts for this fact by an examination of readers' reactions: the controversy caused by the errors "may have conduced . . . to the wider propagation of the accompanying truths," for "a man will borrow a part from his opponent the more easily, if he feels justified in continuing to reject a part" (II, 29).

Having granted Wordsworth a certain amount of success and shown the "Preface" to be worthy of serious consideration, Coleridge begins his refutation. He disagrees, first, with Wordsworth's choice of character; second, with his choice of language; and finally, with the assertion that there is no essential difference between prose and poetry. Following his frequently used method of division, Coleridge lists three grounds by which Wordsworth errs in asserting "that the proper diction for poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken, with due exceptions, from the mouths of men in real life" (II, 29). Furthermore, Wordsworth's theory and practice are shown to be at variance: "in the most interesting of the poems, in which the author is more or less dramatic . . . the persons

introduced are by no means taken from low or rustic life in the common acceptance of those words" (II, 31). Most importantly, however, Wordsworth's premises are false. Coleridge argues from cause and effect that the matter of rustics' is not, in fact, the proper language of poetry. He employs testimony (quoting from Henry More), examples (drawing from his own experience and from that of "country clergymen"), and comparison (the treatment of the poor in cities and in "agricultural villages") in order to prove that "country life" and "country labors" do not necessarily bring refinement of "sentiments and language" and sensitivity of character (II, 31-32). Coleridge cites Aristotle as authority "that poetry as poetry is essentially ideal" (II, 33). Moreover, many of Wordsworth's own characters exhibit this representative quality. Examples from the poetry of Wordsworth are used to persuade the reader that Coleridge is correct, and Wordsworth in error, on the subject of character and diction in poetry.

In a summary statement, Coleridge notes that his objections to Wordsworth's choice of character arise from both principle and practice. Even less tenable are the latter's views on language. Here, Coleridge has recourse to premises stated earlier regarding the "esemplastic power," which "struggles to idealize and to unify" (I, 202). A rustic's language, when purified, is no longer peculiar to one of his situation; it then resembles the discourse of other men "of common sense"--"except



as far as the notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate." From the principle that the "best part of human language . . . is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself," it follows that the rustic--lacking an ability to see relationships and the vocabulary to express "moral and intellectual processes"--will not possess the "philosophical language" of Wordsworth's "Preface." Although Coleridge does not cite Aristotle, this traditional view of appropriate diction is found in the Rhetoric: "each class of men, each type of disposition, has a language suited to it . . . a rustic will not say the same things as an educated man, nor talk in the same way."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge then argues from the topic of ambiguous terms. The "real" of the "Preface" is inexact; the phrase should be "ordinary, or lingua communis," a quality no more "to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life than in that of any other class." Wordsworth's belief that a state of excitement will elevate the rustics' speech has already been refuted in Coleridge's analysis of their concepts and vocabulary. Reasoning from the proportion between cause and effect, Coleridge finds that what the mind has not previously stored cannot appear in the "heat of passion" (II, 38-42).

Chapter XVIII takes up the third point of Coleridge's disagreement with the "Preface": "There neither is, nor can be,

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.7, trans. Cooper, p. 198.

any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition."<sup>1</sup> From his earlier conclusion--related to the definition of imagination--that the uneducated lack arrangement and relationship in their thoughts and speech, it follows that the order of poetry is not that of "the language of ordinary men" (II, 45). Again, Wordsworth's own verse proves this very fact; his word order in "The Thorn," for example, belies the description of the supposed narrator. In another a fortiori argument, Coleridge points out that as prose differs from conversation, all the more should poetry differ from prose. An examination of the latter contention was, Coleridge remarks, his "chief inducement for the preceding inquisition" (II, 45) on language and character. Thus, the discussion of the ways in which poetry differs from prose is given a final, climactic position; and Coleridge employs a full range of rhetorical techniques--definition, distinction, refutation by objection, cause and effect, deduction, example, analogy, and figurative language.

Because Wordsworth had not been precise in defining terms, Coleridge finds definition an effective means of refutation. It both suggests that Coleridge is the more logical, and allows him to express the "true question" (II, 49) in a way best suited to his own argument. In examining the phrase "essential

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 736.

difference," Coleridge concludes that the secondary use of "essence"--"the point or ground of contra-distinction between two modifications of the same substance or subject"--is applicable to the wording of the "Preface" (II, 47). What Wordsworth denies is illustrated by the following analogy: "Thus we should be allowed to say, that the style of architecture of Westminster Abbey is essentially different from that of St. Paul's, even though both had been built with blocks cut into the same form, and from the same quarry" (II, 47-48). The method by which Wordsworth proves this denial (by examples, particularly the analysis of Gray's sonnet) is found to "rest on a . . . sophism" (II, 49). In what the Rhetoric refers to as a "spurious enthymeme,"<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth cites single cases to prove a rule. Coleridge admits that certain prose passages could be "proper in a poem"; similarly, "beautiful lines and sentences" of poems might appear "equally becoming as well as beautiful in good prose." The two modes, however, are not identical merely by reason of such similarities. There is an order, "both of words and sentences, and a use and selection of . . . figures of speech" proper only to poetry. Prose, too, possesses an arrangement and expressions which would "be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry" (II, 49).

Coleridge divides his counter-argument into five parts. From the origin of meter, "the balance in the mind effected by

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.24, trans. Cooper, p. 172.

that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion," it follows that every metrical work will exhibit a union "of passion and of will." This union "not only dictates, but of itself tends to produce, a . . . frequent employment of picturesque and vivifying language" (II, 50).

Wordsworth had warned that the poet should not attempt to "interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests," believing that such an "incongruity" would "shock the intelligent Reader."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge answers by stressing the distinction between life and art, a distinction maintained in that "well understood, though tacit, compact between the poet and his reader" (II, 50). A quotation from The Winter's Tale lends testimony to the appropriateness of "artifice": "ev'n that art,/ Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art,/ That nature makes" (II, 51).

Coleridge's second point concerns the effects of meter, which he compares to that of "a medicated atmosphere, or . . . wine during animated conversation; they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed." The "Preface" had discussed the power of meter to "impart passion" when "the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement."<sup>2</sup> But Coleridge insists

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 737.

<sup>2</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 739.

upon a balance between the two: where "correspondent food and appropriate matter are not provided for the attention and feelings thus roused [by meter], there must needs be a disappointment felt." An analogy effectively describes this "disappointment" as similar to "that of leaping in the dark from the last step of a stair-case, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four" (II, 51). Coleridge then examines the question of "appropriate matter"--with what elements must meter "be combined in order to produce its own effects to any pleasurable purpose?" Wordsworth's implication, that anything narrated in prose could be done better in verse, is refuted by citing examples to the contrary. Included among these examples are some of Wordsworth's own poems, judged more proper for expression "in a moral essay, or pedestrian tour." Here, the language of prose, expressed metrically, produces a "sense of oddity and strangeness." Coleridge concludes, therefore, that the pleasurable effects of meter are "conditional, and dependent on the appropriateness of the thoughts and expressions, to which the metrical form is superadded. . . . I write in metre, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose" (II, 51-53).

In the third part of his argument for a unique poetical order and language, Coleridge differs with remarks in the "Preface" concerning the relationship of poetry and passion. While Wordsworth had felt that the poet's heightened language "must,

often, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of . . . passions,"<sup>1</sup> Coleridge finds emotional power to subsist in "the very act of poetic composition itself." In support of the premise that there exists a proper poetic language, distinct from the conversation of ordinary men, he employs both example and analogy. Passages from Dryden and Donne derive their vividness "as much and as often . . . from the force and fervor of the describer, as from the reflections, forms or incidents, which constitute their subject and materials." "Passion" is part of the creative process--"The wheels take fire from the mere rapidity of their motion"--rather than a reproduction of past emotion (II, 56). Thus Coleridge continues to emphasize the active, volitional quality of the poet's task, in contrast to the "recollection" and "translation" assigned him in the "Preface."

As the "same argument in a more general form," Coleridge then advances "the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment, and thus establishing the principle, that all the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more important and essential parts" (II, 56). Wordsworth, too, had spoken of the "well known" principle of "the pleasure which the mind derives from

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 737.

the perception of similitude in dissimilitude";<sup>1</sup> hence Coleridge simply restates this before coming to the final part of his proof--testimony and a form of "summary review"<sup>2</sup> suited to conclusions:

Lastly, I appeal to the practice of the best poets, of all countries and in all ages, as authorizing the opinion (deduced from all the foregoing) that in every import of the word ESSENTIAL, which would not here involve a mere truism, there may be, is, and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition (II, 56-57).

The remainder of Chapter XVIII augments Coleridge's proof with further examples. Wordsworth's discussion of Gray's sonnet is found deficient in "argumentative analysis," Coleridge objects to the conclusions drawn, and offers his own evaluation of the poem. Certain lines are bad, not, as Wordsworth had implied, because they differ from the language of prose, but by reason of their "incongruous images" and lack of good sense. Stanzas from The Faerie Queen are quoted in order to show that a language inconceivable in prose or conversation is not necessarily "puerile" or "vicious." In contrast, verses of Daniel fail in consequence of their prosaic quality and lack of images; good sense, correct language, and an interesting subject "treated with feeling" are not--without the order and words of poetry--"suitable to metrical composition." Thus,

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 740.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 3.19, trans. Cooper, p. 241.

Wordsworth's criteria fail when applied in practical criticism to a range of styles.

Finally, part of Wordsworth's apology for meter is attacked. The "Preface" had termed meter a "regular and uniform" distinction in poetry, as opposed to the arbitrariness and caprice of "poetic diction." "In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge employs a barrage of rhetorical questions in arriving at his point: the poet who follows caprice in his choice of language is likely to "make just the same havoc with rhymes and metres." He distinguishes, as Wordsworth had not, between "the legitimate language of poetic fervor self-impassioned" and "the madness prepense of pseudo-poesy." A poet worthy of the name, who has regulated his style by "the principles of grammar, logic, psychology," will instinctively use language suited to the emotion; similarly, the reader is able to detect a "deceptive counterfeit" of true passion--"the marble peach feels cold and heavy, and children only put it to their mouths" (II, 63-65).

The close of Coleridge's argument appeals to the reader's good sense, implying that anyone with a "moderate insight into the constitution of the human mind" and average taste will agree with his conclusions. A summary statement also suggests

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 739.



that mere common sense will make the limitations of Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction self-evident. The touchstone of the "Preface"--"a selection of language really used by men"<sup>1</sup>--is incapable of

furnishing either rule, guidance, or precaution, that might not, more easily and more safely, as well as more naturally, have been deduced in the author's own mind from considerations of grammar, logic, and the truth and nature of things, confirmed by the authority of works, whose fame is not of ONE country nor of ONE age (II, 67-68).

Although Chapters XIX and XX do not refute the "Preface" directly, they indicate weaknesses in Wordsworth's reasoning and attempt to answer the question, "What then did he mean?" Coleridge conjectures that Wordsworth had a true "species of excellence" in mind when discussing the language of poetry; he became confused, however, and "narrowed his view for the time." His method is criticized as "groundless," "strange," to "all the common laws of interpretation," and given to "terms at once too large and too exclusive." Even the "real object" that Coleridge ascribes to Wordsworth reveals the latter to have been anticipated in earlier criticism and to have neglected his predecessors in English poetry. Familiar examples (Chaucer, Spenser, Herbert) are cited as proof that "poetry of the milder muse" was already well-established. Furthermore, this "excellence" which Wordsworth professed to emulate is not the true

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<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p. 734.

characteristic of his style. The merit of Wordsworth's poetry is both defined and magnified by "comparison . . . with men of note."<sup>1</sup> "Next to that of Shakespeare and Milton," the language of Wordsworth appears "of all other the most individualized and characteristic" (II, 70-77). Paradoxically, the best poems of Wordsworth are those least like the conversation of ordinary men. Coleridge offers evidence for this conclusion by means of examples; passages are quoted which illustrate that Wordsworth's diction, "style," "modes of connections," and "breaks and transitions" are not those of prose or spoken language. A series of rhetorical questions suggests that such an evaluation is self-evident. Yet a "literal adherence to the theory of his preface" would cause the "marked beauties" of Wordsworth's poetry to go unrecognized (II, 83-84).

Having thus dismissed the "Preface" as of little value, "as far as it is different from the principles of the art, generally acknowledged" (II, 97), Coleridge begins a "fair and philosophical inquisition into the character of Wordsworth, as a poet" (II, 85). In this evaluation, found in the twenty-second chapter of the Biographia, Coleridge answers admirers as well as critics, for both have failed to perceive "the real characteristics" of Wordsworth's poetry. Coleridge again appeals to the reader's "candid and intelligent mind" and seeks

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 1.9, trans. Cooper, p. 54.

to appear as a trustworthy authority: "I will attempt to give the main results of my own judgement, after an acquaintance of many years, and repeated perusals" (II, 95-97).

The principal rhetorical devices used by Coleridge in his analysis include example, division, analogy, enthymeme and authority. Wordsworth will be judged, of course, not by his own standards, but by those advanced by Coleridge in refutation of the "Preface." As a framework for discussion, the qualities of Wordsworth's poetry are divided, in the manner of qualitative criticism, between "prominent defects" and "characteristic excellences" (II, 97). Some of these weaknesses and merits are stated and explained briefly, while others are demonstrated with reasoning and evidence. The first defect--"INCONSTANCY of the style," by which Wordsworth "sinks too often and too abruptly" into the language of prose--is proved to be a fault in any art, and illustrated by means of examples and comparison. What Coleridge terms "matter-of-factness," the second defect, occurs in both the description of objects and of characters. Coleridge again argues that it is, in fact, a serious flaw, quoting Aristotle and Davenant on the necessity of avoiding that "accidental-ity" which contravenes "the essence of poetry." Several analogies and examples, as well as enthymemes developed from his definitions of the imagination and of poetry, complete the argument. Coleridge is particularly thorough in answering "the great point of controversy between Mr. Wordsworth and his

objectors; namely . . . THE CHOICE OF HIS CHARACTERS." Conclusions stated earlier concerning the immediate object of poetry, the limitations of rustics, and the requirement of a poet to "paint to the imagination, not to the fancy," are repeated in order to controvert Wordsworth's selection of minutely described, moralizing characters "of some low profession." Coleridge then refers briefly to Wordsworth's "undue predilection for the dramatic form" and his occasional "intensity of feeling disproportionate to . . . the objects described" (II, 97-109). As minor faults, somewhat overlapping with the one previously discussed, these are not elaborated upon. The final defect, however, "thoughts and images too great for the subject" (or, "mental bombast"), is significantly "a fault of which none but a man of genius is capable." Coleridge calls attention to several instances of "bombast," criticizing the failing at length. He does not offer evidence here for regarding this characteristic as a fault; yet it does follow from the premise--stated in Chapter XVIII--that the poet is to be guided by "considerations of grammar, logic, and the truth and nature of things" (II, 68). In certain passages, Wordsworth expresses thoughts which are unable to "stand the severest analysis." Two of the poems quoted ("I wandered lonely as a cloud" and Gipsies") seem to be judged largely on matters of style; Coleridge's quarrel with the third ("Intimations of Immortality"), however, is with more than its "faulty and equivocal syntax." Differing sharply with

Wordsworth's estimation of a child's powers, Coleridge employs rhetorical questions and an indignant attitude to point out the "absurdity" of the stanza in question (VIII). His literal-minded conclusion is further indication that the passage fails logically rather than poetically: "If the words are taken in the common sense, they convey an absurdity; and if, in contempt of dictionaries and custom, they are so interpreted as to avoid the absurdity, the meaning dwindles into some bald truism" (II, 109-114).

To these "defects," Coleridge opposes six "excellences" to be found in Wordsworth's poetry. Although his negative criticism had often been harsh, Coleridge is equally forceful in his praise of Wordsworth. The first merit, "an austere purity of language both grammatically and logically," follows from Coleridge's many admonitions regarding "a strict accuracy of expression." Wordsworth's achievement is "magnified" by the topic of "circumstances of time and occasion."<sup>1</sup> It is most difficult with the medium of language for the artist to "avoid the infection of multiplied and daily examples" of "perverted taste." Wordsworth's "valuable" attainment, therefore, is the result of "arduous work." An effective maxim demonstrates the importance and the benefit of this excellence: "It is at all times the proper food of the understanding; but in an age of corrupt eloquence it is both food and antidote" (II, 115-116).

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 1.9, trans. Cooper, p. 53.

The second merit--Wordsworth's "weight and sanity" of "Thoughts and Sentiments," acquired through his "own meditative observation"--is presented by means of example, comparison, and figurative language. Quotations are taken from "his humblest compositions" to those intended for readers "accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their inmost nature." Coleridge's praise of Samuel Daniel is meant for Wordsworth as well: "whose diction bears no mark of time, no distinction of age," and whose thoughts no "frequency of perusal can deprive . . . of their freshness." Finally, lines from Dante--applied to "Intimations of Immortality"--serve to magnify Wordsworth's achievement (II, 118-120).

The third excellence--"the sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs"--requires no proof: "this beauty, and as eminently characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry, his rudest assailants have felt themselves compelled to acknowledge and admire." Nor does "the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions" need more than a fitting tribute, which Coleridge gives:

Like a green field reflected in a calm and perfectly transparent lake, the image is distinguished from the reality only by its greater softness and lustre. Like the moisture or the polish on a pebble, genius neither distorts nor false-colours its objects; but on the contrary brings out many a vein and many a tint, which escapes the eye of a common observation, thus raising to the rank of gems what had been often kicked away by the hurrying foot of the traveller on the dusty road of custom (II, 120-121).

Coleridge concludes the list of Wordsworth's "excellences" in a similar manner, using the devices of epideictic rhetoric. The quality of "mild and philosophic pathos"--"a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man"--is attributed to Wordsworth "without a compeer." Coleridge appeals to the reader's emotions in citing "The Affliction of Margaret----", which "no mother, and, if I may judge by my own experience, no parent can read without a tear." Finally, and "pre-eminently," Wordsworth is endowed with "the gift of IMAGINATION in the highest and strictest sense of the word." Like "Shakespeare and Milton," Wordsworth's power is singular--of "a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own"--and visible throughout his words. Coleridge's proof consists of examples which "obviously" manifest "this faculty." In his peroration, Coleridge quotes lines from Bartram's Travels "as a sort of allegory, or connected simile and metaphor of Wordsworth's intellect and genius." Its description of soil, rocks, and trees is a fitting image for one possessing "a long and genial intimacy with the very spirit which gives the physiognomic expression to all the works of nature" (II, 122-128).

The epilogue to Coleridge's argument concerning the poems and "Preface" of Wordsworth illustrates several elements advised by the Rhetoric: "render the audience well-disposed to yourself, and ill-disposed to your opponent"; "magnify and depreciate"; and "recapitulate what has been

said."<sup>1</sup> Both sorts of opponents--the "petulant" and "feeble" detractors and the "affected admirers"--are again disparaged. Coleridge himself exhibits generosity toward Wordsworth and a just indignation at "unmanly" criticism and "indiscriminate" praise. Wordsworth's merits are emphasized, while his defects are termed few and insignificant: "His fame belongs to another age, and can neither be accelerated nor retarded." Finally, Coleridge recalls the nature and aims of his argument:

I have declared my opinions concerning both his theory and his defects, most of which are more or less connected with his theory, either as cause or effect, . . . I have advanced no opinion either for praise or censure, other than as texts introductory to the reasons which compel me to form it. Above all, I was fully convinced that such a criticism was not only wanted; but that, if executed with adequate ability, it must conduce, in no mean degree, to Mr. Wordsworth's reputation (II, 129-131).

The evaluation of Wordsworth's theory and poetry was Coleridge's primary objective in the Biographia Literaria. He looked back upon the second volume of the work as a successful accomplishment of this aim: "the first Critique which acknowledging and explaining his faults (as a Poet) weighed them firmly against his merits."<sup>2</sup> Coleridge's contemporaries found this the most valuable part of his argument; and the section has become, of course, one of the classic pieces of criticism--not

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.19, trans. Cooper, pp. 240-241.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, IV, 938.



only for its content, but for its "method of close reading"<sup>1</sup> and its importance "as a great innovative document in the history of English criticism."<sup>2</sup> Less enthusiastically received was that part of the Biographia concerned with Coleridge's defense of himself and his assault upon reviews and reviewers. Coleridge had hoped that the autobiographical passages in the Biographia would prove that he was not--as reviewers had charged--indolent, obscure, and heretical. Furthermore, he anticipated that his experiences would be of use "to the youthful literati" (I, 152). For many years, however, commentators on Coleridge's life and character appeared to have been unmoved. And the youths were as few as those he had predicted would appreciate Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality"--those who "feel a deep interest in modes of inmost being" (II, 120). Such a one was F. D. Maurice, who wrote (in 1842) of his own inner "struggle" and of the "help" provided by the Biographia:

If a young man in this age is much tormented by the puzzles of society, and the innumerable systems by which men have sought to get rid of them, he is haunted almost as much by the different problems of Criticism, by a sense of the connexion between his own life and the books which he reads, by theories about the nature and meaning of this connexion, . . . I seemed to see a writer, who was feeling his way into the

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Hall Creed, "Coleridge on Taste," ELH, XIII (March, 1946), 145.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer H. Abrams, "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Diction and Figures," English Institute Essays, 1952 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 188.

apprehension of many questions which had puzzled me, explaining to me his own progress . . . into a discovery that there is a keynote to the harmony.<sup>1</sup>

Maurice reacts to the Biographia not as a "system" with "principles . . . ready made,"<sup>2</sup> but as the revelation of a mind thinking. The relationship of this mode of thought to rhetorical procedure (in reference to Coleridge's Aids to Reflection) is pointed out by John Holloway:

He [the writer employing this method] does not and probably cannot rely on logical and formal argument alone or even much at all. His main task is to quicken the reader's perceptiveness; and he does this by making a far wider appeal than the exclusively rational appeal . . . He<sup>3</sup> gives expression to his outlook imaginatively.

In the Biographia, this form of persuasiveness appears especially in Coleridge's self-defense, which includes the repudiation of his critics and the history of his philosophical and religious opinions.

The ethical and emotional appeals, as well as the devices most suited to epideictic and forensic rhetoric, are evident in these autobiographical sections of the Biographia Literaria. Coleridge must present himself in a favorable light, vindicate his actions, and persuade the reader to sympathize

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<sup>1</sup>"Dedication," The Kingdom of Christ (2 vols.; 3rd ed.; London: Macmillan and Company, 1883), xv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The Victorian Sage (London: Macmillan and Company, 1953), p. 10.

with his beliefs and condemn those who have unjustly opposed him. In the opening paragraph of the Biographia, Coleridge is careful to note that an "exculpation" alone is not his purpose; and he professes bewilderment at the notoriety he has received. From his own particular experience, he turns at once to the principle, the general case, of critics and their treatment of authors. His analysis of "that complex feeling, with which readers in general take part against the author, in favor of the critic" (II, 19) accuses such readers of a "debility and dimness of the imaginative power." Their motives are further belittled by means of figurative language: "Cold and phlegmatic in their own nature, like damp hay, they heat and inflame by co-acervation; or like bees they become restless and irritable through the increased temperature of collected multitudes" (I, 19). Coleridge frames his conclusion as a maxim: "the first defence of weak minds is to recriminate" (I, 20).

By the topic of opposites, those who possess a high degree of imaginative power--"men of the greatest genius"--are found "to have been of calm and tranquil temper in all that related to themselves." Coleridge selects, from the "records of biography," a number of English writers who prove his point. He naturally stresses that aspect of their character which contrasts with the "anger" and "fear" typical of the unimaginative reader. Spenser's "severe calamities" and Milton's "scorners and detractors" could not destroy their "calmness" and

"self-possession." Furthermore, a distinction must be made between the author and the man; a physical weakness may be the accidental cause of some "irritability" (I, 21-24).

Having stated, then, that "irritability" is not a quality of poetic genius, Coleridge attempts to "explain the easy credence generally given to this charge." His answer is evolved from a study of the causes of human action--the proper material for his "subject of accusation and defense."<sup>1</sup> At a time when "literature is widely diffused," many aspire to "the reputation of poetic genius." Lacking that genius, and its concomitant "sense of inward power," they experience a "suspicious and jealous irritability." Aristotle notes that "those who have any desire that is not being satisfied--are prone to anger, and are easily incensed."<sup>2</sup> In Coleridge's example, the impossibility of satisfaction is additional cause: "men, whose dearest wishes are fixed on objects wholly out of their own power, become in all cases more or less impatient and prone to anger." Because of the present state of language--"mechanized as it were into a barrel-organ"--literature, especially the "manufacturing of poems," is a trade requiring little "talent or information." A long passage describes the course of those who lack genius, fail to acquire literary success, grow

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 1.10, trans. Cooper, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 2.2, trans. Cooper, pp. 95-96.

"embittered and envenomed," and end as "the fit instruments of literary detraction, and moral slander"--that is, as "anonymous critics." From a combination of these facts has arisen "the prejudice . . . which considers an unusual irascibility concerning the reception of its products as characteristics of genius." Coleridge follows this conclusion with an argument from the topic of "incentives"<sup>1</sup>--conditions which cause men to act. "Ribbon-weavers, calico-printers, cabinet-makers, and china-manufacturers" would, if their works were subjected to similar criticism in reviews, "soon reduce the resentment of poets into mere shadow fights" (I, 24-29).

Returning to his premise that calm and self-possession coexist with imaginative power, Coleridge points out that the sensibility of "true genius . . . is excited by any other cause more powerfully than by its own personal interests." The man who is accustomed to live in an "ideal world" gives least thought to the "self." His "liveliness" of "manner and language" while answering some "false charge" or "erroneous censure" is no different from that energy he would expend upon any topic. Coleridge then applies the results of his argument to his own circumstances. He professes a "careless indifference to public opinion, and to the attacks of those who influence it"; this indifference is attributed, however, to "constitutional indolence" and "ill-health" which leave him "but little grief

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.23, trans. Cooper, p. 168.

to spare for evils comparatively distant and alien." This explanation allows him to evoke sympathy, while modestly avoiding a claim to "true genius." Finally, and in answer to the attacks and belittling views upon literary composition, Coleridge emphasizes its disciplined, professional nature. Because of the lifelong devotion of his "whole being" to this pursuit, a writer is well justified in feeling "a due interest and qualified anxiety" for the "products of his intellect and intellectual industry." A metaphor for Coleridge's own experience, illustrating the difficulties he has outlined above, closes the chapter. Those works he has brought forth with "ostrich carelessness and ostrich oblivion" have been largely "trodden under foot, and are forgotten." Others have survived, "some to furnish feathers for the caps of others, and still more to plume the shafts in the quivers of my enemies" (I, 30-32).

The points developed in this chapter seem rather belabored at times, and the opposition not clearly defined; but Coleridge will make use of the arguments in later chapters. The challenge to reviews and reviewers, repeated throughout the work, is initiated here. Conclusions regarding the motives of hostile readers and the nature of an author's reactions to criticism will be applied in defense of Southey, of Wordsworth, and of Coleridge's own reputation. The chapter provides a justification for such an apology, and transfers the blame to the careless reader and frustrated critic. Premises concerning the

powers of the poet and the characteristics of genius will also appear again in the Biographia, when Coleridge defines a poem and the poetic imagination and discusses Shakespeare and Wordsworth.

Having stated these general principles, Coleridge returns to his own particular case in Chapter III. His motivation, in keeping with the claims made in the preceding chapter, is based upon justice and a natural curiosity about the causes of his "reputation and publicity"--and he is careful to deny "any feeling of anger." The opposition is so described as to warrant a defense. Coleridge expresses

some degree of surprize, that, after having run the critical gauntlet for a certain class of faults which I had, nothing having come before the judgement-seat in the interim, I should, year after year, quarter after quarter, month after month (not to mention sundry petty periodicals of still quicker revolution, "or weekly or diurnal") have been, for at least 17 years consecutively dragged forth by them into the foremost ranks of the proscribed, and forced to abide the brunt of abuse, for faults directly opposite, and which I certainly had not.

Several possible motives--"personal dislike," "envy," and "vindictive animosity"--are discarded, for Coleridge insists upon the obscurity of his person and writings and his avoidance of controversy. The cause of this onslaught of criticism is traced, therefore, to an external cause: his friendship with Southey and Wordsworth. Coleridge then asks, "how came the torrent to descend upon them?" (I, 34-39).

In answering the question for Southey, Coleridge argues against false principles of criticism and applies the methods of epideictic rhetoric to the poet's character and writings. Another lament for a "retrograde movement" in literature and the despotism of the "multitudinous PUBLIC" uses analogy as a means of persuasion. The public's claim to the "guardianship of the muses" is humorously likened to "St. Nepomuc" who "was installed the guardian of bridges, because he had fallen over one, and sunk out of sight." Critics of Southey concentrated on his juvenilia, failing to point out his merits. Southey is praised and the argument strengthened by comparison with "men of note": his detractors are such as would "omit or pass slightly over the expression, grace, and grouping of Raphael's figures; but ridicule in detail the knitting-needles and broom-twigs, that are to represent trees in his backgrounds." A catalogue of Southey's personal and literary virtues concludes the chapter. The highest terms are used to describe the "variety and extent of his acquirements" and the "matchless industry and perseverance in his pursuits"; Southey's "enemies," on the other hand, are dismissed as mere "quacks." Finally, Coleridge gives evidence of his sincerity by defending Southey at his own expense. In a footnote to the chapter, Coleridge mentions his accusation as an "infidel and fugitive" in order to clear Southey, "whose name has been so often connected with mine for evil to which he is a stranger" (I, 41-49).



Chapters V-IX, preliminary to the definition of imagination, record the history of Coleridge's philosophical studies. The section both defends his intellectual integrity and refutes erroneous systems of thought. The example appears prominently here. Also notable is Coleridge's "frequent recourse to the poetic use of language in the course of philosophical argument."<sup>1</sup> His method follows a general pattern: various theories of association are outlined; their fallacies are revealed; finally, examples and enthymemes illustrate these errors and indicate a solution. Coleridge's own investigations provide a framework; and in acknowledging debts to certain thinkers, Coleridge seeks to absolve himself of the charges that he plagiarized from Schelling.

A 1799 lecture by Sir James Mackintosh offers a jumping-off place for Coleridge's argument on a wider topic. Mackintosh had stated that "the law of association as established in the contemporaneity of the original impressions, formed the basis of all true psychology"; further, "he declared Hobbes to have been the original discoverer, while its full application to the whole intellectual system we owed to David Hartley." Coleridge denies this attribution, showing Descartes to have anticipated Hobbes. Briefly mentioning others who had defined and commented upon the law of association, Coleridge passes "at once . . . to the

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<sup>1</sup>Judson S. Lyon, "Romantic Psychology and the Inner Senses: Coleridge," PMLA, LXXXI (June, 1966), 257.

fullest and most perfect enunciation of the associative principle, viz. to the writings of Aristotle." The latter's doctrines are to provide the standards by which other theories of association will be judged. Aristotle's great merit is that his "positions on this subject are unmixed with fiction"; he "delivers a just theory without pretending to an hypothesis." This factual approach is used by Coleridge in pointing out absurdities, such as Hobbes' "successive particles propagating motion like billiard balls." Also of interest to Coleridge are the conclusions of "the Aristotelian Psychology": "in association . . . consists the whole mechanism of the reproduction of impressions, . . . It is the universal law of the passive fancy and mechanical memory; that which supplies to all other faculties their objects, to all thought the elements of its materials" (I, 67-73).

Coleridge then argues that "Hartley's system, as far as it differs from that of Aristotle, is neither tenable in theory, nor founded in facts." He does this largely by examples and analogies, showing that Hartley's theory is contradicted by observable fact. The terms of Coleridge's analogies appeal to common experience: "so many differently coloured billiard-balls"; "a broad stream, winding through a mountainous country with an indefinite number of currents"; "the sphere of a total impression from the top of St. Paul's church." Hartley errs in taking "the principle of contemporaneity" as the "sole law" of

association, relegating "the will, the reason, the judgement, and the understanding" to the position of "mechanical effects." Such a case, says Coleridge, "would be absolute delirium." He illustrates his point with an "authenticated case" of a young woman "seized with a nervous fever." Her behavior, were Hartley's theory true, would be the normal state of consciousness. A positive conclusion reached by Coleridge in examining this "case" is "that all thoughts are in themselves imperishable" (I, 74-79).

Chapter VII continues Coleridge's refutation of Hartley's theory and its "necessary consequences." He reveals the absurdities that must follow from this mechanistic scheme, in which "the soul is present only to be pinched or stroked." Arguing from the topic of antecedent and consequence, Coleridge lists examples of what would result from Hartley's theory; as the effects are obviously impossible, so is the theory itself:

The inventor of the watch, if this doctrine be true, did not in reality invent it; he only looked on, while the blind causes, the only true artists, were unfolding themselves. . . . So it must have been with Mr. SOUTHEY and LORD BYRON, when one fancied himself composing his "RODERICK," and the other his "CHILDE HAROLD."

Coleridge then reduces the errors of Hartley and his followers "to one sophism as their common genus; the mistaking the conditions of a thing for its causes and essence." Working from this premise, Coleridge formulates a counter-statement: "contemporaneity . . . is the limit and condition of the laws of

mind, itself being rather a law of matter." He again offers analogies from common experience to illustrate the conclusion that a voluntary power is at work "when we leap," or compose, or try "to recollect a name." The image of "a small water-insect" winning "its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion" is applied to "the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking." Both active and passive powers are at work; "and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once . . . active and passive"--in philosophical terms, "the IMAGINATION" (I, 80-86).

Having discarded the Hartleian theory, Coleridge examines the systems of dualism, hylozoism, and materialism, concluding that none of these, "or any possible theory of association, supplies or supersedes a theory of perception, or explains the formation of the associable." The method of argument is similar to that used against Hartley--the consequences of each system are shown to be absurd. Coleridge suggests that he has fuller and more systematic arguments, but that these are reserved for a future work. For the present, he lists three conclusions: most importantly, that the theories here examined do not provide for a "mechanism and co-adequate forces in the percipient." An analogy is taken from art: "the formation of a copy is not solved by the mere pre-existence of an original; the copyist of Raphael's transfiguration must repeat more or less perfectly the process of Raphael" (I, 88-92).

Chapter IX records the progress of Coleridge's thought after his rejection of the systems of Hartley and others. His first reaction was to declare that "a system of philosophy, as different from mere history and historic classification," was impossible. He soon felt, however, "that human nature itself fought up against this wilful resignation of intellect." In this state of inquiry, Coleridge came upon the writings of the mystics, especially Boehme, and the systems of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. His indebtedness to them is acknowledged in such a way as to praise their achievements and evince his own sincerity. The latter is important to Coleridge's defensive aim in the Biographia, since he had been accused of appropriating the thoughts and words of others as his own. In contrast to the mechanistic theories, the beliefs of these philosophers move his whole being. Of the writings of the mystics, Coleridge says: "If they were too often a moving cloud of smoke to me by day, yet they were always a pillar of fire throughout the night, during my wanderings through the wilderness of doubt, and enabled me to skirt, without crossing, the sandy deserts of utter unbelief." The "clearness and evidence" of Kant's works took "possession" of him "as with a giant's hand." Coleridge denies the charge of plagiarism from Schelling, warning his readers "that an identity of thought, or even similarity of phrase, will not be at all times a certain proof that the passage has been borrowed from Schelling, or that the conceptions

were originally learnt from him." Proof for this statement is taken from the topic arguing "from identity of results to the identity of their antecedents,"<sup>1</sup> in this case, reversed.

Schelling and Coleridge reached the same conclusions because they had "studied in the same school" and were "disciplined by the same preparatory philosophy." Finally, Coleridge appeals to the reader by generously acknowledging the "great and original genius" of Schelling and urging:

For readers in general, let whatever shall be found in this or any future work of mine, that resembles, or coincides with, the doctrines of my German predecessor, though contemporary, be wholly attributed to him: provided, that the absence of distinct references to his books, which I could not at all times make with truth as designating citations or thoughts actually derived from him; and which, I trust, would, after this general acknowledgement be superfluous; be not charged on me as an ungenerous concealment or intentional plagiarism (I, 93-105).

Chapters X and XI, containing a miscellany of arguments and anecdotes, interrupt Coleridge's philosophical speculations. After defending the importance he ascribed to proper terminology, Coleridge offers advice to anyone who "should be preparing or intending a periodical work." From his own experience, he cites examples in confirmation of his warnings. The episodes, intended as an amusing interlude, contribute to the ethical appeal of the Biographia by revealing Coleridge's good-natured approach to difficulties and the integrity of his motives.

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.23, trans. Cooper, p. 167.

Having failed at journalism, Coleridge devoted himself "to the study of ethics and psychology." He describes a period of religious doubt and questioning, and the manner in which certain writers aided him. Coleridge also takes this opportunity to praise his benefactors, the Wedgewoods. Chapter X concludes with an apology, answering those who had termed him "a man incorrigibly idle, and who, intrusted not only with ample talents, but favored with unusual opportunities of improving them, had nevertheless suffered them to rust away without any sufficient exertion, either for his own good or that of his fellow creatures." Coleridge contradicts such charges by citing the fact that his writings, if "published in books," would "have filled a respectable number of volumes." In addition, the preceding anecdotes have shown "why the facts appear in a wrong light."<sup>1</sup> Coleridge argues, finally, against critics who would make quantity of publications the standard of merit:

Would that the criterion of a scholar's utility were the number and moral value of the truths, which he has been the means of throwing into the general circulation; or the number and value of the minds, whom by his conversation or letters he has excited into activity, and supplied with the germs of their after-growth! (I, 110-149).

Chapter XI has a similar function from a rhetorical point of view, giving evidence of Coleridge's "good will." From a sincere interest in "the welfare of those" who "in early

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.23, trans. Cooper, p. 170.

life feel themselves disposed to become authors," he offers this advice: "NEVER PURSUE LITERATURE AS A TRADE." Appealing to what is good and expedient, Coleridge lists a number of reasons for this assertion. He knows, from his own experience, that a wife is pleased "by the knowledge that . . . you have satisfied the demands of the day by the labor of the day." The examples of Cicero, Xenophon, Thomas More, Bacon and others "are at once decisive of the question." Coleridge settles upon the church as the most suitable profession for a "man of learning and genius."

An emotional argument idealizes the clergyman:

he is neither in the cloistered cell, nor in the wilderness, but a neighbour and a family-man, whose education and rank admit him to the mansion of the rich landholder, while his duties make him the frequent visitor of the farm-house and the cottage. . . . There is scarce a department of human knowledge without some bearing on the various critical, historical, philosophical and moral truths, in which the scholar must be interested as a clergyman; no one pursuit worthy of a man of genius, which may not be followed without incongruity.

Other advantages follow, "whatever be the profession or trade chosen." One who is not a "mere literary man . . . lives in sympathy with the world, in which he lives" and gains "a superior chance of happiness in domestic life." Further corroboration comes from Herder, who reached conclusions similar to Coleridge's and practiced this advice in his own life (I, 152-159).

Coleridge returns to the subject of philosophy in Chapter XII. He prefaces his exposition of "the true and original



realism" with an appeal to the reader, in which the proper way of approaching a philosophical work is outlined. One maxim to be followed is this: "until you understand a writer's ignorance presume yourself ignorant of his understanding." Coleridge constructs examples to illustrate both positions. Another caution is addressed to "the unknown reader": "that he will either pass over the following chapter altogether, or read the whole connectedly." An analogy argues for the necessity of this course--"the fairest parts of the most beautiful body will appear deformed and monstrous, if dis severed from its place in the organic Whole." Coleridge then describes different sorts of readers, basing his metaphor on a "range of hills": most never pass beyond the "first range," the "scanty vale of human life"; a few, however, have "even in level streams . . . detected elements, which neither the vale itself or the surrounding mountains contained or could supply." The latter is the "true philosopher," and only those with such tendencies, implies Coleridge, can trace the arguments to follow (I, 160-167).

After this lengthy introduction, designed to win a sympathetic hearing, Coleridge proceeds to what has been called "the heart of the book"<sup>1</sup> and its "centre of gravity."<sup>2</sup> It is,

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<sup>1</sup>George Watson, The Literary Critics (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 99.

indeed, the climax of the philosophical chapters and the prelude to Coleridge's central argument--"the deduction of the Imagination." From Schelling, Coleridge takes the premise that "all knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject. . . . the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE we will henceforth call NATURE, . . . On the other hand the sum of all that is SUBJECTIVE, we may comprehend in the name of SELF or INTELLIGENCE." During the "act of knowledge itself," both intelligence and nature--the conscious and the unconscious, "are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two priority belong." Coleridge's task is to "explain this concurrence, its possibility and its necessity" (I, 174-180).

His explanation is undertaken in the ten theses which, Coleridge admits, are results rather than demonstrations. Like the definition of Imagination given in Chapter XIII, the theses are said to be supported by a "scientifically arranged" process of reasoning, here omitted. Coleridge justifies this neglect by an analogy with the "science of arithmetic" which "furnishes instances, that a rule may be useful in practical application, and for the particular purpose may be sufficiently authenticated by the result, before it has itself been fully demonstrated." The "result" essential to Coleridge's argument concerns the nature of the creative act--"the idea of an indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces, . . . For my present purpose, I assume such a power as my principle, in order to

deduce from it a faculty, the generation, agency, and application of which form the contents of the ensuing chapter" (I, 180-188).

Before approaching the study of this "faculty," Coleridge considers the "great . . . obstacles which an English metaphysician has to encounter." Here, he lists three unsympathetic classes of readers, as well as "the predominance of a popular philosophy." To those who have "an habitual aversion to all speculations, the utility and application of which are not evident and immediate," Coleridge cites the authority of Bacon that such speculations are useful as mental exercise. To those "whose prejudices . . . are grounded in their moral feelings and religious principles," he answers: first, "that true metaphysics are nothing else but true divinity"; second, "that false metaphysics can be effectually counteracted by true metaphysics alone." Finally, some "believe that they are themselves metaphysicians," but will admit no "system of terminology" except the mechanistic. Coleridge again defends the need for precise terms, noting that one of his principal aims has been "to demonstrate the vagueness or insufficiency of the terms used in the metaphysical schools of France and Great Britain since the revolution." The "worst and widest impediment"--a "counterfeit" popular philosophy--results in "an utter loss of taste and faculty for all system and for all philosophy." Thus Coleridge answers several charges that had been levelled at his works:

worthlessness, heterodoxy, and pedantry. The "popular philosophy," characteristic of reviews, is pronounced "an irremediable disease"--the "mortal enemy of all true and manly metaphysical research" (I, 191-193).

Having prepared his audience in Chapter XII for a thorough study of "the nature and genesis of the imagination," Coleridge breaks off his discussion early in Chapter XIII. Again, this move is said to be dictated by consideration for the reader. Coleridge also gives the impression, in the letter from a "friend," that a lengthy and reasoned "disquisition" precedes the definitions of imagination and fancy. The means of persuasion, therefore, even in those chapters providing philosophical background, are emotional and ethical as well as rational. Coleridge is defending not only his theories, but his character; he shows, too, as much interest in the concrete application as in the general principle. As he is seeking to persuade in the Biographia Literaria, he does not "begin the chain of reasoning too far back, or . . . put in every single link."<sup>1</sup> Yet these fragmentary starts of Chapters XII and XIII--to some degree, at least, calculated--have most often been received unfavorably. A recent critic traces the frequent lack of direction in Chapters V-XIII to the uncertainty of Coleridge's views at the time. Rather than an "exposition of a philosophy," we see "the drama

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 2.22, trans. Cooper, p. 155.

of Coleridge struggling to improve order on the recalcitrant elements of his earlier philosophy"; the Biographia is a record of "the state of his mind in the summer of 1815."<sup>1</sup> This explanation is substantiated by Coleridge's later reflections on the work: he called the chapters "at the end of the first volume . . . unformed and immature," their ideas "not fully thought out";<sup>2</sup> he remained satisfied, however, with the criticism of Wordsworth.

Coleridge's apology for his works and character, which appears prominently in Volume I of the Biographia, is continued in Chapters XXI and XXIV. The critics of Wordsworth are foremost in Coleridge's mind in Chapter XXI, but there are also implied references to his own quarrel with reviewers. Coleridge sets standards for the "fair and philosophical" critic which reflect the method he has used in the preceding evaluation of Wordsworth: establishment of his principles "of poetry in general"; "the specification of these in their application to the different classes of poetry"; selection of "striking passages" for illustration; and the discrimination of characteristic "merits or defects." Attempting to follow principles of fairness, Coleridge first acknowledges the merits of the Edinburgh Review. Against its valid criticism, "the writer is

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry, 1791-1819 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Table Talk, p. 293.

authorised to reply, but not to complain." However, the great fault of the Review is its tendency toward "personal injury" and "personal insults." Coleridge himself had been subjected to such treatment by the "contemptible . . . gossip, backbiter, and pasquillant." To strengthen his argument against the Review, Coleridge magnifies the virtues of the author and the vices of the critic. The latter "steals . . . into the very place which, next to the chapel and oratory, should be our sanctuary, and secure place of refuge." Because the Review often chose works of "trifling importance," Coleridge suspects "either that dislike or vindictive feeling were at work; or that there was a cold prudential predetermination to increase the sale of the Review by flattering the malignant passions of human nature." In support of this charge and his "second point of objection" ("the substitution of assertion for argument"), Coleridge cites examples--including that of the Edinburgh Review's essay on The Excursion. By means of a series of rhetorical questions, the essay itself is ridiculed: its conclusions are contradicted by some who "hold a higher intellectual rank than the critic himself would presume to claim"; its method lacks "a single leading principle either established or announced"; and the tone is one of "rudest contempt." A final argument makes use of an extended analogy. Coleridge recounts a discussion with "a Prussian artist" before Michaelangelo's "Moses." While the two are pointing out the artistic function of the statue's horns, two

"French officers of distinction and rank" enter the church. As the Prussian predicts to Coleridge, the Frenchmen associate the horns, not with a "super-human" force, but with "those of a HE-GOAT and a CUCKOLD." This point of view, claims Coleridge, betokens the same sort of "low and degraded mind" that marks the reviewer of Wordsworth's Excursion (II, 85-93).

In the concluding chapter of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge tells of his own unjust treatment by reviewers and affirms his religious orthodoxy. The opening paragraph of Chapter XXIV gives, in general terms, some of the causes and manifestations of human grief: "the punishment for faults "by incidents, in the causation of which these faults had no share"; and the "instinct which . . . almost compels the Afflicted to communicate their sorrows." But Coleridge insists, in keeping with that calm and self-disinterestedness he claimed to be characteristic of genius, that he will not trouble the reader "with any complaint." His account of the reception of "Christabel" and The Statesman's Manual, however, accomplishes this very end. As in earlier discussions of reviewers, Coleridge expresses surprise and horror at the tenor of their essays. The magnitude of the wrong against him is stressed: the poem "was assailed with a malignity and a spirit of personal hatred that ought to have injured only the work in which such a tirade appeared"; The Statesman's Manual was reviewed "by anticipation with a malignity so avowedly and exclusively personal, as is . . .

unprecedented even in the present contempt of all common humanity that disgraces and endangers the liberty of the press" (II, 207-214).

Having thus stressed the enmity and prejudice of reviewers, Coleridge, by contrast, appears all the more magnanimous when he assures the reader that "the grief with which I read this rhapsody of predetermined insult, had the rhapsodist himself for its whole and sole object." In order to deny the "innuendo" of "'potential infidelity,'" Coleridge simply counters with a list of his beliefs "concerning the true evidences of Christianity." Additional evidence for his orthodoxy and sincerity is offered in a peroration to the chapter. Coleridge concludes the Biographia Literaria with a final ethical appeal: his desire and earnest endeavor has been "to kindle young minds, and to guard them against the temptations of Scorners, by showing that the Scheme of Christianity, as taught in the Liturgy and Homilies of our Church, though not discoverable by human Reason, is yet in accordance with it." Admittedly, such a conclusion does not follow from the principal topics discussed in the Biographia. Nor are Coleridge's words, eloquent though they may be, in any way a "summary review"<sup>1</sup> of his proofs. However, he had viewed the attacks upon his character and works as a continuous offensive; and he opposed critics both in

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.19, trans. Cooper, p. 241.



principle and as one closely affected. The antagonism displayed in a review of The Statesman's Manual was the most recent manifestation of narrow and defamatory criticism; a refutation of its errors, therefore, was an essential part of Coleridge's larger intentions (II, 214-218).

A final argument in the Biographia Literaria--not directly connected with either of the main topics discussed above--is found in Chapter XXIII.<sup>1</sup> The essay, largely a reprint of five letters sent to The Courier in August and September of 1816,<sup>2</sup> is concerned with the "Jacobinical drama" Bertram. Coleridge employs several methods and premises seen elsewhere in the Biographia. His rationale for including this essay--as proof that he had been "falsely charged with any fickleness in . . . principles of taste"--suggests a continuity of opinion; and, as a review article, it enables the reader to compare Coleridge's practice of this form of criticism with the tenets he professed. Although Coleridge had personal cause for disagreement with Drury Lane at their selection of Bertram, he does not allow such feelings overtly into his criticism. Nearly the first half of the review is taken up with a discussion of the origin of "the so called German drama." Coleridge's final condemnation of

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<sup>1</sup>"Satyrane's Letters," inserted, says Coleridge, to show him in "the first dawn" of his "literary life," contribute little to the argument of the Biographia. Letter II, however, initiates the question of "Jacobinism" in drama.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge made contradictory statements regarding the extent of a collaborator's hand in the letters (see above, Chapter II); their authenticity, however, has not been challenged.

Bertram follows a brief historical survey of its predecessors and the causes of their popularity, and an analysis of the play's style, logic, dramatic probability, and "moral sense" (II, 180-182).

Coleridge opens the review by explaining the background of the performance of Bertram: it was to herald

the redemption of the British stage not only from horses, dogs, elephants, and the like zoological rarities, but also from the more pernicious barbarisms and Kotzebuisms in morals and taste. Drury Lane was to be restored to its former classical renown; Shakespeare, Jonson, and Otway, with the expurgated muses of Vanbrugh, Congreve, and Wycherley, were to be reinaugurated in their rightful domain over British audiences.

Because of the significance thus given the work--"the first production of the Tragic Muse which had been announced under such auspices"--its failure will be the more ignominious. The "examination of Bertram," however, is prefaced by "a few words on the phrase German Drama." Coleridge employs a favorite rhetorical device in arguing from the meaning of terms; "German" drama, "altogether a misnomer," is found to be "English in its origin, English in its materials, and English by re-adoption." Characteristically, Coleridge moves from the specific instance to causes and general principles. He opposes here, not only Bertram, but the popular taste which would welcome a play of this sort. For this reason, the accuracy of English critical judgments are questioned. In clearing Lessing of any connection with the "sickly" German drama (of which Schiller's Robbers is

given as the "earliest specimen"), Coleridge points out that it was he who first showed the English their "blunder . . . concerning the irregularity and wildness of Shakespeare." The limitations of English taste are also apparent in the popularity of certain pre-Romantic writers and the Gothic novelists. A combination of their qualities, says Coleridge, created the "so called German drama" which "was denounced by the best critics in Germany as the mere cramps of weakness and orgasms of a sickly imagination on the part of the author, and the lowest provocation of torpid feeling on that of the readers" (II, 181-184).

Having given evidence for his charges by means of definition, example, and authority, Coleridge continues to establish principles by which Bertram will be judged--a method he deemed necessary for a "fair and philosophical" (II, 85) evaluation. His procedure is announced in this premise:

I know nothing that contributes more to a clearer insight into the true nature of any literary phenomenon, than the comparison of it with some elder production, the likeness of which is striking, yet only apparent, while the difference is real.

The two works contrasted are both based upon the Don Juan legend--"the old Spanish play, entitled Atheista Fulminato," and Shadwell's The Libertine from which "our modern drama is taken, in the substance of it." Bertram, as a descendant of the latter, will exhibit the same faults (though Coleridge underlines the defects of Bertram by conceding a "palpable superiority of judgement" to Shadwell). Coleridge's judgment against

Bertram, a representative of "modern Jacobinical drama," is based upon moral grounds. In order to justify this conclusion, he must also attempt to explain the causes of its dramatic failure. By comparing the play to Atheista Fulminato, Coleridge shows how similarly "grotesque and extravagant" material could achieve an entirely different effect. The subject matter of Coleridge's own plays (including the rejected Zapolya) was equally "extravagant"; additional criteria, therefore, were needed (II, 185-193).

Coleridge's argument for the success of Atheista Fulminato is centered on the characterization of Don Juan, which fulfills several requisites called for earlier in the Biographia: the author has achieved "the happy balance of the generic with the individual"; the play has dramatic, if not actual, probability--"the poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream." Working from analogies and a knowledge of the readers' emotions, Coleridge concludes that the presentation of Don Juan in the Spanish play reveals the "hollowness" of the qualities of "gentlemanly courage" and "scrupulous honor" when they become "the substitutes of virtue, instead of its ornaments." The "modern Jacobinical drama," on the other hand, attempts to "reconcile us to vice and want of principle; . . . by rewarding with all the sympathies which are the due of virtue, those criminals whom law, reason, and religion have excommunicated from our esteem" (II, 187-193).

Coleridge is at last ready to analyze Bertram. He proceeds act by act, taking care to heed his own warning against verdicts "not seldom unsupported even by a single quotation from the work condemned" (II, 90). The final evaluation is that the play is both absurd and immoral--indeed, a work "of such trifling importance" (II, 89) as Coleridge had criticized the Edinburgh for reviewing. His mocking summary points out errors in logic, "solecisms, corrupt diction, and offences against metre"--"a superfetation of blasphemy upon nonsense." Why, then, was the criticism undertaken? Coleridge was undoubtedly disappointed by Drury Lane's choice of Bertram over Zapolya. The remarks on Bertram were published anonymously in The Courier; and at times, Coleridge denied their authorship. It is possible that the elaborate framework for the review was intended to give Bertram a significance in keeping with the force of Coleridge's attack--and, as such, was a rhetorical device which coincided well with his earlier remarks on "moral and intellectual Jacobinism" (II, 164). In any case, the chapter is of interest as an illustration of Coleridge as reviewer within a short time after he had established relevant principles in the Biographia (II, 193-207).

From an examination of the arguments in the Biographia Literaria, it is apparent that Coleridge was both conscious of the reactions of his audience and aware of the means of persuasion suited to his aims. A common opinion has held that

Coleridge was unable "to focus on an audience"; he is said to be speaking, in the Biographia, sometimes "to the contemporary public at large, sometimes to a group of close friends, sometimes to posterity, and sometimes to himself alone."<sup>1</sup> This diversity is termed a "handicap"; however, such shifts are made necessary by Coleridge's variety of aims and are not ineffective. He wished, for example, to convince the general public--then and of the future--of Wordsworth's merits. The quarrel with reviewers, on the other hand, was a more private issue. And the appeals to posterity, as a common rhetorical device, speak to the contemporary reader as well. Coleridge does seek to establish a rapport with the reader, to understand his motivation, and to win him to a certain way of thinking. From his interest in the reader's psychology, Coleridge is led to a number of perceptive observations. Finally, the care taken to exert an ethical persuasion is further indication of Coleridge's concern for his audience. He intends to appear "worthy of belief"<sup>2</sup> both directly, in his own self defense, and indirectly, in speaking as an authority upon other topics.

In addition to the ethical appeal, Coleridge exhibits a wide range of rhetorical devices in the Biographia. Examples and analogies are his most frequently used means of persuasion.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes (eds.), Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1940), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 1.2, trans. Cooper, p. 8.

Here, Coleridge is able to draw upon a well-stocked mind and capacious memory, as well as an innate ability to see relationships and diffuse a "tone and spirit of unity" (II, 8). Contrary to his reputation for obscurity, Coleridge often forms his analogies from terms of common experience. This practice follows his own definition:

Analogies are used in aid of conviction: . . .  
 The language is analogous, wherever a thing, power, or principle in a higher dignity is expressed by the same thing, power, or principle in a lower but more known form.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge recognized analogy as an important part of argument, and became particularly effective in his use of the device.

Care for the arrangement or dispositio of argument is also apparent in Coleridge's critical method. The Biographia contains many remarks on the division and structuring of questions to be discussed. And Coleridge is at times explicit in his reason for placing evidence in a certain order. Wordsworth's merits, for example, follow the list of defects in order to achieve their proper significance and climactic position. Notable, too, is Coleridge's use of the techniques of epideictic rhetoric. The spirit of that "controversy" to which he often referred is reflected in his "praise" of the people and profession he admired, and his "blame" of those he deplored.

Finally, the devices of definition and testimony are prominent in the Biographia. Coleridge's emphasis on precision

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<sup>1</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 235.

in one's use of terms affords him a most effective method of persuasion. By carefully defining the terms of his argument, Coleridge then possesses standards or premises from which further conclusions may result. Authority, or testimony, one of the "non-artistic" proofs of rhetoric, indicates Coleridge's fondness for quotation. In addition to confirming his own judgments, the testimony of others reveals Coleridge's acquaintance with the literature of many fields and ages; in this way, it adds to his impression as a qualified "authority." Thus, an examination of the Biographia Literaria as an argument supplies further evidence that the work was a product of "prolonged, patient, and mature consideration."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies, VI (1953), 92.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE RHETORIC OF THE BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

#### THE STYLE

Both the cogency and the appeal of the Biographia Literaria depend, in large measure, upon the effectiveness of Coleridge as a prose stylist. For a reading of the Biographia is an experience similar to that produced by Sidney's Apology for Poetry, Johnson's Lives of the Poets, or Shelley's Defence of Poetry. Each of these critical works, in which a writer examines his own craft, offers proof that "the discussion of art" may be "itself an art, and is, in many analyses, possessed of the same characteristics and directed to the same end as the art it treats."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the only single term applicable to Coleridge's prose is that of "variety." And for this reason, it would seem, little attention has been given to the style of the Biographia; Coleridge's manner is less easy to define, for example, than that of Johnson, or Carlyle, or Ruskin. Early critics who noted an obscurity and formlessness in the Biographia (see above,

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<sup>1</sup>Richard McKeon, "The Philosophic Bases of Art and Criticism," Critics and Criticism, ed. Ronald S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 465.

Chapter III) were expressing either the inability or the unwillingness to follow Coleridge's arguments. The style itself, on the whole, is not unusually complex or involved; furthermore, it is definitely a prose style--not the "vile Olio" of "poetical prose" Coleridge repudiated early in his career.<sup>1</sup> Because of a frequent simplicity or "neutrality," later nineteenth-century critics found the prose of Coleridge colorless and dull, reflecting, as Pater remarked, "the impress of a somewhat inferior theological literature."<sup>2</sup> But his style is a flexible one, allowing the varied aims and topics of the Biographia to be expressed in that tone and manner most suitable to each--whether humor or earnestness, enthusiasm or indignation.

The negative side of a varied style lies in its tendency toward unevenness. It is this quality that has led several critics to find two distinct styles in Coleridge. The most elaborate development of such a theory is contained in Stephen Potter's Coleridge and S. T. C. Interpreting Coleridge's personality as the conflict between his "true self" and a "strongly marked character" or pose,<sup>3</sup> Potter applies this distinction to matters of style. There are "two authors: a 'Coleridge' to be assimilated, and an S. T. C. to be marked, noted,

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, II, 814.

<sup>2</sup>"Coleridge," Appreciations (London: Macmillan and Company, 1889), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>(London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 16.

and, finally, skipped." The first is illustrated in the "unpremeditated" Coleridge of the "long sentences," "lack of plan," and parentheses; the more self-conscious, and less successful, style of "S. T. C." exhibits a "petrifying elegance."<sup>1</sup> Potter's theory appears again in a recent study, Virginia L. Radley's Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Here, the notion of the superiority of Coleridge's jottings is repeated, though without the attempt to provide a psychological foundation. On the one hand, there is "the easy, pithy, aphoristic style of Table Talk and Anima Poetae, and, on the other . . . the weighty, pontifical, and often circumlocutory style of The Friend, Aids to Reflection, and 'Toward a Theory of Life.'" Both styles are said to be combined in the Biographia Literaria.<sup>2</sup>

There are, of course, inconsistencies, both in Coleridge's personality and in his writings. However, the sharp dichotomy outlined above does not fully describe Coleridge's prose style. And although it has been called "so uneven as almost to defy specific analysis,"<sup>3</sup> a number of positive strengths are at work in his prose. An article by a contemporary, John Foster, perceptively notes Coleridge's use of simile and metaphor, as well as his characteristic sentence structure.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 117, 123-124.

<sup>2</sup>(New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 143.

<sup>3</sup>Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes (eds.), Coleridge the Talker (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1940), p. 30.

As Foster points out, Coleridge "perpetually falls on analogies between moral truth and facts in nature"; and his sentences are distinguished by their lack of "settled construction or cadence . . . no two, perhaps, of about the same length being constructed in the same manner."<sup>1</sup> Recent studies of Coleridge's prose have elaborated upon Foster's analysis. Humphrey House, for example, stresses the relationship of Coleridge's sensitivity to the external world to his manner of expression: "the shapes and shifts and colours of nature" become "symbols of emotional and mental states."<sup>2</sup> The single extensive study of sentence patterns in the Biographia provides additional evidence for Foster's generalization. Coleridge's sentences often have "a periodic cast initially, but lose this in the process of construction so that they become ultimately loose." Further, the parallelism "sometimes directs attention from itself by reason of an apparent fortuitousness, a nonchalance about construction in the attempt to achieve completeness of expression."<sup>3</sup>

Coleridge's style, then, may be viewed under the general headings of language and sentence construction. Metaphor (which

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<sup>1</sup>"Coleridge," Critical Essays, ed. J. E. Ryland (London: George Bell and Sons, 1877), II, 9, 17.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge: The Clark Lectures (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1953), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Sister M. Lucille Osinski, "A Study of the Structures of Coordination in a Representative Sample of the Biographia Literaria" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1963), pp. 33, 91.

will be understood to include figures of speech in general) is the most significant aspect of language in the Biographia. Also of importance in determining style is the kind of diction employed: abstract or concrete, formal or informal, technical or colloquial. Sentence length, as well as the different types of sentence patterns, will be examined. But of more concern than a listing of qualities will be the attempt to show how each functions within the Biographia.

"Analogies," says Coleridge, "are used in aid of conviction: metaphors, as means of illustration."<sup>1</sup> The Biographia follows this dictum, for metaphorical language is often used to explain or illustrate an idea--to express the general notion in a concrete manner. But metaphor also appears for its own sake, lending "charm" and "distinction" as well as "clearness"<sup>2</sup> to the style. It has been noted many times that a characteristically Coleridgean (and Romantic) trait is the employment of figures related to external nature. A study of metaphor in the Biographia demonstrates just how consistent was this choice.

"Plants" and "harvests," "streams" and "hills" recur throughout the work, and are applied to other living or "organic" things--man and the creative acts of man. A secondary group of figures borrows its terms from architecture. Ideas are seen as "keystones" and "foundations"; writings are compared to "light airy

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<sup>1</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 3.2, trans. Cooper, p. 187.

chapels" and a "Russian palace of ice." Finally, a small number of more unusual and striking metaphors stand out, as in the criticism of contemporary literature in Chapter II:

In the days of Chaucer and Gower, our language might (with due allowance for the imperfections of a simile) be compared to a wilderness of vocal reeds, from which the favorites only of Pan or Apollo could construct even the rude Syrinx; and from this the constructors alone could elicit strains of music. But now, partly by the labours of successive poets, and in part by the more artificial state of society and social intercourse, language, mechanized as it were into a barrel-organ, supplies at once both instrument and tune. Thus even the deaf may play, so as to delight the many (I, 25).

The pervasive "plant" figure occurs first in the second paragraph of the Biographia. A description of his early poetry illustrates the way in which Coleridge develops a rather common expression:

In the after editions, I pruned the double epithets with no sparing hand, and used my best efforts to tame the swell and glitter both of thought and diction; though in truth, these parasite plants of youthful poetry had insinuated themselves into my longer poems with such intricacy of union, that I was often obliged to omit disentangling the weed, from the fear of snapping the flower (I, 3).

Starting with "pruned"--a term not unusual for the idea he is expressing--Coleridge constructs a figure by reviving its literal signification and applying this, in a metaphorical sense, to his "youthful poetry." Images taken from nature are used almost exclusively in connection with poetry and philosophical concepts. "POETIC GENIUS" is termed "not only a very delicate but a very

rare plant" (II, 106), while poetry itself "is the blossom and the fragrantcy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language" (II, 19).

In addition to generalizations such as these, the plant world supplies Coleridge with more precise analogies for various types of poetry. Wordsworth's juvenilia, for example, with its "harshness and acerbity connected and combined with words and images all a-glow," is likened to "those products of the vegetable world, where gorgeous blossoms rise out of the hard and thorny rind and shell, within which the rich fruit was elaborating" (I, 56). And for Wordsworth's mature work, Coleridge borrows a passage from Bartram's Travels:

'The soil is a deep, rich, dark mould, on a deep stratum of tenacious clay; and that on a foundation of rocks, which often break through both strata, lifting their back above the surface. The trees which chiefly grow here are the gigantic black oak; magnolia magni-floria; fraxinus excelsior; platane; and a few stately tulip trees' (II, 128-129).

Images drawn from nature also appear in Coleridge's negative pronouncements. The work of Erasmus Darwin is numbered among those "'painted mists' that occasionally rise from the marshes at the foot of Parnassus" (I, 12). False pretensions to poetic ability will be revealed "even as the flowery sod, which covers a hollow, may be often detected by its shaking and trembling" (II, 25). Finally, the limitations of Wordsworth's poetic theory are contrasted with Coleridge's attempt at a more comprehensive study:

My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness (I, 64).

Plant and nature images are also notable in providing an "analogy" or "sort of allegory, or connected simile and metaphor" (II, 128) for ideas and processes of the mind. In some cases, Coleridge attempts to simplify an abstract notion by repeating it in terms of a visual image. Certain ideas viewed by Coleridge as dangerous or fanatic are compared to a form of "blight" and to a "poison-tree" (I, 124, 130); the intention here, however, is emphasis and emotional appeal rather than clarification. An example of the latter aim may be seen in Chapter VII. Coleridge portrays the "mind's self-experience in the act of thinking" as "a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets": it "wins its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary fulcrum for a further propulsion" (I, 85-86). A similar method is used in presenting "an accurate image of Hartley's theory of the will" (I, 77). Several "currents" in a "broad stream" that winds through "mountainous country" come together temporarily "so as to form the main current of the moment" (I, 76-77)--such an occurrence in nature offers a way of visualizing Hartley's system. Other associations of external nature with mental states and faculties are less concerned with elucidation,



and add primarily a stylistic appeal. One example is the distinction made between the philosopher and the ordinary man (Chapter XII). A lengthy passage develops the commonplace of the "vale of human life" (I, 165) into an image for the levels of intellectual searching. Those who look "far higher and far inward" will discover the "correspondent world of spirit":

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 involucre for antennae yet to come (I, 166-167).

Here, the image does not so much simplify the fact as it emphasizes the singularity of those "few" who possess "intuitive knowledge" (I, 166).

Coleridge's own mental progress is told by means of metaphorical language. To the "mystics"--Fox, Boehme, and Lawhe owed the "presentiment, that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of DEATH, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter" (I, 98). During his "wanderings through the wilderness of doubt," their writings enabled Coleridge "to skirt, without crossing, the sandy deserts of utter unbelief" (I, 98). His youthful enthusiasm for "the morning rainbow of the French revolution" was to be "disciplined by the succeeding storms and sobered by increase of years" (I, 123). As a writer for the Morning Post, Coleridge became "a specified

object of Buonaparte's resentment" by his anti-Jacobin articles.

He accounts for the "late tyrant's" interest in this way:

[His] appetite was omnivorous, and preyed equally on a Duc d'Enghien, and the writer of a newspaper paragraph. Like a true vulture, Napoleon with an eye not less telescopic, and with a taste equally coarse in his ravin, could descend from the most dazzling heights to pounce on the leveret in the brake, or even on the field-mouse amid the grass (I, 145-146).

Again, Coleridge takes a rather conventional term of comparison (the "vulture" preying) and expands it in full detail. The development of Coleridge's ideas is told primarily in Volume I of the Biographia Literaria. Chapter XXIV, however, includes a defense of his religious beliefs against recent criticism. Coleridge uses the occasion for a general vindication of his "personal as well as . . . LITERARY LIFE," and a plea for the accordance of "Religion" with "Reason" (II, 218). Elaborating the figure contained in the statement "that Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon," Coleridge proceeds, by stages, from the "Day" to "sacred Night" and from the "starry Heaven" to the "universe" -- a fitting word with which to conclude the Biographia Literaria (II, 218).

A second group of metaphorical expressions may be classified as "architectural." As many of the "plant" images are concerned with natural order and growth, those taken from building also reflect Coleridge's interest in method and structure. Comparisons are drawn between ideas and literature and

various types and details of constructions. Darwin's Botanic Garden, "glittering, cold and transitory," resembles "the Russian palace of ice" (I, 12). The poetry of Shakespeare and Milton, in which each word is precise and necessary, is likened to the "pyramids": "it would be scarcely more difficult to push a stone out from the pyramids with the bare hand, than to alter a word, or the position of a word," in their writings (I, 15). Coleridge describes the works of "men of commanding genius" in similar terms:

in tranquil times [they] are formed to exhibit a perfect poem in palace, or temple, or landscape-garden; or a tale of romance in canals that join sea with sea, or in walls of rock, which, shouldering back the billows, imitate the power, and supply the benevolence of nature to sheltered navies; or in aqueducts that, arching the wide vale from mountain to mountain, give a Palmyra to the desert (I, 21).

Coleridge's debts to the philosophers in whose "schools" he "had successively studied" (I, 93) are viewed as components of his final synthesis. The work of Fichte, for example, "was to add the keystone of the arch" (I, 101). And when Coleridge criticizes the theories of the associationists, he employs a corresponding figure to point out their errors:

How can we make bricks without straw? or build without cement? We learn all things indeed by occasion of experience; but the very facts so learnt force us inward on the antecedents, that must be pre-supposed in order to render experience itself possible (I, 94).

The conclusions of Coleridge's investigations, to have been expounded in Chapter XIII, are instead represented in the

letter from a "friend" as a "Gothic" structure. Their effect is that of

ever and anon coming out full upon pictures and stonework images of great men. . . . Those whom I had been taught to venerate as almost super-human in magnitude of intellect, I found perched in little fret-work niches, as grotesque dwarfs; while the grotesques, in my hitherto belief, stood guarding the high altar (I, 199).<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Coleridge's religious opinions are phrased in architectural idiom. Religion is "both the corner-stone and the key-stone of morality" (I, 135). His summary of "the true evidences of Christianity" employs the figure of a "spiritual Edifice," with the "outer Court of the Temple" corresponding to religion in its "consistency with right Reason." One's "inward feeling" of need is "the true FOUNDATION"; the "Trial of the Faith in Christ" forms the "arched ROOF"; and "Faith itself" provides the "completing KEY-STONE" (II, 215-216). In addition to extended comparisons, Coleridge frequently uses such terms as "link," "chain," and "construction," thus reflecting the importance he places on the "synthetic" power which "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (II, 12).

The remaining metaphors employ a variety of terms; and, in general, these are less familiar than the plant and building

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<sup>1</sup>With the image of a "Gothic" structure compare Wordsworth's preface to The Excursion (1814), in which the poet describes his works in similar terms.

images--hence, more striking. Several "battle" figures are particularly effective. "In Shakespeare's poems," writes Coleridge, "the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace. Each in its excess of strength seems to threaten the extinction of the other. At length in the DRAMA they were reconciled, and fought each with its shield before the breast of the other" (II, 19). Language is described as "the armoury of the human mind," containing "at once . . . the trophies of its past, and the weapons of its future conquests" (II, 22). The reader of Wordsworth's Preface appears as an "opponent" who could have been made to "abandon by little and little his weakest posts, till at length he seems to forget that they had ever belonged to him, or affects to consider them at most accidental and 'petty annexments,' the removal of which leaves the citadel unhurt and unendangered" (II, 29). A number of times, Coleridge compares language to coins. The weaknesses in Wordsworth's poems should "be regarded as so many light or inferior coins in a rouleau of gold, not as so much alloy in a weight of bullion" (I, 54). Coleridge's discussion of poetic language in Chapter XXII expands the figure:

Even in real life, the difference is great and evident between words used as the arbitrary marks of thought, our smooth market-coin of intercourse, with the image and superscription worn out by currency; and those which convey pictures either borrowed from one outward object to enliven and particularize some other; . . . (II, 98).

Other metaphorical expressions, with more specialized application, are used in single instances. Some appear together with the more familiar figures; for, as Coleridge points out, "it is with similes, as it is with jests at a wine table, one is sure to suggest another" (I, 25-26). Kant's writings, which impressed Coleridge by their "adamantine chain" of logic, are said to have taken "possession" of him "as with a giant's hand" (I, 99). Meter, successively compared to a "medicated atmosphere," "wine during animated conversation," and "yeast," is justified by that "unusual state of excitement" which arises during "the very act of poetic composition itself" (II, 51-52, 56). Coleridge then adds a final analogy: "The wheels take fire from the mere rapidity of their motion" (II, 56). A few of the metaphors found in the Biographia are among Coleridge's best-known phrases. An example is the figure which concludes Chapter II: "I have laid too many eggs in the hot sands of this wilderness, the world, with ostrich carelessness and ostrich oblivion" (I, 32). Coleridge's answer to charges of plagiarism--"I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist: I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible" (I, 105)--is also frequently quoted. In arguing against Hartley's theory of association, Coleridge again employs, to good effect, a number of comparisons at once:

The razor's edge becomes a saw to the armed vision; and the delicious melodies of Purcell or Cimarosa might be disjointed stammerings to

a hearer, whose partition of time should be a thousand times subtler than ours (I, 81).

And in several instances, Coleridge uses analogies which appeal strongly to the reader's sensory experience. When the "attention and feelings" are aroused by meter, only to find "correspondent food and appropriate matter" wanting, "there must needs be a disappointment felt; like that of leaping in the dark from the last step of a stair-case, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four" (II, 51). Similarly, those "apparent paradoxes . . . which on examination have shrunk into tame and harmless truisms" are likened to the "eyes of a cat," which, "seen in the dark, have been mistaken for flames of fire" (II, 46).

Metaphorical language, therefore, serves both an expository and a rhetorical function in the Biographia Literaria; it is a method by which precision and persuasiveness are achieved. The two main areas from which Coleridge's figures are drawn--external nature and architecture--reinforce his fundamental critical concerns. In general, these figures are well interspersed throughout the work, although few appear in "Satyrane's Letters" or in Chapter XXIII. The letters rely on literal description; and, in the review of Bertram, Coleridge relates the plot in a derisive tone without the aid of metaphor. An exception in Chapter XXIII is the characterization of "the so called German drama" which precedes Coleridge's discussion of Bertram. The form, termed an "Olla Podrida" by Coleridge, is found to be "English in its origin." For this reason,

we should submit to carry our own brat on our own shoulders; or rather consider it as a lack-grace returned from transportation with such improvements only in growth and manners as young transported convicts usually come home with (II, 184-185).

On the whole, metaphorical language is employed "as means of illustration"<sup>1</sup> in the more abstract chapters (V-IX and XII-XIII), and to clarify at certain points of the argument in Volume II. Elsewhere, figures provide emphasis and that "air of novelty" or "remoteness"<sup>2</sup> essential to an effective style.

The second notable trait of Coleridge's style is found in the construction of his sentences. A characteristic sentence in the Biographia Literaria would be lengthy rather than short and concise; it would contain qualifying clauses or parenthetical expressions; and it would employ parallelism or antithesis, though without an exact or fully symmetrical balance. George Williamson, in discussing seventeenth-century prose, lists three principal types of sentence structure:

On the relation of form to thought, we may conclude that structurally the circular is built upon suspension, the antithetic upon correspondence, and the loose upon linear addition. . . . the Ciceronian style belongs to the circular type; the Euphuistic to the antithetic; and the Senecan to the loose.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Aids to Reflection, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 3.2, trans. Cooper, pp. 185-186.

<sup>3</sup>The Senecan Ambler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 52. In Williamson's classification, a sentence may be at once periodic and loose--if lacking exact balance.



Each of these forms may be found in Coleridge's varied style; the latter, however--the Senecan or "loose" sentence--is most typical of the Biographia. An example may be taken from Chapter I:

But if in after time I have sought a refuge from bodily pain and mismanaged sensibility in abstruse researches, which exercised the strength and subtlety of the understanding without awakening the feelings of the heart; still there was a long and blessed interval, during which my natural faculties were allowed to expand, and my original tendencies to develop themselves: my fancy, and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds (I, 10).

This sentence, illustrating well the principle of "linear addition," builds upon two antithetical statements--the "abstruse researches" versus the "natural faculties." A certain parallelism of ideas exists: the periods of time, the nature of the two pursuits, and their effects upon Coleridge. In addition, many pairings are used ("pain" and "sensibility," "strength and subtlety," "expand" and "develop"). However, the potential for achieving perfect balance is everywhere denied. Coleridge is the doer in the first clause ("I have sought"); he is acted upon ("were allowed to expand") in the latter. His "understanding" possesses "strength and subtlety," while the heart can claim only "feelings." Nor is there a correspondence in the second half of the sentence to the contrast between the understanding and the heart. Coleridge deviates most from his tenuous pattern at the end of the period: "my fancy, and the love of nature, and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds." These qualities,

illustrating what is "natural" and "original," have no structural precedence in the first clause; expressed almost as an afterthought, they add to the general impression of looseness--the idea seems to grow as the sentence itself evolves.

Coleridge frequently depends upon antithesis when presenting his poetic theory. Yet even when two qualities or concepts are sharply contrasted, he tends to vary or interrupt any parallelism in their expression. An example is found in the opposition of "the characteristic faults of our elder poets" to the "false beauty of the moderns:"

In the former, from DONNE to COWLEY, we find the most fantastic out-of-the-way thoughts, but in the most pure and genuine mother English; in the latter, the most obvious thoughts, in language the most fantastic and arbitrary. Our faulty elder poets sacrificed the passion and the passionate flow of poetry, to the subtleties of intellect, and to the starts of wit; the moderns to the glare and glitter of a perpetual, yet broken and heterogeneous imagery, or rather to an amphibious something, made up, half of image, and half of abstract meaning. The one sacrificed the heart to the head; the other both heart and head to point and drapery (I, 15).

In the first sentence, the balance is almost complete. Coleridge reverses the "thoughts" and "language" from the "former" to the "latter," with the repetition of "fantastic" underlining the contrast. Certain variations, however, may be noted: there is no phrase corresponding to "from DONNE to COWLEY"; the first description of "thoughts" is more extensive than the second; and the order and phrasing of the differences in form ("mother English" and "language") is altered. The second sentence is

even freer in construction. Both groups of poets "sacrificed" an important strength to less vital qualities. But Coleridge does not attempt to list their faults in a symmetrical manner. Although the use of alliteration leads one to expect a more exact parallelism, the "subtleties of intellect" and "starts of wit" are balanced only by a "broken and heterogeneous imagery." At this point, the pattern breaks down completely, and another sentence ends with an afterthought ("or rather to an amphibious something, . ."). Finally, Coleridge employs a structural contrast. The ideas of the first two sentences are compressed into an epigrammatic summary of the whole, with the antithesis of the first clause ("heart" and "head") becoming one term of the second ("heart and head" and "point and drapery").

The afterthought, qualifying clause, and parenthetical expression are among the most prominent features of Coleridge's prose style. Several apparent afterthoughts have been noted above; in general, this device contributes an informal, almost conversational tone to the discussion. Phrases such as "perhaps," "as far as," "I trust," "if it is possible," and "as I believe" are used quite frequently, as are "but," "yet," and "although." In Chapter I, for example, Coleridge writes: "Perhaps a similar process has happened to others; but my earliest poems were marked by an ease and simplicity, which I have studied perhaps with inferior success, to impress on my later compositions" (I, 4). Sometimes a number of qualifying clauses will be

strung together, resulting in obscurity rather than in clarification. Coleridge's description of the reception of "Christabel" provides an illustration:

This before the publication. And since then, with very few exceptions, I have heard nothing but abuse, and this too in a spirit of bitterness at least as disproportionate to the pretensions of the poem, had it been the most pitiably below mediocrity, as the previous eulogies, and far more inexplicable (II, 211).

The parenthesis, a device defended by Coleridge (see above, Chapter IV), occurs at least every few pages in the Biographia Literaria. At times it is simply an aside or a digression, and therefore truly "parenthetical"; in some cases, however, the material enclosed in parentheses could easily have been incorporated into the thought of the sentence. Coleridge's discussion of Wordsworth's first defect contains an example of the latter: "Under this name I refer to the sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity (at all events striking and original) to a style, not only unimpassioned but undistinguished" (II, 97). Definitely a separate thought, however, is the praise of Lessing in the following sentence:

This determination of unlicensed personality, and of permitted and legitimate censure (which I owe in part to the illustrious LESSING, himself a model of acute, spirited, sometimes stinging, but always argumentative and honorable, criticism) is beyond controversy the true one: . . . (II, 87).

More often, the parenthetical digression will be closely related to the thought of the main sentence, providing additional

information or a meaningful example for the reader. Coleridge's criticism of the language of "The Thorn" is such a case:

But in a poem, still more in a lyric poem (and the NURSE in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet alone prevents me from extending the remark even to dramatic poetry, if indeed the Nurse itself can be deemed altogether a case in point) it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity (II, 36).

Each of these characteristics--the afterthought, the qualifying clause, and the parenthetical expression--reinforces the predominant "looseness" of Coleridge's sentence patterns in the Biographia.

A more Ciceronian, periodic structure is also employed in the Biographia; even here, however, external balance is combined with internal asymmetry. Coleridge's summation of the "useful" parts in the "Preface" is the most notable example:

As far then as Mr. Wordsworth in his preface contended, and most ably contended, for a reformation in our poetic diction, as far as he has evinced the truth of passion, and the dramatic propriety of those figures and metaphors in the original poets, which, stripped of their justifying reasons, and converted into mere artifices of connection or ornament, constitute the characteristic falsity in the poetic style of the moderns; and as far as he has, with equal acuteness and clearness, pointed out the process by which this change was effected, and the resemblances between that state into which the reader's mind is thrown by the pleasurable confusion of thought from an unaccustomed train of words and images; and that state which is induced by the natural language of impassioned feeling; he undertook a useful task, and deserves all praise, both for the attempt and for the execution (II, 28).

Three parallel "as far as" clauses finally culminate in the subject-verb-object: "he undertook a useful task." Coleridge continues the basic notion contained in the opening of the sentence (the "reformation" in "poetic diction") in his two successive clauses, widening the scope each time in a progressive expansion. Within this "spiraling" structure, coherence is gained by the use of parallel expressions ("ably contended" and "acuteness and clearness," "contended," "evinced," and "pointed out"); in addition, Coleridge does not qualify or inject peripheral thoughts.

A similarly conceived sentence occurs in Chapter II, Coleridge's defense of "men of Genius." But in this case, the periodic construction conveys confusion rather than emphasis:

Thus, in part, from the accidental tempers of individuals (men of undoubted talent, but not men of genius) tempers rendered yet more irritable by their desire to appear men of genius; but still more effectively by the excesses of the mere counterfeits both of talent and genius; the number too being so incomparably greater of those who are thought to be, than of those who really are men of real genius; and in part from the natural, but not therefore the less partial and unjust distinction, made by the public itself between literary and all other property;--I believe the prejudice to have arisen, which considers an unusual irascibility concerning the reception of its products as characteristic of genius (I, 29).

Again, three parallel clauses precede the main thought. However, the divisions are not as clearly defined as those in the sentence discussing poetic diction. There are several causes for this lack of clarity. In the second clause ("but still more

effectively"), the "in part" is understood, but not expressed; and only in the first clause is this phrase emphasized by italics. More importantly, the use of parentheses and qualifiers impedes the progress of Coleridge's thought; the devices contributing to "looseness" are less successful in a periodic sentence.

It is the lengthy and complex sentence that is most typical of Coleridge's style in the Biographia Literaria. Although these comprise "only a third of the sentence-count," "by reason of their extent they encompass the major part of the discourse."<sup>1</sup> A study of Chapter XVIII finds "52 short sentences (to 20 words), 61 long (over 40 words, with the chapter average at 40.3), and the remaining 70 ranging in between."<sup>2</sup> The sentences of intermediate length, at least from the point of view of construction, are not of particular significance. Coleridge does, however, make effective use of the short sentence. A means of variation and emphasis, the short sentence may be found on almost every page of the Biographia. It may mark the beginning or conclusion of an argument, express a maxim or aphoristic saying, or summarize Coleridge's viewpoint on a topic. Occasionally, several short sentences are grouped together,

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<sup>1</sup>Sister M. Lucille Osinski, "A Study of the Structures of Coordination in a Representative Sample of the Biographia Literaria," p. 113. The count is based upon eight chapters (I-IV, XIV, XVII-XVIII, and XXII), but is relevant to the whole.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

producing a rhythm in sharp contrast to Coleridge's usual manner. The argument against Hartley's theory is introduced in a brief, emphatic sentence: "From a hundred possible confutations let one suffice" (I, 74). Similarly compact phrases are used in Chapter X to signal the progress in Coleridge's changing beliefs and influences:

Here I found myself all afloat (I, 132).  
 From these premises I proceeded to draw the following conclusions (I, 136).  
 These principles I held, philosophically, while in respect to revealed religion I remained a zealous Unitarian (I, 136).

Groups of short sentences appear primarily in the discussion of association and in the ten "Theses" of Chapter XII, the more "scientific" sections of the work. A passage from Chapter VIII provides an illustration:

Motion could only propagate motion. Matter has no Inward. We remove one surface, but to meet with another. We can but divide a particle into particles; and each atom comprehends in itself the properties of the material universe (I, 90).

Finally, the short sentence is used to express anthithetical sayings and maxims:

But as Southey possesses, and is not possessed by, his genius, even so is he master even of his virtues (I, 47).  
 Always employed, his friends find him always at leisure (I, 48).  
 My opinions were indeed in many and most important points erroneous; but my heart was single (I, 115).  
 The writer is authorized to reply, but not to complain (II, 87).  
 Truth and prudence might be imagined as concentric circles (II, 129).



The functional variety of sentences--as well as their length and rhetorical pattern--is important in the Biographia Literaria. Both questions and exclamations are used extensively, again contributing to a personal, conversational tone. In arguing for the "tranquil temper" of poets, Coleridge addresses a series of rhetorical questions to the reader: "Or is wealth the only rational object of human interest? Or even if this were admitted, has the poet no property in his works? (I, 29). Two more questions, of increasing length and similarly expressed ("Or is it . . .?"; "Or, should be . . .?"), present his case. The device is again used argumentatively in the climax to Coleridge's examination of meter. In an attempt to prove untenable the "principles" by which Wordsworth would have the poet "regulate his own style," Coleridge brings forth a barrage of objections:

By what rule that does not leave the reader at the poet's mercy, and the poet at his own, is the latter to distinguish between the language suitable to suppressed, and the language, which is characteristic of indulged, anger? Or between that of rage and that of jealousy? Is it obtained by wandering about in search of angry or jealous people in uncultivated society, in order to copy their words? Or not far rather by the power of imagination proceeding upon the all in each of human nature? By meditation, rather than by observation? And by the latter in consequence only of the former? (II, 63-64).

Questions also suggest a type of "self-dialogue," related to the loose sentences in which the thought seems to evolve before one's eyes. "Here then shall I conclude? No!" (I, 46). "Had she

remained constant? No, she has been married to another man, whose wife she now is" (II, 196).

Exclamatory sentences also appear frequently in the Biographia. In Chapter II, for example, the expression "alas!" is used three times. The device conveys wonder and disbelief as well as sorrow:

And lo! just at this time I received a letter from his Lordship, . . . who knew nothing of me or my work! (I, 111).

But, surely, it would be strange language to say, that I construct my heart! or that I propel the finer influences through my nerves! or that I compress my brain, and draw the curtains of sleep round my own eyes! (II, 112).

Aye, here now! (exclaimed the Critic) here comes Coleridge's Metaphysics! (II, 212).

In general, both questions and exclamations are chosen by Coleridge for matters of controversy, pointing out absurdity and error. And since both indicate a speaker more strongly than a declarative sentence would, the conversational effect is heightened. The hortative sentence (though not as common in the Biographia) suggests the tone of speech to a lesser degree, for its purpose is to propose rather than to denounce:

Let a communication be formed between any number of learned men in the various branches of science and literature; . . . (II, 87).

If his mistaken theory have at all influenced his poetic compositions, let the effects be pointed out, and the instances given (II, 95).

The paragraphs in the Biographia Literaria, in keeping with the quality of its sentences, tend to be long rather than short. A typical "long" paragraph opens Chapter XVI, occupying

over two pages in the Shawcross edition.<sup>1</sup> One almost equal in extent occurs in Chapter IV (I, 57-60); together with its footnotes, this paragraph extends for more than three pages. An "intermediate" paragraph in the Biographia would fill from two-thirds of a page to about a page and a half (or from approximately twenty-five to fifty lines). Most of the paragraphs belong to this intermediate group; the "short" paragraph, therefore (the paragraph of fewer than twenty-five lines), stands out from the others and is generally transitional or emphatic in nature. An example of a transitional paragraph may be taken from Chapter XIV. Coleridge moves from his search for "a definition of poetry" to a discussion of the poet himself. An eight-line paragraph provides the link: "What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other" (II, 12). And at the conclusion of this discussion, Coleridge sets apart one sentence for emphasis: "Finally, GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, FANCY its DRAPERY, MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole" (II, 13). Brief paragraphs are also used parenthetically, containing the sort of material Coleridge often assigns to footnotes. One example of

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<sup>1</sup>The lines are numbered on each page of the Shawcross edition (the edition cited throughout this thesis). With thirty-five lines to a page, the paragraph noted here fills eighty-five lines.

this usage occurs in the refutation of Wordsworth's theory of rustic diction (Chapter XVII). In the midst of his discussion, Coleridge remarks:

Here let me be permitted to remind the reader, that the positions, which I controvert, are contained in the sentences . . . / several phrases from the "Preface" are quoted/. It is against these exclusively that my opposition is directed (II, 41).

Finally, short paragraphs naturally appear with greater frequency when Coleridge lists certain things--as in Chapters XII and XXII, containing the ten "Theses" and the catalogue of Wordsworth's defects and merits.

Coleridge's word choice is another important stylistic aspect of the Biographia Literaria. In this area, too, there is considerable variation: slang, dialect, and informal language appear occasionally; the vocabulary of formal, "literary" prose, however, is more characteristic of the work as a whole. Finally, Coleridge borrows specialized terms from philosophy and science, and also forms new words to express his concepts.

Informal usage occurs primarily in the chapters of reminiscence and anecdote in Volume I and in "Satyrane's Letters." Here, Coleridge's purposes are humorous; thus he often combines "lower" diction with Latin or technical expressions in order to heighten the comic effect. One of the footnotes in Chapter III illustrates this device. The reading of "devotees" of "circulating libraries" is described in this manner:

the whole materiel and imagery of the dose is supplied ab extra by a sort of mental camera obscura manufactured at the printing office, which pro tempore fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, . . .

Coleridge claims that such "amusement" should not be called "reading"; it should be transferred to that "genus" which comprises as its species, gaming, swinging, or swaying on a chair or gate; spitting over a bridge; smoking; snuff-taking; . . . (I, 34n).

A similar juxtaposition is found in Coleridge's attempts at humorous dialogue. The story of his "sympathy" with Jacobinism begins: "The dark guesses of some zealous Quidnunc met with so congenial a soil in the grave alarm of a titled Dogberry of our neighbourhood, that a SPY was actually sent down from the government pour surveillance of myself and friend" (I, 126).

This form of speech contrasts with that of the "rustic" in his testimony: "Why, folks do say, your honor! as how that he is a Poet, and that he is going to put Quantock and all about here in print; and as they be so much together, I suppose that this strange gentleman has some consarn in the business" (I, 128).

Coleridge produces the same effect in "Satyrane's Letters." The Danish traveller, he writes,

convinced me of the justice of an old remark, that many a faithful portrait in our novels and farces has been rashly censured for an outrageous caricature, or perhaps nonentity. . . . He commenced the conversation in the most magnificent style.

The Dane's "conversation," then, opens: "Vat imagination! vat language! vat vast science! and vat eyes! vat a milk-vite forehead! O my heafen! vy, you're a Got! (II, 134-135). Coleridge also seeks to inject humor by describing the commonplace or mundane in "elevated" language. One subscriber to The Friend, for example, reneged when the payment was due:

Seventeen or eighteen numbers of which, however, his Lordship was pleased to retain, probably for the culinary or post-culinary conveniences of his servants (I, 111).

Part of Coleridge's argument concerning meter employs a similar juxtaposition:

But I am not convinced by the collation of facts, that the 'Children in the Wood' owes either its preservation, or its popularity, to its metrical form. . . . 'TOM HICKATHRIPT,' 'JACK THE GIANT-KILLER,' 'GOODY TWO-SHOES,' and 'LITTLE RED RIDING-HOOD' are formidable rivals. . . . The scene of GOODY TWO-SHOES in the church is perfectly susceptible of metrical narration; . . . (II, 52-53).

The purpose here, of course, is to show the absurdity of Wordsworth's argument; humor is not the principal aim, as it is in the "Letters."

Scattered through Coleridge's critical and philosophical discussions are a number of familiar or homely terms, serving to make the abstract more "actual." He thus provides this example in the chapter on "the necessary consequences of the Hartleian theory": "Seeing a mackerel, it may happen, that I immediately think of gooseberries, because I at the same time ate mackerel

with gooseberries as the sauce" (I, 80, 86). And again in reference to associationism:

We might as rationally chant the Brahmin creed of the tortoise that supported the bear, that supported the elephant, that supported the whole world, to the tune of 'This is the house that Jack built' (I, 92).

As an example of false criticism, Coleridge cites this hypothetical judgment:

Omit or pass slightly over the expression, grace, and grouping of Raphael's figures; but ridicule in detail the knitting-needles and broom twigs, that are to represent trees in his backgrounds; and never let him hear the last of his galli-pots! (I, 43).

And in defending an author's right to indulge in "relaxations of his genius," Coleridge asks, "What literary man has not regretted the prudery of Spratt in refusing to let his friend Cowley appear in his slippers and dressing gown? (I, 44-45). Other phrases used in connection with poetry and philosophy include "rag-fair finery," "calico-printers," "plague-spots," "hobby-horse," "soiled and over-worn finery," and "pin-papers, and stay-tapes" (I, 14, 29, 54, 62; II, 21, 94). Coleridge also introduces several slang terms, using italics to mark them as such:

At the same time that we were studying the Greek Tragic Poets, he made us read Shakespeare and Milton as lessons: and they were the lessons too, which required most time and trouble to bring up, . . . (I, 4).

There is a state of mind, which is the direct antithesis of that, which takes place when we make a bull (I, 52n).

Even more prominent are the technical words and phrases found in the Biographia Literaria. Coleridge's specialized terminology is quite extensive; and, although it has been criticized for lending obscurity to the work, its aim was that of precision. As Coleridge argues in Chapter X:

The language of the market would be in the schools as pedantic, though it might not be reprobated by that name, as the language of the schools in the market. The mere man of the world, who insists that no other terms but such as occur in common conversation should be employed in a scientific disquisition, and with no greater precision, is as truly a pedant as the man of letters, who . . . converses at the wine-table with his mind fixed on his musaeum or laboratory (I, 107-108).

"Mordaunt," one of the terms of "scientific disquisition," is described by Coleridge as "a well-known phrase from technical chemistry" (II, 55). The language of "the schools" appears frequently; Coleridge speaks, for example, of "a sorites, or, if I may exchange a logical for a grammatical metaphor, a conjunction disjunctive, of epigrams" (I, 11). The reader becomes accustomed to encountering such phrases as "vis representativa," "ens representans," "sensorium," "intermundium," "categorical forms," and "subintelligitur." Other unusual words are coined by Coleridge--or used in a special sense which he explains. These include "esemplastic," "psilosophy," "multeity," "potenziate," and "aphorisming" (I, 107, 120, 188, 189, 191). The abundance of Latin and Greek phrases may be attributed in part to Coleridge's propensity for quotation. "A valuable thought, or a particular train of thoughts," he writes, "gives me additional



pleasure, when I can safely refer and attribute it to . . . another" (I, 9). And such phrases were, of course, for Coleridge an idiomatic manner of expression. It may be noted that many of these terms were no longer the property of "the schools": "a priori," "argumentum in circule," "viva voce," and "deo volente."

Informal and technical words, however, are a minority--although a significant one--in the vocabulary of the Biographia Literaria. Coleridge's diction, on the whole, is that of educated, formal, literary discourse. Such a manner prevails in much of Volume I; while Chapters XIV-XXII are notably uniform in word choice. The following sentences, selected from five key chapters (I, IV, XIII, XIV, XXII), are illustrative of the "normal" style of the Biographia:

Though I have seen and known enough of mankind to be well aware, that I shall perhaps stand alone in my creed, and that it will be well, if I subject myself to no worse charge than that of singularity; I am not therefore deterred from avowing, that I regard, and have ever regarded the obligations of intellect among the most sacred of the claims of gratitude (I, 9).

And therefore it is the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so as to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence (I, 59-60).

Every other science presupposes intelligence as already existing and complete: the philosopher contemplates it in its growth, and as it were represents its history to the mind from its birth to its maturity (I, 196).

Controversy is not seldom excited in consequence of the disputants attaching each a different meaning to the same word; and in few instances has this been more striking, than in disputes concerning the present subject (II, 10).

If Mr. Wordsworth have set forth principles of poetry which his arguments are insufficient to support, let him and those who have adopted his sentiments be set right by the confutation of these arguments, and by the substitution of more philosophical principles (II, 95).

The diction may be described as "neutral"--that is, it seems to strike a mean between the truly informal and the obviously elevated. Here, words are taken "from the current stock,"<sup>1</sup> and connote neither the "market" nor the "laboratory." Although it is not the common vocabulary of speech, it is well within the range of the literate reader.

Coleridge's occasional excursions into poetical prose should also be noted among the variations in his style. In the Biographia, this mode is marked by rhythmical and alliterative repetitions, and by an archaic tone in the vocabulary. One example is a sentence Coleridge himself admired, for it appears both in The Friend and in Anima Poetae: "To find no contradiction in the union of old and new; to contemplate the ANCIENT of days and all his works with feelings as fresh, as if all had then sprang forth at the first creative fiat; characterizes the mind that feels the riddle of the world, and may help to unravel it" (I, 59). The same topic, when it arises in Chapter XIV, is

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.2, trans. Cooper, p. 186.

similarly expressed. Wordsworth's genius directs the "mind's attention . . . to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand" (II, 6). Coleridge's discussion of his own religious beliefs also tends toward this manner. Thus he writes in Chapter X: "The fontal truths of natural religion and the books of Revelation alike contributed to the flood; and it was long ere my ark touched on an Ararat, and rested" (I, 132). Biblical phrasing again occurs in Chapter XXIV, a mixture of piety and invective. Coleridge orates on the "afflicted Soul" who can "still recognize the effective presence of a Father, though through a darkened glass and a turbid atmosphere, though of a Father that is chastising it" (II, 207-208). The final paragraph returns to this note: "It is Night, sacred Night! the upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone: . ." (II, 218). "Yea" and "nay," used frequently throughout the Biographia, occasionally suggest such a manner. In describing the blessings of a clergyman's life, Coleridge exclaims, "Nay, the social silence, or undisturbing voices of a wife or sister, will be like a restorative atmosphere, or soft music which moulds a dream without becoming its object" (I, 154). Carlyle's repetition, in Sartor Resartus, of "nay" in "a quaint and curious connection" was objected to

by John Sterling;<sup>1</sup> thus the phrase may not have passed entirely unnoticed, even in the early nineteenth century.

From this brief examination of the more prominent characteristics of Coleridge's style in the Biographia Literaria, several conclusions may be drawn. Coleridge's concern for language is everywhere made apparent: explicitly, when he argues the need for precise terminology and the distinction between prose and poetry; and implicitly, from the evidence of his own usage. "Coleridge's care with words is always that of a poet, never that of a pedant."<sup>2</sup> Yet the diction itself is generally that proper to prose. For this reason, it would appear that there is more "judgment" behind the style than Coleridge is often given credit for. One critic, for example, finds that Coleridge did not, in the Biographia, adapt "his language to a critical audience." As a result, "all sorts of esoteric words and combinations of words rushed to the surface."<sup>3</sup> But the sections of the Biographia intended for a general "critical" audience have, in fact, few "esoteric" words not explained by Coleridge. The chapters in Volume I to which this criticism does apply, however, are specifically aimed at a group of readers "fit . . . though few"--"it is neither possible or necessary for all men, or for many, to be PHILOSOPHERS" (I, 164).

<sup>1</sup>G. B. Tennyson, Sartor Called Resartus (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Potter, Coleridge and S. T. C., p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>Armour and Howes (eds.), Coleridge the Talker, p. 34.

On the whole, Coleridge's vocabulary does not make undue demands on the literate reader.

Similarly, the handling of figures of speech in the Biographia reveals Coleridge's sense of control. His two main sources of metaphorical language--nature and architecture--are appropriate for the subject-matter. Their principles of growth and construction reflect Coleridge's critical theory without being too "obviously related."<sup>1</sup> The more striking metaphors are inserted "but sparingly and seldom,"<sup>2</sup> thus avoiding the excesses of "poetical prose" that Coleridge disliked. His interest in the way of saying things, which appears in the choice of words and use of figures, may also be associated with the direction his sentences take. The parentheses, qualifiers, and after-thoughts frequently present a different manner of expressing the same idea--as though Coleridge declined to discard or select from several equally appropriate phrases that came to mind.

The latter quality, the evolution of thought or means of expression within a sentence, can make the style of the Biographia a difficult one to follow. "It exacts patience, sometimes a gymnastic alertness, the ability to traverse chasms of thought."<sup>3</sup> Readers may complain that "the play of free

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<sup>1</sup>Rhetoric, 3.11, trans. Cooper, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>Rhetoric, 3.2, trans. Cooper, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup>George Whalley, "Coleridge Unlabyrinthed," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXII (July, 1963), 337.

association in his mind" piles up "subordinate phrases and clauses until the central idea is submerged."<sup>1</sup> This is, without doubt, a true fault in a number of Coleridge's sentences; however, the same charge may be leveled at much of seventeenth-century and, for that matter, nineteenth-century prose. When successfully handled, Coleridge's sentence displays "a logic of its own, as severe as that of science" (I, 4). The "apparent spontaneity that gives distinction"<sup>2</sup> to Coleridge's style also gives it a conversational note. This is not, of course, an actual reproduction of speech, but rather a "looseness" that suggests natural qualities in a way that Ciceronianism does not.

Apparent "spontaneity" should be stressed, for Coleridge has often been denied intentional art in his prose. In the Biographia, the use of parallelism is notable among Coleridge's conscious techniques. A study of eight chapters in the work reveals that over three-fourths of its sentences contain some form of parallelism--either verbal or structural.<sup>3</sup> Also testifying to Coleridge's concern for style are the numerous contrasts and variations in sentence structure and length, and such devices as alliteration, anaphora, and climactic arrangement.

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<sup>1</sup> Armour and Howes (eds.), Coleridge the Talker, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> W. P. Ker (ed.), "Samuel Taylor Coleridge," in English Prose Selections, ed. by Henry Craik, V (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896), p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Sister M. Lucille Osinski, "A Study of the Structures of Coordination in a Representative Sample of the Biographia Literaria," p. 97.

For Coleridge's purposes--his own "apology" and his critique of Wordsworth's poetry and theory--the style of the Biographia appears well-suited. By means of variations within a certain pattern, Coleridge can be both self-revelatory, indicating the nature of his thoughts and temperament, and detached, attesting to the validity of philosophical and critical principles. At its best, the Biographia Literaria illustrates the truth of Coleridge's own defense:

My prose writings have been charged with a disproportionate demand on the attention; with an excess of refinement in the mode of arriving at truths; with beating the ground for that which might have been run down by the eye; with the length and laborious construction of my periods; in short with obscurity and the love of paradox. But my severest critics have not pretended to have found in my compositions triviality, or traces of a mind that shrunk from the toil of thinking. . . . Seldom have I written that in a day, the acquisition or investigation of which had not cost me the previous labour of a month (I, 149).

"A mind engaged in 'the toil of thinking'" might serve as an epigraph to the work.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The Biographia Literaria, one of the most important texts in the history of literary criticism, is also of significance as a work of art. It is at once a moving personal narrative, a valuable expression of English Romanticism, a chapter of a debate in literary history, and a model of critical method. To account for the appeal of the Biographia, and to examine the controversy over its artistic excellence, I have undertaken a study of the formal aspects of the work: its conception and purposes; its structure, argument, and style. Such a focus, of course, must result in the omission of other aspects. The validity and usefulness of Coleridge's tenets and methods, and the sources, significance, and influence of his ideas are referred to only in passing. Coleridge's psychological penetration, his humane wisdom, and his irony and humor are likewise slighted. It is hoped, however, that a rhetorical study, narrow and limited though it is, may help to make these and other qualities of the Biographia Literaria more readily accessible.

Because persuasive and polemical aims are frequently expressed by Coleridge, both within the Biographia itself and in



numerous other writings, it seemed that an examination from a rhetorical point of view might shed some light on misunderstood or ignored characteristics of the work. And Coleridge's own interest in prose composition, in addition to the reader's awareness of the stylistic qualities of the Biographia, further suggest that the form of the work should be an important consideration.

Chapters II-IV of this study bring together some of the materials necessary for evaluating the arrangement, argumentation, and style of the Biographia. Coleridge is seen to have projected the work, and thoroughly considered its main ideas, for at least fifteen years prior to publication. Autobiography was chosen as a framework encompassing certain long-contemplated questions: the merit of Wordsworth's poetry, a philosophical basis for poetical theory, the nature of poetic diction, and the function of literary criticism (examined primarily in relation to early nineteenth-century reviews). The reception of the Biographia is recounted for several reasons. Contemporary reaction to an acclaimed and seminal work is of interest in itself. More importantly, the early reviews contain the germs of much to be found in later criticism--for good and for ill. Prejudices which arose out of reviewers' personal bias were long repeated as fact. On the other hand, the generally hostile response to the Biographia often pointed to its actual problems and complexities. Finally, Coleridge's own awareness of the

concerns of style and rhetoric, as reflected in his other published writings, his letters, and his notebooks, are not without relevance to the Biographia. Coleridge accurately comments on a number of his stylistic attributes: his copiousness, his interest in the proper and the unusual word, and his method of constructing sentences. In preference and in practice, Coleridge tends to follow the writers of the early seventeenth century. His dislike of eighteenth-century poetic diction is paralleled in his condemnation of much of the prose of Johnson and Gibbon. Coleridge's rhetorical interests include the requirements for logical argument, the necessity for unity and ordered arrangement, the importance of concentrating on a particular audience, and the effectiveness of stylistic devices.

Thus, in Chapters V-VII, the background of the work, some of Coleridge's own criteria, and the method of analysis employed in Aristotle's rhetoric are applied to the Biographia Literaria. Although the Rhetoric is not a conscious model for Coleridge, its principles may still reveal much about his work. For whenever a speaker or writer wishes to persuade an audience, to arrange his discourse to this end, and to express himself forcefully and appropriately, his choices will illustrate Aristotle's observations. His appeal to the reader will be rational, emotional, or--through the proper revelation of his own character--ethical. His aim will be to exhort or dissuade (deliberative rhetoric), to accuse or defend (forensic rhetoric),

to praise or blame (epideictic rhetoric). Examples of each of these sources of appeal and types of rhetoric may be found in the Biographia.

The arrangement of the Biographia Literaria is considered first (Chapter V). The different editions of the work reflect the problem of its structure: no two are alike in what the editor has chosen to include or omit. Coleridge's other published works, and his general remarks on literary structure, are examined for any help they might provide. The emphasis is found to be upon organic unity rather than upon a clear division of parts or sections. Coleridge does tend, however, to diagrammatically list or enumerate the steps in his discourse. By noting the transitions at the opening and close of chapters, one may discern certain breaks in the Biographia. Eight parts seem to be indicated by Coleridge's abrupt introductions; the chapters within the parts, by contrast, are carefully linked to one another.

In what I have designated as Part I of the Biographia (Chapters I-IV), Coleridge provides a personal and general background, states his aims, and illustrates some of his methods and topics. Part II (Chapters V-IX), the discussion of association, lays the groundwork for Coleridge's distinction between Imagination and Fancy. Personal reminiscence, designed as edification and amusement, takes up Part III (Chapters X-XI). Volume I of the Biographia concludes with Part IV (Chapters XII-

XIII) and the results of Coleridge's philosophical investigations as applied to poetry. In Part V (Chapters XIV-XVI) Coleridge reviews the controversy stirred by Wordsworth's poems and preface, defines his terms (poem, poetry, and poet), and applies and illustrates his conclusions (by examining poems of Shakespeare, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and of his own age). Part VI (Chapters XVII-XXII) provides Coleridge's answers to Wordsworth's choice of characters, his choice of language, and his assertion that no essential difference exists between prose and poetical composition. Wordsworth's "real object" (II, 69), the neutral style, is shown to have existed from the early period of English literature (Chapter XIX); furthermore, this neutral style is not Wordsworth's characteristic excellence (Chapter XX). "Canons of criticism" proposed in Chapter XXI are then applied to an analysis of the faults and merits of Wordsworth's poetry (Chapter XXII). Part VII ("Satyrane's Letters" and Chapter XXIII), rather tenuously related to the whole of the Biographia, presents Coleridge in "the first dawn" (II, 131) of his literary life and illustrates the continuity of his "principles of taste" (II, 181). The Conclusion--Part VIII (Chapter XXIV)--is personal and apologetic; Coleridge defends himself against critical attacks and insists upon his personal sincerity and good will.

Other ordering devices in the Biographia include Coleridge's enumerations of his points of argument, the several

listings of his aims, and the frequent use of transitional phrases. Similarly, the many pairings and groups of three give testimony to Coleridge's desire for plan and purpose. The rhetorical effects of arrangement are also taken into account. Coleridge is careful, for example, to present an ethical appeal in the early chapters of the Biographia. He appears modest and sincere, yet notes his experience and qualifications to discuss the subject at hand. In addition, the introductory chapters gain the readers' interest by the personal element, the suggestion of controversy, and an informal style filled with anecdotes and examples.

Chapter VI of the present study regards the Biographia as a persuasive work and examines the nature and methods of its arguments. Coleridge's principal argument, the evaluation of the poems and poetic theory of Wordsworth, belongs primarily to deliberative rhetoric. Volume I of the Biographia presents Coleridge's objections as those of the general reader; and in Volume II, he openly declares "once for all, in what points I coincide with his [Wordsworth's] opinions, and in what points I altogether differ" (II, 8). Coleridge first dismisses the "Preface" of 1800 as invalid "as far as it is different from the principles of art, generally acknowledged" (II, 97). This declaration is followed by an examination of Wordsworth's poetical character, using the rhetorical proofs of example, enthymeme, analogy and authority. Coleridge's second main

argument consists of his self-defense and his assault upon reviewers. Here, Coleridge attempts to present himself in a favorable light, vindicate his past actions, and persuade the reader to sympathize with him and condemn those who would cavil or oppose. The refutation of false theories of association is part of this self-defense; Coleridge is portrayed as a sincere and earnest seeker after truth. A final argument is found in Chapter XXIII. In this review of Bertram, Coleridge may be seen practicing that form of criticism for which--in the previous line of argument--he set standards and rules.

The style of the Biographia Literaria is the subject of Chapter VII. Although little attention has been accorded Coleridge as a prose stylist, his manner of expression is varied, flexible, and generally effective. Coleridge's use of metaphor and his characteristically loose sentence structure are the most notable aspects of his style in the Biographia. The principal sources for his metaphors--external nature and architecture--reinforce his fundamental critical concerns. Metaphorical language is found to serve both an expository and a rhetorical function in the Biographia: it is a means by which precision and persuasiveness are achieved. The average sentence of the Biographia would fulfill this description: lengthy; containing qualifying clauses or parenthetical expressions; employing parallelism or antithesis; and failing to complete a pattern of balance set initially in the sentence. The short sentence also

appears--for variation and emphasis, to mark the start or close of an argument, to express a maxim or principle, or to summarize Coleridge's thought. Interrogative and exclamatory sentences are frequently used in clusters, to point out absurdity and obvious error. They contribute, too, a conversational or informal tone at times. Coleridge's vocabulary is remarkably varied, but is normally that of formal, "literary" prose. However, informal or slang terms, technical or specialized expressions, and neologisms occur frequently enough to be considered telling marks of his style. Less common are passages of poetic prose; in the Biographia, these are characterized by rhythmical and alliterative repetition, an archaic type of diction, and Biblical phrasing.

In conclusion, then, it may be said that a rhetorical examination of the Biographia Literaria attests to the validity of Coleridge's claim that it is "a Work per se" (see above, p. 153), not a disjointed collection of brilliant insights and absurd digressions. On the whole, the Biographia shows Coleridge striving after unity in the arrangement of his materials, persuasiveness and cogency in the discovery and construction of his arguments, and propriety and eloquence in his style. The fact that each attempt does not achieve "ideal perfection" (II, 12)--because of the external difficulties Coleridge encountered and his own limitations--suggests the magnitude of his endeavor.

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

The dissertation submitted by Mary McGoohan Price has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 17, 1969  
Date

Math J. Stagli  
Signature of Adviser