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Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria: The Authorial Presence

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SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA:

THE AUTHORIAL PRESENCE

by

M. Sheila Bartle-Harrod

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

The author, Mary Sheila Bartle-Harrod, the daughter of Dr. John F. Bartle and Eileen Sammon Bartle, was born November 21, 1945, in Langdon, North Dakota.

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In September, 1968, she was granted a Teaching Assistantship at Loyola University of Chicago, where she received her Master of Arts degree in English in January, 1971. In September, 1978 she was awarded a Loyola University Fellowship.

Her teaching experience has included public and private secondary schools as well as junior college and university.

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CHAPTER I

PART I

THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's authorial presence throughout the Biographia Literaria is continual and engaging, a constant and dynamic force operative in the work. This study proposes that we address the speaker's presence as a rhetorical function rather than yet another Coleridgean digression, as a literary convention rather than the verbosity of a garrulous author, as an integral part of the literary entity before us rather than a series of detachable fragments. Such a rhetorical consideration can yield insights and suggest an additional dynamic for a work too long described as fragmentary, labyrinthine, and excessively personal.

The role of the narrator has long been explored as a controlling force guiding the reader's experience of fictional literature. Similarly, we may approach the speaker of non-fiction as an integral part of the fabric of his text. The tradition of such an approach originates in the realm of pragmatic classical rhetoric in which the orator's self-presentation assumed obvious importance in light of his ultimate persuasive purpose. For Aristotle, the first

mode of persuasion depended on the personal character of the speaker, which "may also be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses."¹ With his understanding of audience psychology, Aristotle detailed the means of inspiring confidence in the speaker's good character and of establishing rapport with and finally control over one's audience. The ethical appeal, most appropriate to deliberative rhetoric, dovetails with the emotional appeal: the speaker's self-characterization as a man of "good sense, good moral character, and good will,"² reinforced by his appropriate language expressing "emotion and character, and . . . correspond[ing] to its subject,"³ creates a willing and empathetic disposition in the audience. To induce such receptivity and to arouse the audience's appropriate feelings the skillful rhetorician must appear trustworthy as well as understand the complexities of the human heart. Aristotle's concern with ethos, while thoroughly practical, in no way suggests the duplicity of a falsely assumed mask or character; indeed, the image established by the speaker and sustained by the suggested practical techniques was presumed to be integral with his person. Aristotle, as well as Cicero and Quintilian, followed the

¹Aristotle, Rhetoric, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, The Modern Library, bk. 1, chap. 2, p. 25.

²Rhetoric 1. 1. 90.

³Rhetoric 3. 7. 178.

tradition of Isocrates in his belief that since the whole man must be brought to bear in the persuasive process, "it behooved the aspiring orator to be broadly trained in the liberal arts and securely grounded in good moral habits."⁴ The moral bias, modified somewhat by Cicero in his admonition to the perfect orator to synthesize "thinking and speaking, ethics and style,"⁵ achieved uncompromising importance for Quintilian, whose "auctoritas" or "genuine wisdom and excellence of character"⁶ becomes the first essential criterion for the perfect orator.

The rhetorical tradition, with its oral and public origins, has been diversified in modern criticism to the extent that Aristotle's categories of ethos and pathos have been transformed into dimensions of a rhetorical performance, that is, "the relative positions of S (the speaker) and H (the hearer);"⁷ the concern for the speaker's moral character has become the disinterested study of the author's persona; and the attention to the audience's receptivity has become a delineation of the "created," "implied," or "ideal"

⁴Edward Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 597.

⁵Peter Dixon, Rhetoric (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 17.

⁶Corbett, Classical Rhetoric, p. 601.

⁷John R. Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 70.

reader.⁸ With the withdrawal of rhetoric from the community forum to the enclosed world of the literary text the goal of persuasion has become, rather, "identification" or association with the reader. Because of the unconscious factor implicit in this appeal, the "new" rhetoricians suggest a rhetoric beyond, though inclusive of, verbalization: the author's adoption of a role, while impinging on classical rhetorical devices, may also have a "more personalized dimension. . . . Aristotle treated rhetoric as purely verbal. But there are areas of overlap (making for a kind of 'administrative' rhetoric.)"⁹ Thus, rhetoric may now be said to involve the position or stance which the author assumes toward his audience, or, "the writer's attitude toward what he is saying, toward his reader, and toward himself, as suggested by his language."¹⁰ In twentieth-century criticism it is axiomatic that "the writer's mind persists in non-fiction no less than fiction,"¹¹ that the literary utterance is

⁸See Walter Ong, S.J., Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), particularly chap. 2, "The Writer's Audience Is a Fiction"; and Robert DeMaria, "The Ideal Reader: A Critical Fiction," PMLA 93 (1978): 463-74.

⁹Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric--Old and New," in New Rhetorics, ed. Martin Steinmann, Jr. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 67.

¹⁰Richard Ohmann, "A Linguistic Appraisal of Victorian Style," in The Art of Victorian Prose, eds. George Levine and William Madden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 137.

¹¹Norman Holland, "Prose and Minds: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Non-Fiction," in The Art of Victorian Prose, p. 314.

"modified by the created personality put forth in the act of communicating. . . . The voice, like the medium, is the message."¹² In poetry, fiction, and the literary criticism which has achieved its own aesthetic, we may address the speaker's image or the "self-portrait his book presents"¹³ as a rhetorical strategy for engaging the reader. Aristotle's principle of ethos, then, remains operative if redefined and suited to the stylistic concerns of modern criticism.

The premise of this study, that the "I" of the Biographia is Coleridge, the speaker of this work whose voice and stance alter according to his subject and in turn control the reader's engagement, rests on the critical tenet that the writer's presence in the literature is a formal element in the work. We may ask: How does Coleridge as the speaker of the Biographia present himself? What is the rhetorical function of such a self-characterization? How does the authorial presence accomplish the express purposes of the Biographia Literaria? As we shall discover, Coleridge as speaker is overt, vividly personal, and conscious of himself as subject of the work and object in the eyes of the reader. While presenting himself to us in various roles (autobiographer, teacher, friend, saviour, guide, prophet, reformer), he calls the audience's attention to the demands and rewards of

¹²Walker Gibson, Persona: A Style Study for Readers and Writers (New York: Random House, 1969), p. xi.

¹³William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," New Literary History 5 (1974): 365.

our role in undertaking this work.

That Coleridge's various encounters with the reader of the Biographia may function as a personal, immediate rhetoric or as a means of conveying his philosophical and critical ideas is infrequently considered by scholars. Indeed, the personal mode of the work, far from being viewed as a literary device, has stimulated equally personal and non-critical responses. The presence of the author throughout this work has traditionally been regarded as an intrusion, embarrassment, or annoyance to the reader whose expectations of a discursive critical text are, no doubt, offended.¹⁴ For these readers the Biographia may be "distasteful . . . because [it is] an exculpation, soaked in the atmosphere of self-defense."¹⁵ Coleridge's presence is found excessive by some, and what one reader might view as self-disclosure another considers "the over-dramatizing of his misfortunes."¹⁶ His contemporaries castigated Coleridge for perpetrating "an

¹⁴It is for this reason, "simply because they are personal," that Sara Coleridge edits out Coleridge's remarks on Jeffrey and the Edinburgh Review: "as those passages contain personal remarks, right or wrong, they were anomalies in my Father's writings." "Introduction," Biographia Literaria, vol. 3 of The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884), pp. cxix-cxxx.

¹⁵Stephen Potter, "On Editing Coleridge," The Bookman 85 (1934): 435.

¹⁶Max F. Schulz, "Coleridge's 'Apologetic Prefaces'," TSE 11 (1961): 63.

indecent demonstration, or defense of a diseased personality,"¹⁷ a misuse of biographical criticism which persists today in writings which point to the man's "emotional excesses"¹⁸ or financial difficulties¹⁹ as somehow indices for a critical evaluation. This aversion to Coleridge's personality and its emergence in his works, particularly the Biographia, is partly due, I believe, to the traditionally accepted and only too well known self-image of the author, whose plans outstripped his realization of them and whose self-analysis frequently undermined his abilities. Coleridge's self-assessment in his Notebooks and Letters is more often than not self-castigation; often, too, his insecurity is balanced by encouraging reiterations of self-assurance. Understandably, then, readers often find him to be inconsistent, tiresome, and perpetually wavering between grandiosity and weakness. Our knowledge of his difficult literary career has become intertwined with our assessment of his works to the point that our disappointment is almost predetermined by the man's self-publicity. Consequently, descriptions of Coleridge as "a dreamer rather than a doer" and "essentially

¹⁷M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber: Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria," PQ 50 (1971): 209. Cooke specifies John Wilson's "Some Observations on the 'Biographia Literaria' of S. T. Coleridge," Blackwood's 2 (Oct., 1817): 3-18; and Hazlitt's "Biographia Literaria," Edinburgh Review 28 (August, 1817): 488-515.

¹⁸Schulz, "Coleridge's 'Apologetic Prefaces'," p. 63.

¹⁹J. R. De J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 12.

a talker, unconcerned with audience"²⁰ too easily lead to a dismissal of any serious artistry: "Thanks to Morgan," one modern critic promotes; "the task [of composing the Biographia] was completed and was on paper."²¹ Moreover, the repeated disappointments Coleridge experienced with the progress of his work, the discrepancies between his plan for the Biographia and its final expression, as well as his inability to control its publication are carelessly equated with desultoriness and an incapacity for craftsmanship. Dudley Bailey's defense of the revised Friend might well answer similar charges of carelessness leveled against the Biographia. Maintaining that "the general reliance which students of Coleridge place upon the evidence from his letters and various biographical sources" often results in "a great deal of myth," Bailey concludes:

These eccentric notions of the purpose of the work and equally eccentric descriptions of Coleridge's revisions of it seem to have derived from sources other than the work itself; and they have been kept alive by scholarship which has consistently based its views on something besides the works Coleridge made public.²²

²⁰R. W. Armour and R. F. Howes, eds., Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1940), p. 28.

²¹Maurice Carpenter, The Indifferent Horseman: The Divine Comedy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London: Elek Books, 1954), p. 304.

²²Dudley Bailey, "Coleridge's Revisions of The Friend," MP 59 (1961): 99.

The tendency to wield biographical data as a critical tool seems particularly tempting with autobiography because our emotional engagement with the self-exposed author is an essential dynamic of the work. Recent autobiographical scholarship, however, has demonstrated the richness and complexities of this genre which is at once art and life, fiction and fact. Studies such as William Earle's, Robert Olney's and Roy Pascal's,²³ in exposing the dimensions of the autobiographical act, illuminate the performance of the double persona with which the reader of autobiography is confronted: "Standing foremost in the autobiographer's strategy is the element of character (called ethos by Northrop Frye) . . . which we must carefully distinguish . . . from the author himself." For while the author narrates his own story he enacts it as a protagonist and "the artist-model must alternately pose and paint."²⁴ Coleridge, in choosing the autobiographical frame to convey his philosophy of literature, was not only relying on his characteristic tendency toward self-analysis, but more importantly, I believe, was employing a deliberate device by which to involve his reader and express formally his long held belief in the

²³William Earle, The Autobiographical Consciousness: A Philosophical Inquiry into Existence (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972); Robert Olney, Metaphors of Self (Princeton: University Press, 1972); Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁴William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," p. 365.

intricate relationship between the subjective personal experience and metaphysical truths. "Seem to have made up my mind," he wrote as early as 1803, "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."²⁵ Only a few critics have explored Coleridge's life-long concern with the intersection of the individual life and philosophy and its expression in the Biographia Literaria.

The critical tendency has been, as M. G. Cooke remarks in his noteworthy departure from it,²⁶ to isolate the argument of the Biographia for explication, thus divorcing it from its context and form. Coleridge, who echoes Aristotle in his concept of organic form, is thought to be incapable of accomplishing the very principle which he explicates in the Biographia. Critics continue to focus on traditionally "key" chapters, extracting them from the "irrelevant mass" and thereby presumably solving their frustration with the Biographia's apparent lack of design. The question of whether the autobiographical mode is inherent to the content has been neglected, while extensive and serious scholarship has been devoted to Coleridge's metaphysics, epistemology, critical theory, and practical criticism in the Biographia. The Biographia Literaria, of crucial importance in Coleridge's

²⁵The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 6 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957-1973), 1: 1515.

²⁶M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," pp. 208-229.

canon and central to an understanding of the Romantic consciousness and artistry, continues to be read inorganically by students and scholars.²⁷ The traditional, selective focus on Coleridge's theory of the Imagination and his elucidation of Wordsworth's craft, however valuable to the development of his thought, nonetheless "carries a cost of impairing the full grasp of his ideas."²⁸ For to deny the complete form of the Biographia is to exclude its complete meaning. That the autobiographical narrative is focused (i.e. "sketches of my literary life"), intermittent, or "introductory" should not preclude the necessary explication of its nature and function.

Admittedly, the Biographia can not easily be subsumed under the genre of autobiography as George Watson maintained in his 1956 edition,²⁹ and any expectation of a consistently penetrating focus on the personality of the autobiographer and his voyage through life must be disappointed. Our expectations of the genre, however, need not exclude our consideration of the author's intended relation of his literary text to that genre. Here we might recall Coleridge's repeated

²⁷So much so that at the 1977 MLA convention Coleridge scholars and teachers were asked if any actually taught the entire Biographia.

²⁸M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," p. 210.

²⁹George Watson, "Introduction," Biographia Literaria (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1956), p. xx. "He was not writing an autobiography, not even an account of his literary life, and any sort of biographical approach to the book is certain to be disappointed."

insistence on the forthcoming work as "the Autobiography" and the "Literary Life" as well as his explicit reference to the significance of its form: "The Autobiography I regard as the main work. . . ." ³⁰ Autobiographical critic Darell Mansell views the title, subtitle, dedication, and purpose statement as part of the author's "rhetorical strategy . . . [meant] to establish an intended genre for his work. We make our determination [of genre] on the basis of the author's declared or inferred intention. . . ." ³¹ In light of Coleridge's intended structural use of the autobiographical narrative, and allowing that the Biographia may fail to "pass for an autobiography weighed, measured, and parceled up for publication," ³² we are still unjustified in ignoring his deliberate reliance on this personal mode of expression. For "a study which is meant to be inclusive must accept its materials as they are found and not succumb to the temptation to sweep confidently aside half or more of its subject matter." ³³

It is not enough, then, to find the Biographia to be a failed autobiography. As Cooke was the first to assert, the

³⁰"To John M. Gutch," 17 September 1815, Letter 974, Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-1977), 4:585.

³¹Darell Mansell, "Unsettling the Colonel's Hash: 'Fact' in Autobiography," MLQ 37 (1976): 121-22.

³²Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," p. 210.

³³Wayne Shumaker, English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials and Form (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 52.

self-construction "is there, and bears scrutiny."³⁴ His 1971 study, based on the premise that the Biographia "warrants every consideration as a brilliantly, intricately improvised autobiography, at once apologia and de profundis, exegesis and polemic, self-description and self-discovery,"³⁵ explored Coleridge's ethos as a shaping force of his ideas. In the first part of the work Cooke finds the "firm coherence and articulation" of Coleridge's self-characterization and its counterpart, the "concrete relationship with the reader." With the entrance of Wordsworth, however, "something precious goes by the board; the very turning to Wordsworth prevents his 'proceeding' to his sole, his proper subject of the nature and function of the imagination." The interpretation of Wordsworth, Cooke believes, is motivated by retaliation, "frankly but obsessively violating Coleridge's principles of geniality and organicism in reading." The breakdown in self-construction continues, "the sketchiness of Coleridge's formal essaying of the imagination abstractly duplicat[ing] the more personal autobiographical hesitations we see at work elsewhere." By the "Conclusion" we see "not the imagination but the imager . . . in crisis," with "self-annihilation, not self-construction" imminent.³⁶ In direct contrast, Richard Mallette, in a comparable study of

³⁴Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," p. 213.

³⁵Ibid., p. 210.

³⁶Ibid., p. 222 passim.

Coleridge's ethos and engagement with the reader, discovers a "special unity" in the Biographia.³⁷ This "communality of reader and narrator" is accomplished by a "network of metaphors" which convey two narrative voices--that of the "approachable, modest writer" and the "authoritative fiery prophet of the imagination." Mallette concludes that Coleridge enables the audience to progress with him to the prophetic stance; their shared attainment of it is "a graphic realization of the extraordinary powers of the imagination."³⁸

The opposing conclusions which these two critics draw from their study of Coleridge's presence in the Biographia exemplify a characteristic of Coleridge scholarship, the continued dispute over the existence of any pattern or unity in this work. No doubt Mary Lamb's second-hand account of Coleridge's mushrooming preface with its implicit suggestion of his lack of control ("at first the preface was not to exceed five or six pages, it has however grown into a work of great importance."³⁹) as well as his own deprecation of "so immethodical a miscellany"⁴⁰ have contributed to the persistent critical disappointment over its apparent formlessness.

³⁷Richard Mallette, "Narrative Technique in the Biographia Literaria," MLR 70 (1975): 40.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 34, 40 passim.

³⁹Letters of Charles Lamb, ed., E. V. Lucas, 2: 172, quoted in Watson, "Introduction," p. xiii.

⁴⁰S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), 1: 64.

George Whalley's unprecedented argument for "an unfolding if elusive pattern"⁴¹ created an avenue for reevaluation. His work penetrated the myth of the Biographia as a "whimsical and absent-minded improvisation"⁴² by tracing Coleridge's fifteen-year development of the concerns which finally achieved "prolonged, patient, and mature consideration" in the Biographia. Freed from the misconception of Coleridge's careless composition, other scholars followed the example of Whalley's study, the "one notable exception"⁴³ to the unexamined legends. George Watson's "Introduction" to his 1956 edition similarly asserted that a design of the Biographia, however unorthodox, "does exist and demands to be understood."⁴⁴ His tracing of the compositional history of the work is a modification of Shawcross's earlier reconstruction: both men find that the "Autobiographia Literaria" of July, 1815, originally a preface to Sibylline Leaves, finally came to demand its own preface which, in turn, "outgrew its proposed limits and was incorporated into the whole work."⁴⁵ Yet while Shawcross finds the Biographia of

⁴¹George Whalley, "The Integrity of the Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies 6 (London: John Murray, 1955), p. 88.

⁴²Ibid., p. 92.

⁴³Watson, "Introduction," p. xiv.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵J. Shawcross, "Introduction," Biographia Literaria 1: lv. See also Watson, p. xiv and Daniel Mark Fogel, "A Compositional History of the Biographia Literaria," Studies in

"miscellaneous character" and disjointed, Watson believes "its greatest originality to be its design" and effecting a "peculiarly Coleridgean unity."⁴⁶ The later theory of the composition of the Biographia, originally projected by E. L. Griggs, supported by George Whalley, and now substantiated by Daniel Mark Fogel, holds that the present work was an extension of a preface to the projected Sibylline Leaves. By the 29th of July, 1815, it is believed that this preface consisted of Chapter I through V and XIV through XXII of the Biographia. In August Coleridge expanded "ten to twelve manuscript pages of metaphysics," revising Chapters IV and V, and writing Chapters VI through XIII. By September 17th Coleridge's conception of the work had changed: "it is no longer subordinate to the book of poems to which there was to be a preface. It is now the more important work and a book in its own right."⁴⁷ Finally, in early 1817 Coleridge inserted "Satyrane's Letters" and the critique of Bertram, wrote the "Conclusion," and possibly padded the last two-thirds of Chapter XXII.⁴⁸ This theory of composition, substantiated by Coleridge's letters and notebook entries, suggests that the critique of Wordsworth and the first three

Bibliography 30 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), pp. 219-34.

⁴⁶Shawcross, p. xlv and Watson, p. xix.

⁴⁷Fogel, "A Compositional History," p. 221.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 222.

chapter of Volume I were written first with the philosophical sections (or the first half of the Biographia) added later. By implication, then, Shawcross's charge that the "metaphysical disquisition" is not directly applied to the criticism of Wordsworth⁴⁹ appears unfounded; evidently Coleridge felt bound to substantiate his assessment of Wordsworth's theory and poetry with a philosophical inquiry of the "nature and function of the imagination." Our knowledge of Coleridge's composition of most of the Biographia, a "Work per se,"⁵⁰ in three and a half months in 1815 answers the charges of his incapacity,⁵¹ carelessness, and "'ludicrous dilatoriness'."⁵² Fogel convincingly argues for Coleridge's productiveness, describing his composition as "an astounding feat of concentration and energy . . . an extraordinary effort of will and intellect."⁵³ That Coleridge's

⁴⁹Shawcross, "Introduction," p. lxxv.

⁵⁰"To John M. Gutch," 17 September 1815, Letter 974, Letters 4: 585.

⁵¹His daughter believed that "his energies for regular composition were deserting him. . . . But for the failure of his powers, he might have recast what he had already written, and given it such shape and proportions, as would have made it seem suitable to the work in which he was engaged," p. xxiii. Jackson finds the completion of this "occasional" criticism to be an "accident," p. 1.

⁵²Arthur Quiller-Couch quoted in Fogel, "A Compositional History," p. 233.

⁵³Fogel, "A Compositional History," p. 233.

method of composition was purposeful does not, however, automatically dispel the criticism of the work's disunity.

The outstanding scholarship of such critics as Gordon McKenzie, Alice Snyder, J. A. Appleyard and I. A. Richards has succeeded in explicating the philosophical principles underlying Coleridge's literary criticism and, by application, the central argument of the Biographia.⁵⁴ Stemming from their conviction that Coleridge was a serious philosopher, their work is devoted to an exposé of the logical and intricate relationships between his metaphysics and aesthetics. In their search for intellectual cohesion they turn to key concepts sustained and developed throughout Coleridge's career which serve as vantage points from which to view the argument of the Biographia, whether it be his theory of organic unity, of the reconciliation of opposites, or of the principle of method. The result of their studies is our increased awareness of Coleridge's life-long devotion to and refinement of essential and intersecting concepts; the Biographia may be viewed as a crucial point of expression along the line of development. Their discovery of the unity within Coleridge's life-long philosophy, then, elucidates the

⁵⁴Alice D. Snyder, The Critical Principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites as Employed by Coleridge (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1918); J. A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Gordon McKenzie, Organic Unity in Coleridge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939); I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960).

logical coherence within the Biographia and his criticism is seen as securely founded in his philosophy. By implication, however, the student of Coleridge may believe that the Biographia cannot be read singly without the illumination and comparison of his other texts and, as mentioned earlier, the explication of the argument depends on its isolation from the form of the Biographia.

Less comprehensive and ambitious studies have confined themselves solely to the Biographia, discovering Coleridge's fulfillment of purpose and exploring his rhetorical methods. The studies of Lynn Merle Grow, James Barcus, and Mary McGoochan Price share the conviction of the Biographia's unity, arguing that "thematically as well as structurally it forms a coherent expression."⁵⁵ While these studies recognize the role of the personal narration, their common conclusion is that at best it functions pragmatically in order to secure our good will⁵⁶ and to "provide a concrete grounding for his often abstruse philosophical arguments."⁵⁷ The peculiar power and philosophical implications of the authorial

⁵⁵L. M. Grow, The Prose Style of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1976), p. 136; James Edward Barcus, "The Homogeneity of Structure and Idea in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Philosophical Lectures, and Aids to Reflection (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1968); Mary McGoochan Price, "The Genesis, Reception and Form of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 1969).

⁵⁶Price, "The Genesis, Reception and Form," p. 185.

⁵⁷Grow, The Prose Style of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 136.

presence are not suggested in these studies; indeed, there is no inductive and complete exposé of the speaker's position in the Biographia.

The stimulus for this study is shared by a few Coleridge scholars who sense a dynamic operating in the work which infuses and supports Coleridge's argumentative purpose. Coleridge's personal rhetoric infuses his text, whether it be in the form of autobiography, argument, or critical application, and creates an explicit and powerful bond with the reader which functions thematically. The intimate character of this bond is initially established in the opening autobiographical section of the Biographia where Coleridge's recollection of his youthful self is offered for the reader's benefit. But the shared membership of author and reader in a literary fellowship is confirmed and elaborated throughout the Biographia with Coleridge's continuing delineation of his principles of criticism. Just as the autobiography is presented as a vicarious experiential basis for Coleridge's principles, so too can his refutation of associationism, his theory of the Imagination, and his revision of Wordsworth's theories be viewed as an authorial legacy to his young reader. For the Coleridge reader, the young man of genius, is groomed to carry Coleridge's vision of genial criticism founded upon the Imagination into the future; the reader's participation in the Biographia constitutes his membership in this elite fellowship and provides a training ground for

the development of his mature genius. The direction of the Biographia is far from reflexive or solipsistic: Coleridge's concern is beyond himself, directed toward the reader whose role is that of beneficiary of a criticism marked not only by its philosophical foundation, but also by its humanitarian approach. Thus, Coleridge's vivid rhetorical presence before his reader, whether in the role of autobiographer, teacher, or prophet, serves an organic function in the Bio-graphia Literaria.

CHAPTER I

PART II

BIOGRAPHY: A PARALLEL STUDY

When a man is attempting to describe another's character, he may be right or he may be wrong--but in one thing he will always succeed, in describing himself. If he express simple approbation, he praises from a consciousness of possession--If he approve with admiration from a consciousness of deficiency.⁵⁸

The difference between writing a biography and one's autobiography is, admittedly, great. While the former subject is essentially defined, separate from the author, and completed, the latter is unfinished, inseparable, and may be continuously elusive in the very act of composition. Nonetheless, an examination of Coleridge's life-long concern with biography does, as he suggests in this quote from his young adulthood, reveal significant parallels with his equally continuous habit of self-discovery, a tendency which found its form in autobiography. That for Coleridge the two approaches were closely linked is not surprising; the word "autobiography" did not achieve its own separate linguistic form until the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Notebooks 1 (1796-97): 74.

⁵⁹The Compact Edition of The Oxford English Dictionary. This earliest form, "autobiography," is attributed to Southey in 1809. s.v. "autobiography."

Frequently linking the two, Coleridge considered them comparable endeavors and studies, both as a rhetorical means to engage an audience and as fitting pursuits for a serious student of the Humanities.⁶⁰ His frequent biographical plans and the biographical sketches in The Friend reveal characteristic approaches and principles which will also be apparent in the Biographia. For example, his stress on the revelation of a "comprehensive truth" rather than factual minutiae is integral with his principle of organic unity. Also, he emphasizes the interior history of the mind over external events; the biography of a man of genius can render that individual genius eternal and in effect, defeat the fixed divisions of time. Finally, his vivid authorial presence as a biographer, which elicits the reader's participation and confirms his responsibilities, contributes to the fulfillment of Coleridge's purpose.

For virtually every year from 1794 to 1822 Coleridge considered and occasionally accomplished a work of biography. From his Notebooks, Letters, and lectures we are able to trace repeated concerns which, when viewed in light of his more explicit and thorough statements in The Friend, reveal a thoughtful and consistent theory of biography.

Coleridge was attracted to men of genius, men whose

⁶⁰ See "To William Godwin," 13 October 1800, Letter 358, Letters 1: 636 where Coleridge advises, ". . . you have not read enough of Travels, Voyages, & Biography--especially, of Men's Lives of themselves. . . ."

personal and public lives were reconciled and mutually stimulating, whose great works reflected their integrity of character. In keeping with his belief in the "impossibility of any man's being the good Poet without being first a good man,"⁶¹ Coleridge's most comprehensive studies invariably were to include biography. Any sort of literary history made use of this approach: his first such plan, in 1794, "Imitations of the Modern Latin Poets" would be accompanied by "an Essay Biog[raphical] & Crit[ical] on the Rest[oration] of Lit[erature]."⁶² Similarly, in 1803 he proposed the "Bibliotheca Britannica or an History of British Literature, bibliographical, biographical, and critical." The first half of this history was structured around "great single names," the second half, a history of the genres of "poetry and romances, everywhere interspersed with biography. . . ."⁶³ In 1816 he proposed a:

fortnightly or monthly letter to my Literary Friends . . . concerning the real state and value of the German Literature from Gellert and Klopstock to the present Year. . . . After these [historical letters] I propose to take each great name by itself, beginning with Klopstock, & attaching a short biographical Sketch to each.⁶⁴

⁶¹Notebooks 1 (November-January 1802): 1057.

⁶²Notebooks 1 (1796): 161. cf. "To George Coleridge," 30 March 1794, Letter 44, Letters 1: 77n.

⁶³"To Robert Southey," July 1803, Letter 507, Letters 2: 664.

⁶⁴"To Thomas Boosey," 31 August 1816, Letter 1023, Letters 4: 664.

Similarly, in his proposed and widely inclusive philosophical studies biography figured prominently. His 1817 prospectus for the Encyclopaedia Metropolitana expresses his identification of history with biography. The second of four divisions was "Biographical or Historical"; specifically, the "Historical part will be found . . . in Biography and the interspersed Preliminaries"⁶⁵ designed to "teach the same truths by example, that have been evolved."⁶⁶ The 1818-1819 Philosophical Lectures, "Historical and Biographical, on the Rise and Progress, the Changes and Fortunes, of Philosophy, from Tales and Pythagoras to the Present Times," consistently employ biography "of the most elevated genius, or of the most singular character," for the "instances and illustrations" which it affords history.⁶⁷ Finally, in his repeated and varying outlines of the Logosophia (which was also to include fragments of autobiography) Coleridge planned the fourth treatise to be a merging of biography and philosophy. While in 1814 "Spinozism with a Life of B. Spinoza"⁶⁸ was his sole topic, by 1815 it had expanded to include "the

⁶⁵"To Thomas Curtis," 22 May 1817, Letter 1058, Letters 4: 734.

⁶⁶"To Robert Southey," 28 April 1817, Letter 1054, Letters 4: 724n.

⁶⁷The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1949), pp. 66, 67.

⁶⁸"To Daniel Stuart," 12 September 1814, Letter 951, Letters 3: 533.

Mystics and Pantheists, with the Lives of Giordano Bruno, Jacob Behmen, George Fox, and Benedict Spinoza, with an analysis of their systems."⁶⁹

The integration of biography with such histories of literature and philosophy suggests that for Coleridge biography served at least two purposes: it concretized and illustrated general principles and truths; and, conversely, it was the proper groundwork for an historical study, for the character of the man of genius was the basic, vital foundation of what finally became our history, philosophy, or literature. Coleridge's consistent focus throughout all his biographical endeavors was on character, not deeds, for he believed the former to be essential and revelatory of the individual's genius. He found, in reading the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, "the sum of my remark on the--not what has he done, but what is he?"⁷⁰ His Philosophical Lectures of 1818-1819, as well as his numerous plans for individual biographies, reveal this repeated emphasis on "character" or the "grounds of genius" as primary, with the accomplishments of the individual relegated to a secondary importance. A journal entry of 1804 concerning Southey exemplifies Coleridge's concerted effort to preserve this crucial distinction

⁶⁹"To Daniel Stuart," 7 October 1815, Letter 977, Letters 4: 592; cf. "To John May," 27 September 1815, Letter 976, Letters 4: 589-90.

⁷⁰Notebooks 2 (May 1804): 2077.

⁷¹Notebooks 1 (January 1804): 1815.

between character and action:

The character of Australis a striking Illustration of the Basis of Morals. . . . All this Australis does, & if all Goodness consists in definite, observable, & rememberable Actions, Australis is only not [sic] perfect, his good Actions so many, his unad[mirable] ones so few, & (with one or two exceptions) so venial. But now what IS Australis?⁷¹

The distinction can be elusive. After a lengthy explanation of what Southey "is NOT," Coleridge answers his own question in a single sentence, reverting to metaphor in his attempt to understand his attraction to this man whose goodness was cold and strangely insensitive: "He is a clear handsome piece of Water in a Park, moved from without--or at best, a smooth stream with one current, & tideless, & of which you can only avail yourself to one purpose." Without the illumination of the essential identity of the subject Coleridge feared that exclusive attention to an individual's deeds would render a partial portrait. In The Friend, which includes his most sustained biographical work, Coleridge cautions against "huge volumes of biographical minutiae, which render the real character almost invisible, like clouds of dust on a portrait. . . ." ⁷² Deeds or accomplishments were not to be excised from biography, but were to illustrate the individuals' "general character" (357); the externals of a life were, for Coleridge, subordinate to the interior history

⁷²The Friend, ed., Barbara Rooke, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 1: 356. All further references to Vol. 1 appear in the text.

of the mind.

To complete this exposition of Coleridge's approach to biography we may now focus somewhat exclusively on his 1818 *Rifacimento* of The Friend, where his most explicit and comprehensive explanations occur and where biography functions as a means for accomplishing the structural and thematic organicism of the work.⁷³ The purpose of The Friend, "to refer men to PRINCIPLES in all things, in Literature, in the Fine Arts, in Morals, in Legislation, in Religion,"⁷⁴ is in part fulfilled through biography which "furnish[es] ample proof" (417) of the presence of genius throughout the ages. For Coleridge, then, biography is teleological. Conscious of the biographer's editorial powers and the meanness of a "mere fact," Coleridge chose to present the particulars of a life in "the light of some comprehensive truth" (358), thereby effecting an organic unity. Furthermore, as the incidents or specifics of a life are used by the biographer for a greater end, the delineation of the individual's genius, so in turn is this biography of a genius used to fulfill the purpose of the work as a whole, "to draw the attention of my countrymen . . . from expedients and short-sighted

⁷³The addition of the "Landing-Places" to this later edition points to the structural role of biography. Other additions include the Extract from North's Examen and the introductory and final sections in the sketch of Sir Alexander Ball. The biographical sketches of Erasmus, Voltaire, Luther and Rousseau and the short essay, "Biography," contain minor revisions of the 1809-10 version, but are, most importantly, re-positioned in the "Landing-Places."

⁷⁴The Friend 2: 13; cf. 1: 19.

tho' quick-sighted Expedience, to that grand Algebra of our moral nature, Principle & Principles."⁷⁵ This dual subordination of the part to the whole is rhetorically equivalent to the goal of The Friend--in effect, the redirection and consequent enlargement of the reader's vision from the immediate and partial to the eternal and comprehensive; the realm of the Understanding, which deals with the phenomena of experience is subsumed by the realm of Reason, which takes for its objects "the Universal, the Eternal, the Necessary" (156).

With regard to the biographical essays Coleridge quite judiciously, I believe, claimed a structural organicism for his work: "Each Essay will, he believes, be found complete in itself, yet an organic part of the whole considered in one disquisition" (150). Moreover, this claim occurs in the first of three "Landing-Places," each of which treats biography. Biography is confined to these intervals of amusement, retrospect, and preparation, metaphorical landing-places which "relieved at well proportioned intervals . . . the magnificent staircase" (148). The ascent of the staircase is a striking metaphor for the reader's experience of this organic work; a process in time, the experience is cumulative, with each new stage incorporating the former, our climb relieved by three landing-places where we pause to consider our

⁷⁵"To George Coleridge," 18 April 1809, Letter 758, Letters 3: 197.

new perspective. Each landing-place is a moment of rest and preparation, of synthesis and vision, a balance between the past accomplishment and the future ascent. Yet each also offers a different and distinct perspective. The first landing-place, with its essays on Erasmus, Voltaire, Luther, and Rousseau and closing with his distinction between Understanding and Reason, he imagined as adorned with "a few plants, of somewhat gayer petals and a livelier green, though like the Geranium tribe of a sober character in the whole physiognomy and odor. . . ." The second landing-place, including Coleridge's essay on Biography and the extract from Roger North's Examen, as well as the lighter fables and nature descriptions, looked out on "an extensive prospect through the stately window with its side panes of rich blues and saturated amber or orange tints." Finally, the third and "highest," which affords us a view of "the whole spiral ascent with the marbled pavement of the great hall from which it seemed to spring up as if it merely used the ground on which it rested," closes the work with Coleridge's biographical tribute to Sir Alexander Ball. As Coleridge suggested, there is "no difficulty in translating these forms of the outward senses into their intellectual analogies. . . ."

In a sense it seems almost a tautological observation that the men of genius Coleridge chose as biographical subjects exemplify an harmonious balance of heart and mind, intelligence and morality, private judgement and public spirit, for the essential characteristic of genius for Coleridge

is a high degree of the imaginative power. Men of genius, he writes in the Biographia, "rest content between thought and reality, as it were in an intermundium of which their own living spirit supplies the substance, and their imagination the ever-varying form. . . ."76 We have noted Coleridge's focus on the history of the individual mind, what he calls the "interior history (the history of Man)," but he is likewise concerned in biography with the "harmonious Counterpart . . . the History of men." Together they form "a complete whole . . . consisting of two correspondent Worlds, as it were, co-relative and mutually potenziating, yet each integral and self-subsistent-- . . ."77 Moreover, the man of genius accomplishes this reciprocity and correlation: his individual life is "of necessity" a reflection of the historical Age he is born into, yet his genius lies in his surpassing of his Age, his altering of it, and his affecting a future history. For Coleridge this dynamic and richly paradoxical tension between the man of genius and his age was a crucial biographical question; his repeated consideration of it makes it tantamount to his first principle of biography.

In the Bibliotheca Britannica of 1803 Coleridge's approach was to treat biography as a facet of a wider, historical context, his object to delineate the representative

⁷⁶Biographia Literaria 1: 20.

⁷⁷"To Thomas Allsop," 8 August 1820, Letter 1245, Letters 5: 96.

characteristics of the literary works as well as their unique quality: "What of these belong to the Age--what to the author quasi peculium."⁷⁸ But his exploration of this inter-relation pervaded his treatment of individuals as well. Fascinated by "Revolutionary Minds,"⁷⁹ men "who in states or in the mind of Man had produced great revolutions, the effects of which still remain, & are, more or less distant, causes of the present state of the World,"⁸⁰ Coleridge planned his first biography, "a Life of Lessing--& interweaved with it a true state of German Literature, in it's [sic] rise & present state." The biography was to be an exploration of the "controversies, religious & literary, which they [his works] occasioned."⁸¹ His purpose in writing a life of Chaucer would be, he wrote in 1803, "to make the Poet explain his Age, and to make the Age both explain the Poet, & evince the superiority of the Poet over his age."⁸² Throughout his many literary lectures this delineation of the man of genius's simultaneous rootedness in and surpassing of his history is repeatedly addressed. It is, of course,

⁷⁸"To Robert Southey," July 1803, Letter 507, Letters 2: 956.

⁷⁹Notebooks 1 (November, 1803): 1646.

⁸⁰"To William Godwin," 26 March 1811, Letter 818, Letters 3: 314.

⁸¹"To Thomas Poole," 4 January 1799, Letter 269, Letters 1: 455.

⁸²"To William Godwin," 10 June 1803, Letter 505, Letters 2: 951.

his most frequent approach to Shakespeare and became, I believe, the essence of what he called a "Philosophical Analysis of the Genius and Works"⁸³ of his long list of literary giants. He wished to "contra-distinguish" these men from one another and from their age," to determine what of his [Shakespeare's] merits and defects belong to his age, as being found in contemporaries of Genius, what belong to himself."⁸⁴ Many men of genius, because of their greater vision, were in opposition to their age; later in his life this apparently characteristic resistance of the public to their contemporary genius became an increasingly strong motif in Coleridge's exploration of this relationship. In 1821 he wrote, "I have often thought of writing a work to be entitled . . . Vindication of Great Men unjustly branded; and at such times the names prominent to my mind's eye have been Giordano Bruno, Jacob Behmen, Benedict Spinoza, and Emanuel Swedenborg."⁸⁵ The same names figured in earlier biographical plans, but in light of an exploratory rather than a defensive purpose.

This biographical principle, which remained a conviction throughout his life, was utilized in the 1809-10 Friend

⁸³"To Thomas Allsop," 30 March 1820, Letter 1228, Letters 5: 26.

⁸⁴"To Humphry Davy," 9 September 1807, Letter 656, Letters 5: 136n.

⁸⁵"To C. A. Tulk," 12 February 1821, Letter 1260, Letters 5: 136n.

and further refined in the *Rifacciamento* in "Sketches of the Life of Sir Alexander Ball" and in the essays which compare Erasmus and Voltaire and Luther and Rousseau for their "similar effects on their different ages." For Coleridge, "men of great and stirring powers, who are destined to mould the age in which they are born, must first mould themselves upon it" (130), their lives culminating in "effects extended over Europe" (132) and invariably creating our present history. This reciprocal cause and effect relationship is, Coleridge stresses, inherent in the very definition of genius, since "every Man of Genius . . . must of necessity reflect the age in the first instance, tho' as far as he is a man of Genius, he will doubtless be himself reflected by it reciprocally."⁸⁶

The unbroken line of continuity from the past to the future, embodied in the men whose influence is still felt by the reader, is metaphorically expressed in his opening essay in the "First Landing-Place." Coleridge describes our experience of music:

Each present movement bringing back, as it were, and embodying the spirit of some melody that had gone before, anticipates and seems trying to overtake something that is to come: and the musician has reached the summit of his art, when having thus modified the Present by the Past, he at the same time weds the Past in the Present to some prepared and corresponsive Future. The auditor's thoughts and feelings move under the same influence: retrospection blends with anticipation, and Hope and Memory . . . become one power with a double aspect (130).

⁸⁶To Thomas Allsop," 8 April 1820, Letter 1229, Letters 5: 33.

The analogy is between music and biography, or perhaps more inclusively, between music and literature. The simultaneity of past, present, and future which is our experience of music (we hold, as it were, the established theme in our minds while anticipating its return and alteration) can also be effected by the biographer who revivifies the inaccessible, "dead" past, transposing it through language into the reader's immediate present. Biography as an art form, and particularly what we may call Coleridgean biography with its stress on a comprehensive truth rather than literal facts, effects a corresponding defeat over the divisions of time: the biographer's power lies in his ability to transpose the inaccessible past into the reader's immediate present just as the greatness of men of genius, while nurtured in a particular age, lies in their vision and accomplishments which surpassed their time.

A final aspect of Coleridge's biographical work calls for our consideration in light of the Biographia, that is, the relation between Coleridge as biographer and his audience. The imposition of the biographical subject between the speaker and his reader afforded Coleridge sufficient distance and latitude for, paradoxically, a highly personal and empathetic stance toward his individual subject and his audience. We have explored Coleridge's attraction toward his subjects; his belief that the biographer's "admiration" bespeaks his "consciousness of deficiency"⁸⁷ seems aptly

⁸⁷Notebooks 1 (1796-97): 74.

fulfilled in his praise of Ball's thoroughly self-generated and self-executed accomplishments:

Luck gave him nothing: in her most generous moods, she only worked with him as with a friend, not for him as for a fondling; but more often she simply stood neuter and suffered him to work for himself. AH! how could I be otherwise than affected. . . (533).

But a study applying Coleridge's theory of the self-description implicit in biography remains for the psycho-biographer (as does an answer to the unavoidable question of why so few of these numerous biographical plans failed to materialize). What we may address here is Coleridge's personal engagement of his audience, particularly in light of the dual purpose of biography as a moral exemplum and as entertainment.

Coleridge has frequently been charged with disregard of his audience. The relative lack of contemporary success of his prose works is often traced to his scorn of the public and consequent "maladjustment" to his audience.⁸⁸ However, if we adhere to Coleridge's firm distinction between the Public, by which he meant "the ordinary crowd of English readers,"⁸⁹ and his specifically imagined or constructed audiences, we find strong evidence of his concern with the necessary rapport between author and

⁸⁸John Colmer, Coleridge Critic of Society (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 173.

⁸⁹"To Sir George Beaumont," 14 December 1808, Letter 731, Letters 3: 147.

reader. Coleridge had a great deal to say about the mindlessness and tastelessness of the British public and the consequent problems of literary men, but small attention has been paid to an equally serious concern, his commitment to his readers, a small, select group of thoughtful, literate, well-educated people, quite set apart from the anonymous Public. His attention to this audience is, I believe, undeniable; indeed, his continued re-construction of them and attempts to engage and control them in his prose works demand a far more extensive study than can be included here.⁹⁰

As basic as it may seem, our first task, in light of the pervasive criticism of Coleridge's purported lack of craftsmanship and carelessness, is to establish his deliberate choice of an audience for his prose works, what Walter Ong calls the writer's necessary construction "in his imagination, clearly or vaguely [of] an audience cast in some sort of role. . . ." ⁹¹ There is strong evidence that Coleridge consistently considered the author's recognition and regard of his audience as a requisite of his craft and

⁹⁰ Richard Haven in Patterns of Consciousness (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969) and Walter Bate in Coleridge (New York: Macmillan Co., 1968) consider Coleridge's treatment of the audience of Religious Musings. David R. Sanderson in "Coleridge's Political 'Sermons': Discursive Language and the Voice of God," MP 70 (1973) discusses Coleridge's attempt in The Friend to alter the reader's experience.

⁹¹ Walter Ong, S.J., "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," PMLA 90 (January 1975): 12.

necessary for the fulfillment of his purpose. As early as 1795 he wrote of the author's "duty to consider the character of those, to whom we address ourselves, their situations, and probable degree of knowledge."⁹² Important as this consideration was to the purposes of political journalism, it carried equal significance for literary criticism. In The Friend Coleridge addressed the problem of the "probability of injurious consequences from the communication of Truth" by reaffirming this initial "duty" of the author:

. . . if the Author have clearly and rightly established in his own mind the class of readers, to which he means to address his communications; and if both in this choice and in the particulars of the manner and matter of his work, he conscientiously observes all conditions which reason and conscience have been shewn to dictate, in relation to those for whom the work was designed; he will, in most instances, have effected his design and realized the desired circumscription (54-55).

The principle is again enunciated in his reaction to a contemporary review of 1814: "The writer of the illiberal article . . . among other uncharitable oversights forgot the first Duty of a candid Critic--that of asking, to whom & for whom was the Work written?"⁹³

John Colmer has noted the variations among the audiences

⁹²Kathleen Coburn, gen. ed., The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Bollingen Series 75, 6 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969-78) vol. 1: Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, p. 51.

⁹³"To John Prior Estlin," 5 April 1814, Letter 912, Letters 3: 465.

of Coleridge's political and philosophical journalism as well as suggesting reasons for his failure or success in reaching these contrasting audiences.⁹⁴ Certainly The Watchman and the Second Lay-Sermon were directed toward a heterogeneous group, men of "common education and information,"⁹⁵ and were executed (the latter especially, Coleridge thought) in a suitably "popular style." For the most part, however, Coleridge's audience, whether the topic was political, philosophical, or literary, remained homogeneous: learned, reflective, Christian, and unprejudiced individuals who could meet his intellectual rigor and, most of all, whom he believed he could affect. They are frequently described in his Letters and Notebooks and most explicitly in The Friend, often in contrast with the reading Public whose opinion was "Perdition." He addressed himself to the "least numerous," the "earnest impersonal Reader Who in the work forgets me and the world and himself."⁹⁶ If the number was small because "I have

⁹⁴ John Colmer, Coleridge Critic of Society, p. 174. Colmer finds the "strange blend" of philosophy, religion, and politics to be too difficult for Coleridge's readers, with the single exception of the Morning Post where he proved himself "capable of adapting his style and manner of delivery to the subject under discussion and the character of the public." There is a certain irony to Colmer's exception, knowing Coleridge's dread of newspaper writing which distracted him, he felt, from what he considered his essential work. See Letter 844, 7 December 1811, Letters 3: 352.

⁹⁵ "To T. G. Street," 22 March 1817, Letter 1048, Letters 3: 141.

⁹⁶ Notebooks 1 (1807-08): 3220.

addressed the soul, not the senses," it was all the more efficacious; for when "men of Learning write to men of Learning, & the number of Readers is small, then rise the Suns, Moons, and Stars out of the Chaos. . . ." ⁹⁷

The exclusiveness and the caliber of the audience of The Friend was firm in Coleridge's mind:

I do not write in this work for the multitude of men; but for Those, who either by Rank, or Fortune, or Official situation, or by Talents & Habits of Reflection, are to influence the multitude. . . . Now three fourths of English Readers are led to purchase periodical works, even those professedly literary, by the expectation of having these Passions [i.e. curiosity] gratified. . . . All these Readers I give up. ⁹⁸

Still, Coleridge goes to great lengths to address, instruct, and engage his readers; the first seven essays are devoted exclusively to the mutual responsibilities of both author and reader. Because the author and reader are essentially peers, "men of Learning," Coleridge's delineation of their responsibilities is tantamount to a characterization of their potential, if not existent, qualities. Implicit throughout Coleridge's reminders to the reader is their shared participation in an exclusive, valuable, high-principled world. Their experience of this work, it is implied, will solidify their life-long search for moral and intellectual excellence. Two extended metaphors which Coleridge presents in the second essay express the cooperation and reciprocity essential to

⁹⁷Notebooks 1 (January 1805): 3295.

⁹⁸"To Daniel Stuart," 14 December 1808, Letter 729, Letters 3: 141; cf. The Friend 1: 21.

this author-reader relationship. The first, taken from Erasmus, compares the reader of a book to a "well-behaved visitor" at a banquet:

The master of the feast exerts himself to satisfy all his guests; but if after all his care and pains there should still be something or other put on the table that does not suit this or that person's taste, they politely pass it over without noticing the circumstance, and command other dishes, that they may not distress their kind host, or throw any damp on his spirits (15n).

The admonition to the reader is clear: the politeness of the guest corresponds to Coleridge's critical dictum of viewing the work of art as a whole rather than focusing on uncharacteristic or infrequent defects. Presumably, with a combination of the host's care and the guest's sensibilities and tact, the banquet will be mutually enjoyable. Immediately following this opening Motto to the essay Coleridge presents his corresponding metaphors of the author's responsibility, thereby balancing the obligations:

The musician may tune his instrument in private, ere his audience have yet assembled: the architect conceals the foundation of his building beneath the superstructure. But an author's harp must be tuned in the hearing of those, who are to understand its after harmonies; the foundation stones of his edifice must lie open to common view, or his friends will hesitate to trust themselves beneath the roof (14).

Both the enjoyment of the banquet and of the harp music are, by definition, shared experiences: the greater the mutual participation of host and guest, musician and listener, the more beneficial the experience is for both. The relationship between author and reader, then, is essentially collaborative:

Coleridge most frequently, of course, refers to himself as "THE FRIEND," but also alternates with "fellow-labourer" or "guide." Thus, their responsibilities are, on the whole, equally balanced:

Where then a subject, that demands thought, has been thoughtfully treated, and with an exact and patient derivation from its principles, we must be willing to exert a portion of the same effort, and to think with the author, or the author will have thought in vain for us (25).

The reader is expected to apply rigorous thought and sustained attention to the well-reasoned and uncompromising truths which the author presents.

This reciprocity which Coleridge creates, this exclusive, challenging, and mutual endeavor toward the heights of Truth which he paints, functions as a kind of ethos. Coleridge has constructed, in effect, a shared identity for the author and reader which works toward the fulfillment of his purposes. Implicit in the reader's presumed decision to embark on this arduous journey is his belief, implanted by the author, that the required efforts are well-worth the result. The stringency of the reader's responsibility bespeaks the excellence of the work. Life would be easier, Coleridge states in his opening essay, if "we" could rest content with mere entertainment, if, like most men, we could heed the "whispers [of] worldly prudence" and forego intellectual or moral improvement. Far more convenient would it be, Coleridge writes, "if I could persuade myself

to take the advice, . . . if instead of perplexing my common sense with the flights of Plato, and of stiffening over the mediations of the Imperial Stoic [Marcus Aurelius], I had been labouring to imbibe the gay spirit . . ." (11,12). By the close of this initial essay the reader is masterfully, simultaneously praised and shamed into the ensuing effort.

I do not intend to suggest any slyness on Coleridge's part. His scorn for popularized philosophy and effortless learning stemmed from his adamant belief in intellectual reform. Moreover, he believed his readers capable of reaching "the summit and absolute principle of any one important subject" (55) by "severe thinking" or "gather[ing] strength by [the] exercise" (56) of their intellects. Perhaps most importantly, they had a responsibility to do so. This class of readers, the "Diamond-Sieves,"⁹⁹ men of Influence, would profit by what they read and enable others to profit by it also; their learning they could convert from "book-knowledge" into power. By affecting them deeply, Coleridge could fulfill the ultimate purpose of the work, "the hope of doing any real good."¹⁰⁰

Consequently, an important aspect of Coleridge's relation with his reader, in keeping with their cooperative bond, was the reader's intellectual self-sufficiency. The individual whom The Friend would profoundly move is not the

⁹⁹Notebooks 2 (1808-1811): 3242.

¹⁰⁰"To Samuel Purkis," 20 October 1809, Letter 789, Letters 1: 253.

"Sponge" or "Sand Glass" who derives nothing from his reading, nor the "Straining Bag" who retains only the defects of the work,¹⁰¹ but the man "whose knowledge and opinions had for the greater part been acquired experimentally," who was "on guard with respect to all speculative reasoning" yet not "insensible to the desirableness of principles" (4). Thus, while the author may act as our guide, "he cannot carry us on his shoulders: we must strain our own sinews, as he has strained his; and make firm footing on the smooth rock for ourselves. . . ." (55). In his effort to fulfill his purpose, then, to propel the effectiveness of the book into the world, Coleridge repeatedly urges his readers to "retire into themselves and make their own minds the objects of their steadfast attention" (21). His long held conviction concerning the test for a truth or philosophical system was this exacting and rigorous self-examination, this decision to "go into [our] own Nature, look at it stedfastly, & observe whether or not it or the part of it then in question, corresponds with the statement,"¹⁰² in short, to make our self an object of study. Our thought and attention to his principles will be fruitless without this constant self-reflection, since for Coleridge "the first step to knowledge

¹⁰¹Notebooks 2 (1808/1811): 3242.

¹⁰²Notebooks 1 (December 1803): 1758. cf. The Friend 2: 73. "But what are my metaphysics but the referring of the mind to its own consciousness for Truths indispensable to its own happiness."

or rather the previous condition of all insight into truth, is to dare commune with our very and permanent self" (115). Thus, his method in The Friend was "not so much to shew my Reader this or that fact, as to kindle his own torch for him, and leave it to himself to choose the particular objects, which he might wish to examine by its light" (16). The Friend, then, serves not only as an expression of Coleridge's moral and political principles, but also as a training manual for teaching his readers how to proceed on their own from principles to conclusions.¹⁰³ As in his lectures, he wished to "leave a sting behind--i.e. a disposition to study the subject anew, under the light of a new principle."¹⁰⁴

The rigors of self-reflection have, the reader assumes, already been experienced by the author. Coleridge wrote to Daniel Stuart concerning this work, "I bring the Results of a Life of intense Study, and unremitting Meditation--of Toil, and Travel, and great & unrepaired Expense,"¹⁰⁵ reiterating as much to his audience and more in his statement of authorial responsibilities. In view of our further study his self-imposed duties are worth quoting in full:

¹⁰³J. R. de J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism, p. 34.

¹⁰⁴"To J. Britton," 28 February 1819, Letter 1128, Letters 4: 924.

¹⁰⁵"To Daniel Stuart," 14 December 1808, Letter 729, Letters 3: 142.

As long therefore as I obtrude no unsupported assertions on my Readers; and as long as I state my opinions and the evidence which induced or compelled me to adopt them, with calmness and that diffidence in myself, which is by no means incompatible with a firm belief in the justness of the opinions themselves; while I attack no man's private character, from the truth of his doctrines, or the merits of his compositions, without detailing all my reasons and resting the result solely on the arguments adduced; while I moreover explain fully the motives of duty, which influenced me in resolving to institute such investigation; while I confine all asperity of censure, and all expressions of contempt, to gross violations of truth, honor, and decency, to the base corrupter and the detected slanderer; while I write on no subject, which I have not studied with my best attention, on no subject which my education and acquirements have incapacitated me from properly understanding; and above all while I approve myself, alike in praise and in blame, in close reasoning and in impassioned declamation, a steady FRIEND to the two best and surest friends of all men, TRUTH and HONESTY; I will not fear an accusation of either Presumption or Arrogance from the good and the wise, I shall pity it from the weak, and despise it from the wicked (32-33).

An impressive enumeration of self-assumed requirements expressed in a stately, rhythmical style, this is a deliberate and masterful self-presentation of a careful, judicious author who combines integrity with fearlessness, and logic with passion. Coleridge's fulfillment of these responsibilities (or his failure to meet them), since it has been treated extensively, is not our concern here. Rather, I wish to suggest that his statement of them constitutes an attempt to create an ethos, to further solidify the shared identity by, after making demands on his audience, proffering his more exacting self-demands. Moreover, the construction of this relationship is germane to the purpose of the work: not only his reasoning, but his engagement of the

reader as well is used to draw our attention from "expedients & short-sighted tho' quick-sighted Expedience" to essential moral principles. If we persevere in the "ascent," we ultimately share with Coleridge an unprejudiced, moral vision of truth.

In the fourth essay of The Friend Coleridge assures his readers:

with strictest truth . . . that with a pleasure combined with a sense of weariness I see the nigh approach of that point of my labours, in which I can convey my opinions and the workings of my heart without reminding the Reader obtrusively of myself (27).

The paradox of the end of the statement notwithstanding, Coleridge's authorial presence does fade to a degree as he delves into his political philosophy. He is not, however, altogether unobtrusive; the personal "I" dominates his discussions and often autobiographical incidents are used to introduce a topic or illustrate a point. It is in the "Landing-Places," however, that Coleridge's presence emerges most dramatically.

We recall that these intervals in the work were designed as "vacations of innocent entertainment" (16) if "in entertainment be included whatever delights the imagination or affects the generous passions," and that they were regarded by Coleridge as "means of persuading the human soul" (11). Strongly opposed to the common "craving for amusement, that is, to be away from the Muses," he nonetheless found, that after rigorous study, a "holiday with the Muses" (127n.) could be helpful to the reader. His criticism of

Wordsworth's Convention of Cintra demonstrates his insight into what we now know as reader psychology:

. . . I fear, that Readers even of Judgment may complain of a want of Shade & Background, that it is all foreground, all in hot tints--that the first note is pitched at the height of the Instrument, & never suffered to sink--that such depth of Feeling is so incorporated with depth of Thought, that the Attention is kept throughout at it's utmost Strain & Stretch--. . .
 . . .¹⁰⁶

It is in this light that Coleridge found biography and autobiography entertaining; they provided the reader a contrasting relief from theory and argument as well as a more personal involvement.¹⁰⁷ It is, I believe, significant that during his biographical sketches, specifically in the first and third "Landing-Places," Coleridge's presence becomes most intense and immediate to the reader.

What Coleridge called in The Friend "open-heartedness" is an additional authorial quality which we have reserved for consideration until now. Understandably, the notion of sincerity as a critical criterion causes many scholars to wince as the stereotype of Romantic effusiveness at the expense of craft looms its head. In defense of Coleridge's uncompromising belief that "above all things, an Author ought to be sincere to the public"¹⁰⁸ we may point to two

¹⁰⁶"To Daniel Stuart," 13 June 1809, Letter 767, Letters 3: 214.

¹⁰⁷See "To Thomas Allsop," 2 December 1818, Letter 1155, Letters 4: 889 and "To John Murray," 31 August 1814, Letter 947, Letters 3: 525 for his use of biography as entertainment.

¹⁰⁸"To William Godwin," 13 October 1800, Letter 358, Letters 1: 635.

facts. First, Coleridge strictly distinguished between "earnestness of feeling" and what he called "Oil." The latter could be effective, but amounted to manipulation:

How worldly men gain their purposes even with worldly men by that instinctive Belief of Sincerity hence (nothing immediately and passionately contradicting it) the effect of "with unfeigned esteem," "devotion" & the other smooth speeches of Letters all in short, that Sea officers call "Oil"---. . . .109

This was a defect of Gibbon's, "our greatest Historian," the "affectation of supposing every thing known beforehand to the reader, and thus carrying the insincere politeness of courtly conversation into the solemn chair of History. . .

."110 In direct opposition, authorial sincerity was a species of "Moral truth, [where] we involve likewise the intention of the speaker, that his words should correspond to his thoughts in the sense in which he expects them to be understood by others" (42). Secondly, that the distinction could be easily lost Coleridge recognized and consequently tried to refine his language beyond the "usual compliments and courtesies" (150). When revising The Friend he wrote,

It is very difficult, I find, to combine earnestness of feeling with fineness of ear, in the act of composition. You will have met with too many of these slovenlinesses in the style of the Friend. You would serve me by noticing them with your pencil as they occurred. . . .111

As Henri

¹⁰⁹Notebooks 2 (July-September 1805): 2659.

¹¹⁰Notebooks 3 (May 1810): 3823.

¹¹¹"To Hugh J. Rose," 19 November 1818, Letter 1148, Letters 4: 881-2.

Peyre maintains, the Romantic notion of authorial sincerity was not necessarily accurate truthfulness, but emotional intensity, "the restrained but explosive force of an uncommonly sensitive man pouring the whole of himself" into his expression.¹¹² Particularly in his essays on Luther and Ball Coleridge's intensity is striking, effecting a mutual emotional experience for both author and reader.

After a comparison of Erasmus and Voltaire and Luther and Rousseau to demonstrate that "men whose characters . . . appear widely dissimilar" (130) may yet cause parallel effects on their different ages, Coleridge narrows his focus to Martin Luther, examining his psyche and attempting to explain his "nightly apparitions." Within one paragraph, which opens with the effect of the age upon the man, Coleridge's style changes drastically as he warms in sympathy to Luther's solitary and unappreciated "fight against an Army of evil Beings. . ." (140). The first stylistic change is from expository, complex sentences to emphatic, balanced sentences interspersed with italicized words:

He was a Poet indeed, as great a Poet as ever lived in any age or country; but his poetic images were so vivid, that they mastered the Poet's own mind! He was possessed with them, as with substances distinct from himself: LUTHER did not write, he acted Poems. The Bible was a spiritual indeed but not a figurative armoury in his belief . . . (140).

Next, Coleridge switches to the present tense, creating an

¹¹²Henri Peyre, Literature and Sincerity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 130.

evocative description of Luther battling the darkness of his own inabilities:

Methinks I see him sitting, the heroic Student, in his Chamber in the Warteburg, with his midnight Lamp before him, seen by the late Traveller in the distant Plain . . . as a Star on the Mountain! Below it lies the Hebrew Bible open, on which he gazes, his brow pressing on his palm, brooding over some obscure Text, which he desires to make plain. . . . And he himself does not understand it! Thick darkness lies on the original Text: he counts the letters, he calls up the roots of each separate word, and questions them as the familiar Spirits of an Oracle. In vain! thick darkness continues to cover it! . . . With sullen and angry hope he reaches for the VULGATE, his old and sworn enemy. . . . Now--O thought of humiliation--he must entreat its aid. See! there has the sly spirit of apostacy worked-in a phrase. . . . This is the work of the Tempter! it is a cloud of darkness conjured up between the truth of the sacred letters and the eyes of his understanding, by the malice of the evil one, and for a trial of his faith! Must he then at length confess, must he subscribe the name of LUTHER to an exposition which consecrates a weapon for the hand of the idolatrous Hierarchy? Never! never! (140-41)

Simile, metaphor, personification, and alliteration, as well as a highly dramatic and suspenseful style create this vision which is later interrupted by Coleridge's direct address, "O honoured Luther! as easily mightest thou convert the whole City of Rome . . . as strike a spark of light from the words, and nothing but words, of the Alexandrine Version." In discouragement Luther succumbs to a "trance of slumber . . . [in which] the objects which really surround him form the place and scenery of his dream" and he hurls an ink-stand at the imagined Arch-fiend. Coleridge is completely understanding of Luther's state of mind where "what would have been mere thoughts before, now . . . shape and condense themselves into things, into realities!" (142).

The paragraph continues in the present tense, closing with Luther's later confusion about the reality of Satan's visitation and his discovery of the ink spot on his wall. With the abrupt opening in the following paragraph ("Such was Luther under the influences of the age and country in and for which he was born" [142]), the reader is returned from an immediate experience of the past to fixed time, from a seemingly irrational event to rational discourse, from a re-enactment of the past to an analysis of it. This momentary transport where we become present spectators ("See!" Coleridge commands) of a sixteenth-century occurrence is accomplished by Coleridge's heightened imagination and intensity. His empathy for Luther builds to an imaginative participation in his struggle which is equally shared by the reader. Coleridge believed that biography, like music, could effect this defeat of time; this passage might serve as a model of the genre's potential.

Although Coleridge's tribute to Sir Alexander Ball does not stylistically shift the past into the reader's present, it does solidify Coleridge's engagement with his audience as he draws us into his circle of reciprocity and indebtedness. The immediate stimulus for this biographical tribute, Coleridge suggests, is his discovery the day before of Ball's death.¹¹³ What follows is Coleridge's impassioned exposure of his grief and indebtedness: "I was moved

¹¹³This section under consideration is an 1818 addition to the earlier biographical sketch.

I was moved Ah! how could I be otherwise than affected. . . . it is not by tears that I ought to mourn for the loss of Sir Alexander Ball" (533-34). Then immediately his personal grief is altered to include his audience:

He was a man above his age: but for that very reason the age has the more need to have the master-features of his character pourtrayed and preserved. This I feel it my duty to attempt. . . . But custom requires that something should be said: it is a duty and a debt which we owe to ourselves and to mankind, not less than to his memory. . . ." (534, 537). (Emphasis added.)

Again, the speaker has positioned himself as an intermediary between the man of genius and the reader. Coleridge's duty and desire is to extend the wisdom which he has inherited to his present audience, to widen, in effect, the circle of Sir Alexander Ball's influence. The biography functions then, both as a tribute to the past and as an attempt to affect the future. Occasionally, Coleridge even uses Ball's character as a tool for promoting future political reforms: "Sir Alexander Ball would likewise, it is probably, urge . . ." (569). But essentially the purpose of the essay is to offer the reader "useful knowledge" (357), to portray the embodiment of moral principles in Sir Alexander Ball's life. This is accomplished, certainly, in the portrait itself, but also by the "felt presence" of the portrait painter, which includes both the biographical subject and the reader in its embrace.

Walter Jackson Bate's observation that Coleridge "became most completely alive and the resources of his mind

most open"¹¹⁴ when he wrote vicariously in defense or praise of another placed in the foreground seems applicable here. Coleridge confided in Josiah Wedgwood that he chose to write the life of Lessing because "it would give me an opportunity of conveying under a better name, than my own ever will be, opinions, which I deem of the highest importance."¹¹⁵ From the rhetorical point of view it is evident that Coleridge's "open-heartedness" is strongly elicited by biography, effecting an intensely immediate authorial presence.

Many of the dynamics and concerns of The Friend are patently operative in the Biographia. Biography, as we have seen, is teleological, with the life of the man of genius serving as an exemplum of a truth which surpasses time. The mutual responsibilities of author and reader are necessary prerequisites to the reader's present understanding of the vision of an individual genius. Moreover, Coleridge's authorial presence contributes to the fulfillment of his purpose, for in Coleridgean biography the reader is part of a kind of nexus of "presences": it is the rhetorical immediacy of the biographer which, while eliciting our attention and response, also evokes the presence of his subject, bringing him into our shared emotional proximity. In the Biographia a similar company is created; sometimes the third party is Southey, or Wordsworth, and sometimes it is

¹¹⁴Walter Jackson Bate, Coleridge, p. 37.

¹¹⁵"To Josiah Wedgwood," 21 May 1799, Letter 283, Letters 1: 519.

the autobiographical subject, Coleridge's youthful self. Finally, in the Biographia a movement of time similar to that of Coleridgean biography is accomplished: in fulfillment of his intention of proposing a revolutionary and futurist genial criticism based on psychological and philosophical principles, Coleridge "weds [his] Past in the Present to some prepared and corresponsive Future" (130).

PART III

THE DIMENSIONS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The form chosen by the author, the genre to which he submits, determines and infuses the ensuing work of art. This study addresses the question: to what end did Coleridge choose autobiography as a frame, however sketchy and intermittent its execution, for an expression of his critical principles? It remains to be demonstrated in our explication of the Biographia that autobiography afforded Coleridge a means of bringing his audience into close personal proximity, the modesty and gentle irony of his self-exposure creating a bond with his reader which continues to be operative throughout the work. Moreover, there are moments in Coleridge's autobiographical sketches where the drama "of a mind turning upon itself to behold its own being"¹¹⁶ shatters the controlled, selective autobiography. These infrequent but compelling moments when Coleridge the autobiographer appears immediately affected by his self-imposed autobiographical act also create an intensely

¹¹⁶Patricia M. Ball, The Central Self: A Study in Romantic and Victorian Imagination (London: Athlone Press, 1968), p. 100.

personal bond between the exposed author and his witness. In addition to this bond of identification which the autobiographical rhetoric accomplishes, Coleridge's personal narrative is also designed to fulfill the goal of the Biographia: Coleridge's autobiography, like his biography, is meant to be read as an exemplum, a case-study, if you will, which provides the personal foundation of his theory of the Imagination, the core of his humanistic approach to literature. We may consider Coleridge's statements concerning the autobiographical form, its personal roots and its philosophical implications, as indicative of its role in the Biographia.

With the publication of his Letters and Notebooks came the discovery that Coleridge's philosophical exploration of self-consciousness was grounded in a far more pervasive and personal foundation than hitherto realized. His unceasing self-observation fills the Notebooks and becomes, through refinement and generalization, the basis of his psychological approach to aesthetics and philosophy. The most elemental motive for the recorded self-investigation seems to be the moral and intellectual improvement which Coleridge believed followed close upon accurate self-knowledge. Throughout the Notebooks Coleridge admonishes himself to renew his self-analysis, to "truly . . . look into myself, & to begin the serious work of Self-amendment,"¹¹⁷ to pursue self-

¹¹⁷Notebooks 2 (13 May 1804): 2091.

observation "with . . . [the] psychological minuteness of inner Soul-Biography."¹¹⁸ His self-probing is so unrelenting and constant throughout his life that its transition from the personal and private realm to the status of the first principle governing his metaphysics is difficult to pinpoint. The doctrine of self-consciousness (Coleridge employs the metaphor of searching the "Soul with a Telescope . . . & add[ing] to the Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds")¹¹⁹ permeates virtually all his intellectual systems, whether metaphysics, theology, politics, or epistemology, for he believed that

. . . all things that surround us, and all things that happen to us, have (each doubtless its own providential purpose, but) all one common final cause: namely, the increase of Consciousness, in such wise, that whatever part of the terra incognita of our nature the increased consciousness discovers, our will may conquer and bring into subjection to itself under the sovereignty of reason.¹²⁰

This basic and all-encompassing activity of the mind he claimed as the core of "my metaphysics . . . [which are] merely the referring of the mind to its own consciousness for Truths indispensable to its own happiness."¹²¹ As we have noted, he demanded corresponding continual self-knowledge on the part of the "learned" reader. Finally, Coleridge

¹¹⁸Notebooks 2 (9 September 1805): 2667.

¹¹⁹Notebooks 1 (January 1804): 1798.

¹²⁰"The Statesman's Manual," Lay Sermons, ed. R. J. White, Collected Works, 89.

¹²¹The Friend 2: 73.

based his definition of the primary Imagination upon his concept of self-consciousness. I. A. Richards finds that "the rest of his philosophy is a verbal machine for exhibiting what the exercise of this postulate ['know thyself'] . . . yielded."¹²²

I find, in considering Coleridge's theory of self-knowledge, a metaphysical underpinning for the art of autobiography, and that Coleridge's framing of his exposition of the Imagination in the autobiographical mode is not only appropriate to his epistemology of self-knowledge, but is meant to be organic to the work. He stated: "In my literary Life you will find a sketch of the subjective Pole of the Dynamic Philosophy; the rudiments of Self-construction, barely enough to let a thinking mind see what it is like. . . ."¹²³ It is uncertain whether we can equate "sketch" as it is used here with his autobiographical "sketches;" nonetheless, the autobiographical act is essentially one of self-construction. The autobiographer takes a position with himself, objectifies himself in order to construct an "artful" self which he presents as a "subject" of a literary text. The act of autobiography involves both a study and a creation, for the self-knowledge which the autobiographer executes is not fixed or given, but is continually altered and stimulated by his "constructing . . . [himself] objectively to

¹²²I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, p. 46.

¹²³"To C. A. Tulk," September 1817, Letter 1077, Letters 4: 767.

. . . [himself]" (1:183).¹²⁴ I wish to suggest (and will explore later in more depth) that autobiography is an effective metaphor for Coleridge's theory of self-knowledge, or the primary Imagination, which

. . . treats knowing as a kind of making, i.e. the bringing into being of what is known. . . . and with an implication that the self that has to be known is a self that is created in the act of endeavouring to know it.¹²⁵

For the moment, we may look to Coleridge's personal statements outside the Biographia for a sense of the context of his choice of the autobiographical frame.

What Coleridge called the "inner Soul-Biography" of his Notebooks occurs in a more formal and composed manner in his letters to intimate friends. A few letters remain which are purely and deliberately autobiographical. More frequently, he interposes an autobiographical account into a longer explanatory letter. For both occasions the impulses he expresses are dual--his need for the recipient's understanding and the deepening of his own self-understanding, two motives basic to communication, but particularly to autobiography with its dual audience of self and reader. Although the two purposes frequently overlap, their distinctions point to an illuminating duality with Coleridge's self-presentation.

¹²⁴See James Olney, Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography; Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography.

¹²⁵I. A. Richards, pp. 49-50.

Those letters expressing Coleridge's desire for empathy often portray his great openness of heart, a quality, we have noted, which he wished to reveal to his public readers. "[U]nbosoming myself to you," he wrote in a history of his opium addiction to John Prior Estlin, was "slight proof" of his gratitude for Estlin's "warm and zealous friendship when I was nakedly my own undisciplined Self, friendless, fameless, fortuneless. . . ." ¹²⁶ Similarly, Thomas Poole received a series of five autobiographical letters in 1797-98 because, for Coleridge, "you, MY BEST FRIEND! have a right to the narration." ¹²⁷ To Sir George Beaumont, to whom Coleridge could not "endure to make up Letters of mere Thoughts & Generalizations . . . without telling you any thing of my own self, however near my heart," he wished "to write my whole Life . . . including my Trials in a series of Letters." ¹²⁸ Coleridge's sense of his "Trials" introduces the note of self-defense, occasionally heard in the autobiographical accounts when his self-exploration is colored by an expressed need for forbearance. It was sympathy far more than praise that he coveted: "In Sympathy alone I found at once Nourishment and Stimulus: and for Sympathy alone did

¹²⁶"To John Prior Estlin," 3 December 1808, Letter 719, Letters 3: 127.

¹²⁷"To Thomas Poole," 6 February 1797, Letter 174, Letters 1: 302; elsewhere he addressed Poole as "another Self." See "To Thomas Poole," 23 March 1801, Letter 388, Letters 2: 709.

¹²⁸"To Sir George Beaumont," 30 January 1804, Letter 546, Letters 2: 1049-50.

my heart crave."¹²⁹ Thus he writes to Poole, "what I am depends on what I have been; . . . it will perhaps make you behold with no unforgiving or impatient eye those weaknesses and defects in my character, which so many untoward circumstances have concurred to plant there."¹³⁰ Yet the tone of self-defense is most often offset by the simultaneous admission of his faults, evidenced in this promise to his brother, written during Coleridge's escapade in the Dragoons, of "a minute history of my thoughts, and actions for the last two years of my Life--A most severe and faithful history of the heart would it have been--the Omniscient knows it."¹³¹ Often Coleridge's admission of past errors precedes his self-defense against present injustice; the initial autobiographical account is meant to establish his objectivity. For example, in defending himself against the misuse of a mock sonnet published without his consent, Coleridge introduces his self-justification with a lengthy review of his youthful "political sins," acknowledging these "former errors" with insight and without defensiveness.¹³² "I am prepared to suffer without discontent the consequences of my follies and

¹²⁹"To Thomas Allsop," 2 December 1818, Letter 1155, Letters 4: 888.

¹³⁰"To Thomas Poole," 6 February 1797, Letter 174, Letters 1: 302.

¹³¹"To George Coleridge," 11 February 1794, Letter 34, Letters 1: 64.

¹³²"To Mary Cruikshank," September 1807, Letter 655, Letters 3: 26.

mistakes," he wrote to his brother George, whose disapproval he felt keenly. But Coleridge is equally concerned with a careful distinction between his alleged indolence and his self-described withdrawal from "immediate causes."¹³³ There exists too a meaningful distinction between defensiveness, which elicits a sense of one's own righteousness, and self-accuracy, which is aimed at understanding. At the risk of assuming the role of Coleridge's apologist, it seems clear that his concern was, for the most part, with the latter, with "rectifying some misstatements, both concerning my opinions and the events of my life,"¹³⁴ and with "render[ing] a good Account of what may have appeared . . . a distracting Manifoldness in my Objects & Attainments---."¹³⁵ The purpose of the Biographia was, in part, "to notice & prove . . . [the] falsehood" of the charge of squandering his potential; yet Coleridge's sense of the "delicacy" of publicly answering such personal attacks is evident in his frequently expressed fear of eliciting the charge of self-conceit.¹³⁶

The vanity of authors and the correspondent attention of

¹³³"To George Coleridge," 10 March 1798, Letter 234, Letters 1: 397.

¹³⁴"To Author of 'Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk'," November 1819, Letter 1212, Letters 4: 970.

¹³⁵"To Thomas Poole," 15 January 1804, Letter 536, Letters 2: 1036.

¹³⁶"To Lord Byron," 22 October 1815, Letter 981, Letters 4: 604; "To William Worship," 22 April 1819, Letter 1194, Letters 4: 937.

reviewers to "personality" was deplored by Coleridge, who disliked publishing anything that "brings me forward in a personal way."¹³⁷ Yet his sensitivity to the charge of indolence partially stimulated his autobiographical sketches; invariably, an earnest disclaimer of self-interest follows.¹³⁸

Coleridge found autobiography written "with honesty, not disguising the feelings" to be inherently intriguing.

"I could inform the dullest author," he wrote to Poole,

how he might write an interesting book--let him relate the events of his own Life. . . . I never yet read even a Methodist's 'Experience' in the Gospel Magazine without receiving instruction & amusement; & I should almost despair of that Man, who could peruse the life of John Woolman without an amelioration of Heart.¹³⁹

Within his autobiographical fragments a pattern emerges complementary to his need to be understood: the increased self-understanding that accompanied his verbal "reflections on the past" was not only "interesting . . . in the history of my own mind,"¹⁴⁰ but further provided a stimulus for extending his knowledge of humanity, for exploring the dynamic interrelation between unique individuality and common

¹³⁷"To Thomas Poole," 16 March 1801, Letter 387, Letters 2: 707; cf. "To William Wordsworth," 30 May 1815, Letter 969, Letters 4: 571.

¹³⁸This charge plagued Coleridge all his life. See "To Hugh J. Rose," 23 May 1818, Letter 1136, Letters 4: 862; "To William Sotheby," 3 June 1831, Letter 1711, Letters 6: 865.

¹³⁹"To Thomas Poole," 6 February 1797, Letter 174, Letters 1: 302.

¹⁴⁰"To William Godwin," 30 April 1807, Letter 645, Letters 3: 12.

experience. His focus on the formation of "my particular mind"¹⁴¹ is unquestionable: one can discover approximately ten distinct references in his publications, letters, and notebooks to an anticipated autobiography. This self-interest is often balanced, however, even within the autobiographical fragments, by an opposing movement away from self to a more comprehensive and psychologically objective concern. So, in the fourth autobiographical letter to Poole in the midst of tracing the habituation of "my mind . . . to the Vast" to his reading and his father's influence, he abruptly shifts his focus from himself as a child to all children: "Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii?--I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative." Self-interest stimulates a wider concern as he goes on to compare two kinds of minds, those "rationally educated" and those exposed to imagination. Exposing the youthful mind to "a love of 'the Great', & 'the Whole'" finally fosters the adult perception of a comprehensive unity in the universe.¹⁴² A similar topic elicits the same movement from autobiographical analysis to objective consideration: in describing "trains of Feeling" which act on him "underneath . . . Consciousness,"

¹⁴¹"To Thomas Poole," March 1797, Letter 179, Letters 1:312.

¹⁴²"To Thomas Poole," 16 October 1797, Letter 210, Letters 1:352.

Coleridge writes to Poole that "all Feelings which particularly affect myself, as myself . . . tho' I feel them en masse, I do not & cannot make them the objects of a distinct attention." The self-probing continues with a complex degree of psychological insight. He concludes, "This is an interesting Fact of Character."¹⁴³ A month later he wrote to Mrs. Coleridge on the same topic, this time contrasting himself with Poole, who can "do one thing at a time, but . . . can seldom think but of one thing at a time." Again he concludes, "The Detail of the Good & the Bad of the two different Makes of Mind would form a not uninteresting Brace of Essays in a Spectator or Guardian."¹⁴⁴ Coleridge's acute sense of self-observation and analysis, then, did not confine him to solipsistic individualism, but stimulated intellectual, impartial, and wide application.¹⁴⁵ The movement we have traced here is from introspection to extension, from focus on his "particular mind" to the mind of man, a pattern we shall see operating in the Biographia.

The inference is, in contradiction to the image of a self-absorbed, defensive Coleridge, that his self-knowledge afforded him a means for understanding and extrapolating a

¹⁴³"To Thomas Poole," 30 January 1804, Letter 544, Letters 2:1046.

¹⁴⁴"To Mrs. S. T. Coleridge," 19 February 1804, Letter 561, Letters 2:1069.

¹⁴⁵Coleridge also proceeds deductively, using autobiographical instance to illustrate a general theory. See "To Isaac Wood," 19 January 1798, Letter 224, Letters 1:375.

sense of "common consciousness,"¹⁴⁶ that self-awareness permitted him a release from self-conscription. It is in this light that we may more easily understand his belief that the "disinterestedness of phrase" intended by avoidance of the authorial "I" is "commensurate with selfishness of feeling"¹⁴⁷ and conversely, that his presentation of the "opinions and workings of my heart" could yet be free from "conscious selfishness."¹⁴⁸ We may infer, then, that in his self-consciousness Coleridge did objectify himself to the point that he found the workings of his mind "an interesting Fact of Character." The absence here of the possessive pronoun "my" is, I believe, indicative of Coleridge's ability to make his mind an object of study. (And his face as well. In comparing his portrait with the King's he wrote, "The exceeding Weakness, Strengthlessness, in my face, was ever painful to me--not as my own face--but as a face.")¹⁴⁹ The self-deprecating and ironic humor which underscores his autobiographical letters to Poole also suggests a certain distanced self-perspective, as do his many self-allegories, particularly the self-image of "a Rock with its' summit just

¹⁴⁶Biographia Literaria 1:64.

¹⁴⁷"Preface to 1796 'Poems on Various Subjects'," Complete Poetical & Dramatic Works, ed. J. D. Campbell (London: Macmillan & Co., 1938), p. 537.

¹⁴⁸Friend 1:27.

¹⁴⁹"To J. J. Morgan," 16 August 1814, Letter 945A, Letters 6:1029.

raised above the surface of some Bay or Strait in the Arctic Sea. . . ."¹⁵⁰ The self-imagining which is performed before the reader of the Biographia, then, can be frequently traced to his expressions of self-consciousness in his private journals and personal letters.

It is not so much a sense of single individuality that Coleridge found "useful" in autobiography as a comprehensive sense of "humanity," by which he meant "whatever contradistinguishes man." He believed that a sense of humanity could be found "common to all periods of Life, which each period from childhood to Age has it's own way of representing." To capture that essential sense of childhood, or youth, or adulthood, while conveying a common humanity, Coleridge urged:

Let each of us then relate that which has left the deepest impression on his mind, at whatever period of his life he may have seen, heard or read it; but let him tell it in accordance with the present state of his Intellect and Feelings, even as he has, perhaps . . . acted it over again by the parlour Fireside of a rustic Inn, with the Fire & the Candle for his only Companions.¹⁵¹

Coleridge wrote to Byron that he thought of himself "representatively & for psychological purposes,"¹⁵² two inroads to the self which not only free autobiography from narcissism

¹⁵⁰"To an Unknown Correspondent," November 1819, Letter 1215, Letters 4:974.

¹⁵¹"To Thomas Allsop," 8 April 1820, Letter 1229, Letters 5:35.

¹⁵²"To Lord Byron," 22 October 1815, Letter 981, Letters 4:604.

but which render this self-conscious genre capable of suggesting a universally human perspective. His commitment to seeing everything not in isolation, but in relation extended to his concept of individuality or the self. "Individuality," the only "possible definition of Life . . . is impossible without the assumption of a universal Life. . . ." ¹⁵³

To Coleridge self-consciousness does not involve our modern notion of private isolation, but rather an extension of personal boundaries, an expansion of the self to include the larger life surrounding and defining that self. In The Friend he urges, "Never let it be forgotten that every human being bears in himself that indelible something which belongs equally to the whole species as well as that particular modification of it which individualises him." ¹⁵⁴ The autobiographical sections of the Biographia reflect Coleridge's expressed demands of this genre; we may anticipate, then, his movement beyond merely personal interest but conveyed with a style "warm from my heart," ¹⁵⁵ and the reader's corresponding experience of "a consciousness of Self so strong, that self-consciousness melts away." ¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³"To James Gillman," 10 November 1816, Letter 1033, Letters 4:690.

¹⁵⁴The Friend, 1:206.

¹⁵⁵T. M. Raysor, ed., Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 2:82.

¹⁵⁶Potter, Coleridge and S.T.C., p. 16.

CHAPTER II

The rhetorical approach isolates certain factors which, in our experience of the literary text, function dependently in a complex interrelation. Literature may be said to operate on the level of a rhetorical transaction involving three interacting elements: the rhetorical context or the extra-linguistic factors that fostered this literary act, the rhetorical strategies used by the author, and their rhetorical effects or the audience's responses. Each is, of course, a compound process and each process is attendant upon the others; "to vary one is . . . to produce concomitant variations in the other two."¹ For a description of the first component we must focus outside the text on biography or history, and with the third we enter the realm of the psychology of reader response. Nonetheless, the extra-literary situation which gave rise to the work becomes implicit in the text itself, and the intended or desired audience response becomes a determinant of future strategies. Coleridge's extra-textual statements concerning the stimulus of the Biographia become purpose statements in the work; we may consider his comments in letters as a context for

¹Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 135.

Since its publication in 1800 Coleridge had held significant disagreements with Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" while retaining the highest admiration for his genius. Moreover, the public and private alliance of the two men, as well as Southey, was easily transformed by the contemporary literary society into a school of poetic theory, a classification which Coleridge attributed to their "not hating or envying each other" and their ability to "take pleasure in each other's welfare---& reputation."² Two aims of Coleridge's eventually merged--to publish his principles of poetry and to distinguish himself from Wordsworth. Had Coleridge written the Preface, as originally intended, presumably the first goal would have been accomplished and the second unnecessary. But by 1802 the two motives were corollaries, and all other expressed purposes of the Biographia fall under this twofold but synthesized aim. The "radical Difference"³ in theory between Wordsworth and Coleridge, however, was further compounded by Coleridge's sustained admiration for Wordsworth's poetry which, for Coleridge, remained thankfully free from any adherence to Wordsworth's own theory. In addition, the alleged classification of the "Lake Poets" was not merely "impertinent" to Coleridge, but decidedly pejorative, eliciting his

²"To Sir George & Lady Beaumont," 12 August 1803, Letter 511, Letters 2: 965.

³"To William Sotheby," 13 July 1802, Letter 444, Letters 2: 812.

indignation against anonymous and personal reviews which was to foment throughout his life. The complexity of Coleridge's position is evident: he wished to differentiate between his philosophically grounded theory of poetry and Wordsworth's insufficient theory as well as to defend their personal alliance; to demonstrate simultaneously Wordsworth's poetic genius while arguing the superiority and comprehensiveness of his own principles; to settle the "controversy" while characterizing Wordsworth as the true poet. Finally, an additional complexity muddies the purpose. Coleridge felt compelled to disprove the "often and public denunciation of having wasted my time in idleness,"⁴ to defend himself to the anonymous and known detractors, the most formidable of the latter company being Wordsworth himself.

Coleridge's statements concerning the anticipated reception of the Biographia demonstrate a conflict apparently inherent in his purpose. He feared that his "reasonings may not please Wordsworth," but was "convinced, that the detection of the faults in his Poetry is indispensable to a rational appreciation of his Merits."⁵ His "Duty" to himself "and to the Public, in . . . completely subverting the Theory & in proving that the Poet himself has never acted

⁴"To John Hookham Frere," 2 July 1816, Letter 1014, Letters 4: 646.

⁵"To Daniel Stuart," 7 October 1815, Letter 977, Letters 4: 591.

on it except in particular Stanzas"⁶ took precedence, he felt, over Wordsworth's anticipated displeasure. Nor did Coleridge foresee any success in satisfying either "Wordsworth or Wordsworth's Detractors;" nonetheless, he felt "a true philosophical Critique" and a "fair statement of the Facts" was necessary.⁷ Coleridge's purpose, then, both for its anticipated lack of success and for its contrary directions, seems from the outset potentially troublesome. He stated in 1817 that his "main motive and continued impulse was to secure, as far as in me lay, an intelligent admiration to Mr. Wordsworth's Poems,"⁸ while a year earlier the first of his "chief purposes" in this work described as "Biographical sketches of my own literary Life; and of my opinions . . ."⁹ was to "defend myself" against the charge of idleness.¹⁰ His multiple purpose demanded a precarious balance among different, if not contrary, forces of interest. Consequently, in the Biographia we encounter various stances adopted by Coleridge, dictated not only by the changing subject matter but by his intricate mosaic of feelings concerning most of the topics, particularly himself and

⁶"To R. H. Brabant," 29 July 1815, Letter 972, Letters 4: 578.

⁷"To William Sotheby," 31 January 1816, Letter 993, Letters 4: 620.

⁸"To Derwent Coleridge," July 1817, Letter 1071, Letters 4: 576.

⁹Biographia Literaria 1: n.p.

¹⁰"To John Hookham Frere," 2 July 1816, Letter 1014, Letters 4: 646.

Wordsworth. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the Biographia lies in discovering how to "take" it, in the frequent realignment of our expectations of a genre with the variety of internal forms we encounter. Furthermore, Coleridge's construction of his audience shares whatever difficulties lie in his heterogeneous purpose. In addition to the formidable audience of his detractors or doubters, which included not only reviewers but also Wordsworth and Byron, his ostensible and more immediate audience is "young men of Genius and Literature"¹¹ whom he addresses as "reader" and whom he approaches with the serious urgings and disarming personalism which were operative in The Friend.

The title and the opening motto of the Biographia Literaria, considered as part of the rhetorical strategy, establish the author's intended genre and the relative positions of author and reader within that genre.¹² The selectivity of this autobiography, limited to "sketches" and further focused on the author's literary and intellectual life, suggests a correlative selectivity of approach. The reader is not to expect a fully drawn self-portrait, nor a comprehensive view of domestic and social experience, but a selective review of the past to demonstrate "what seeds of the future it held."¹³ This type of autobiography, which

¹¹"To Mr. Fryce," 14 April 1816, Letter 1003, Letters 4: 633.

¹²Mansell, "Unsettling the Colonel's Hash," p. 121.

¹³Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p. 110.

carries its own inherent limitations and focus, had become something of a literary tradition since the late eighteenth century when "it came gradually to be thought that a literary career might naturally be concluded by the publication, often posthumous, of a volume or sketch describing the origin of the author's ideas and the genesis of each of his works."¹⁴ By the nineteenth century Wayne Shumaker finds that autobiographical sketches "often served as introductions to collected works" intended to "summarize intellectual or spiritual history . . . in terms of actual achievements."¹⁵ Although participating in this tradition, Coleridge also departed from it in the Biographia; the emphasis on "solid factual data" which Shumaker finds necessary to such a concise autobiography is not characteristic here, perhaps because Coleridge's literary life far surpassed his career accomplishments. But the focus of this autobiography orients the reader's expectations: the "life" we shall encounter, while internally formed, has existed in the public domain; the authorial reflexiveness we anticipate as primarily intellectual, concerning writings and "opinions"; and the center of the work is not to be the personality of the man, but his experience of literature and the development of his thought. As Shumaker says of Trollope's literary autobiography:

¹⁴Shumaker, English Autobiography, p. 26.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 63.

He would reveal only those aspects of his life which had exercised a shaping influence on his literary career. . . . Everything but literature would be secondary--background and point of departure, not core and goal. If Trollope's purpose had been to draw a portrait of himself, he would have set to work in a different manner.¹⁶

The purpose of the ensuing literary act, implicit in the title of the Biographia, is to relay the story of a life-long experience of literature.

Goethe figures as the first instrument: the personal bond of friendship, good will, and intellectual communion expressed in the opening motto implicitly extends to Coleridge and his reader, including them in a literary heritage of generosity of spirit, guidance, and enlightenment:

Little call as he may have to instruct others, he wishes nevertheless to open out his heart to such as he either knows or hopes to be of like mind with himself, but who are widely scattered in the world: he wishes to knit anew his connexions with his oldest friends, to continue those recently formed, and to win other friends among the rising generation for the remaining course of his life. He wishes to spare the young those circuitous paths, on which he himself had lost his way (l: n.p.).

The fellowship encompasses all generations from the "oldest friends" to those "among the rising generation," and the impulse from the author to the reader "of like mind" is characterized by modesty and altruism. Coleridge's translation of Goethe demonstrates meaningful emphases: for the literal translation of "communicate" Coleridge substitutes the characteristic "to open out his heart," for the less emotional "to take up again the relations" he uses "to knit

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 160, 163.

anew his connexions," and the "roundabout ways on which he himself strayed" is intensified by Coleridge to "those circuitous paths, on which he himself had lost his way."¹⁷

Through this motto Coleridge has characterized the relationship between author and reader, conveying their mutual positions and roles and creating a shared identity. The identification effected here is both emotional and erudite: it is not any pragmatic sense of self-interest that is appealed to but participation in a literary fellowship which extends beyond this text, a community where "heart" and "mind" are "instructed," friendships solidified, and confusion forestalled.

The opening sentence of the Biographia conveys the author's standpoint: although mildly puzzled, Coleridge is essentially disinterested and passive concerning the literary notoriety which has been his "lot." Coleridge's initial self-presentation portrays an unambitious, reluctant, and unworldly author accustomed to living in "retirement and distance . . . both from the literary and political world." This traditional "disclaimer of personal importance,"¹⁸ designed to forestall the charge of vanity suggested by the autobiographical position, also controls the reader's expectations. Since Coleridge claims that the "least of what I have written concerns myself personally" (1:1), we do not

¹⁷"Notes," Notebooks 2 (1807-08): 3221.

¹⁸Shumaker, p. 66.

anticipate a thorough tracing of his established public achievement. Rather, we infer that our author has been compelled to emerge from his modest and private domain into the arena of public "controversy" for what must be a more crucial reason than a public self-portrait. What Coleridge impersonally calls the "narration" is, paradoxically, not the end of this literary biography; his personal reflections are "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" (1:1). The autobiography, then, is to function in a dual capacity: as a structural device it is meant to give "a continuity to the work," and as a genre it is used to convey to the reader the experiential process by which the author arrived at conclusive intellectual principles. The "unworldliness" of Coleridge's literary life defines his autobiographical point of view. Thus, his present reentry into the literary milieu retains the aura of the untainted aloofness of past retirement. This element of his ethos is, of course, to Coleridge's advantage, securing for him the position of personal impartiality in the midst of public controversy, rendering his autobiographical sketches free from ulterior motives.

Coleridge's recounting of his early venture into the literary world suggests an accurate self-perspective, for his estimate of his poetic incapacities implies the corresponding development of his critical powers. His present

position enables him to view former praise and criticism with detachment while retaining a certain fondness for his youthful attempts. Coleridge openly admits his youthful neglect of poetic form: "My mind was not then sufficiently disciplined to receive the authority of others;" "I forgot to enquire;" "My judgement was stronger, than were my powers of realizing its dictates." Moreover, his present, altered realization has been sustained by a continuity of insight. His concentration on his faults not only conveys his judiciousness, but also, by his present charting of them, implies the process implicit in the refinement of judgement. As a young man, his keen awareness of the flaws of "turgidness of diction, and a profusion of double epithets" as well as his lack of success in correcting them, directly contributed to his retreat from the literary world: "From that period to the date of the present work I have published nothing, with my name, which could by any possibility have come before the board of anonymous criticism." But the youthful insight that "an austerer and more natural style" was superior remains "not less clear . . . at present," and his attempt to correct the disparity between poetic form and content continues (1:2-4).

Implicit in all autobiography is this juxtaposition of two temporal planes, "the period being described and . . . the moment of writing; or more than two, if one wishes to take into consideration the fact that the latter includes

awareness drawn from the whole of the preceding life."¹⁹ Coleridge's present perspective of his 1794 literary debut, a point of view which encompasses a continuum of "pasts," is certainly not unorthodox. However, two aspects of this opening reminiscence deserve attention. First, Coleridge begins in medias res. His decision to begin his literary autobiography with his initial publication (and not, for example, his first reading or his initial education) underscores the significance of this present publication, the first interruption of his sustained literary silence.²⁰ The Biographia, which he designates as his second signed literary publication, may be said to represent a new stage in Coleridge's literary life. The "present work" constitutes his reentry into the literary world and, by implication, signifies his renewed faith in affecting that world. At the same time, the autobiographical form is an enactment of a rediscovery of the self. The Biographia, then, formally expresses Coleridge's renewed responsibility toward his literary "self," while its publication constitutes a reaffirmation of his participation in the milieu of literary study. In other words, for Coleridge this work was a "comeback";

¹⁹Shumaker, pp. 112-113.

²⁰Shawcross points out that the years of silence actually span 1797 (the second edition of "Poems upon Various Subjects") to 1813. Coleridge excluded Remorse, though we cannot know whether the oversight was conscious. We may presume that in his own mind Remorse did not merit inclusion in his "writings" which could rightfully have "come before the board of anonymous criticism."

the autobiographical re-collection of himself is a strikingly appropriate form.

Secondly, Coleridge's opening self-evaluation, designed to trace the development of his present critical powers, concentrates on his past faults, reading more like a confession than a defense. The author's immediate treatment of his youthful ignorance and mistakes suggests the essentially experiential nature of knowledge; the attention given to his faults intimates their contributory role in his present criticism. Far from being denied or minimized, these youthful faults are presented as organic to his intellectual development. Also, Coleridge's alacrity in acknowledging and evaluating his former offenses functions rhetorically as a self-presentation to the reader, suggesting his qualifications for the ensuing work, namely, self-awareness, modesty, and a willingness to change. The reader, then, holds this opening image of the author in his mind, anticipating a developmental autobiography with emphasis on the author's progression from one state of being to another.²¹

Coleridge's deference and respect for the reader expressed in the opening pages of the Biographia characterize his authorial role, one which Walter Bate describes as "the benevolent and understanding usher, a role he was to fulfill brilliantly in the literary criticism."²² Although

²¹Shumaker, p. 86.

²²Walter Jackson Bate, Coleridge, p. 50.

the reader is in the position of being "instruct[ed]," the emphasis in the selection from Goethe is on the warmth and good will emanating from the author to his audience. The shared identity effected here is essentially "belonging," what Kenneth Burke defines as the rhetorical identification "whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant" in a particular class.²³ The mutual interest of author and audience is the world of literature and philosophy, a Coleridgean world where the reverence of truth, beauty, and intellect is presumed. The "young authors" (1:2) to whom Coleridge addresses himself, while not completely his equals, do share a public commitment to an aesthetic. Coleridge's role as the older, experienced teacher is muted by his deferential addresses. Our forbearance is, in effect, presumed: "had I no other motive or incitement, the reader would not have been troubled with this exculpation;" "May I be permitted to add" And our shared experience is expected: "It will be found, that the least of what I have written . . . ;" "Perhaps a similar process has happened to others . . ." (1:1-4). As fleeting and minor as these exchanges may seem, they constitute rhetorical signals to the reader indicating the role he is to assume.²⁴ The audience's position in this literary interaction, delineated at the outset by Coleridge, is participatory, our place is that of a willing student already committed to a shared endeavour,

²³Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 28.

²⁴Walter Ong, S.J., "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," p. 18.

and our attitude is to be a balance of tolerance and empathy. Later, more particular capacities and obligations will be ascribed to the reader of the Biographia, but for now Coleridge has unobtrusively defined his somewhat exclusive though inexperienced audience and characterized the role we are to perform.

Coleridge's brief overview of his inauspicious literary career closes with a movement from the past to the present perfect tense, suggesting that his struggle with a natural and organic poetic style continues. Ironically, while his juvenile poems "were marked by an ease and simplicity," the same accomplishment in his "later compositions" has entailed deliberate effort ("I have studied to impress") and met "perhaps with inferior success" (1:4). He turns now to an exposition of the intellectual milieu and its figures which instilled and fostered his youthful abilities, and the emphasis shifts from the "faults" of his poetic practice to the earlier "inestimable advantage[s]" (1:4) of his schooling.

The rest of Chapter I, structured around two figures of moral and intellectual influence, Bowyer and Bowles, frequently demonstrates epideictic rhetoric. In paying tribute to these men Coleridge further reveals himself, maintaining through his style the distinction between his present perspective and his past experience. From Bowyer, Coleridge learned the principle of organic form, the seamless union of poetic form and matter, the integration of style

and content. Coleridge goes to some length to describe Bowyer's teaching techniques, enumerating the classical Greek and English poets whose natural style was preferred, repeating the teacher's challenges to the students, and describing the practical exercises designed to teach them the application of the theory. Coleridge's description demonstrates Bowyer's blend of theory and practice and the adult Coleridge expressly reaffirms both elements of his childhood education. He summarizes the essence of what he was taught: "I learnt from him, that Poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes" (1:4), and advocates its practical application in these suggestions:

I have sometimes ventured to think, that a list of this kind, or an index expurgatorius of certain well known and ever returning phrases . . . might be hung up in our law-courts, and both houses of parliament. . . . [T]here was one custom of our master's which I cannot pass over in silence, because I think it imitable and worthy of imitation (1:5,6).

In reporting this educational experience to his audience Coleridge uses quoted speech and indirect report²⁵ to bring the reader closer to the author's past while also conveying a humorous tolerance for his youthful "self." Bowyer's

²⁵I am indebted to Elizabeth Bruss (Autobiographical Acts [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], p. 28) for these terms as well as her thorough and exacting analysis of the dynamics of autobiographical rhetoric.

"severities" (1:6) are undercut by Coleridge's recreation of his teacher's voice; furthermore, the author's style renders the reader's experience auditory and therefore immediate. Coleridge reminisces:

In fancy I can almost hear him now, exclaiming "Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, Muse? Your Nurse's daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh aye! the cloister-pump, I suppose!" . . . Among the similes, there was, I remember, that of the Manichineel fruit, as suiting equally well with too many subjects. . . . Was it ambition? Alexander and Clytus!--Flattery? Alexander and Clytus!--Anger? Drunkenness? Pride? Friendship? Ingratitude? Late repentance? Still, still Alexander and Clytus!

Coleridge closes his reminiscence of his early education with a ceremonial tribute to Bowyer, extending a rhetorical gesture to the reader which assumes our obliging forbearance:

The reader will, I trust, excuse this tribute of recollection. . . . He is now gone to his final reward, full of years, and full of honors, even of those honors, which were dearest to his heart, as gratefully bestowed by that school, and still binding him to the interests of that school, in which he had been himself educated, and to which during his whole life he was a dedicated thing. (1:5-6).

Bowyer's influence on the student Coleridge was both "moral and intellectual," his "classical knowledge the least of the good gifts. . . ." The present recollection and reiteration of Bowyer's ideas is a testament to the sustaining of that influence over three decades of our author's life; simultaneously, this reminiscence is an extension of that influence to the present reader. Moreover, Coleridge's appreciation of his teacher is self-disclosing, for the remembrance of Bowyer's "severities" has "neither lessen[ed] nor dim[med]"

Coleridge's admiration. The union of moral and intellectual excellence, found in Bowyer, is an ideal integration which Coleridge recognized in all great men, whether statesmen, poets or educators, and is implicit in his approach to his audience.

The generalization which opens the following paragraph ("no models of past times, however perfect, can have the same vivid effect on the youthful mind, as the productions of contemporary genius" [1:6]) indicates Coleridge's temporary shift in subject from the autobiographical "I" to a more inclusive company. This enlargement of focus, also conveyed by the change to the present tense, occurs frequently throughout the work and is designed to move Coleridge's experience as "a young man" into the audience's proximity, thereby enclosing both author and reader in a common bond. Of the eight sentences in this paragraph only the two which follow the topic sentence retain the autobiographical focus; in those which follow, Coleridge's "appreciation . . . [and] delight" of his contemporary, Bowles, is presented as a collective experience. The linguistic transition from the individual response to the generally shared is evident in Coleridge's choice of pronouns and generic nouns:

That I was thus prepared for the perusal of Mr. Bowles's sonnets and earlier poems, at once increased their influence, and my enthusiasm. The great works of past ages seem to a young man things of another race, in respect to which his faculties must remain passive and submiss, even as to the stars and mountains. But the writings of a contemporary, perhaps not many years older than himself, surrounded by the same circumstances,

and disciplined by the same manners, possess a reality for him, and inspire an actual friendship as of a man for a man.

Again, reader and author participate in a shared literary fellowship: Coleridge's subject, the bond of "friendship" and "influence" between a young reader and his contemporary artist, is presently re-enacted in this work. Coleridge has, rhetorically and thematically, extended to his young reader the valuable heritage he received from Dr. Bowyer, an awareness of "moral and intellectual obligations" which, in turn, prepared him for future aesthetic appreciation. This gift of appreciation, the ability to admire, is self-rewarding, "the wind which fans and feeds his [the reader's] hope." Moreover, the Biographia is a present demonstration of this inspiring admiration; Coleridge's expression of the joyous reciprocity between reader and author prefigures his own treatment of Wordsworth: "To recite, to extol, to contend for them [contemporary authors] is but the payment of a debt due to one, who exists to receive it" (1:7). Finally, Coleridge's demonstrated capacity for willing esteem negates any implication of authorial vanity. Up to now, his autobiography has been a record of gratitude and adulation.

In the first discordant note in the Biographia Coleridge attacks the opposite of his tutelage of admiration and inspiration, education which produces vain prodigies who value their ego-gratification over a sense of history, who despise the reverence of literary heritage, and whose arrogance prohibits any comprehensive or humanitarian vision. In this

education disputation takes the place of the exercise of the judgement, contempt replaces admiration, and a shallow knowledge of the "technicals" (1:8) substitutes for wisdom. Coleridge's style conveys the adamancy of his scorn, his structure suggesting the replacement of one set of values by another:

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 nurselings 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 (1:7-8; emphasis supplied).

Pliny and Wordsworth are quoted, the classical and contemporary representatives of the Coleridgean literary fellowship in which the reader is now for the first time also included: ". . . we have been called on to despise our great public schools, and universities. . . ." ²⁶

Another participant in the literary community of Coleridge's past is gratefully and formally acknowledged, Middleton, whose introduction of Coleridge to Bowles' poetry was multiplied and extended by Coleridge's forty transcriptions for his friends. Coleridge's claim to "regard, and

²⁶ See Coleridge's "Preface" to the 1796 Poems on Various Subjects for his criticism of the egotistical author who, to avoid the authorial "I", "multiplies himself and dwells into 'we'." Campbell, Complete Poetical & Dramatic Works, p. 537.

ever have regarded the obligations of intellect among the most sacred of the claims of gratitude" (1:9) comes as no surprise to the reader; this authorial principle, which will now be applied to Bowles, has been solidly demonstrated. Why then, we may ask, does Coleridge call attention to his solitary but fearless embrace of a "creed" which, from the wisdom of his experience, he claims to vow alone?

He writes:

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 ever have regarded. . . .

This dramatic stance, which recurs in the Biographia, further solidifies Coleridge's remove from the "contemptible arrogance" of the many, heightening his unusual, and now firmly resolved, tendency toward appreciativeness. Moreover, in light of his reader's participation in this august company, we must infer that Coleridge's use of "perhaps" acts as a gentle, suggestive nudge: the strategy is designed to make us firm allies in an exclusive, superior, and even "sacred" act.

Bowles entered Coleridge's life at a crucial time, rescuing him from loneliness and the "preposterous pursuit" of "bewilder[ing] myself in metaphysicks, and in theological controversy" (1:9-10). Coleridge's obligations to Bowles are presented in a highly personal and emotional tone, with the autobiographical review dramatizing Coleridge's emotional

state, and this initial tribute attesting to the "reality" by which a contemporary poet can "inspire an actual friendship as of a man for a man." Bowles' poetry, "so tender and yet so manly, so natural and real, and yet so dignified and harmonious," effected a more "genial," immediate, and powerful influence on Coleridge than the "amiable" Evans family, turning his attention away from the solitude of abstruse intellectualism to the more expansive and selfless "love of nature and the sense of beauty in forms and sounds" (1:10).

Then, in a most intimate moment of self-revelation Coleridge disrupts the narrative chronology, shifting temporarily to a past nearer than 1789 and assuming a wistfully regretful but resigned tone of voice. The stimulus for this moment of private departure is, of course, the youthful "wanderings" into endless mental mazes; but while that was a "preposterous pursuit," "injurious" but not yet "destructive," the latter relapse in 1801-02 is conveyed in more serious language, termed "the same mental disease," an unfeeling, reclusive "delving in the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths" (1:10). From his letters we discover that both the 1789 and the 1801 periods were emotional and intellectual withdrawals from what he calls "the cultivated surface;" by delving into "austerest reasonings" he escaped from the demands of personal interaction and poetic creation, not to mention the bizarre mental

terrors of opium.²⁷ Coleridge described this later period as a "strange . . . Out-of-the-wayness,"²⁸ a compulsion which "denaturalized my mind"²⁹ to the extent that

I look at the Mountains only for the Curves of their outlines; the Stars, as I behold them, form themselves into Triangles--and my hands are scarred with scratches from a Cat, whose back I was rubbing in the Dark in order to see whether the sparks from it were refrangible by a Prism.³⁰

The terrible result was, he believed, the loss of "all my poetic Genius, if ever I really possessed any Genius. . .

."³¹ He wrote to Godwin, "The Poet is dead in me--my imagination . . . lies, like a Cold Snuff on the circular Rim of a Brass Candle-stick, without even a stink of Tallow to remind you that it was once cloathed & mitred with Flame."³²

In comparison, Coleridge's selective and vague description of this period in the Biographia is understandable; moreover, his recall of this relapse seems spontaneous and momentary and is conveyed as a personal lapse which interrupts the

²⁷"To William Godwin," 28 April 1801, Letter 396, Letters 2: 725.

²⁸"To John Prior Estlin," 1 March 1800, Letter 323, Letters 1, 578.

²⁹"To William Godwin," 28 April 1801, Letters 2: 725.

³⁰"To William Godwin," 25 March 1801, Letter 390, Letters 2: 714.

³¹"To Robert Southey," 29 July 1802, Letter 449, Letters 2: 831.

³²"To William Godwin," 25 March 1801, p. 714. But Kathleen Coburn warns against the "baseless, psychologically unsound" conclusion that metaphysics killed the poet in Coleridge in Experience Into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 58-63.

highly controlled autobiographical procedure. Nor does this experience seem safely frozen in the past. Coleridge's changing use of tense conveys the continuancy of this self-perspective:

Well were it for me, perhaps, had I never relapsed into the same mental disease; if I had continued to pluck the flower and reap the harvest from the cultivated surface, instead of delving in the unwholesome quick-silver mines of metaphysic depths. 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 (1:10).

The present perfect tense in the final sentence, in contrast with the past perfect verbs in the previous sentence, suggests that Coleridge's withdrawal is not a definitely completed action, while what is unmistakably and simply lost to the past is the "long and blessed interval." This is a private and poignant moment of self-acceptance, for Coleridge's brief consideration of what might have been contains no hint of self-pity. Nor is the reader explicitly included in this self-intimacy, though our overhearing it, with its resigned and bittersweet tone, surely draws us closer to our author on a simply human, personal level.

The "second advantage" to reading Bowles, then, in light of Coleridge's comparison of these two periods of withdrawal, is a natural intellectual extension of the first "radical good." Emotionally, Bowles' poetry effected

Coleridge's return to his natural self, diverting him from the disproportion of excessive introspection to a more comprehensive, integral perspective through the encouragement and freeing of his "natural faculties . . . and original tendencies" (1:9-10). Intellectually, Bowles' poetry provided a concrete and accessible touchstone for Coleridge's taste; the consequence of using Bowles' work as an aesthetic test was the refinement and reassessment of Coleridge's youthful literary experience. His earlier disappointment with eighteenth-century poetry and his affinity for classical Greek poetry, Shakespeare, and Milton could now be compared and analyzed in terms of this compelling and unusual contemporary poetry, the style of which surpassed normal expectations. Bowles' stylistic accomplishments, his union of "natural thoughts with natural diction" and his reconciliation of "the heart with the head" (1:16), became distinguishing poetic principles for Coleridge. With the "frequent amicable disputes" (1:11) which entailed his zealous defense of the contemporary poet, Coleridge felt the need to back up his critical intuition and personal taste with a "solid foundation, on which permanently to ground my opinions." Though to the modern reader it may seem commonplace, Coleridge's turning directly to the "faculties of the human mind itself" (1:14) as the source of aesthetic experience and the basis of his critical theory is truly remarkable.

Coleridge's review of the process by which he arrived

at a chosen, permanent, and "solid foundation" demonstrates a progression from, first, a reliance on his own inner experience, to a comparative study, and, finally, the arrival at what he believes to be universal aesthetic experience. His estimation of eighteenth-century poetry as largely a disjunction between thought and form, or "thoughts translated into the language of poetry" was individualistic and not shared by his colleagues "who had formed their taste, and their notions of poetry, from the writings of Mr. Pope and his followers." However, through exchange of thought and "amicable disputes" Coleridge "had occasion to render my own thoughts gradually more and more plain to myself. . . ." (1:11). The forum of literary debate was extended to include more than the topic of controversy as Coleridge engaged in a comparison of "original" poetry with various inferior imitations and a tracing of Greek and British classical poetry--all to substantiate his "unfeigned zeal" (1:13) for Bowles' style. The "great advantage" in this method is its essentially dialectic nature: Coleridge's willing participation in these "controversies" precludes a singular, solipsistic point of view, and his dependence on his literary tradition as well as the concepts of "TRUTH, NATURE, LOGIC, and the LAWS OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR" (1:14) demonstrate his thorough attempt to discover a commonality or unity of experience. The process unmistakably begins with "my own thoughts." The "primacy of his own experience as a source

and criterion of his ideas"³³ resounds throughout this passage dominated by the authorial "I". "I conversed," Coleridge writes, "I was not blind," "I doubtless undervalued," "I saw," "I had occasion to render," and "I preferred" (1: 11-12). But close upon his individual response is Coleridge's attempt to objectify it by assembling comparative data and by the "earnest and extensive searching of others' theories."³⁴ This movement from his "personal intuition as a standard of judgement" to a reliance on the function of "the human mind itself" (1:14), which we have seen elsewhere in his autobiographical writings and which constitutes the general intellectual pattern of the Biographia, suggests, in Appleyard's words, "the metaphysical character of Coleridge's philosophy."³⁵ Indeed, Coleridge found psychology and metaphysics interdependent, arguing for the use of the word "psychological" because "we have no single term to express the Philosophy of the Human Mind."³⁶

Also, Coleridge's reiteration of his procedural method, which we must remember he undertook at approximately seventeen years of age, functions as "evidence of his intellectual pedigree,"³⁷ an authorial responsibility which he

³³J. A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, p. 3.

³⁴Ibid., p. 4

³⁵Ibid., p. 6.

³⁶Alice D. Snyder, ed., S. T. Coleridge's Treatise on Method (London: Constable, 1934), p. 32.

³⁷J. R. De J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism, p. 55.

similarly advocated in The Friend. His self-description, particularly as he nears his conclusive deductions, manifests a variety of abilities desirable in a careful, systematic thinker. Coleridge combines thoroughness, zeal, and intellectual rigor:

I had continually to adduce the metre and diction of the Greek Poets from Homer to Theocritus inclusive; and still more of our elder English poets from Chaucer to Milton. Nor was this all. But as it was my constant reply to authorities . . . actuated too by my former passion for metaphysical investigations; I labored at a solid foundation. . . . According to the faculty or source, . . . I estimated the merit. . . . As the result of all my reading and meditation, I abstracted two critical aphorisms. . . . Be it however observed, that I excluded from the list. . . . I was wont boldly to affirm. . . . One great distinction, I appeared to myself to see plainly. . . (1:14-15).

On the one hand, Coleridge's conclusions are couched in the autobiographical past, attesting to his youthful ardor and commitment; at the same time, his subsequent switch to the present tense in an application of the idea demonstrates its sustaining value.

After stating his two "critical aphorisms," Coleridge's use of the authorial "I", though retained, is balanced somewhat by the inclusive "we", for his subject now is the common aesthetic experience as a criterion of artistic excellence. He believes that "not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power, and claims the name of essential poetry" and that "our genuine admiration of a great poet is a continuous under-current of feeling . . . every-

where present. . ." (1:14-15). Moreover, his specific application of his second principle, organic unity, while claimed as an individual insight, includes the present reader:

One great distinction, I appeared to myself to see plainly, between, even the characteristic faults of our elder poets, and the false beauty of the moderns. In the former, from Donne to Cowley, we find the most fantastic out-of-the-way thoughts. . . (1:15).

Coleridge's address to the reader, which specifies what is required for an adequate understanding of the author's experience, while certainly directive, also presumes, again, our participation in the text and its world. That we may study Bowles' cultural context in partial fulfillment of our responsibility as reader conveys the cooperative effort implicit in a literary experience. Moreover, in this text, author and reader not only ideally share "matters of public acquaintanceship,"³⁸ but also, by virtue of the autobiographical exposure, personal experience. Aware of a possible difference between his past exposure to Bowles and his reader's current response, Coleridge instructs us, in effect, to put ourselves in his past position, to intellectually reconstruct the literary milieu of 1789 not only to appreciate Bowles, but primarily "in order to understand and account for the effect produced on me" (1:15; emphasis added). Autobiography is employed as an inroad to a

³⁸Walter Ong, S.J., "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," p. 5.

philosophy of criticism; the audience's engagement with the author functions as a vicarious experiential basis for adopting his principles.

The closing paragraphs of Chapter 1 resume the autobiographical period which opened the chapter when Coleridge had "barely passed the verge of manhood" (1:2); this chapter is framed, then, by our author's assessment of his poetry. Coleridge's enumeration here of additional compositions (those of "my twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth years [ex. gr. the shorter blank verse poems, the lines . . . in Mr. Southey's Joan of Arc . . . and the Tragedy of REMORSE]" 1:16) contrasts oddly with his earlier assertion that "from that period to the date of the present work I have published nothing, with my name" (1:3), amounting to a public admission of authorship of previously unsigned writings. (However, Shawcross believes "a few introductory pages"³⁹ were a final addition to the work, which could account for Coleridge's discrepancy.) In any case, whenever the opening delineation of the author's breaking of his professional silence was drafted, the sternness with which Coleridge approached his role as a published poet is now mitigated and tempered with a gentle self-irony. His previous focus on his poetic incapacities is now initially reversed by a positive self-assessment: "Gradually, however, my practice conformed to my better judgement. . ." (1:16). Immediately,

³⁹Shawcross, Biographia Literaria, p. xcii.

however, the self-assessment regresses to a kind of static equilibrium as he approaches his more recent poetic compositions: ". . . the compositions of my twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth years . . . are not more below my present ideal in respect of the general tissue of the style than those of the latest date" (1:16). Finally, the text itself (admittedly a footnote, but the prose chiefly serves as an introduction to the poetry), this immediate "present," becomes the ultimate in literary and autobiographical irony, self-parody. Coleridge has effectively perpetrated "one upmanship" on the critics (and any wary reader) by his "good-natured" (1:17) self-mockery transposed from the past into the present. The authorial "distance" from the literary world of ambition and praise, attested to at the opening of the Biographia, is now vividly and delightfully demonstrated. The chapter closes with a shared laugh as the author lets his audience in on his private autobiographical joke.

The structural composition of Chapter I, the surrounding framework which presents Coleridge the poet and the central narrative of Coleridge's literary education, indicates Coleridge's conscious control of his autobiography. This first chapter is a deliberately shaped representation, not a series of "involuntary sighs"⁴⁰ for a lost private self. The structure creates the vantage point from which Coleridge

⁴⁰Bruss, Autobiographical Acts, p. 120.

introduces his first main topic, "the true nature of poetic diction" (1:1). The frame of the chapter, sharply delineated from the central autobiographical narrative, presents the author as a poet struggling, often unsuccessfully, with his linguistic materials. Only Coleridge's earliest poems "were marked by an ease and simplicity" (1:4) of language; all later compositions entailed a degree of failure, whether from "diffidence" or inability, in wedding poetic form and matter. Thus, Coleridge's "ideal" of organic unity (specifically presented in this chapter as the reinforcement of poetic sense with natural poetic language) is initially conveyed to the reader through the author's admission of his continued inability to accomplish this ideal. In the opening frame, Coleridge's enumerated poetic flaws all involve a disintegration of thought and language, while his closing frame is not only a description, but an ironic performance of different manifestations of this same disharmony. This frame of self-presentation suggests that Coleridge's view of himself as a poetic craftsman is, on the whole, disappointing, surely not marked by a continuous line of improvement. What emerges, however, is a sense of Coleridge's knowledgeable self-assessment free from any hint of defensiveness or self-condemnation.

If Coleridge the presented poet does not develop in a continuous progression but remains relatively static, Coleridge the critical thinker, who is presented in the heart

of the chapter, experiences a steady evolution as his initial "insight" (1:3), which exceeded his poetic practice, is strengthened, refined, and tested with the help of two principal figures. We have spoken earlier of Coleridge's need to differentiate himself from Wordsworth; the autobiographical act "necessarily isolates and individuates its author."⁴¹ But Coleridge, in choosing to exhibit himself "against the background of others, against society . . . [and] schools" and his literary milieu,⁴² demonstrates that his literary identity has been shaped by the nature of his personal encounters and his participation in surrounding institutions. The effect is the creation of a reciprocally stimulating and influential literary community which becomes more populated with individual figures as Coleridge's life story continues. Bowyer was the first who gave him the sense of the "severe . . . logic" of poetic language, instilling in Coleridge the affinity for a natural and dignified style. Bowles' poetry demonstrated Bowyer's principle, its language "natural . . . neither bookish, nor vulgar, neither redolent of the lamp, nor of the kennel." Finally, Coleridge makes the poetic principle his own, testing it, tracing it to its literary and psychological roots, and restating it: "whatever lines can be translated into other

⁴¹Bruss, Autobiographical Acts, p. 169.

⁴²George Boas, "The Romantic Self: An Historical Sketch,"
SIR 4. (Autumn, 1964): 14.

words of the same language, without diminution of their significance, either in sense, or association, or in any worthy feeling, are so far vicious in their diction" (1:13-14). The chapter traces the personal development of Coleridge's theory of the organicism of poetic thought and diction. The structure suggests that Coleridge's admitted deficiencies as a poet and his continuous struggle with the demands of this craft are immediately relevant to the sustaining of his critical powers. This is not to say that the best critic is a failed poet; indeed, in Coleridge's experience the two realms are mutually reinforcing and contributory. But in light of Coleridge's presentation of the Biographia as a formal interruption of his professional silence, it is evident that Coleridge's chosen role is now that of the philosophic critic, the mediator between the reader and author. He stated in 1800: "I abandon Poetry altogether--I . . . reserve for myself the honorable attempt to make others feel and understand their [Wordsworth's and Southey's] writings, as they deserve to be felt and understood."⁴³ His poetic publications before the board of criticism, his first-hand experience with this demanding art, and his judicious evaluation of what is entailed in both success and failure constitute his qualifications.

Finally, his awareness of the reader is an additional qualification for Coleridge's role as intermediary.

⁴³"To James Webbe Tobin," 17 September 1800, Letter 351, Letters 1:351.

Dispelling for his "young authors" the myth of an unbroken, systematic line of self-improvement in the practice of their craft, Coleridge includes them in a literary fellowship characterized by LOVE and ADMIRATION" (1:8) where literature is a "reality" which can influence their personal and intellectual lives for "radical good" (1:9). Once the beneficiary, Coleridge now intends the reader to benefit from this autobiographical record of his experience. As he explained when he first submitted the mock Sonnets for publication, "I think they may do good to our young Bards."⁴⁴

Chapter II of the Biographia suspends the autobiographical narrative in order to further characterize (largely by contrast) Coleridge's idea of the literary community, to present the values which he believes indigenous to serious literary pursuit, and to educate the reader concerning his place and role in this world. Chapter I has consisted of a self-presentation of Coleridge as author, reader, and critic, each function advancing the cause of the others and each role depending on qualities inherent in the others. Implicit in his delineation of these roles and their necessary qualities is the message that, given Coleridge's literary education, his appreciative and discriminating reading ability, and his experience as a poet, a certain critical approach will follow. Chapter II, however, immediately poses the present, regrettable state of affairs, a separation

⁴⁴"To Joseph Cottle," 20 November 1797, Letter 212, Letters 1: 357.

of these three roles and an animosity among the participants. In his analysis of this divisive situation, manifested in the stereotype of the irritable, egotistic artist, Coleridge further specifies his opposite ideal of the literary community, supporting it with models from his experience. The reader is, of course, a participant in the Coleridgean community, a position insured by the author at the outset of the chapter when Coleridge allies his audience with him against "readers in general" and the "collected multitudes" whose lives are victimized by an excessive dependence on their senses. Coleridge's rhetoric reinforces the shared identity created in Chapter I:

A debility and dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses, do, we well know, render the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism. . . . Experience informs us that the first defense of weak minds is to recriminate (1:19,20; emphasis added).

Coleridge's opening analysis of what is termed "irritability," conveyed in general terms so as to include both the prejudiced reader and the failed and bitter artist, exemplifies his psychological approach which focuses on the "faculties of the human mind itself." In keeping with his wish to "analyze, and bring forward into distinct consciousness," Coleridge elucidates the tendencies, needs, and responses of "minds of this class" who, in direct contrast to those who possess "imaginative power," rely chiefly on their immediate sense impressions as motivation for action. Coleridge's imagery of the "damp hay . . . [which] heat[s] and

inflamm[e] by co-acervation" and the "bees . . . [which] become restless and irritable through the increased temperature of collected multitudes" vividly conveys the powerless, uncontrolled nature of those who, lacking "all foundation within their own minds," lose themselves in a collective mob, thereby mitigating their vague sense of fear and insecurity. The metaphors are substantiated by Coleridge's psychological analysis so that what is thought of as self-indulgent irritability is actually shown to be a "complex feeling," a psychological process of self-created fear resulting in hostile behaviour. The reader's response, then, is a blend of understanding and distaste. In direct opposition to this description of irrationality, this gulf between insight and passion, head and heart, Coleridge offers his first definition of the Imagination, the "endless power of combining and modifying [ideas]" so that "the feelings and affections blend . . . with these ideal creations" (1:19-20). Whereas the former state is characterized by extreme, raw emotion unmodified by thought and the individual is vulnerable to the uncontrolled excesses of the senses, "sanity," in which the mind controls the external impressions of "things," is marked by a balanced harmony of thought and feeling. However, the prominent, vivid mind may tend toward its own extreme in which the idea becomes isolated from an external reality. For Coleridge the naturally healthy mind operates between these two extremes of thoughtless fanaticism

and unrealistic ideality. Far from being "a quite irrelevant topic,"⁴⁵ Coleridge's delineation of the healthy mind prefigures his metaphysical inquiry in Chapter XII, where he questions the prominence of the objective, phenomenal world or the supervention of the subjective, mental world. There, as in Chapter II, neither isolated supremacy is valid. For Coleridge, "the realism common to all mankind" (1:179) is the coherence of the percipient mind and the "real and very object," or in psychological terms, the existing balance "between thought and reality" (1:20).

Furthermore, the topic is relevant to Coleridge's previous and future self-presentation. He has briefly exposed two times in his life when he was a victim of the "mental disease" which is the other extreme from the collective fanaticism pictured at the opening of the chapter, the state of "enthusiasm with indifference and diseased slowness to action" (1:20). Solitary, withdrawn from the tempering influence of artistic and social intercourse, Coleridge had delved into the isolation of "abstruse reasonings," intellectualizing over metaphysical questions which "precluded . . . realizing," to the point that he felt his mind "denaturalized." Despite his linguistic impersonalism, Coleridge's introductory remarks on men of "commanding genius" seem a veiled self-description. His personal correspondence frequently refers to the state of acute frustration

⁴⁵Shawcross, ed., Biographia Literaria, p.212.

described:

For the conceptions of the mind may be so vivid and adequate, as to preclude that impulse to the realizing of them, which is strongest and most restless in those, who possess more than mere talent, (or the faculty of appropriating and applying the knowledge of others,) yet still want something of the creative, and self-sufficing power of absolute Genius (1:20).

Coleridge hesitated to deem himself a genius, but the question of the capacities and accomplishments of men of genius became for him a touchstone of self-assessment.⁴⁶ In 1802 he wrote to Southey,

As to myself, all my poetic Genius, if ever I really possessed any Genius, & it was not rather a mere general aptitude of Talent, & quickness of Imitation/ is gone. . . .⁴⁷

The single affinity he claimed to share with men of genius was the indifference to fame which, he believed, excluded the charge of irritability. "If you knew me," he wrote to an admirer, "you would know that I am not of the genus irritable; and must resign all claim to the poetic inspiration, if irritability be an essential character of it. I feel no resentment or offense on my own account. . . ."⁴⁸

Although the unconcern with fame characteristic of men of

⁴⁶See "To Robert Southey," 1 August 1803, Letter 509, Letters 2: 959, where he opposes his "knowledge that I am not of no significance, relatively to, comparatively with, other men, my contemporaries" with his "habitual Haunting" that "I had no real Genius, no real Depth."

⁴⁷"To Robert Southey," 29 July 1802, Letter 449, Letters 2:831.

⁴⁸"To George Dyer," 15 March 1804, Letter 573, Letters 2: 1091.

genius is attributable to their "great confidence in their own powers,"⁴⁹ Coleridge attributed his lack of professional vanity to his retreat to his "Books and my own meditations" where he found "a sort of high-walled Garden, which excluded the very sound of the World without"⁵⁰ and to his greatest trial, "that severe & long continued bodily disease exacerbated by disappointment in the great Hope of my Life."⁵¹

Coleridge's brief description of "commanding genius," those who "impress their preconceptions on the world without" (1:20), is reminiscent of his biographical sketch of Sir Alexander Ball. This capacity too may have its extreme; the involvement in the actual, present, and immediate world may supervene, assuming a disproportionate prominence. Men of "absolute Genius," however, are rooted, not in physical, external reality, but in the platonic reality of eternal ideas. Their self is their genius, their spirit its "sub-stance," their imagination "the ever-varying form," and their artistic creations the embodiment of their timeless ideality. Their superior vision, their "wide comprehension, of the more & the less, balance & counterbalance,"⁵² and

⁴⁹"To Robert Southey," 10 September 1802, Letter 458, Letters 2: 863.

⁵⁰"To Thomas W. Smith," 22 June 1809, Letter 769, Let-ters 3: 216.

⁵¹"To Francis Jeffrey," 16 July 1808, Letter 712, Let-ters 3: 118.

⁵²Notebooks 3 (July-September 1809): 3554.

their dedication to the "ideal world" preclude egotism or the need for worldly approbation. But lest Coleridge's image of the artistic genius fade into the removed, aloof realm of "enthusiasm" (he uses the word in its original sense of "possession by a god," or in this case, an unrealized idea), he provides four examples of individuals whose lives, though primarily literary, were unmistakably active and involved in the social tumult of their eras.⁵³ All demonstrated the "self-possession" (1:23) implicit in the genius's realization of his powers and the serenity which is the necessary result of their selfless vision. Also, Coleridge is careful to specify the relationship of these poets with their critics. Shakespeare demonstrated "a readiness to praise his rivals" (1:22); Spenser, although unjustly persecuted, held no "Quarrelsome or affected contempt of his censurers;" and Milton's calm endurance of persecution was broken only by an impersonal anger "for the enemies of religion, freedom, and his country" (1:23).

Coleridge's concern with delineating genius is central to his metaphysics and philosophy of criticism. His probing of the mind of the genius reveals the similar but lesser capacities of the ordinary mind, and his attention to their imaginative powers yields an aesthetic specifically directed toward the appreciative illumination of timeless,

⁵³Coleridge not only lectured on these authors but also planned biographical studies of each. See "To Sir George Beaumont," 1 February 1804, Letter 550, Letters 2: 1054; "To Thomas Allsop," 30 March 1820, Letter 1228, Letters 5: 26.

enduring literary art. Moreover, Coleridge's personal affinity for these poets becomes a dynamic of this literary autobiography, particularly explicit in such expressions as, "My mind is not capable of forming a more august conception, than arises from the contemplation of this great man in his latter days: poor, sick, old, blind, slandered, persecuted. . . (1:23). Implicitly, the qualities demonstrated by these men in their personal and professional lives become standards of conduct for a committed, serious author. For the reader's part, it is presumed that the audience emulates and aspires to these heights of integrity and munificence; while the author, by virtue of his recorded esteem, creates the expectation that he will appropriately meet his own criteria through this literary performance.

Before turning to the social conditions which contribute to the misperception of talent for genius and the identification of irritability with artistic greatness, Coleridge allows that irritability may be discovered in certain exceptions. Then the error lies in attributing its cause to genius rather than the more likely possibility of a physical ailment. But the four authors, particularly Spenser and Milton, have provided evidence of the equanimity with which men of genius withstand personal trials. In Coleridge's time, however, "a more artificial state of society and social intercourse," the ill will within the literary community assumes greater complexity and more serious proportions.

The underlying conditional cause, Coleridge maintains, is the "general diffusion of literature." The commonness of the literary endeavour, its easy accessibility for uncommitted and untrained readers and writers, has led to the debasement of art into a trade and the accompanying pervasive depreciation of criticism. Coleridge's distaste for mass literature is unveiled: "Thus even the deaf may play, so as to delight the many" (1:25).

Treating authors first, Coleridge recalls his opening analysis of irritability, attributing the anger of vain authors to their "intense desire" for fame and its accompanying doubt of incapacity. The preponderance of these reputation-seekers with their "jealous irritability" renders the valid distinction of "the best grounded complaints of injured genius" meaningless--both are coupled together by indiscriminating and thoughtless readers. Nor are these readers solely to blame, for they are inundated with unimaginative, popular language, "mechanized as it were into a barrel-organ" and with pre-fabricated, "stereotype pieces," senseless, imitative literature which "spares the reader the trouble of thinking; prevents vacancy, while it indulges indolence; and secures the memory from all danger of an intellectual plethora" (1:26). Still, the carelessness and laxity of readers contributes; in a footnote Coleridge demonstrates an alternative criticism which, mediating between author and reader, elicits a careful and gratifying aesthetic experience. His treatment of the excellence of Pope's

"original compositions" in contrast to the flawed "pseudo-poetic diction" of his Homeric translation startled Coleridge's lecture audience into a realization of their untapped capacities and unfulfilled experience. Coleridge immediately balances this story of his success by expressing his indebtedness to Wordsworth who, in stimulating Coleridge's re-perusal of Gray, was responsible for his feeling "newly couched" and taking "additional delight" in the poem (1:27). It is appropriate to recall here that among Coleridge's high expectations of his readers was not only a readiness to admire, but also the ability to sustain their own intellectual self-sufficiency, to "go into [their] own nature, look at it stedfastly, & observe whether or no it or the part of it then in question, corresponds with [the author's] statement."⁵⁴ A letter to Thomas Clarkson expresses Coleridge's standards of good reading:

. . . I am not now disputing with a quibbler in mock-logic, but addressing myself to a Reasoner, who seeks to understand, and looks into himself for a sense, which my words may excite in him, not to my words for a sense, which they must against his own will force on him. . . .⁵⁵

No sense of reader, or for that matter, authorial, responsibility is evident in the popular literature and

⁵⁴Notebooks 1 (December 1803): 1758.

⁵⁵"To Thomas Clarkson," 13 October 1806, Letter 634, Letters 2: 1194.

anonymous criticism which Coleridge lambasts. The impulses to authorship are "idleness and ignorance," its short-lived reward a "temporary reputation with the public at large," and its final stage the recriminatory transformation from failed author into slanderous critic. The public's "rage for personality"⁵⁶ feeds this libelous criticism which, in turn, gratifies "the bad and malignant passions of mankind" (1:27). Coleridge's indignant righteousness is unmistakably moral in origin as is his humanistic view of literary art. The public's aversion to any effort of thought he called "the mother Evil of all other Evils, that I have to attack."⁵⁷ Accordingly, he believed the "Trade of Reviewing" to be "an immoral employment unjust to the Authors of the Books reviewed, injurious in it's effects on the public Taste & Morality, and still more injurious in it's influences on the Head and Heart of the Reviewer himself."⁵⁸ His ironic suggestion of creating a review for the criticism of dry goods "conducted in the same spirit, and which should take the same freedom with personal character, as our literary journals" (1:29) is lightly reminiscent of Swift's absurdist satire, for the comparison of the artist with "ribbon-

⁵⁶"To Matilda Betham," 4 April 1808, Letter 689, Letters 3: 84.

⁵⁷"To Samuel Purkis," 20 October 1809, Letter 789, Letters 3: 253.

⁵⁸"To William Godwin," 29 March 1811, Letter 819, Letters 3: 316.

weavers, calico-printers, cabinet-makers, and china-manufacturers" vividly demonstrates the debasement of literature. Addressing his audience in language which juxtaposes the commercial with the ideal, Coleridge poses a series of rhetorical questions designed to shame the reader into a greater appreciation of the artist who "labours for our intellectual pleasures":

Or is wealth the only rational object of human interest? Or even if this were admitted, has the poet no property in his works? Or is it a rare, or culpable case, that he who serves at the altar of the muses, should be compelled to derive his maintenance from the altar, when too he has perhaps deliberately abandoned the fairest prospects of rank and opulence in order to devote himself, an entire and undistracted man, to the instruction or refinement of his fellow citizens?

In contrast to the gainful pursuits of the capitalist, the man of genius is selflessly devoted to the edification of mankind, his works effecting a defeat of fixed time:

But it is not less an essential mark of true genius, that its sensibility is excited by any other cause more powerfully than by its own personal interests; for this plain reason, that the man of genius lives most in the ideal world, in which the present is still constituted by the future or the past; and because his feelings have been habitually associated with thoughts and images, to the number, clearness, and vivacity of which the sensation of self is always in an inverse proportion (1:30).

Coleridge reserves his personal remarks for the close of the chapter, sharply separating them from the preceding analysis and argument. Coleridge's purpose in these closing paragraphs is to first dissociate himself from any suggestion of the self-assessment of genius and, secondly,

to further delineate the "duty . . . creditable to his heart" (1:32), that is, his role in relation to "the offspring and representatives of our nobler being." Coleridge first uses himself as evidence of the importance of distinguishing the author from the man, of dissociating "intellectual power" from "habit of . . . feelings" (1:31). In the conditional mode he personally attests to the superficiality of aligning irritability with genius. "[A] tried experience of twenty years," capsulized in the previous chapter, has led to this self-assessment: contrary to literary jealousy, "the original sin of my character consists in a careless indifference to public opinion, and to the attacks of those who influence it; that praise and admiration have become yearly less and less desirable, except as marks of sympathy. . . ." (1:31). Nor is this indifference contributory to his "intellectual power." The effect of this conventional disclaimer, however, is the opposite of what Coleridge professes, for his confession of "constitutional indolence, aggravated into languor by ill-health" and "mental cowardice" concerning his own powers, renders his authorial position unthreatening and secure. That is, it is precisely Coleridge's highly personal self-disclosure which elicits our trust and shapes our experience of his text. Moreover, an important distinction operates within Coleridge's argument (which we may further distinguish from his performance): while it is "silly and arrogant" to equate

a detrimental "habit of . . . feeling" with "intellectual power," the reader's obligation to the man of genius is deference and a kind of benign protectiveness, for "the character and property of the man who labours for our intellectual pleasures, [should not be] less entitled to a share of our fellow feeling, than, that of the wine-merchant or milliner" (1:30). Also, implicit in Coleridge's definition of genius is the moral excellence attendant upon their vision, their dedication to eternal truths, and their selflessness. The "character" of the man of genius, as we have seen in Coleridge's biographical sketches, infuses his work, but his personal life should remain inviolately protected:

Where then a man has, from his earliest youth, devoted his whole being to an object, which by the admission of all civilized nations in all ages is honorable as a pursuit, and glorious as an attainment; what of all that relates to himself and his family, if only we accept his moral character, can have fairer claims to his protection, or more authorize acts of self-defence, than the elaborate products of his intellect and intellectual industry? (1:32; emphasis added).

Removed from this morass of temperament and personal recrimination, Coleridge's self-perspective and experience ably qualify him for the position of judicious defender of the most demanding, "honorable" and "glorious" profession. Having disqualified himself from the ranks of genius, he appears all the more suited to the role of intercessor whose "duty" is "to show . . . a due interest and qualified anxiety for the offspring and representatives of our nobler being" (1:32). Coleridge closes this literary performance

with an outburst in sharp contrast to his usual benevolent distance and pervasive tone of moderation, indulging briefly and for the first time in pure self-interest. He exclaims,

I know it, alas! by woeful experience! 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 (1:32).

The extremity of his language, with its biblical overtones, creates an intensely intimate moment of self-exposure which, had it not followed the consistent presentation of a modest, judicious, and self-deprecating author, could threaten the boundaries of politeness which preserve the author-reader relationship. As it is, Coleridge's seemingly spontaneous burst of emotion, his eruption through the shield of authorial reserve, constitutes a performance of self-manifestation in full view of his audience. After his increasingly indignant exposure of the present travesty of the profession he deems "sacred," this final and momentary discharge of emotion serves as a compelling invitation to the reader's empathy and commitment. Such authorial expressions are best viewed as performances, assuming all the rich implications attendant upon a "present," immediate, and social act. Thus, "they can most effectively be criticized in terms of their force."⁵⁹ The effect of these moments of eruption is

⁵⁹John Stewart, "J. L. Austin's Speech Act Analysis,"

nothing less than a transformation of the text: the author's distant vantage point, which elicits (or imposes) a selective, purposeful unity to his past life, is shattered. The autobiographical art, the presumption of re-shaping one's life, is shattered. Such moments display the immediate experience of taking the autobiographical stance with one's self. The text, then, is no longer expository, the expressions are not merely statements about the self, but constitute the experience of the self and create what we mean, quite literally, by authorial "presence." The author is present not only to his reader, but to his autobiographical self. Thus autobiography may frequently display "a collusion, between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past."⁶⁰

At the opening of Chapter III, which sustains the same analytical criticism of anonymous reviewers, Coleridge recovers himself, employing a lightly satiric tone toward his endurance of critical "cannonading." The chapter is designed to first expose the disproportionate and misguided attention which anonymous critics have paid to Coleridge and Southey and then to demonstrate criticism appropriate to and illuminative of the works of genius. Ostensibly, Coleridge's

in Philosophers on Rhetoric: Traditional and Emerging Views, ed. Donald G. Douglas (Skokie: National Textbook Co., 1976), p. 196.

⁶⁰Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p. 11.

bemused puzzlement concerning his unrequested and unprovoked notoriety stimulates the question which thematically unifies the chapter. However, his autobiographical dilemma is resolved within five paragraphs, functioning as a personal entrée to his more comprehensive and pressing subject. The vulnerability of his presence at the close of Chapter II is immediately offset by the self-possessed and ironic detachment with which he views his present reputation. Satirically, he professes his obligation to the critics who have "year after year, quarter after quarter, month after month" (1:35) implanted his name on the senseless memories of the reading public. Requesting the reader's forbearance, he assumes the tongue-in-cheek attitude of mild "surprize" toward a situation which he then goes on to depict as utterly illogical and absurd:

Without any feeling of anger therefore (for which indeed, on my own account, I have no pretext) I may yet be allowed to express 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 . . . 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 (1:35).

"How," he rhetorically asks the reader, "shall I explain this?" Coleridge's wry humor, reminiscent of the close of Chapter I, again reinforces his ironic detachment from this pompous, inflated world of popular criticism.

Coleridge denies three possible causes of the

"persecution": "personal dislike, envy, or feelings of vindictive animosity," and the reasons given for the implausibility of each constitute a further presentation of his ethos. Coleridge's direct and assertive style here, unembellished with autobiographical reminiscences or emotional flourishes, is suitable to the position in which he has placed himself. He responds to the (albeit presumed) highly personal and injurious feelings of critics factually, almost blandly, circumspectly avoiding a defensive tone of voice. Numerous biographical data and personal statements could be offered in substantiation of Coleridge's self-description, but would place this study in the mode which Coleridge largely avoids, apologia. What emerges from his responses to the critics is a picture of a fair-minded, unambitious, modest author whose dealings with his peers are marked by rationality and accord. Moreover, his primary plea for exemption from these proposed charges is "alibi" in its original sense of "in another place." His defense is his removal from the literary world:

I have had little other acquaintance with literary characters, than what may be implied in an accidental introduction, or casual meeting in a mixed company. . . . The few pages which I have published, are of too distant a date; and the extent of their sale a proof too conclusive against their having been popular at any time. . . . I have before said, that my acquaintance with literary men has been limited and distant. . . . From my first entrance into life, I have, with few and short intervals, lived either abroad or in retirement. My different essays on subjects of national interest . . . constitute my whole publicity; the only occasion on which I could offend any member of the republic of letters (1:36,37,38).

Coleridge then offers the fundamental attitude implicit in his literary criticism which we have seen demonstrated as well as traced to its origins in his education: rather than "oppugn the merits of a contemporary," it is better for the critic to "content . . . himself with praising in his turn those whom he deems excellent." If he were to depart from this approach, it would not be in transitory conversation, but in "books which could be weighed and answered, in which I could evolve the whole of my reasons and feelings, with their requisite limits and modifications" (1:38-39). This is an important statement not only for its sense of intellectual responsibility, but for its implied reference to the Biographia. Contrary to the common belief that this work is in answer to the attacks of anonymous reviewers, the conditional mode of this sentence clearly indicates that Coleridge did not consider the object of this work "to oppose the pretensions" of promiscuous reviewers. Moreover, Coleridge, rather than answering charges specifically directed against him, has taken the offensive position. After acknowledging the accurate criticisms and carefully analyzing the preposterous attention of the reviewers, Coleridge can still find no plausible motive rooted in reality. Far from defending himself against the critics, Coleridge attacks irresponsible criticism, assaulting his opponent in order to present his thoroughly opposite alternative.

The stimulus for the presentation in this chapter is

Robert Southey, whose work, along with Wordsworth's, came under direct attack from the critics. Withdrawing from the foreground, Coleridge, though "wet through with the spray" from "the waterfall of criticism," directs his attention to the more significant "torrent" (1:39) which his friend has endured. The autobiographical frame is loosely retained ("I well remember"), but the focus is shifted to an active participant in Coleridge's literary life; the author's relation to his colleague and friend is self-revelatory while his delineation of Southey's genius is a practical demonstration of Coleridge's critical approach.

Coleridge's primary objection is to the personal attacks on Southey's "writings, name, and character" (1:40) in reviews which are "extant, and may be easily referred to" (by the responsible reader). The structure of the chapter follows this threefold division, alternating between Southey's specific case and the general tendencies it exemplifies. The first "calumny" which critics have perpetrated against Southey's poetry, a specific illustration of the substitution of an inappropriate personalism for "fixed canons of criticism" (1:44), is misconstruing the deficiencies of inexperience for a willful employment of "careless and prosaic lines" (1:40) in keeping with an avant-garde theory of poetic diction. His contrast of the charge against Southey with his own perception of the reality renders the former ludicrous:

But it was as little objected by others, as dreamt of by the poet himself, that he preferred careless and prosaic lines on rule and of forethought, or indeed that he pretended to any other art or theory of poetic diction, besides that which we may all learn from Horace, Quintilian, the admirable dialogue de Causis Corruptae Eloquentiae, or Strada's Prolusions. . . . All that could have been fairly deduced was, that in his taste and estimation of writers Mr. Southey agreed far more with Warton, than with Johnson. Nor do I mean to deny, that at all times Mr. Southey was of the same mind with Sir Philip Sidney in preferring an excellent ballad in the humblest style of poetry to twenty indifferent poems that strutted in the highest (1:40).

His method is to reverse the charge of membership in a new school of poetry by placing Southey's theory of style firmly in the classical tradition. A fair presentation of the case would be, for the benefit of future readers, an edition which would juxtapose Southey's writings with their reviews. Yet Coleridge "dare[s] not hope" (1:40) that his suggestion would alter the situation; he poses a worse depreciation of future literature in light of the "gradual retrograde movement" (1:41) of the past.

Coleridge poses briefly as a prophet of doom, holding up the lost ideal of literary honor as an appeal to the reader, and the present "despotism" (1:42) as a prediction of certain deterioration. The reverence for literature, like the divine reed of Pan in Chapter II, diminishes with the growth and secularization of its social context. Books, which were originally "religious oracles," decline from "venerable preceptors" to "instructive friends" to "entertaining companions," until they reach the presently shameful state of "culprits" liable to "every self-elected, yet

not the less peremptory, judge." A parallel deterioration of the relation between author and reader is traced by Coleridge, implicitly reaffirming the prominence which he confers upon this association. The ancient authorial position of benefiting the readers and serving "their interest" has gradually been reversed to the point where the "multitudinous PUBLIC . . . sits nominal despot on the throne of criticism" above the fearful author. The interim period of this disruption of author and reader rapport, when "Poets and Philosophers, rendered diffident by their very number, addressed themselves to 'learned readers;' then, aimed to conciliate the graces of 'the candid reader'" (1:41-42), provides an interesting gloss of Coleridge's engagement of his present reader. His disapproval of "affectation . . . [and] the insincere politeness of courtly conversation,"⁶¹ "the smooth speeches of Letters" which he called "Oil,"⁶² has been considered earlier in light of his engagement with the reader of The Friend. His commitment to sincerity was for Coleridge a question of the author's moral integrity, linguistically conveyed by a correspondence of his words "to his thoughts in the sense in which he expects them to be understood by others."⁶³ He advised William Godwin that

⁶¹Notebooks 3 (May 1810): 3823.

⁶²Notebooks 2 (July-September 1805): 2659.

⁶³The Friend 1:39.

"above all things, an Author ought to be sincere to the public," because "when William Godwin stands in the title page, it is implied, that William Godwin approves that which follows."⁶⁴ Finally, Coleridge completes his charting of the demoralization of literature in society with three bizarre, satiric analogies which relegate popular critics to the company of eunuchs and sainted fools. Immediately Coleridge seems to catch himself from offering any more examples of reductio ad absurdum.

The second criticism to which Coleridge responds is the "printing of half a dozen or more playful poems" (1:43). In comparing Southey's lighter compositions with "all the silly criticisms," particularly those which isolate and reprint "worthless passages," he finds the critics to be the worst offenders of their own maxim. Coleridge nears now the exposition of his opposite approach, reemphasizing his focus on "characteristic beauties" by pointing to extreme illustrations of its reverse. The antithetical construction of his sentence which juxtaposes the first three general nouns against the three specific, concrete nouns heightens the ludicrousness of this disproportionate focus:

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 back grounds; and never let him hear the last of his galli-pots! (1:43).

⁶⁴"To William Godwin," 13 October 1800, Letter 358, Letters 1: 635.

Finally Coleridge states directly his estimate of the serious failings of contemporary criticism, replacing them with his principles of reform:

But till reviews are conducted on far other principles, and with far other motives; till in place of arbitrary dictation and petulant sneers, the reviewers support their decisions by reference to fixed canons of criticism, previously established and deduced from the nature of man; reflecting minds will pronounce it arrogance in them thus to announce themselves to men of letters, as the guides of their taste and judgement. . . . He who tells me that there are defects in a new work, tells me nothing which I should not have taken for granted without his information. But he, who points out and elucidates the beauties of an original work, does indeed give me interesting information. . . (1:44).

Coleridge's demand of intellectual responsibility on the part of reader and reviewer expresses his goal of eliciting a consistent and fair method of analysis derived from psychological and philosophical principles. De J. Jackson finds Coleridge's suggestion that "reviewers should devote themselves to teaching readers to read critically, instead of relieving them of the necessity of doing so" to be "reform indeed!"⁶⁵ Returning to his consideration of Southey's works, Coleridge closes the topic with a reiteration of his defense of the publication of "relaxations of . . . genius" as harmless in any event, and in Southey's case, as "evidence of the purity of that mind, which even in its levities never wrote a line, which it need regret on any moral account" (1:45).

⁶⁵J. R. de J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism, p. 80.

Thus Coleridge moves to an exposé of Southey's "literary character," his various accomplishments as an historian, bibliographer, popular essayist, and especially a poet, in which field, with the exception of the "highest lyric . . . he has attempted every species successfully" (1:46). The "variety and extent" of Southey's literary expertise thus established, Coleridge enumerates the qualities of Southey's work in a balanced style which conveys the man of genius's power of "combining and modifying" vivid ideas"

I look in vain for any writer, who has conveyed so much information, from so many and such recondite sources, with so many just and original reflections, in a style so lively and poignant, yet so uniformly classical and perspicuous; no one in short who has combined so much wisdom with so much wit; so much truth and knowledge with so much life and fancy. His prose is always intelligible and always entertaining (1:45-46).

In short, Southey figures as Coleridge's first example of the imaginative power of genius to combine opposites.⁶⁶

Warming to his subject, Coleridge interposes, "Here then shall I conclude? No!" (1:46). He continues, we are told, for the benefit of the reader of Southey's works, as it is in our "interest . . . no less than that of posterity to be made acquainted" with this contemporary genius. Coleridge assumes the formal epideictic stance of public defender, balancing, for the record, the defilements against Southey's character with professions of his genius and moral

⁶⁶Bowles' poetry is described (1:10,16) similarly in pairs of opposites, but Coleridge does not name him as a "Genius."

greatness.⁶⁷ The rhythmic cadence of Coleridge's style and the sense of control and direction in this closing paragraph indicate a remarkable mastery of prose. There has been no comparable writing thus far in the Biographia and we are led to believe, with Walter Bate, that

Coleridge became most completely alive and the resources of his mind most open when he could talk or write vicariously . . . when he could speak on behalf of another, as a champion. . . . With the other person in the foreground . . . Coleridge's own pent-up abilities then flowed freely.⁶⁸

His ceremonial tribute to Southey, almost completely free from afterthought and parenthetical expression, conveys a combined tone of formality and deep conviction by its structural rhythms:

But as Southey possesses, and is not possessed by, his genius, even so is he master even of his virtues. . . . Always employed, his friends find him always at leisure. . . . As son, brother, husband, father, master, friend, he moves with firm yet light steps, alike unostentatious, and alike exemplary. As a writer, he has uniformly made his talents subservient to the best interests of humanity, of public virtue, and domestic

⁶⁷The strong tone of conviction throughout this ringing tribute is substantiated in Coleridge's personal writings where he expresses his thorough and deep admiration for his friend. "My dear Southey!" he wrote in 1805, "the longer I live, and the more I see, know, and think, the more deeply do I seem to feel your Goodness/ and why at this distance may I not allow myself to utter forth my whole thought by adding--your greatness." "To Robert Southey," 2 February 1805, Letter 614, Letters 2: 1161. And in 1812 during a personal distance between the two men Coleridge wrote to his wife, "God knows my Heart! & that it is my full Belief & Conviction, that taking all together there does not exist the Man who could without flattery or delusion be called Southey's Equal." "To Mrs. S. T. Coleridge," 21 April 1812, Letter 861, Letters 3: 386.

⁶⁸Bate, Coleridge, p. 37.

piety. . . . They will likewise not fail to record, that as no man was ever a more constant friend, never had poet more friends and honorers among the good of all parties; and that quacks in education, quacks in politics, and quacks in criticism were his only enemies (1:47-49).

If in Chapter II we have seen the exposure of men who were not genius but only jealous prostitutes of the name, here we are presented with a man whose sterling moral character comes "not in obedience to any law or outward motive, but by the necessity of a happy nature;" and whose intellectual genius, in opposition to the petty egotism of anonymous critics, is "subservient to the best interests of humanity." Southey functions as an exemplum of genius; in turn, Coleridge's treatment of him is a demonstration of his critical approach to works of genius. Moreover, the treatment which Southey has suffered at the hands of anonymous critics illustrates a pervasive situation which, if not reformed, will ultimately do a great injustice to the reader. Coleridge's assault on the critics, then, is projected from his position as intermediary and not primarily out of self-interest. Until the literary community fulfills its intellectual and moral responsibilities, genius such as Southey's will remain unnurtured and unappreciated; a condition detrimental to the future of literary art and to the present reader. With Chapter III Coleridge's ideal literary fellowship, in which the reader is placed, has been further realized by the inclusion of Robert Southey, by the author's performed tribute to his colleague, and by the firm separation and

exclusion of his detractors.

The chronological passage of time has been suspended in this chapter while Coleridge investigates the possible causes of a situation which has continued for "at least 17 years;" thus, the autobiographical narrative is replaced by an aggressive analysis. Nonetheless, Coleridge's rhetorical presence is strongly felt, his voice changing from a tone of bemused irony to biting sarcasm when speaking of the critics and deepening to warm, stirring conviction when he considers Southey. Moreover, it is during his tribute to Southey that the authorial "I" is most frequent:

I have in imagination transferred to the future biographer. . . . But I cannot think so ill of human nature. . . . For reflect but on the variety and extent of his acquirements! He stands second to no man . . . and when I regard him as a popular essayist . . . I look in vain for any writer. . . (1:45).

Since the delineation of another's capacities is Coleridge's self-appointed role, "the strict rendering of another's position meshes with, in fact is geared to . . . the representation of his own," as others such as Bowyer, Bowles, Southey, and soon Wordsworth are brought into "his main stream."⁶⁹ Conversely, anonymous critics are excluded and deprecated by argument and satire, stances which Coleridge is free to adopt from his ironical and detached perspective. Without the expressed "ingenuousness toward the writer's own frailties," which we have seen demonstrated by Coleridge in

⁶⁹M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," p. 217.

Chapter I, "the shafts directed at acquaintances and at society in general will not pierce; the reader will become indignant and give his sympathies to the satirized." Coleridge had not spared himself; hence he "could be forgiven his amused excoriation of others."⁷⁰ Moreover, Coleridge's heartfelt praise of Southey is a performance of those qualities explicitly lacking in contemporary critics; his willing readiness to attest to Southey's genius and moral superiority contrasts sharply with the insecurity and jealousy exposed in Chapter II.

Chapter IV resumes the autobiographical frame; Coleridge presents his experience of Wordsworth's poetry as a young man in 1793, expressing his intellectual and emotional responses in the past tense. Before his tracing of his development via Wordsworth, which is paralleled by Wordsworth's own development as a practicing poet, Coleridge presents himself directly and immediately to the reader, presuming his participation and graciously presupposing his continued attention and understanding. The chapter opens with a self-deprecating apology, the force of which is immediately canceled by a presumption of the reader's magnanimity. "I have wandered far from the object in view," Coleridge admits, "but as I fancied to myself readers who would respect the feelings that had tempted me from the main road; so I dare calculate on not a few, who will warmly sympathize

⁷⁰Shumaker, pp. 203, 201.

with them" (1:50). Richard Mallette finds this "notion of a journey . . . revealing" in its reminder of

the narrator's concern with his audience; his work is a journey which the narrator leads and shares with his readers. He feels a certain apprehension lest he lose his readers on such a digressive route and therefore reiterates his desire to be helpful, amiable, and instructive."⁷¹

Characterized as respectful and sympathetic, the reader is further identified by Coleridge's specific (and hypothetical) description of the orientation with which the reader "has taken . . . up" Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, that is, "as he would have done any other collection of poems . . . without knowledge of, or reference to, the author's peculiar opinions." Dismissing other presumed readers, "men of business who had passed their lives chiefly in cities" and "others more catholic in their taste," Coleridge describes the ideal reader's organic experience of Wordsworth's poetry, placing a "positive obligation" on the present reader's shoulders. The few "colloquial phrases . . . they would have deemed but an inconsiderable subtraction from the merit of the whole work; or . . . as serving to ascertain the natural tendency, and consequently the proper direction of the author's genius" (1:50-51). Next, Coleridge and his audience are consolidated into a unity in their shared perception of the few minor drawbacks to the Ballads, reaching the conclusion as to the "true origin of the unexampled

⁷¹Richard Mallette, "Narrative Technique in the 'Biographia Literaria'," p. 35.

opposition" together: "In the critical remarks, therefore, prefixed and annexed to the 'Lyrical Ballads,' I believe that we may safely rest" (1:51; emphasis added). Coleridge finds the same critical misapprehension imposed upon Wordsworth as Southey endured, the imposition of intentionality on passages which, by a more judicious critic and "not a few" readers, would have been "either forgotten or forgiven as imperfections" (1:51-52). Coleridge's attention to specific figures in his review of the "general censure" of the Ballads highlights the current tendency to ground one's opinion on a preposterously narrow basis and then extrapolate that exclusive experience to include the entire work; what Coleridge advocates is, of course, a "genial" and organic reading of the work as a formal whole. But just as "less than an hundred lines" stimulated "nine-tenths of the criticism" (1:50), so too did six different people base their "general censure" of the Ballads on one poem, despite their "great pleasure" with several other poems. Coleridge distinguishes his "belief" and "conjecture" from "my own knowledge," but finally his personal experience with individuals whose judgement he admires suggests to him that a thoughtful and principled critical exposition of Wordsworth's poetry is sorely needed. The experience with a "friend whose talents I hold in the highest respect, but whose judgement and strong sound sense I have had almost continued occasion to revere" was repeated frequently: "I have heard at different

times, and from different individuals every single poem ex-tolled and reprobated" (1:54). The disparity in taste was perhaps to be expected, but that a "counterfeit of poetry" (that is, Wordsworth's commonplace imperfections)

should succeed in forming a school of imitators . . . [and] should for nearly twenty years have well-nigh engrossed criticism, as the main, if not the only, butt of review, magazine, pamphlet, poem, and paragraph;--this is indeed matter of wonder! (1:55).

Coleridge's analogies convey his view of this critical activity as a ludicrous farce, comparable to a "twenty years' war, campaign after campaign, in order to dethrone the usurper and re-establish the legitimate taste" or to "the contest . . . undecided . . . between Bacchus and the frogs in Aristophanes" (1:54-55). An even greater waste of energy, Coleridge mocks in the footnote, is "the attempt to ridicule a silly and childish poem, by writing another still sillier and still more childish." Such mimicry can only prove "that the parodist is a still greater blockhead than the original writer, and . . . a malignant coxcomb to boot" (1:55n).

It is through his presence, then, and not by reasoning or argument, but through his stylistic conveyance of his personal conjectures and experience that Coleridge places the reader in a position to empathize with the author's progression to his conclusion, the public defense of Wordsworth's poetry. To this end, Coleridge's rhetorical strategies include direct appeal to the reader, quoted speech,

concrete analogies, satire, literary quotations, and prominent authorial presence. The sense of the accumulation of identical and frustrating experiences, following a belief based on "careful and repeated examination," intensifies as Coleridge's prose becomes more punctuated with italics and exclamations and his sentences become heavier and longer, until his frustration seems to peak with the closing phrase, "--this indeed is a matter of wonder!"

With the resumption of the autobiographical distance of approximately twenty years, Coleridge adopts the past tense, couching his youthful appreciation of Wordsworth in the autobiographical perspective. Since his primary focus is his intellectual appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry and not, for example, its emotional effect (as with Bowles), Coleridge's style returns to its rational, discursive tone, though frequently involving metaphors in order to experientially convey the character of Wordsworth's poetic genius. His task is to communicate his youthful and startled enthusiasm for Descriptive Sketches; he turns, not to himself, but to the poetry, utilizing the poetic technique of metaphor and visual and auditory imagery to affect the reader. He describes the structure, "form, style, and manner of the whole poem":

. . . there is an harshness and acerbity connected and combined with words and images all a-glow, which might recall 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.

The language was not only peculiar and strong, but at times knotty and contorted, as by its own impatient strength; while the novelty and struggling crowd of images, acting in conjunction with the difficulties of the style, demanded always a greater closeness of attention, than poetry, (at all events, than descriptive poetry) has a right to claim (1:56).

He then offers a selection from the very poem he has attempted to describe, not as an example of Wordsworth's style, but as a metaphor for the man's genius, transforming Wordsworth's poetry into a self-reflexive "text" like the Biographia itself. Coleridge's initial approach to this subject reflects his own maxim of viewing youthful faults with an equitable perspective and his belief that "where there is genius, these [characteristic defects] always point to his characteristic beauties" (1:43). What has been true in Coleridge's literary life is similar in the case of genius: "The poetic Psyche, in its process to full development, undergoes as many changes as its Greek name-sake, the butterfly" (1:57). This sense of organic process which, of course, the popular critics consistently deny in their fixation on small or temporary flaws, is a theme which runs throughout the Biographia, in the autobiographical sections, in the treatment of aesthetic experience of literature, and in the delineation of genius. Coleridge's autobiographical vantage point yielded this truth which he now confers on Wordsworth --that youthful errors become, with the transformation of growth, organic to personal development, like "diseases, which must work on the humours, and be thrown out on the

surface, in order to secure the patient from their future recurrence" (1:57-58).

Wordsworth's development in his craft is framed within Coleridge's personal chronology: "I was in my twenty-fourth year, when I had the happiness of knowing Mr. Wordsworth personally, and while memory lasts, I shall hardly forget the sudden effect produced on my mind, by his recitation of a manuscript poem. . ." (1:58). Thus neither Wordsworth's poetry alone, nor Coleridge's autobiography is given primary focus, but the intellectual and experiential relationship of the two is stressed. At the risk of elucidating the obvious, the meaning of this personal rhetoric, which is sustained by such phrases as "I did not perceive anything particular," "in my then opinion," "made so unusual an impression on my feelings immediately, and subsequently on my judgement" (1:58-59), can be grasped if we imagine Coleridge's other compositional choices: an impersonal work of critical analysis, or a "pure" autobiography in which the crises and highlights of the Wordsworth-Coleridge relationship were presented. The intended genre for this work, however, encompasses, through selectivity, both approaches; its immediate purpose is to convey a "lived," personal experience of literature. That Wordsworth's poetry stimulated Coleridge's judgement and altered his experience becomes explicit and literally present to the reader by Coleridge's self-quoting. His experience of 1796, when he detected

the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying . . . and above all, the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere. . . of the ideal world (1:59)

was extended, refined, and reaffirmed when in 1809 he wrote,

To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day . . . had rendered familiar . . . is the character and privilege of genius (1:59).

Both Coleridgean expressions, stimulated by Wordsworth, are re-collected in this 1815, present work of recommitment to the literary community. The text reverberates with reflexivity.

Now on his own, Coleridge reviews in detail the process by which he arrived at his decision to undertake a philosophical exploration of the Imagination. He alludes to his mental habits: "Repeated meditations led me first to suspect. . ." (1:60). He sketches the intellectual obstacles which had to be overcome: "The first and most important point to be proved is, that two conceptions perfectly distinct are confused under one and the same word" (1:61-62). He offers his successful method in approaching them: "If therefore I should succeed in establishing the actual existences of two faculties generally different, the nomenclature would be at once determined." He expresses his intellectual and humanitarian motivation:

. . . the theory of the fine arts, and of poetry in particular, could not, I thought, but derive some additional and important light. It would in its immediate

effects furnish a torch of guidance to the philosophical critic; and ultimately to the poet himself (1:62).

Finally, he disarmingly reveals his personal aspirations:

I trust therefore, that there will be more good humour than contempt, in the smile with which the reader chastises my self-complacency, if I confess myself uncertain, whether the satisfaction from the perception of a truth new to myself may not have been rendered more poignant by the conceit, that it would be equally so to the public. There was a time, certainly, in which I took some little credit to myself, in the belief that I had been the first of my countrymen, who had pointed out. . . (1:62-63).

While distinguishing himself from Wordsworth, Coleridge is careful to stress their relationship, reiterating the "advantage[s]" derived from his "friend['s]" contribution (1:64). Their intellectual departures from one another were, in fact, an outgrowth of their shared experiences, a relationship aptly conveyed in Coleridge's image of the tree whose "branches with their poetic fruitage" Wordsworth has already "sketch[ed]" (1:64).

The chapter closes as it opened, with Coleridge's direct appeal to the reader, requesting his patience immediately after assuming his participation: "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" (1:64; emphasis added). Deprecating his text, Coleridge describes the Biographia as an "immethodical . . . miscellany" (1:64), but as Cooke points out, "at once institutes a comparison with Hooker . . . to acquit him of the charge."⁷² Coleridge uses established authority to

⁷²Cooke, p. 216.

confirm the reader's commitment, simultaneously reaffirming their shared membership in the historical fellowship of literary men. These appeals also function as a challenge to the reader who, as a witness to Coleridge's painstaking preparations for this future study, is now called upon to rise to the occasion. Moreover, the ensuing "labor" should yield appropriately meaningful results: this forthcoming preliminary to "an intelligible statement of my poetic creed" is "calculated either to effect a fundamental conviction, or to receive a fundamental confutation" (1:65). The reader is given the freedom to choose either position, but (and for the first time Coleridge alludes to a quite different audience, his public detractors) responsible attention, demanded by the author, must precede a judgement.

Contrary to popular critical belief that the opening chapters of the Biographia are merely "endless preliminaries"⁷³ which point to Coleridge's incapacity "to shape a book,"⁷⁴ Chapters I-IV can be viewed as a structural entity in which major themes are established and enacted and where Coleridge's personal rhetoric creates a relationship with the audience which is intrinsic to the meaning of the work. The purposes of the Biographia which Coleridge announced in its opening pages, to settle the "controversy concerning

⁷³I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, p. 44.

⁷⁴E. K. Chambers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, A Biographical Study, p. 280.

the true nature of poetic diction" and to "define . . . the real poetic character of the poet" were, in part, to be structurally accomplished by an autobiographical "narration," an intention which is fulfilled in these first chapters. Chapter I, with its personal review of intellectual obligations, introduces the question of poetic diction with Coleridge's reaffirmation of the lessons of Bowyer; Bowles' poetry encompassed Bowyer's principle of organic poetic language as well as inspiring in Coleridge "an actual friendship as of a man for a man." Chapter II, in preparation of the delineation of genius, consists largely of a psychological investigation into the opposite mentality and behaviour. Chapter III includes a tribute to a contemporary poetic genius, in which the "real poetic character" is further defined and celebrated. Finally, with Chapter IV Coleridge's two main subjects are reunited in the topic of Wordsworth's poetry, though the question of poetic diction is prominent. Furthermore, Chapters I and IV, composed in the autobiographical mode, serve as a frame to Chapters II and III where the narrative is suspended; together the four chapters constitute a balanced consideration of poetic language and character. Although he excludes the tribute to Southey (mistakenly, I believe) from his consideration of the first four chapters, Appleyard rightly concludes that the insight which Wordsworth afforded Coleridge, "an awareness of the unity of thought and feeling, . . . summarizes and completes

the first two [that is, the lessons of Bowyer and Bowles] and implies an activity so unique as a creative communication that a special faculty of the mind must be distinguished as its source."⁷⁵

Two major themes reverberate and frequently coalesce throughout this material, organizing the various subjects into a unified concern. First, the significance of proportion recurs time and time again, whether on an autobiographical level or as a principle of criticism. Various disproportionate experiences, such as Coleridge's youthful and adult immersion in "abstruse metaphysics," the critics' fixation on minor flaws, single poems, or the poet's personality, and the commanding genius's liability to an immersion in his immediate, external world, all indicate a lack of comprehensive vision, fixing the individual in an extreme, unbalanced, and therefore inadequate position. In contrast, the healthy mental state, in which "natural faculties . . . expand, and original tendencies . . . develop," involves a balanced harmony between external senses and internal ideas: the shaping mind turns "things" into "thoughts," thereby effecting a "sanity" which is essentially a state of moderation and balance between extremes. Or, in another idiom, an organic reading of a work of literature implies a balanced perspective, an ability to treat the work as a whole, discovering the relations between parts and avoiding

⁷⁵Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, p. 176.

the temptation to rest with a single, monomaniacal concern. The discovery of the meaning of a work of art (for example, a Raphael painting), Coleridge implies, is dependent upon an "organic" perspective, that is, the point of view or genial approach which searches out internal relationships, attempting to connect separate and single entities into a proportionate whole.

The second theme which echoes throughout these chapters is that of process, a continuous action which progresses through time and, as such, implies change and development as opposed to fixation or end. Coleridge believed that "all things are a Process;"⁷⁶ his literary autobiography is a demonstration of the developing course of his intellectual powers. To the modern reader a developmental autobiography which traces a pattern of growth, with its implicit regressions and advances, is commonplace. However, this approach is an authorial choice and we have numerous examples of autobiographies which seem bent upon denying the experience of process in their focus on external activities or in their construct of life as a logical phenomenon which proceeds by cause and effect. Coleridge's faults as a poetic craftsman, however, are presented as contributory to his capacities as a philosophic critic; his arrival at the "solid foundation" of psychology as a basis for his criticism is presented in

⁷⁶"To Robert Southey," 25 January 1800, Letter 314, Letters 1: 564.

experiential terms; and his decision to define the Imagination is traced along an intellectual and personal course. The route is similar: in both cases, Coleridge's individual, personal experience is primary; an influential poet enters his life, stimulating his confrontation of essential questions; a dialectic or comparative investigation follows; and finally, Coleridge embarks on a search for fundamental principles. Moreover, the process he first underwent after reading Bowles, by which he arrived at the "solid foundation . . . of the faculties of the human mind itself," is contributory to and enveloped by his later process and arrival at a definition of the Imagination.

With the autobiographical mode it is difficult, and perhaps unadvisable, to separate the concepts of organicism and process, for implicit in the notion of a movement through time is the (admittedly, humanly imposed) characteristic of development. Coleridge's choice of the developmental autobiography as a frame for his critical principles is, I believe, successful. Coleridge's personal and intellectual self-development acts as a pedigree for his chosen role of philosophic critic. He, in turn, applies this concept of growth and evolution to poetic genius, avoiding the judgmental tendency to freeze poetic flaws in permanent isolation. Moreover, to fulfill his ultimate purpose of the reader's "fundamental conviction," Coleridge employs the autobiographical rhetoric of experience, allowing the reader

to enter into the author's experiences vicariously. Coleridge's selective autobiography, with its rhetorical presentation of the "drama of . . . the thought growing,"⁷⁷ is a vehicle for the reader's literary and immediate experience of, primarily, Wordsworth's poetry. To this end, Coleridge performs various authorial engagements, acting self-consciously before the reader and creating a self-conscious literary text which depends on the reader's cooperation for its very existence. As Coleridge wrote of literary communication, "This Work is not the Idea, but the ceremonial Rites by which I invoke it, or provoke to it."⁷⁸

⁷⁷"To Thomas Poole," 28 January 1810, Letter 801, Letters 3: 282.

⁷⁸N. 52, quoted in Kathleen Coburn, The Self Conscious Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 66.

CHAPTER III

Chapters V through VIII of the Biographia differ markedly in content and compositional style from those preceding and from the following Chapters IX through XI. The rhetorical style too is altered: although the autobiographical chronology is sustained, its narrative form is suspended; Coleridge follows the course of his youthful philosophical studies, but presents them in the present tense of argumentation from his mature and altered perspective. Interestingly enough, his former adherence to associationism goes unmentioned, and in place of the autobiographical theme of process, the authorial point of view now conveys a sense of conclusive knowledge and lasting conversion.¹ Coleridge's firmly polemical stance correspondingly alters the reader's role: in place of our intimate rapport with a self-exposed author, which held the foreground in the opening chapters, reader and author are now aligned in league against a public

¹M. H. Abrams, "Coleridge and the Romantic Vision of the World," Coleridge's Variety: Bicentenary Studies, ed. John Beer (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), p. 107. Abrams finds the entire Biographia to be written after Coleridge "had escaped from the flood of doubt and the wilderness of despair, in the persona of a new creature who sees the world with new eyes."

and insidious opponent. Although these chapters are far from dispassionate, the alliance of author and reader assumes a different tone: Coleridge and his audience share a combative stand (along with eminent historical authorities) in righteous defense of their "human nature." The appeal of the common cause supplants that of private intimacy as Coleridge's focus widens from his literary autobiography to a preparation of his universal epistemology. Moreover, after creating this reader-oriented rhetoric of loyal solidarity, Coleridge employs it as his major argumentative weapon against associationism which he presents as contrary to what "we well know" to be our experience, fragmentary, and ultimately both inhuman and inhumane.

These chapters have posed some problem for readers who find the refutation of associationism to be impropportionate and dryly didactic. J. A. Appleyard, for example, finds the devotion of four chapters to associationism, in comparison with "only one short chapter to the influence of the whole idealist tradition," to be an imbalance betraying Coleridge's "fundamentally negative motivation."² The rhetoric of these chapters has largely remained unexamined or described as "the philosophical style," characterized by "conservative diction . . . a limited range in tone, drab metaphors, long sentences, and a scarcity of rhetorical devices."³ Stylistic

²J. A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 187.

³Lynn Merle Grow, The Prose Style of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1976), p. 120.

analysis shows this is far from being the case, and Jerome Christensen is more accurate in pointing out Coleridge's many classical rhetorical devices in this material. He describes Coleridge's style, however, as "marginal rhetoric" for its shift from "a deliberate, scientific argument of inductive or deductive proof to a mobile fragmentary discourse of persuasion."⁴ The coexistence of what we might call a discursive, logical style as well as blatant rhetorical devices need not, however, constitute the duplicity which Christensen suggests. The strict division between philosophy and rhetoric seems more of an academic framework than an operative practice; as Henry Johnstone maintains,

Even the most responsible and least questionable philosophical writings that there are have a rhetorical vector. It is this vector that renders them more than just collections of principles or evidence. . . . It is never the case that Plato, or any other thinker, simply places the truth before us and lets us decide. . . . The philosopher does not just stumble on truths; he reaches them through argumentation. But argumentation and rhetoric converge in philosophy.⁵

Also, it is helpful to presume some purposiveness on Coleridge's behalf, to consider that the mixture of logic and emotional appeal might fulfill the author's intention rather than constitute duplicity, and to investigate a possible

⁴Jerome C. Christensen, "Coleridge's Marginal Method in the Biographia Literaria," PMLA 92 (1977): 934.

⁵Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "From Philosophy to Rhetoric and Back," Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1978), pp. 62, 63.

design to be accomplished through Coleridge's choice of content and style.

The central intellectual aim of these four chapters is to argue that associationism, particularly Hartleyan mechanism, "is neither tenable in theory, nor founded in facts" (1:74), a refutation which is preparatory to the presentation of Coleridge's epistemology and his theory of the Imagination. However, because Coleridge's demand on his audience is nothing less than a "fundamental conviction or . . . a fundamental confutation" (1:65), his purpose moves beyond the realm of logical proof and dispassionate reasoning. Thus, Coleridge's rhetoric and authorial presence convey the intensity of commitment he wishes to effect in his audience. We may consider these chapters, and indeed the Biographia itself, as a genre of rhetorical discourse which, as Edwin Black suggests, instead of depending on an emotional response as the consequence of logical argument, utilizes emotion as the force of the argument. The author's purpose, of course, determines his use of emotional appeal, and along the scale of rhetorical discourse from "disinterested, transitory, tentative approbation" to a "radical, permanent, extensive alteration in belief,"⁶ Coleridge's aim falls close to the latter goal. We are not merely asked to calmly and impersonally find associationism insufficient to a

⁶Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 132.

comprehensive psychological system; we are called to a revision of our view of the universe, to assent to a philosophy which entails the responsibility of self-initiated, creative knowledge. For Coleridge associationism was the "philosophy of death," the "neutralization of nature." It may be suggested that since Coleridge abandons the intimacies of the autobiographical narrative, he compensates, in a sense, by making the emotional force of his argument intentionally personal and urgent. For we cannot affirm the Imagination as "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception and as repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (1:202) without a total conversion of intelligence and will. The rejection of the "Mechanistic Dogmatists" is not only the first step in the personal revolution; it is nothing less than an escape from a system which "strikes Death"⁷ to an intellectual and spiritual rebirth.

Coleridge's audience, then, is not merely called on to judge, but to assent to a conviction of far-reaching personal implications. The intensity and thoroughness of their assent demands not only intellectual deliberation but also an emotional charge, a movement out of the lethargy of passivism. In light of Coleridge's characterization of his audience, it is difficult to conceive of them as confirmed

⁷"To William Wordsworth," 30 May 1815, Letter 969, Letters 4: 575, 574.

associationists, but he found the "whole drift of contemporary thought [to be] in the direction pointed out by Locke and Hobbes."⁸ The empiricism and materialism of the eighteenth century he blamed not only for the French Revolution, but also for the pervasive degeneration in the national character, morals, education, and religion.⁹ Conversely, the German Transcendentalists offered the conceptual groundwork "for articulating an alternative vision of the universe,"¹⁰ one which affirmed the creative autonomy of the human mind while offering the possibility of the unity of existence. Concerned with the widespread implications of associationism and believing that his escape from "that labyrinth-Den of Sophistry" afforded him "a better clue than has hitherto been known, to enable others to do the same,"¹¹ Coleridge took particular rhetorical care to insure his audience's confirmation of "our own consciousness" (1:86), the vital unity of being and knowledge.

Coleridge has been criticized for failing to provide a systematic, logical refutation of associationist psychology;

⁸J. B. Priestley, Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge, quoted in Appleyard, p. 37.

⁹The Friend I: 446-47, where he lists such consequences as "the eclipse of the ideal by the mere shadow of the sensible" and the "plebification of knowledge."

¹⁰M. H. Abrams, p. 108.

¹¹"To Thomas Poole," 15 January 1804, Letter 536, Letters 2: 1037.

however, we may consider whether the intensity of his purpose would be served by such an approach. In announcing the focus of his topic, Coleridge excludes the disputed influence of associationist psychology on metaphysics, for it "would require more time, skill and power than I believe myself to possess" (1:67); he also promises a future work which will treat materialism and its ensuing psychology "at large and systematically" (1:91-92). His statement of intention, to "exhibit the grounds of my conviction" (1:73), with its two elements of logical demonstration and personal belief, is, I believe, well met in these chapters. Using a variety of rhetorical tools, Coleridge emphasizes two central ideas throughout this section, the one aligning itself to his "conviction" and the other to deductive reasoning.

First, Coleridge repeatedly draws attention to the dangerous and extensive implications of the associationist doctrine, painting in vivid and evocative language a sometimes absurd and sometimes appalling picture of existence according to associationism. Secondly, the emotionalism of this exposé is offset by his frequent appeals to the reader's "common sense" (1:89) regarding the truths of human nature. By self-knowledge or by an historical knowledge of human behavior, we know, Coleridge maintains, certain unmistakable, universal truths about the workings of our own mind and the nature of existence; these common truths are, he demonstrates, in radical opposition to the tenets of associationism. What may strike us as a circular argument was for Coleridge the

only proper and successful method by which to approach "the component faculties of the human mind itself" (1:14), for "the mind of man . . . is to be estimated (if at all) alone by an inductive process; that is, by its effects."¹² A common idea, an intellectual tendency, the existence of society, religion, and art, a universal experience--all constituted for Coleridge the "effects" of the mind of man, and a psychology which could not account for such human enterprises was invalid.¹³

Unlike Chapters I-IV where his personal history created a bond with the reader, in these chapters Coleridge frequently appeals to the reader's membership in the human race, directing our attention to the "mind of man" or the "nature of man," and asking us to observe the operation of our own mind as an individual proof for his inclusive epistemology. Such appeals constitute a strong bond of generic identification, conveying a sense of ageless continuity, a universally shared identity, and the implicit reassurance of the continuous, indomitable "nature" of man which

¹²"To Joseph Cottle, April 1814, Letter 922, Letters 3: 483.

¹³John Stuart Mill noted this approach of Coleridge's: "With Coleridge . . . the very fact that any doctrine had been believed by thoughtful men, and received by whole nations or generations of mankind, was part of the problem to be solved, was one of the phenomena to be accounted for. The long duration of a belief, he thought, is at least proof of an adaptation in it to some portion or other of the human mind. . . ." On Bentham and Coleridge (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 100.

perseveres throughout the varying ages. Indeed, Coleridge's personal belief was that "there is more than a metaphor in the affirmation, that the whole human Species from Adam to Bonaparte, from China to Peru, may be considered as one Individual Mind."¹⁴ The opening sentence of Chapter V calls attention to this continuous, universal element in the history of the human race, immediately setting before the reader an historical reality unaccounted for by associationist psychology: "There have been men in all ages, who have been impelled as by an instinct to propose their own nature as a problem, and who devote their attempts to its solution" (1:65). His language highlighting the voluntary and natural tendency of the mind toward self-consciousness, Coleridge suggests the irony of an epistemology excluding the very intellectual activity which gave rise to it. The same appeal to a universal "human nature" again serves to subtly undermine associationism when he states in the same paragraph: "But it is not in human nature to meditate on any mode of action, without enquiring after the law that governs it. . . ." (1:66). The self-initiated search for first principles is an ageless human reality unexplained by associationism which subjugates all mental activity to the law of external time.

In his historical tracing of this doctrine Coleridge

¹⁴"To Josiah Wedgwood," February 1801, Letter 384, Letters 2: 701.

further alienates the modern empiricists while solidifying the reader's inclusion in the generic bond of "human." For centuries human beings have engaged, quite voluntarily and unpragmatically, in the activity of metaphysical inquiry, a study of the timeless, immaterial essence of the nature of being. Moreover, Descartes, Hobbes, Hume, and Hartley are all participants in and beneficiaries of this activity, boasting a "venerable ancestry" (1:66). An implicit reminder exists of the moderns' intellectual responsibility to their predecessors and to the body of thought which has existed "for many, very many centuries." Mackintosh and Hobbes (and elsewhere, in Coleridge's letters, Locke) are guilty of shirking the obligations and indebtedness attendant upon membership in this intellectual community, a neglect which for Coleridge implied not only a breach of faith but a narrowness of vision. For a philosophy which was "the most ancient" was "therefore presumptively the most natural" (1:95). Underlying Coleridge's refutation of associationism throughout these four chapters is his admitted equation of "ancient" and "truth" with the rhetorically powerful premise of a "human nature." His acknowledgement of indebtedness to ancient philosophers, then, sheds grace on his authorial undertaking while simultaneously discrediting the modern associationists whose denial (or worse, ignorance) of ancient truth is tantamount to a denial of human nature. Coleridge's rhetoric employs this syllogism both as a shield of generic identity for his audience and as the weapon which

strikes the brand of "unnatural" at his opponent.

Thus Coleridge begins his refutation of associationism with a corrective restoration of "the obligations of intellect," a moral duty of authorship which we have seen performed in his intellectual autobiography. In his reinstatement of Descartes, Coleridge presents the basic law of association straightforwardly, reserving his criticism for Hobbes alone.¹⁵ A similar comparison between Locke and Descartes is found in letters to Josiah Wedgwood in 1801. There Coleridge goes to some length to rectify Descartes' reputation by proving that Locke's traditional fame for having overthrown Descartes' theory of innate ideas was unfounded. This misrepresentation was also occasioned by Mackintosh who figures, Coleridge sarcastically remarks, as "an important exception most honorable to the modern" to the difficulty of advancing "a new error in the philosophy of the intellect" (1:66-67). Coleridge's statements to Wedgwood concerning the motives of the stern comparison shed some light on his authorial choice of an historical introduction to his refutation of Hartleyan associationism:

¹⁵Coleridge seems attracted to Descartes' "method of doubt" and his autobiographical, self-analytic procedure: "In the Meditations and the Treatise De Methodo Descartes gives a little History of the rise and growth of his opinions. When he first began to think himself from out of that state . . . he saw . . . and seeing that his other Ideas were less vivid . . . he was led to believe. . . . These Judgements too were often found to have been wrong; he often misunderstood the meaning. . . ." The language of process is reminiscent of Coleridge's. "To Josiah Wedgwood," 24 February 1801, Letter 382, Letters 2:686.

I feel deeply . . . what ungracious words I am writing. I hazard the danger of being considered one of those trifling men who . . . hunt out in obscure corners of Books for paragraphs in which that System may seem to have been anticipated. . . . I seem to myself as far as these facts have not been noticed, to have done a good work, in restoring a name, to which Englishmen have been especially unjust, to the honors which belong to it. . . . Discoveries of these and similar Facts in literary History . . . lessen that pernicious custom . . . of neglecting to make ourselves accurately acquainted with the opinions of those who have gone before us. . . . It is even better to err in admiration of our Forefathers, [than] to become all Ear, like Blind men, living upon the Alms and casual mercies of contemporary Intellect. Besides, Life is short, and Knowledge infinite; and it is well therefore that powerful and thinking minds should know exactly where to set out from, and so lose no time in superfluous Discoveries of Truths long before discovered. That periodic Forgetfulness, which would be a shocking Disease in the mind of an Individual relatively to it's own Discoveries, must be pernicious in the Species. For I would believe there is more than a metaphor in the affirmation that the whole human Species . . . may be considered as one Individual Mind.¹⁶

The theme which underlies Coleridge's specific criticism of Locke (vague differentiation of philosophical terms, careless translation, bewilderment of the reader, ignorance concerning the ancient metaphysicians) is his breach of faith with his philosophical heritage, demonstrated by his ignorant misuse of Descartes' ideas. Coleridge's tracing of the associationist doctrine to Aristotle, then, functions as more than preparatory background material; it constitutes the performance of a duty implicit in Coleridge's ideal of the intellectual community, an indebtedness which some modern associationists have unwisely neglected.

¹⁶"To Josiah Wedgwood," February 1801, Letters 2: 700-701.

Coleridge's regressive movement to the "source . . . to the first, so to the fullest and most perfect enunciation of the associative principle" (1:71) also seems a rhetorical flaunting of the control of the "one law of time" (1:69). It is during this contrast of Aristotle with the modern empiricists that Coleridge's rhetoric becomes barbed, his language mocking the various "fiction[s]." In five negative parallel phrases Coleridge stresses the foolish notions which Aristotle avoided, employing discordant metaphors and juxtaposing the language of materialism and the language of the mind or spirit. Coleridge's jarring combination of the inert with the vital ("particles propagating motion like billiard balls"), the mechanical with the mental and the natural ("an electric light . . . the ultimate organ of inward vision, which rises to the brain like an Aurora Borealis"), and the mental with the physical ("intelligent fluids" [1:71]) concretizes for the reader the absurdity of a system which disregards the "natural differences of things and thoughts" (1:66). Coleridge next contrasts Aristotle's scientific inductive method with the extreme claims of the moderns. Avoiding an hypothesis for the ultimate cause of association, Aristotle employs objective, scientific observation to arrive at certain proximate causes of the recollection of associable ideas. Nor does he align logically exclusive entities: "he excludes place and motion from all the operations of thought" (1:72). Nor does he confuse the "passive fancy and mechanical memory; that which supplies to all other

faculties their objects" (1:73) with the thinking faculty itself. This negative contrast clarifies Coleridge's quarrel with the modern associationists: they claim a final and external cause for the associative process; in doing so, they abandon the most basic logic of homogeneity between a cause and its effect; and they raise association to the status of the sole activity of all thought.

The authorial "I", which has been absent for most of this chapter, now rather abruptly emerges at the close as Coleridge relates a personal experience which attests to the rich indebtedness and reciprocity of the philosophical community and reemphasizes Coleridge's claim that Aristotle's was the first and best formulation of the associative doctrine. Coleridge refrains from commentary in narrating the incident in which Hume's copies of some of Thomas Aquinas's books, among them Aquinas's copy of Aristotle's Parva Naturalia filled with commentary, were given to Mackintosh. The suggestion is surely that Aquinas's respect for Aristotle assumed the proper form, while Hume's Essay constituted the great literary insult of unacknowledged use of another's ideas. The final irony is that Mackintosh, in his assessment of Hobbes as the "original discoverer" of the law of association could yet ignore Aristotle while admiring Aquinas, and still find the moderns superior to the ancients.¹⁷

¹⁷Coleridge believed Mackintosh unable to appreciate "an eminently original man." The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. T. Ashe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), pp. 25-26.

Mackintosh, who frames this chapter, seems to figure as a fitting example of an irresponsible, self-proclaimed philosopher who promotes the pernicious errors resulting from careless and incomplete study. He closes the chapter on Coleridge's version of the history of associationism as a negative reminder to the reader that the pursuit of philosophy is ideally "an affectionate seeking after the truth" (1:94). For Coleridge the approach itself, earlier described as the "awakening by the noblest models the fond and unmixed LOVE and ADMIRATION," this "affectionate seeking" is inherent to the valid discovery. Elsewhere Coleridge bemoaned the absence of any "truly & nobly-minded Psychologist;" he believed ample materials existed, but "in order to make fit use of these materials he must love and honor, as well as understand, human nature--rather, he must love in order to understand it."¹⁸ Coleridge's public rectification of the influence of Descartes and Aristotle is a demonstration of the highest value in Coleridge's literary fellowship, the humanitarian expression of "intellectual obligations." His closing quotation from Wordsworth ("I earnestly solicit the good wishes and friendly patience of my readers, while I thus go 'sounding on my dim and perilous way.'" [1:74]) is a gesture of inclusion to the reader in this fellowship characterized by conscientious tribute, willing acknowledgement, and forbearance.

¹⁸ Notebooks 2 (September 1808): 3372.

The core of Coleridge's objection to Hartleyan association in Chapters VI and VII takes the form of an argument from consequents: Coleridge unfolds the theory of mechanistic vibrations in order first to demonstrate its logical impossibility, but chiefly to expose its extreme implications. With his focus solely on Hartley's system, Coleridge's rhetoric and language become more emphatic and deliberately provocative. Chapter VI opens with an impatient dismissal of Hartley's "hypothetical vibrations," since Coleridge's predecessors have already exposed the "outraging" contradictions. Coleridge further promises to avoid the question of mechanism as the sole philosophy or as a valid philosophy at all. Briefly but effectively Coleridge breaks both promises, a ploy which he repeats in Chapter VII when he enumerates to the audience what "we will agree to forget" (1:81). While claiming to reserve the question of mechanism as a philosophy, Coleridge asserts that to answer the question affirmatively would carry bewildering repercussions, for to subject metaphysics to "the despotism of the eye," creates a restlessness: "invisible things are not the object of vision." Thus Coleridge answers the question reserved "for another place."

And "the little" that he limits himself to concerning Hartley's vibrations in aether makes up the following two paragraphs where Coleridge tackles the physiological dynamics of Hartley's theory, granting "for a moment" two possibilities in order to demonstrate their infeasibility.

Coleridge's presentation of the vibratory system emphasizes the absence of any certainty as to how it works: "how are dissimilar ideas associated?" Coleridge, appearing to reason from his opponent's premises, grants "the possibility of . . . a disposition in a material nerve" (1:75), a concession which he simultaneously scorns as "scarcely less absurd than to say, that a weathercock had acquired a habit of turning to the east, from the wind having been so long in that quarter." The disposition is either multiple or singular, Coleridge posits, neither of which rationally explain how different vibrations come to be associated. Having demonstrated the logical but fruitless path, Coleridge finds Hartley's answer to the dilemma "constrained." He then proceeds to a dramatization of the consequences of "contemporaneity."

Coleridge's expressed admiration of Hartley's character acts as a transition between the preceding demonstration and the depiction of consequences. This momentary tribute to Hartley as "too great a man, too coherent a thinker" (1:76), repeated in Chapter VII with the careful distinction maintained between the "author and the man," seems designed to offset Coleridge's occasional but unmistakably scornful tone. In this initial exposé of consequents, the imagery which sustains his analogies suggests lack of control, chance, and excessiveness; Coleridge's use of metaphors taken out of their proper context (or "denaturalized")¹⁹

¹⁹Christensen, p. 934.

conveys a fear of the unnatural, unmodified "despotism" of external reality. The will, which Coleridge identified with the self,²⁰ is reduced to:

a broad stream, winding through a mountainous country with an indefinite number of currents, varying and running into each other as the gusts chance to blow from the opening of the mountains. The temporary union of several currents in one, so as to form the main current of the moment, would present an accurate image of Hartley's theory of the will.

Not only are the currents subject to "chance" gusts of wind, but the number is "indefinite," the union "temporary" and the main current only "of the moment." Coleridge's second image reinforces the frightening sense of the uncontrollable impingement of the external upon a defenseless, passive self. His mention of the top of St. Paul's church, of "how immense must be the sphere of a total impression . . . and how rapid and continuous the series of such total impressions" conveys a deliberate sense of dizziness. The experiential consequence of associationism, if taken to its logical extreme, would be an "absolute delirium" or an uncontrolled barrage of unending impressions. At the close of his extended exposition of this "complete lightheadedness," Coleridge reassures his reader that the will, which associationism denies, is nonetheless "perhaps never wholly suspended," a rather comforting idea he will develop in Chapter VII.

²⁰"My Will & I seem perfect Synonimes--whatever does not apply to the first, I refuse to the latter/--Any thing strictly of outward Force I refuse to acknowledge, as done by me/it is done with me." Notebooks 1 (December 1803): 1717.

Like Chapter V, this chapter closes with a personal experience, here designed to counteract the associationist supremacy of contemporaneity. The case of the young girl who, after 16 years, remembered passages of Greek and Latin, proves to Coleridge that thought, far from being subject to time and place, may be imperishable. Having made the suggestion of the infinity of human consciousness, the opposite extreme of mechanism, Coleridge breaks off his emotional utterance as if in fear and a sense of his own unworthiness:

Yea, in the very nature of a living spirit, it may be more possible that heaven and earth should pass away, than that a single act, a single thought, should be loosened or lost from that living chain of causes, to all whose links, conscious or unconscious, the free-will, our only absolute self, is co-extensive and co-present. But not now dare I longer discourse of this, waiting for a loftier mood, and a nobler subject, warned from within and from without, that it is profanation to speak of these mysteries. . . (1:80).

This startling ending to a chapter of argumentation, reminiscent of the personal outburst at the close of his analysis of genius in Chapter II, is comparable to the classical rhetorical technique of aposiopesis in which the speaker, so moved by emotion, would stop suddenly in midcourse, leaving his listeners stunned and thoughtful. This finale, with its allusion to the glory and awe implicit in the potentially infinite human mind, strikes one as quite intentional. We are witnessing a rhetorical drama: Coleridge, who has sustained for some time his role as a vehement arguer, adopting for the most part his opposition's premises in order to refute them, seems to finally give way to his own

radical belief in the power of the mind, suggesting an intimation so powerful that he is profoundly and ultimately moved and made inarticulate. He has moved from the "highest abstraction and most philosophical form" of associationism to a comparable plane in his own theory, from the postulate of a mind subject to time to the suggestion of a consciousness unlimited by time, from a mentality victimized by external impressions to a creative Imagination which is the analogue of the divine creative power. Bishop Hunt, in defining the object of Coleridge's Neoplatonic philosophy as "beyond the reach of language," has noted that more than one chapter of the Biographia ends

in a foreign tongue or with quotations from Scripture, often fortified with bold type and exclamation points --as if to suggest the moment when philosophy, having reached the limits of logical expression, must give away to a sacred language of some kind.²¹

Coleridge's fearful suggestion, with its strongly biblical overtones,²² is also an impassioned exultation of the creative and integral self, and a forceful rejection of the dehumanization of associationist psychology. It is as if the author undergoes the experience of his text, allowing his passionate and radical "conviction" to emerge in expression. Its parallel in Romantic poetry is the "climactic moment of

²¹Bishop C. Hunt, Jr., "Coleridge and the Endeavor of Philosophy," PMLA 91 (1976): 834, 835.

²²See Shawcross's note from Crabb Robinson, Diary, &c, July 12, 1819: "'Coleridge has the striking thought that possibly the punishment of a future life may consist in bringing back the consciousness of the past,'" p. 235.

intuited transcendence, which always manifests itself as an epiphanic silence."²³

The dramatic close of Chapter VI also serves as an entree to Chapter VII where Coleridge intensifies his rendering of the unnatural, bizarre consequences of associationism, but also now directly presents his alternative to the reader, an active, creative mind which reflects the existence of a controlling, integrated self. The chapter may be divided into these two sections with Coleridge's deference to Hartley's moral character serving as a transition. In this exposé of the implications of associationism Coleridge resumes his concern with the mind's blind passivity, stating that with the transformation of the will (whose function rightly is "to controul, determine, and modify") into a mere mechanical effect, the mind becomes a "slave of chance," and the soul "a mere ens logicum . . . present only to be pinched or stroked, while the very squeals or purring are produced by an agency wholly independent and alien" (1:81). With each repeated promise to "pass by," "to forget for the moment," or to "at one high bound" surmount an impossible theoretical obstacle, Coleridge's rhetoric intensifies with growing indignation at the debasement implicit in such consequences of associationism. Far more attention is paid to the reader in these dramatic renderings which cast

²³Cyrus Hamlin, "The temporality of Selfhood: Metaphor and Romantic Poetry," NLH 6 (Autumn, 1974): 109-19.

association as the attacker of our sense of identity, our self-created existence, our emotional realities, and finally, our belief in God. Coleridge begins the list of indignities, quite pointedly, with his present work with which we are intimately and thoughtfully involved:

the disquisition, to which I am at present soliciting the reader's attention, may be as truly said to be written by Saint Paul's church, as by me: for it is the mere motion of my muscles and nerves; . . . Thus the whole universe co-operates to produce the minutest stroke of every letter, save only that I myself, and I alone, have nothing to do with it" (1:82).

This reductio ad absurdum, particularly insulting to both author and reader of a philosophical autobiography such as the Biographia, continues to build incrementally by short, crisp, independent clauses as Coleridge's sense of "I myself, and I alone" is increasingly minimized until its final reduction to a "notion of notions." Coleridge culminates his sarcasm with a poetic quotation, the very presence of this creative art form in his text punctuating and illustrating his argument.

Moving now to other creative activities, the author performs ironically on behalf of mechanism, describing the external "blind causes" as "the only true artists." From an increasingly general catalogue of social enterprises unaccounted for by associationism ("all systems of philosophy; all arts, governments, wars by sea and by land; in short, of all things that ever have been or that ever will be produced" [1:83]), Coleridge turns back to the individual

reader, joining with him in self-protection from the demoralization of our most elemental and powerful area of individual existence. "We only fancy," Coleridge sneers,

that we act from rational resolves, or prudent motives, or from impulses of anger, love, or generosity. In all these cases, the real agent is a something-nothing-every-thing, which does all of which we know, and knows nothing of all that itself does.

But lest we consider these emotional hyperboles mere "rhetorical subversion,"²⁴ we should recall the crucial role of these ideas in Coleridge's philosophy. For Coleridge the self, the "I AM", which the associationists diminished to the "poor worthless I," was the "absolute truth" of his metaphysics, "a truth self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own light" (1:181). Furthermore, "affections and passions," which were diminished by mechanism, played a far more important role in the associative process, Coleridge believed, than ideas. In 1802 he maintained "that association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of Feeling, than on Trains of Idea/ that the recollection of early childhood in latest old age depends on, & is explicable by this. . . ." ²⁵ And perhaps most importantly, emotion was for Coleridge an

²⁴Christensen, p. 934.

²⁵"To Robert Southey," 7 August 1803, Letter 510, Letters 2: 961.

unfailing source of intellectual insight and moral guidance: "a metaphysical Solution, that does not instantly tell for something in the Heart, is grievously to be suspected as apocry[p]hal."²⁶ In light of his belief that "men's errors (intellectual) consist chiefly in denying--what they affirm with feeling,"²⁷ the mechanistic reduction of emotions was understandably disturbing as well as profoundly mistaken.

Finally, Coleridge turns to the inviolate realm of religion, demonstrating from the premises of associationism, and in more subdued tones, that a "God not visible, audible, or tangible, can exist only in the sounds and letters that form his name and attributes," in "mere articulated notions of the air." Clearly, Coleridge's attempt to awaken the reader to the dangerous and pervasive repercussions of associationism relies largely on emotional appeals. Mechanistic association is portrayed as a threat to our autonomy and control of our existence; the reader's fear of powerlessness, subjugation, and excessiveness is elicited through Coleridge's imagery and evocative language. In addition, Coleridge extrapolates the psychological theory in order to move it closer to the reader's personal existence, presenting its implications as irreverent and personal insults which threaten the meaning of our individual and social lives.

²⁶Ibid., p. 961.

²⁷Notebooks 2 (May-June 1805): 2596.

Ironically, the founder of this "pernicious doctrine" which invalidates religion remained personally unimpeachable, his psychology unconnected to his theology. This division between Hartley's "head" and "heart" stimulates Coleridge's relieved and benign tribute to the man and his faith "which saves and sanctifies, [and] is . . . a total act of the whole moral being" (1:84). Thus, while Hartley's "errors of the understanding" can not be "morally arraigned" because they have not "proceeded from the heart," his system, which is contrary to his "whole moral being," is rendered all the more invalid. The founder of this implicitly atheistic psychology is spared Coleridge's judgement, for "God only can know, who is a heretic," but his followers "who have embraced this system with a full view of all its moral and religious consequences . . . need discipline, not argument; they must be made better men, before they can become wiser" (1:84-85). This congruence of morality and intellectual capacity, an essential Coleridgean dictum, accounts for his highly personal and sometimes sermonic approach to his audience, for in many ways our experience of his text is a moral act replete with not only intellectual, but spiritual benefits. Moreover, his allusion to "such men" whose lack of wisdom renders them victims of associationism functions as a rhetorical signal to his readers: our continued acceptance of his philosophy is presumably stimulated by his complimentary inclusion of his audience in the privileged class of "minds framed for a nobler

creed" (1:85).

Allowing that some who have fallen prey to associationism may yet be redeemed, Coleridge now exposes the logical fallacy of "mistaking the conditions of a thing for its causes and essence; and the process, by which we arrive at the knowledge of a faculty, for the faculty itself" in an attempt to demonstrate the true role of association. In his following deduction of our "common consciousness" (1:64), Coleridge reinstates his direct appeal to the reader, alternating "I" and "we" and occasionally addressing the reader in order to move him closer to an acceptance of his theory of the Imagination. His reasoning is clear and unencumbered, his comparison of the water insect resisting and yielding to the current a patent and concrete analogy for the mind's voluntary struggle with the limitation of contemporaneity, and his experience with the mackerel and recollected gooseberries an appealingly mundane illustration of simple association. But it is chiefly Coleridge's rhetorical appeal to his reader, his consistent inclusion of his audience in his expressed epistemology which infuses and distinguishes this passage. Coleridge's arrival at his own theory occasions a noticeable change in tone as his scorn is replaced by a sense of assurance and solidarity with his audience:

The air I breathe is the condition of my life, not its cause. We could never have learnt that we had eyes but by the process of seeing; yet having seen we know. . . . Let us cross-examine Hartley's scheme . . . and we

shall discover. . . . In every voluntary moment we first counteract gravitation, in order to avail ourselves of it. . . . Let us consider what we do when we leap. We first resist . . . and then . . . we yield to it in order to light on the spot, which we had previously proposed to ourselves. Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or . . . trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous. Most of my readers will have observed . . . and will have noticed. . . . But if we appeal to our own consciousness, we shall find. . . . (1:85-86; emphasis supplied).

Moreover, this rhetorical appeal to the reader reveals Coleridge's reliance on the individual's capacity for self-objectification and its validity as an evaluative criterion. He expected continual and exacting self-knowledge on the part of his readers, and the discoveries from self-observation held inestimable value for Coleridge. A notebook entry of 1811 expresses his assured faith in the power of self-knowledge and its supremacy over a proposed hypothesis as an accurate test of truth:

One fruitful remark on or against Hartley's one Law of Time for association is that in different moods we naturally associate by different laws--as in Passion, by Contrast--in pleasurable states, by Likeness--&c. . . . we clearly feel the difference in our own minds & know well when we remember a thing by accident & passively, & when actively--.²⁸

The corollary to his reliance on this unmistakable sense of "our common consciousness" is, as we have already witnessed in his statements on autobiography, his own powers of self-observation which rendered his personal experience not only a valid criterion in itself, but which became, through study

²⁸ Notebooks 3 (March-April 1811): 4059

and comparison, a specific example of a universal experience.²⁹ Coleridge struggled to formalize his certain intuitions, to "give an intelligible structure to his own pre-philosophic experience;"³⁰ it was his classical study, his unceasing inquiry into human existence, his constant attempts at objectivity, and his essentially dialectic approach that afforded him the assurance of universally shared experiences.

In this brief but sustained initial presentation of his epistemology Coleridge is concerned to place the condition of time in its proper position, demonstrating by analogy, experience, and reasoning that external contemporaneity may well be the cause of a "particular act of association," but its role in thought per se is, at most, contributory and invariably subject to the control of the will. Thus, man, while obviously experiencing consciousness in time, is also able to transcend it through the "intermediate faculty" which is both active and passive, both timely and timeless. Coleridge next offers a significant distinction glossed over by the associationists, the difference between our "notion of time" (1:87), which includes the external measurement of space, and "time considered in its essence." Both are acts of the mind, but the first mental construct is inextricably

²⁹See, for example, in Notebook 27, "What was my own case has so often come within my observation in others that I am almost disposed to generalize it into a rule. . . ." Quoted in Kathleen Coburn, Experience Into Thought, p. 77.

³⁰Appleyard, p. ix.

tied to an event which took place (or space) and thus any repetition of the order of the event or of the place, whether comparative or constrative, may recall the original notion. But the second and essential sense of time is tied to nothing but the contemporaneous activity of the mind itself and is, in other words, our active self-consciousness. This is, of course, "true" contemporaneity, that living sense of ourself which occurs in the act of self-consciousness and which can only be immediate and "present," indeed simultaneous to our existence. Thus Coleridge's conceptions of time, self-consciousness, and being merge. But what is more to his purpose here is the reinstatement in the face of mechanism of the power of the will which may "give vividness or distinctness to any object whatsoever," thus freeing man from the uncontrollable despotism of external events.

Chapter VII similarly closes on a more personal note than the previous material, as Coleridge offers his prescription for the "ARTS OF MEMORY" (1:88). It is significant that the intellectual faculties which he includes share a common emphasis on the discovery of unifying relationships:

Sound logic, as the habitual subordination of the individual to the species, and of the species to the genus; philosophical knowledge of facts under the relation of cause and effect; a cheerful and communicative temper disposing us to notice the similarities and contrasts of things, that we may be able to illustrate the one by the other. . . (1:87-88).

Far from being a passive resignation to the controls of time and space, memory for Coleridge is dependent on a

quality of perception, a capacity to create relations or links among the neutral events of the past, an art where the creative self is prominent. Moreover, memory, like all thought, taps the whole being, the self which is by definition integrated, so that "a quiet conscience; a condition free from anxieties, sound health, and . . . a healthy digestion" are also necessary elements. The parallel concern which closes Chapter VI is here modified: Coleridge's self-revealing awe at the possibility that thoughts may be imperishable, expressed in impassioned language, is now tempered and directed outward to the reader in a kind of guide to improving one's memory. A note from 1803 provides a revealing gloss for both endings:

O Heaven when I think how perishable Things, how imperishable Thoughts seem to be!--For what is Forgetfulness? Renew the state of affection or bodily Feeling, same or similar--sometimes dimly similar/and instantly the trains of forgotten Thought rise from their living catacombs!--Old men, & Infancy/ and Opium . . . produces the same effect on the visual, & passive memory/.³¹

Coleridge has taken care, in the last two chapters, to impress upon the reader the debasement of the self by associationism; he now addresses the similar minimization of the opposite pole in epistemology, the external object. Chapter VIII opens with a cursory rejection of three radical alternatives to association: dualism for its illogical postulate that cause and effect can exist between heterogeneous entities (spirit and matter); pre-established

³¹Notebooks 1 (October 1803): 1575

harmony for its repugnance "to our common sense" (1:89); and Hylozoism for its pointless mystification of philosophical questions. The unanswered and crucial question of metaphysics remains: "how the esse . . . can ever unite itself with [the scire]; how being can transform itself into a knowing. . . ." Coleridge's language cleverly reinforces his premise of the identity of being and knowing by his appeal to his audience's "common consciousness," or here our "common sense; (which is not indeed entitled to a judicial voice in the courts of scientific philosophy, but whose whispers still exert a strong secret influence.)" Because Coleridge's rhetoric throughout these chapters has demonstrated a reliance on our shared self-experience, he is free to engage in irony, smugly detaching himself from the proven ineffective "courts of scientific philosophy." Next Coleridge appeals to the universal "nature of man," and the more self-oriented "duty of the philosopher," whose tenacity in addressing apparently insolvable problems is ageless and universal. As in Chapter V, the reminder of men's ancient engagement in the philosophical enterprise functions as a fact of human existence which demands explanation. No existing system has approached a complete or humanistic answer.

Materialism poses intelligence as a property of being and not subsistent with it, a subjugation which has been demonstrated as an "absurdity." Nor does it, ironically, afford the material world any real possibility of being objectively perceived. Since matter impinges on the mind

in a physical manner, what we "know" are motions in the brain or "material Ideas, modifications of our own subjective being . . . the Impressions made on us."³² In an extensive notebook entry on the common principles of empiricism, Coleridge continues:

. . . this very Outness, are not strictly properties of the things themselves, but either constituents or modifications of our own minds. . . . These impressions which we call things, are truly only Ideas, or Representations. . . .³³

The dangers of self-solipsism are immediately apparent. Aside from our impressions, our only mental recourse is to deduce by reasoning, "all else . . . [that] is not given by perception."³⁴ But materialism excludes the "intermediation" (1:90) of reasoning, and so we are left with a knowledge removed from reality, imprisoned in self-impression. But, Coleridge asserts, it is "the object itself, which is immediately present . . . , the object itself, not the product of a syllogism, which is present to our consciousness." As an exercise in logic Coleridge proposes a second answer to the dilemma, the opposite extreme of materialism which "explain[s] thinking as a material phenomenon" and converts matter into "a mere modification of intelligence" (1:91). Neither extreme, however, retains the separate and autonomous reality of the self and external existence, the percipient

³²Notebooks 3 (August-September 1809): 3605.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

and matter. Coleridge has exhaustively paved the way for an intermediate faculty in the mind which not only retains the self's creative perception, but also insures our contact with a reality which exists separate from our minds. With the concept of the Imagination the autonomy of both subject and object can be retained while a fusion of the two is made possible. To Coleridge the Imagination signified nothing less than the freeing of man from the "dream world of phantoms and spectres" (1:92) by positing our natural capacity to touch and creatively perceive external reality. The alternative Coleridge alludes to is an existence of absurdity and futility, with man reduced to an unwitting and stubborn fool:

It is a mere *sophisma pigrum*, and (as Bacon hath said) the arrogance of pusillanimity, which lifts up the idol of a mortal's fancy and commands us to fall down and worship it, as a work of divine wisdom, an ancile or palladium fallen from heaven. By the very same argument the supporters of the Ptolemaic system might have rebuffed the Newtonian, and pointing to the sky with self-complacent grin have appealed to common sense, whether the sun did not move and the earth stand still (1:92-93).

These four chapters are ultimately designed to prepare the reader for the acceptance of Coleridge's theory of the Imagination, and, to this end, Coleridge's procedure is readily apparent and deliberate. Chapter V provides a history of the association doctrine in order to specify Coleridge's objection to the modern and mechanistic version of the law. Chapter VI is devoted to both a logical refutation of the law and a depiction of its far-reaching philosophical

implications. Chapter VII continues the treatment of consequents while introducing Coleridge's alternate theory. Finally, Chapter VIII is a demonstration that the only plausible and valid answer to the epistemological dilemma which Coleridge has posed is his own "intermediate faculty" of the Imagination.

Coleridge's "conviction" (1:73) is presented by means of a rhetoric designed to elicit the reader's "fundamental conviction" (1:65). Although the vivid sense of his personal exposure is muted in comparison with the earlier autobiographical chapters, each of these chapters closes on a personal note, whether the brief deferences to the reader in Chapters V and VII, or the seemingly spontaneous, momentary drama of Chapter VI, or the final release of utter scorn in Chapter VIII. Moreover, Coleridge's two central, recurring arguments both create a bond of identification and a solidarity with the reader. His argument for a universal truth, which is untapped and even dismissed by associationism, depends on an appeal to his audience's sense of membership in the human race; presuming our common consciousness and our sharing of common experience, Coleridge creates a rhetorical solidarity between author and audience which simultaneously expresses his philosophical belief in the unity of experience. Coleridge's argument of consequents rests on the same premise of universally shared experience, but appeals primarily to our fear of loss of self-initiated

control and self-created meaning. Coleridge's purpose is met by his manifest design and his rhetorical appeals.

CHAPTER IV

I have isolated Chapters IX-XI of the Biographia from those preceding on associationism and from those following on the Imagination because of their sustained element of a highly personal authorial contact with the reader. As in Chapters I-IV, Coleridge's presence is in the foreground of our experience, the text is predominantly autobiographical, and Coleridge's review of his young adulthood embodies the theme of organic growth while restructuring the past for the benefit of his youthful audience. However, the very isolation of these intermediary chapters from their surrounding material questions the structural unity of the Biographia. First of all, the theme of organic process which had been established in the opening chapters has been structurally disrupted by the intrusion of the purely argumentative material on associationism which is unmistakably isolated from the autobiographical narrative.¹ Moreover,

¹Although framed by the autobiographical mode, the focus of Chapters II and III is admittedly more inclusive than Coleridge's autobiographical self. However, they differ markedly from the material on associationism in content and authorial approach. Coleridge suspends the autobiographical narrative in Chapters II and III to contrast his experience of the irresponsible, slanderous practice of criticism with his ideal of the literary community, a portrait which not only conveys his approach to criticism, but also accomplishes his ethical identification with the reader.

Coleridge's argument against associationism self-consciously violates his autobiographical chronology; his present firm rejection of mechanism is presented before the life process which gave rise to such a conclusion. Chapters I and IV of the Biographia, which proceed not only according to the author's past chronological development, but also sustain the theme of the experiential nature of knowledge, have set up structural and thematic expectations in the reader which are then deliberately violated by the author. The placement of Chapters V-VIII, then, not only demands a striking alteration in the reader's orientation, but also significantly revises the genre of the work itself. This radical shift in not only subject matter, but also authorial stance accounts for popular insistence on the miscellaneous and disorganized character of the work. At first glance, lack of structural unity might seem to be the case. But additional disruption of autobiographical time as well as a corresponding revision of the theme of organic process occur within Chapter IX-XI which pointedly compartmentalize Coleridge's life. Chapter IX, a chronological summary of Coleridge's study of the idealist philosophers, spans roughly the years 1796-1810,² while Chapter X, which details his youthful enterprises as a "mere literary man," covers 1794-1799. Moreover, Coleridge's intellectual

²Shawcross finds that Coleridge had not studied Schelling in 1804, but "must . . . have become familiar with their [the German idealists'] writings" by 1809-10. Introduction, p. xlix.

growth in Chapter IX is self-consciously juxtaposed against the more worldly backgrop of the writing profession in Chapter X. Finally, in Chapter XI Coleridge, in the present tense of this work, urgently admonishes his reader to choose a profession which mitigates just such compartmentalization in order to exist "in sympathy with the world, in which he lives" (1:157). This cumulative sense of temporal disorder and isolation of intellectual growth from the professional world is, I believe, deliberate and important in its implications.

The disordering of autobiographical chronology by the placement of Chapters V-VIII, then, is clear and called to our attention by the author. In effect, the reader has been offered the conclusions of Coleridge's youthful intellectual experience before the author's mention of his involvement with association and without any rendering of the struggle.³ These conclusive principles are presented as isolated from the experiential process of knowledge; that is to say, they remain to this day of 1817 constant and unaffected, in a realm of static, unmitigated truth. It is only after his adamant refutation of the deadening theories of mechanism

³The opening sentence of Chapter IX, "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. . ." (1:93), is all we are given of his past interest. The reader is understandably disoriented, then, when in the midst of Chapter X he encounters the statement, "I now devoted myself to poetry and to the study of ethics and psychology; and so profound was my admiration at this time of Hartley's Essay on Man, that I gave his name to my first-born" (1:121).

and before his corresponding presentation of the dynamic philosophy that we are immersed in the life process (rendered in the language of struggle, defeat, and finally organic growth) which contributed to his life-long philosophy. We may infer a purposeful emphasis on Coleridge's part--namely that the chronology of intellectual development is superceded by the presentation of unalterable, timeless principles, as his charting of his linear self-development is temporarily suspended for argumentative strategy.

The impetus for this censorship and manipulation of the autobiographical mode (for we cannot say that his personal narrative is conclusively abandoned) is, I believe, his reader. Coleridge re-orders his past and divides his autobiographical self by first presenting the end result of his study of associationism wrenched from its temporal context, and next by isolating his intellectual from his professional life in order to arm his young readers with certain knowledge and refinement of thought. Consequently, the authorial focus temporarily shifts from self-exposition to the reader's immediate instruction, as Coleridge sheds his role as a protagonist to assume the role of teacher. In the terms of a subjective, exploratory autobiography, Coleridge puts the proverbial cart before the horse in Chapters V-IX; but if we consider the focused autobiographical sections of the Biographia as functioning toward a greater end, as "introductory to a statement of my

principles," the apparent "misplacement" of this material can be seen as purposeful. Coleridge, in effect, spares the reader the experience of his short-lived, but dangerous attraction to associationism, one of "those circuitous paths, on which he himself had lost his way," placing the young man of genius immediately in a secure position to benefit conclusively from the author's years of mature study and questioning.⁴ He subsumes this part of his intellectual process, glossing over it in two autobiographical sentences, in order to guide the reader from Coleridge's now firm and enlightened position. Coleridge's explanation of his historical method in the Philosophical Lectures is comparable: he wished to sketch a pattern of the human endeavor of philosophy "so that each change and every new direction should have its cause and its explanation in the errors, insufficiency, or prematurity of the preceding. . . ."⁵ From this point of view, Chapter IX, with its capitalization of Coleridge's growth in the idealist philosophy,

⁴In terms of Coleridge's intention to refute mechanism, this Notebook entry is illuminating: "In all processes of the Understanding the shortest way will be discovered the last and this perhaps while it constitutes the great advantage of having a Teacher to put us on the shortest road at the first, yet sometimes occasions a difficulty in the comprehension--/ in as much as the longest way is more near to the existing state of the mind, nearer to what, if left to myself on starting the thought, I should have thought next. --The shortest way gives me the knowledge best; the longest way makes me more knowing." Notebooks 2 (February-May 1807): 3023.

⁵"Prospectus of a Course of Lectures, Historical and Biographical," Philosophical Lectures, pp. 67-68.

seems a fitting companion-piece to Chapters V-VIII which chart his earlier realization of the inadequacies and dangers of associationism. Coleridge's selectivity and placement of his autobiographical sections, then, suggest the essentially didactic nature of this work; it is not the presentation of his personal subjective history which is Coleridge's intention here, but the conversion of his readers to the dynamic philosophy. To this end, he censors and reorders his life.

Chapter IX resumes Coleridge's autobiographical expression of his intellectual obligations, a fitting context for his closing remarks on "truth as a divine ventriloquist" (1:105). Coleridge's intellectual history is again rendered in the language of process, stressing the changeable, fluid nature of learning wherein doubts and difficulties are integral to the experience. He charts for the reader the personal experience of his study, his "affectionate seeking after truth" (1:94), reserving a thorough exposition of the specific truths themselves for later chapters. This separation of the end-results of his study of idealism from the process of the study is, I believe, purposeful because it calls attention to Coleridge's genial approach to other philosophers and also to the particular balance of indebtedness and originality in his vitalist philosophy. His description of his study in Chapter IX blends both emotional and intellectual vocabulary. "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," Coleridge writes, "I began to ask myself," and he continues with a description of the process he not only underwent, but stimulated:

I was for a while disposed to answer . . . and to admit . . . But I soon felt . . . and as soon did I find . . . I presumed that this was a possible conception . . . The early study . . . had all contributed to prepare my mind for the reception and welcoming of . . . the . . . philosophy . . . the writings of these mystics acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head (1:93-94).

Coleridge's stress on the balance of intellectual rigor and intuitive feeling which he sustained became for him a touchstone of the true philosophic enterprise: his lifelong conviction, drawn from his own experience, was not only that "deep Thinking is attainable only by a man of deep Feeling,"⁶ but also that what we "affirm with feeling . . . if it be real affirmation, & not affirmative in form, negative in reality"⁷ is an unwavering guide to intellectual truth. Moreover, Coleridge's self-description here serves as a model for the reader who is asked to scale philosophic heights in Chapter XII; not only intellectual acuity but also a fervent commitment which entails intense self-reflection are asked of him.

The initiating question of the chapter, ". . . is a

⁶"To Thomas Poole," 23 March 1801, Letter 388, Letters 2: 709.

⁷Notebooks 2 (May-June 1805): 2596.

system of philosophy, as different from mere history and historic classification, possible?" preceded as it is by Coleridge's reference to the incomplete philosophies of materialism and subjective idealism, suggests the debilitating ramifications of his exposure to these schools of thought, that is, his uncertainty concerning the viability of any metaphysical study. Significantly, what rescues Coleridge from this negativity is his subjective intuition concerning the nature of the human mind: "But I soon felt, that human nature itself fought up against this wilful resignation of intellect" (1:93). We have seen this appeal to our shared human nature operate polemically in Coleridge's refutation of mechanism. Indeed, he named as two "distinct sources" for any argument the

2. Subjective, or the experience acquirable by self-observation and composed of facts of inward consciousness . . . [and] 3. Common and simultaneous Experience, collectively forming History in its widest sense, civil and natural.⁸

For Coleridge the certainty of his "inward consciousness" is easily transformed into an argument from "common consciousness." But here, as in Chapter IV, we are given a glimpse of the experiential source of Coleridge's argumentative procedure, that is, the intuitive workings of his youthful mind.⁹

⁸The Inquiring Spirit, p. 124.

⁹Similarly, when Coleridge describes his initial response to Wordsworth's poetry, he charts the same movement from his intuitive feeling to a conviction concerning common

Appropriately, Coleridge completes this movement from his singular subjective feeling to a sense of shared human nature by his rhetorical inclusion of the reader, his stylistic assumption of our common experience: "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" (1:94). Returning to the question posed in Chapter VIII and unanswered by the mechanists, "How being can transform itself into a knowing" (1:89), Coleridge acknowledges his postulate, that "Truth is the correlative of Being," to be a priori, part of his intellectual heritage from Scholastic theology and Platonism, two disciplines "most ancient and therefore presumptively the most natural" (1:95). This essential creed of Coleridge's reverberates throughout every aspect of his thought--that the mind of man is creative, not passive, and that this power of intelligence is not merely a "property or attribute" (1:90) of our being, but is "coinherent" with it; in short, it is. Above all, our human nature. The background for this forthright, simple declaration of his first principle has been laid in the preceding chapters: Coleridge has stressed the intellectual potential: "Immediately" he notes "an unusual impression on my feelings," then seeks "to understand" by "repeated meditations . . . (and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions, and effects. . .)" (1:59,60).

initiative and creative power of the human mind while demonstrating the incapacity of materialism to account for what we, having attended to his arguments, must now acknowledge as our "common consciousness."

With an abrupt question which alters the measured tone of the opening paragraphs, Coleridge seems to interrupt his text: "Why need I be afraid?" The question is self-addressed and its effect, underscored by his immediate revision ("Say rather how dare I be ashamed of the Teutonic theosophist, Jacob Behmen?"), is to move the present, self-conscious author to the foreground of our experience. The reader is startlingly and momentarily conscious of the Coleridge who is writing this work, exposed, and, of all things, afraid. Coleridge seems to scold himself for his fear, presumably, of the reader's scorn of mysticism; he expresses indignation at his own fleeting disloyalty. For the moment, then, Coleridge changes subject matter: our attention is shifted from his past and continuing obligations to other authors to the state of mind of this present author, who is not only strongly affected by his expression of indebtedness, but also by his reader's imagined response, even as he executes his craft. The shared experience of author and reader, that is, our joint undertaking of this work, is dramatically highlighted here. For the moment the veneer of authorial control is purposively shattered; in its place is a self-exposed author who is vulnerable to his

text and his audience. Moreover, Coleridge's brief self-revelation here and his re-affirmation of loyalty to Boehme, while rhetorically engaging the reader, also strengthens the theme which we have seen underlying the Biographia, the Coleridgean ideal of a literary community characterized by a willing acknowledgement of our indebtedness to other minds.

The experience of the "truly inspired" mystics, however, has been quite the opposite; their exclusion from the philosophical community constitutes for Coleridge a violation of "the privilege of free thought." Coleridge's admiration of these "ignorant mystics" (1:97) is, of course, self-revealing; in part it stems from his sympathy with their social and intellectual ostracization as well as their all the more daring because unsophisticated encounter with "the indwelling and living ground of all things."¹⁰ Coleridge smarts at the anti-intellectual elitism of "the haughty priests of learning" who, lacking the genius and the courage to attempt "the penetration to the inmost centre," cloak their incapacity with scorn. Although Coleridge uses Schelling as his mouthpiece here, the criticism of the "literati" is strongly reminiscent of Coleridge's earlier condemnation of contemporary critics who notoriously lack the virtue of "disinterested benevolence" (1:30).

¹⁰These are, according to Sara Coleridge, her father's words. See Biographia Literaria, H. N. Coleridge and Sara Coleridge, eds. (1858), p. 251n.

Moreover, Coleridge, who read Boehme as a schoolboy, planned to write on him as early as 1795, and annotated his works from 1808 on,¹¹ expressed his strong empathy for the "strivings and ferment of a genius so compressed and distorted by strait circumstances."¹² In his metaphorical description of an "enthusiastic Mystic" in Aids to Reflection Coleridge employs language similar to his self-description in his letters and notebooks:

His dreams transfer their forms to real objects; and these lend a substance and an outness to his dreams. Apparitions greet him; . . . His narration is received as a madman's tale. He shrinks from the rude laugh and contemptuous sneer, and retires into himself. Yet the craving for sympathy, strong in proportion to the intensity of his convictions, impels him to unbosom himself to abstract auditors; and the poor Quietest becomes a Penman, and all too poorly stocked from the only writings to which he has had access, the sacred books of his religion.¹³

Not surprisingly, it is the immediate, heartfelt presence of these authors in their writings who "in simplicity of soul, made their words immediate echoes of their feelings" which strikes a responsive chord in Coleridge. And a corresponding openness of heart (and not a "spirit and judgment superior") is asked of their reader:

O! it requires deeper feeling, and a stronger

¹¹John Spencer Hill, ed. Imagination in Coleridge (Towata, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), p. 179n.

¹²Philosophical Lectures, pp. 452-53, n. 25 which quotes Coleridge's Marginalia in Tennemann's Geschichte der Philosophie 10:183-97.

¹³"Conclusion: 'Mystics and Mysticism'," Aids to Reflection, pp. 262-64, quoted in Hill, Imagination in Coleridge, pp. 192-93.

imagination, than belong to most of those, to whom reasoning and fluent expression have been as a trade learn in boyhood, to conceive with what might, with what inward strivings and commotion, the perception of a new and vital TRUTH takes possession of an uneducated man of genius (1:97).

Coleridge couches his expressed obligation to Boehme (and fellow mystics, Fox and Thouleras) in a criticism of the intellectual community which excluded them, thereby accomplishing two things: he demonstrates his sensitivity to unorthodox but vital genius, an aspect of his ethos, and he more specifically contrasts his ideal of the intellectual community with that more common reality of snobbish elitism with which his reader was no doubt familiar. The mistreatment of intellectuals, whether men of literature or philosophy, is a concern which infuses the Biographia and is perhaps an extension and expansion of Coleridge's more personal reasons for writing the book.¹⁴ His self-vindication, which is fully exposed at the close of Chapter X, is nonetheless part of this larger context: Coleridge's apologia is consistently balanced and strengthened by his sensitive defense of the unappreciated man of genius. Moreover, Coleridge's dependence on Schelling, in "tribute due to priority of publication; but still more from the pleasure

¹⁴Coleridge wrote of the Biographia: "my chief purposes were, 1. to defend myself (not indeed to my own Conscience, but) as far as others were concerned, from the often and public denunciation of having wasted my time in idleness--in short, of having done nothing--. . . ." "To John Hookham Frerem," 2 July 1816, Letter 1014, Letters 4: 646.

of sympathy in a case where coincidence only was possible" (1:95), constitutes a demonstration of Coleridge's values. By his deference to his colleague Coleridge conveys their mutual and public appreciation of the intellectual powers of an "uneducated man of Genius" in opposition to refined tradition. This is, rhetorically, an act of commitment. Coleridge aligns Schelling to himself and both of them to the cause of genial criticism. Coleridge's use of Schelling here, preparatory to his later remarks on their affinity, can be viewed as a present enactment of Coleridge's principles of appreciative and responsible reading.

Coleridge's indebtedness to the mystics, Kant, and Schelling is rendered in highly personal and urgent terms, suggesting their more than intellectual influence on him. The tone of this expression of "moral and intellectual obligations" is strongly reminiscent of Coleridge's "tribute of recollection" to Bowyer, whose teaching of "classical knowledge was the least of the good gifts" (1:6), and Bowles, whose "genial" poetry rescued him from his youthful immersion in metaphysical "mazes" (1:10). Similarly, Coleridge's indebtedness to the mystics, far from an objective explanation of ideas received, reads as a testimony to their life-saving powers:

They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working pre-sentiment, that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of DEATH, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter, into which a sap was yet to be propelled from some root to which I had

not penetrated, if they were to afford my soul either food or shelter. 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 (1:98).

His poetic language, with its metaphors and Biblical allusions, suggests the intensity and depth of his experience, a self-exposure for which the reader is prepared and included in by Coleridge's pseudo-apology:

The feeling of gratitude, which I cherish toward these men, has caused me to digress further than I had foreseen or proposed; but to have passed over them in an historical sketch of my literary life and opinions, would have seemed to me like the denial of a debt, the concealment of a boon.¹⁵

This expression of indebtedness also, of course, attests to Coleridge's great capacity for creative reading, his characteristic ability to "profit by what . . . [he] read, and enable others to profit by it also."¹⁶ This is, I believe, the operative motive implicit throughout the Biographia, the extension of manifold benefits and indebtedness from the author, inheritor of a rich legacy, to the reader. To this end, Coleridge presents himself as the

¹⁵Compare with Coleridge's inclusion of the reader in his acknowledgement of Bowyer: "The reader will, I trust, excuse this tribute of recollection to a man, whose severities, even now, not seldom furnish the dreams, by which the blind fancy would fain interpret to the mind the painful sensations of distempered sleep; but neither lessen nor dim the deep sense of my moral and intellectual obligations," (1:6).

¹⁶Notebooks 2 (1808-11): 3242.

intermediary reader and teacher, emotionally and intellectually moved by other writers, a model to his young audience. As William Walsh suggests, Coleridge's atunement to the unique power of other writers is a revelation of his own creative power as a critic. When "pointing to something there in Shakespeare," for example, he implicitly "is making reference to something within himself as a critic."¹⁷ The presentation of himself to his reader, then, his delineation of himself as critic and reader, is crucial to Coleridge's accomplishment of his goal of stimulating appreciative and responsible reading.

In addition to his stress on his personal involvement with these authors' ideas, (indeed, "involvement" or "experience" can hardly do justice to Coleridge's rendition of the power of Kant's thought which "took possession of me as with a giant's hand") Coleridge depicts his connection with these thinkers as a process of growth which has continued to the "present" of this work. The continuation and alteration of his receptivity to these philosophies bespeaks the organic development of Coleridge's reading. His present autobiographical perspective affords him a vantage point from which to assess his youthful response and at the same time encompasses his more sophisticated contemporary evaluation. "The feeling of gratitude" Coleridge expresses in the present tense, a present which allows a discriminating

¹⁷William Walsh, Coleridge: The Work and the Relevance, p. 80.

survey of his personal and intellectual past: "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. . ." (1:98). Coleridge charts not the end results, but the process of his study, stressing both its growth up to the present moment and its consistency throughout the years:

But at no time could I believe, that in itself and essentially it [Spinozism] is incompatible with religion, natural or revealed: and now I am most thoroughly persuaded of the contrary. . . . After fifteen years' familiarity with them [Kant's writings], I still read these and all his other productions with undiminished delight and increasing admiration. The few passages that remained obscure to me, after due efforts of thought . . . and the apparent contradictions which occur, I soon found were hints and insinuations referring to ideas, which KANT either did not think it prudent to avow, or which he considered as consistently left behind in pure analysis. . . . In spite therefore of his own declarations, I could never believe, that it was possible for him to have meant no more by his Noumenon . . . than his mere words express. . . . I entertained doubts likewise . . . whether in his own mind he even laid all the stress, which he appears to do, on the moral postulates (1:98-99).

This passage serves as a model of creative reading, implying both discerning attentiveness to and respect for the author as well as the active and discriminating participation of the reader. Furthermore, the demands which Coleridge placed on his study, freedom from "being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system" and the reconciliation of philosophy with religion, are criteria which the reader may anticipate in Coleridge's own philosophy.

In his synopsis of his study of Kant, Coleridge adopts

a less effusive tone than that of his "cherish[ed] gratitude" for the mystics while sustaining his approach of viewing the author in relation to his intellectual milieu. Indeed, Coleridge seems to exonerate Kant's inadequacies and obscurities on the basis of external constraints, a position of some munificence and assertiveness of Coleridge's part. His tone changes from ardor to firmness when dealing with Kant, and Coleridge's expression of obligation seems to emanate from a secure position, assuming a stronger, more thoroughly self-assured tone. For although Coleridge expressed his obligations to Kant as "infinite," they stemmed "not so much from what Kant . . . taught him in the form of doctrine, as from the discipline gained in studying the great German philosopher."¹⁸ When Coleridge is writing about Kant his assertions concerning the author and his audience are unequivocal:

for those who could not pierce through this symbolic husk, his writings were not intended. . . . Questions which cannot be fully answered without exposing the respondent to personal danger, are not entitled to a fair answer . . . Veracity does not consist in saying, but in the intention of communicating truth. . . (1: 100).

And with Fichte, Coleridge's distinctive reactions become more prominent, both his praise and his criticism assuming a crisp, unapologetic tone.

In a one-sentence paragraph Coleridge expresses his

¹⁸Crabb Robinson writing of 1812 quoted in J. D. Campbell, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 187, n. 2.

indebtedness to Schelling:

In Schelling's "NATUR-PHILOSOPHIE" and the "SYSTEM DES TRANSCENDENTALEN IDEALISMUS," I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do (l: 102).

The effect of this terse summary is a sense of fairness and acknowledgement, but certainly not the enthusiasm or depth of appreciation we have earlier witnessed. The authorial "I" and not the name or ideas of Schelling dominates this sentence, as well as the following paragraph. We have a deliberate sense of Schelling's auxiliary role in Coleridge's self-determined pursuit of metaphysical truth, one which is verified by Coleridge's personal statements. In a letter of 1817 he wrote:

But he is a man of great Genius: and however unsatisfied with his conclusions, one cannot read him without being either whetted or improved. . . . As my opinions were formed before I was acquainted with the Schools of Fichte and Schelling, so do they remain independent of them: tho' I con- and pro- fess great obligation to them in the development of my Thoughts--and yet seem to feel, that I should have been more useful, had I been left to evolve them myself, with out knowledge of their coincidence.¹⁹

Coleridge is explicit in Chapter IX concerning his self-protection against the future "charge of plagiarism," pointing self-consciously to "this statement" with its blend of indebtedness and originality. I find Coleridge's stance to be, for the most part, rather painfully circumspect and respectful of Schelling. His "warning" to his future

¹⁹To J. H. Green," 13 December 1817, Letter 1089, Letters 4: 792-93.

readers, expressed in the conditional mode and as a negative statement, is further tempered by a number of conditionals in mid-sentence which render his claim for originality far more cautious than forceful:

It would be but a mere act of justice to myself, were I to warn my future 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 (1:102, emphasis supplied).

The following sentence with its unmitigated language ("indeed all the main and fundamental ideas, were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German Philosopher") rings more assertive. But Coleridge is quick to realign himself with Schelling as a fellow student of idealist philosophers, two of whom Coleridge has already acclaimed. It is only here, seemingly at the mention of Boehme, that Coleridge assumes a superior and righteous posture toward his colleague:

The coincidence of SCHELLING's system with certain general ideas of Behmen, he declares to have been mere coincidence; while my obligations have been more direct. He needs give to Behmen only feelings of sympathy; while I owe him a debt of gratitude (1:103).

Coleridge's resentment, in the context of his earlier alignment with Schelling in defense of the mystic, is aimed at Schelling's ungracious reservation toward Boehme. There is a note of superiority here when Coleridge writes, "Schelling has lately, and, as of recent acquisition, avowed that same affectionate reverence for the labours of Behmen, and other mystics, which I had formed at a much

earlier period." But in light of the supreme value which Coleridge has consistently placed on responsible and gracious acknowledgement of intellectual indebtedness, his criticism of Schelling, like his criticism of Hume in Chapter V, is not merely gratuitous. He found Schelling to be, as he indicates in a letter of the same period, "too ambitious, too eager to be the Grand Seignior of the allein self-machende Philosophie, to be altogether a trust-worthy Philosopher."²⁰ Nonetheless, Coleridge proceeds to give Schelling his due, specifying the "honours so unequivocally his right:"

not only as a great and original genius, but as the founder of the PHILOSOPHY of NATURE, and as the most successful improver of the Dynamic System which, begun by Bruno, was re-introduced . . . by KANT: . . . With the exception of one or two fundamental ideas, which cannot be with-held from FICHTE, to SCHELLING we owe the completion, and the most important victories, of this revolution in philosophy (1:103-04).

In light of the long-standing critical controversy regarding Coleridge's dependence on Schelling (and other Germans) vs. his repeated claim of intellectual self-possession, a consideration of Coleridge's demonstrated and articulated position within this "Literary Life" can be helpful. First of all, the Biographia can be viewed as a rhetorical demonstration of Coleridge's commitment to "the obligations of intellect [as] among the most sacred claims of gratitude" (1:9), a performance which takes place before an audience

²⁰To J. H. Green," 13 December 1817, Letter 1089, Letters 4: 792.

characterized by their membership in a long-standing and prestigious literary fellowship. In his role as intermediary and teacher Coleridge repeatedly stresses and demonstrates the ideal of "awakening by the noblest models the fond and unmixed LOVE and ADMIRATION" (1:7-8) in his young readers. This spirit permeating the Biographia supports Coleridge's expressed wish to not only refrain from "enter[ing] into a rivalry with Schelling," but to "with happiness and honor enough" render "the system itself intelligible to my countrymen" (1:104). As Kathleen Coburn suggests, Coleridge's willing acknowledgement of intellectual indebtedness should "be taken seriously."²¹ Coleridge's aversion to any sense of "philosophical property rights,"²² his belief in "truth as a divine ventriloquist," is placed in its historical context by Thomas McFarland in his study of Coleridge's intellectual indebtedness:

We note . . . the omnipresent Romantic emphasis upon organic form, and also the emphasis upon the continuity of philosophical thought. The idea that philosophy was a communal endeavour in which thinkers both past and present constantly participated was characteristic of Coleridge too.²³

Secondly, and within this same context, an additional thrust of the Biographia is toward individuation: Coleridge,

²¹"Introduction," Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 55.

²²Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 51.

²³McFarland, p. 50.

in his appraisal of other authors, also wished to distinguish and differentiate himself, a stance not contradictory to his expressions of obligation. For Coleridge "genial coincidence" with another did not undermine either author's originality. Toward the end of his life when his remaining "one wish . . . [was] to be able to finish my work on Philosophy," he remained indifferent to any proprietary claims: "Not that I have any author's vanity on the subject: God knows that I should be absolutely glad, if I could hear that the thing had already been done before me."²⁴ Indeed, he termed his intellectual affinity with Schlegel "morally certain," given their "similar pursuits and acquirements."²⁵ Coleridge's private expression of indebtedness in his journal is the best explanation of this fine relationship between intellectual obligations and intellectual autonomy, a rapport which, I might add, never troubled Coleridge as it has his critics:

In the Preface of my Metaphs. Works I should say--
Once & [for] all read Tetens, Kant, Fichte, &c--&
there you will trace or if you are on the hunt, track
me. Why then not acknowledge your obligations step by
step? Because, I could not do in a multitude of glaring
resemblances without a lie/ for they had been mine,
formed, & full formed in my own mind, before I had ever
heard of these Writers, because to have fixed on the
partic. instances in which I have really been indebted

²⁴T. Ashe, ed. The Table Talk and Omniora of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), 12 September 1831, p. 139.

²⁵"To an Unknown Correspondent," 15-21 December 1811, Letter 845, Letters 3: 360.

to these Writers would have [been] very hard, if possible, to me who read for truth & self-satisfaction, not to make a book, & who always rejoiced and was jubilant when I found my own ideas well expressed already by others, & would have looked like a trick, to skulk there not quoted & lastly, let me say, because (I am proud perhaps but) I seem to know, that much of the matter remains my own, and that the Soul is mine. I fear not him for a Critic who can confound a Fellow-thinker with a Compiler.²⁶

Coleridge answers his own self-directed question, then, by maintaining first, that a number of "glaring resemblances" were not quotations from another author, and to cite those which were would render the others suspect; furthermore, Coleridge evidently did not read or take notes with the goal of exact citation, his involvement with reading taking precedence over his scholarship; and finally, in the midst of his jubilation over genial coincidence, Coleridge is undaunted in his certitude that "the Soul is mine." But he is equally serious concerning the author's moral obligations to his predecessors as well as his responsibility to his own voice. In 1805 he posed the question:

What is the right, the virtuous Feeling, and consequent action, when a man having long meditated & perceived a certain Truth find another . . . foreign Writer, who has handled the same with an approximation to the Truth, as he had previously conceived it?-- Joy!--Let Truth make her voice audible!²⁷

What then was unique to an author in his pursuit of Truth was, for Coleridge, his "original Spirit itself" manifested in his work, "a subtle Spirit, all in each part, reconciling

²⁶Notebooks 2 (December 1804): 2375.

²⁷Notebooks 2 (April 1805): 2546.

& unifying all---."²⁸ The "affectionate seeking after truth" precludes the author's proprietariness or need for personal reputation; indeed, "an essential mark of true genius" is "that its sensibility is excited by any other cause more powerfully than by its own personal interests," for "the sensation of self is always in inverse proportion" to the "number, clearness, and vivacity" of his ideas (1:30).

And it is the responsibility and benefit of a true reader to recognize and appreciate the author's "own spirit" which infuses his work: "Whether a work is the offspring of a man's own spirit, and the product of original thinking, will be discovered by those who are its sole legitimate judges, by better tests than the mere reference to dates" (1:104). What Coleridge believed to be his own originality is the "Soul" or "Spirit" of his work; it is the imaginative reader who will discern the author's unique presence underlying his ideas: "He who can catch the Spirit of an original, has it already."²⁹ Thus, Coleridge refuses to engage in a battle of ownership of ideas with readers who fail to detect a deeper, more pervasive originality:

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. . . (1:104-05).

²⁸"To an Unknown Correspondent," 15-21 December 1811, Letter 845, Letters 3:361.

²⁹Letter 845, Letters 3: 361.

To the twentieth-century reader this attitude may convey a mixture of carelessness and altruism, but it needs nonetheless to be taken as Coleridge's word. An understanding of his conviction, "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," is, if more difficult, then also more valuable than to simply charge him with irresponsible plagiarism or "ungenerous concealment." It is our responsibility as students of Coleridge to understand his liberal, but self-assured attitude:

Those only who feel no originality, no consciousness of having conceived their thoughts & opinions from immediate Inspiration, are anxious to be thought originals--the certainty and feeling is enough for the other, and he rejoices to find his opinions plumed & winged with the authority of venerable Forefathers.³⁰

Thomas McFarland finds that the concept of plagiarism "has no proper applicability to the activities, however unconventional, of a powerful, learned, and deeply committed mind," for what "has always been important in philosophy has been, not the originality of materials, but the coherence and consequence of the ordering of them--the reticulation of the materials."³¹ Also, Kathleen Coburn asserts that even Coleridge's unabashed translations reflect his own thought, for he

³⁰ Notebooks 1: 1965.

³¹ McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, pp. 45, 49.

borrowed only when his own thinking has reached almost the same point as his creditor's, so that he feels able fully to enter into the other's thought, indeed more fully than the propounder very often; he sees its further implications and makes it his own by loading it with his own accumulated knowledge.³²

But what is particularly germane to this study is that Coleridge describes his sense of his own originality not so much in terms of the uniqueness of the ideas, but in the emotive language of his "Soul" and "Spirit," that is, an individualistic, personal presence which infuses the work and characterizes it as unmistakably Coleridgean.

Chapter IX closes in a spirit similar to the conclusions of Chapters II and IV: Coleridge conveys the painful position of the man of letters who, though committed to the communication of his pursuit of truth, is bleakly aware of the scarcity in his age of the discipline and labor necessary to receive it. The dual effect of these quotations is to offset further any lingering suspicions of Coleridge's authorial egotism by emphasizing the thankless difficulty of his undertaking, and also to recall to the reader his corresponding responsibility, an "effort of thought, as well as patience and attention" (1:107), which places him in erudite and historically select company. Coleridge uses Milton, Grynaeus, Barclay, and Hooker to solidify his position and heighten its import by conveying its long history. These authors, whom Coleridge allows to speak for him,

³²Coburn, "Introduction," Philosophical Lectures, p. 55.

bemoan the common lack of erudition in their age, fearing a permanent and seriously consequential loss of "robustness and manly vigor of intellect, [and] all masculine fortitude of virtue."³³ Thus, a stimulation and burden of responsibility is placed on the members of this "scanty audience" who, by virtue of their learning and discipline, have, as it were, the power to rescue authors from their discouragement and be illustrious exceptions to their thoughtless age. It is evident that Coleridge takes deliberate steps throughout the Biographia to reinforce his audience's role and to frequently suggest the nature of their responsibility, not only to themselves and this author, but also to the cause of erudition in their time.

Both Chapters X and XI continue Coleridge's extension of himself to his reader, the "interlude" of Chapter X serving as the final autobiographical sketch before proceeding to his treatment of the Imagination. Although the chronological order of this chapter fails to provide sufficient cohesion for Coleridge's "various anecdotes," a consistent unifying thread is to be found in his express purpose to "turn even his imprudences to the benefits of others, as far as this is possible" (1:110). The miscellaneous content of the chapter--Coleridge's initiation into the literary trade, his role in the domestic political scene, his

³³This passage from Grynæus is translated in Chapter IX, The Friend 1: 23-24.

religious study, his pursuit of German literature, and his experience as a political journalist--is rendered from his mature, adult perspective with a beneficent affection for his youthful naiveté, but chiefly for the lessons which his experiences will offer to his audience. Coleridge's portrayal of his initiation into the realities of literary publication and political separatism functions as a narrative foundation for the advice he proposes in Chapter XI. Thus this purposeful autobiographical recollection, while vividly evoking the experiences of the past, is imbued with the author's present, knowledgeable perspective. Coleridge's past is portrayed as a process, with its attendant failures, accomplishments, and wisdom won from experience, by which the author arrived at his personal decision "that literature was not a profession, by which I could expect to live," a conclusion drawn from the realities of his life which he then directs toward his audience in the following chapter. Accordingly, Chapter X provides for the reader the vicarious experience which renders the advice of Chapter XI meaningful and pragmatic.

The impetus for Coleridge's introduction of a new term or of his re-introduction of appropriate terms "that had without sufficient reason become obsolete" (1:108) is clearly his reader, whose philosophical education Coleridge, the "instructor," now firmly undertakes. In his position as teacher Coleridge's confidence is unmistakable; the

authorial "I" dominates his unhesitant explanation of his method of choosing terminology:

I constructed it myself . . . because, having to convey a new sense, I thought that a new term would both aid . . . and prevent . . . I have adopted from our elder classics the word sensuous . . . Thus too I have followed Hooker, Sanderson, Milton, &c, in designating . . . The very words, objective and subjective . . . I have ventured to re-introduce . . . Lastly, I have cautiously discriminated the terms, THE REASON, and THE UNDERSTANDING, encouraged and confirmed by the authority of our genuine divines and philosophers . . . I say, that I was confirmed by authority so venerable: for I had previous and higher motives in my own conviction . . . of the necessity of the distinction . . . (1:107,109-10).

Coleridge's concern with accuracy of language is based on his long-held belief that, in Kathleen Coburn's words, "one of the main obstacles to clarity of thought, . . . one of the main sources of confusion in politics, religion, literary criticism, society at large, [was] the widespread inability to think thoughts, to think in relations."³⁴ The "vocabulary of common life" (1:108), in contrast, is filled with words "which seem most general & elementary," and the resulting carelessness of language excludes attention to the philosophical notions of "kind & as it were element."³⁵ Before encountering his discussion of the Imagination, Coleridge implies, the reader must be "wean[ed] . . . from the DEGREES of things," and "direct[ed] to the KIND abstracted from degree."

³⁴Coburn, "Introduction," Philosophical Lectures, p. 50.

³⁵Notebooks 1 (January 1804): 1835.

Seemingly at the mention of The Friend, Coleridge's tone briefly changes, his firm self-assurance giving way to momentary "bitter" remembrance for which he asks the reader's indulgence:

. . . if even in a biography of my own literary life I can with propriety refer to a work, which was printed rather than published, or so published that it had been well for the unfortunate author, if it had remained in manuscript! I have even at this time bitter cause for remembering that, which a number of my subscribers have but a trifling motive for forgetting. This effusion might have been spared; but I would feign flatter myself, that the reader will be less austere than an oriental professor of the bastinado, who during at attempt to extort per argumentum baculinum a full confession from a culprit, interrupted his outcry of pain by reminding him, that it was "a mere digression!" All this noise, Sir! is nothing to the point, and no sort of answer to my QUESTIONS! Ah! but (replied the sufferer,) it is the most pertinent reply in nature to your blows. (1:110).

But Coleridge's humorous comparison of the reader with the oriental torturer immediately offsets any note of self-pity, simultaneously setting the tonal context for the following ironic and charming narrative of Coleridge's youthful and naive exploits. For all the awkwardness of this transition from Coleridge's choice of philosophical terminology to his "semi-narrative" of warnings to his audience of prospective authors, the thread of continuity seems to be in Coleridge's associative process as he "even at this time," composes. His use of the terms "Reason" and "Understanding" calls to mind The Friend whose "one main object" was to "establish this distinction," in turn eliciting his short "effusion," which he immediately directs to the

"benefit of others." Furthermore, the implicit contrast between the subject which opens the chapter, "philosophic discipline," and the anecdotes which continue it is conducive to Coleridge's point: the reality of literary trade is a far cry from the pursuit of "abstrusest themes" (1:106).

Coleridge exposes his audience to a number of mundane realities, retaining a note of mature self-irony and humor throughout his autobiographical narrative. A list of subscribers cannot be trusted with certainty, for the true circumstances regarding their agreement cannot be known. "In confirmation of [this] my first caveat," Coleridge offers the example of the Earl of Cork, presumably a suitable reader for The Friend, though "he might as well have been an Earl of Bottle," who kept his unread copies "probably for the culinary or post-culinary conveniences of his servants" (1:111). From his own experience Coleridge lists the "hardship[s] to which the products of industry in no other mode of exertion are subject," urging his readers to avoid such "certainty of insult and degrading anxieties" by washing their hands of the matter outright and selling their copyright (1:112). The degradation of literature into a trade, the intellectual effects of which have been exposed in Chapter II and III, is now rendered in the realistic terms of actual experience. Before dramatizing some of his encounters Coleridge is careful to specify the cause of his complaint as the commercial situation itself and not its

"tradesmen, as individuals" (1:113), and his motive as self-defense and not the attack of others who stood in his way. But if, as he suggests, his motive is "an honorable acquittal" (1:150) of the charge of intellectual indolence, the self-descriptive tone of "the excusable warmth of a mind stung by an accusation" (1:149) is not present in these autobiographical vignettes. On the contrary, they are marked by an engaging and light self-deprecation, as when he describes himself setting forth "with . . . lack of worldly knowledge" to sell the Watchman with its "flaming prospectus, 'Knowledge is Power' &c., to cry the state of the political atmosphere, and so forth. . . ." (1:114). The autobiographical perspective is artfully at work here; Coleridge's self-directed humor suggests a fondness for his youthful self, but also a mature and wry distance from it. He exclaims with a note of nostalgia for his innocent eagerness:

O! never can I remember those days with either shame or regret. For I was most sincere, most disinterested! My opinions were indeed in many and most important points erroneous; but my heart was single. Wealth, rank, life itself then seemed cheap to me, compared with the interests of (what I believed to be) the truth, and the will of my maker. I cannot even accuse myself of having been actuated by vanity; for in the expansion of my enthusiasm I did not think of myself at all (1:115).

And this almost elegiac tone is immediately complemented by his present, apt satire on his past self:

I commenced an harangue of half an hour to Phileleutheros, the tallow-chandler, varying my notes, through the whole gamut of eloquence, from the

ratiocinative to the declamatory, and in the latter from the pathetic to the indignant. I argued, I described, I promised, I prophesied; and beginning with the captivity of the nations I ended with the near approach of the millennium, finishing the whole with some of my own verses describing that glorious state out of the Religious Musings. . . (1:116).

What is unquestionably derived from Coleridge's present perspective is his witty and vividly impressionistic description of the Calvinist tallow-chandler, whose face Coleridge has "before me at this moment:"

The lank, black, twine-like hair, pingui-nitescens, cut in a straight line along the black stubble of his thin gunpowder eye-brows, that looked like a scorched after-math from a last week's shaving. His coat collar behind in perfect unison, both of colour and lustre, with the coarse yet glib cordage, that I suppose he called his hair, and which with a bend inward at the nape of the neck, (the only approach to flexure in his whole figure,) slunk in behind his waistcoat; while the countenance lank, dark, very hard, and with strong perpendicular furrows, gave me a dim notion of some one looking at me through a used gridiron, all soot, grease, and iron! (1:115).

Coleridge seems to take delight in reliving the encounter and in "the joy of imaginative re-creation,"³⁶ making the man visible, odorous, and audible to his audience, his humor preventing any hint of mockery:

My taper man of lights listened with perseverant and praiseworthy patience, though, (as I was afterwards told, on complaining of certain gales there were not altogether ambrosial,) it was a melting day with him. And what, Sir, (he said, after a short pause,) might the cost be? Only FOUR-PENCE, (O! how I felt the anti-climax, the abysmal bathos of that four-pence!) . . . Thirty and two pages? Bless me! why except what

³⁶Shumaker, English Autobiography, p. 143. Shumaker uses this phrase to demonstrate what is "nowhere" present in Mill's Autobiography.

I does in a family way on the Sabbath, that's more than I ever reads, Sir! all the year round. I am as great a one, as any man in Brummagem, Sir! for liberty and truth and all them sort of things, but as to this, (no offence, I hope, Sir!) I must beg to be excused (1:116-17).

This short scenario, as well as the vignettes that follow (one describes the "stately and opulent wholesale dealer in cottons" who crushed Coleridge's letter of introduction into his pocket, the other a story Coleridge tells on himself concerning his embarrassing reaction to tobacco at the local minister's house), mark a change of style in Coleridge's autobiography. Here description and narration take precedence over the more common form of self-exposition. This dramatized recollection of his inauspicious beginnings in the literary trade, sometimes told with "unspeakable amusement" (1:117), other times with "affectionate pleasure" (1:118), presumes the "imaginary presence of an addressee, a confidante who is made an indulgent and amused accomplice by the playfulness with which the most outrageous behaviour is recounted."³⁷ The sharing of these "first stroke[s] in the new business" by the mature, bemused author with his young readers not only familiarizes and humanizes Coleridge, the teacher, but also lends the solid support of personal, vivid experience to his forthcoming advice. Moreover, among the "benefit[s]" which are implicitly extended to his audience is not only their vicarious introduction to

³⁷Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," p. 293.

the individuals Coleridge encountered, among them "many respectable men . . . not a few of whom I can still name among my friends" (1:119), but also the self-understanding which he now possesses, his present awareness of the grandiosity of his youthful schemes and the needs which stimulated them:

From this rememberable tour I returned with nearly a thousand names on the subscription list of the Watchman; yet more than half convinced, that prudence dictated the abandonment of the scheme. But for this very reason I persevered in it; for I was at that period of my life so compleatly hag-ridden by the fear of being influenced by selfish motives, that to know a mode of conduct to be the dictate of prudence was a sort of presumptive proof to my feelings, that the contrary was the dictate of duty.

Thus, his uncompromising personal realization that "literature was not a profession, by which I could expect to live; for . . . my talents . . . were not of the sort that could enable me to become a popular writer" (1:121) was based on a combined understanding of himself as well as of his political and social era. The author's present state of recollecting is brought to our attention by Coleridge's parenthetical revision: "(but why should I say this, when in truth I cared too little for any thing that concerned my worldly interests to be at all mortified about it?). . . ." (1:120). We have seen this technique earlier in the chapter and its effect, again, is to heighten the reader's awareness of the self-conscious author before him who is momentarily affected by his review and reconstruction of his own past. We can take Coleridge at his word concerning

this past and present disinterest in worldly affairs, for he closes this narrative on the failure of The Watchman by charmingly telling a joke on himself:

Of the unsaleable nature of my writings I had an amusing memento one morning from our own servant girl. For happening to rise at an earlier hour than usual, I observed her putting an extravagant quantity of paper into the grate in order to light the fire, and mildly checked her for her wastefulness; "la, Sir!" (replied poor Nanny) "why, it is only WATCHMEN," (1: 121).

With this certainty of his necessary withdrawal from the trade of popular writing, Coleridge appropriately "retired to a cottage to Stowey . . . [and] devoted myself to poetry and to the study of ethics and psychology. . ." (1: 121). Glossing over but acknowledging his "admiration . . . of Hartley's Essay on Man," which according to scholars continued from 1795 at least up to 1797,³⁸ Coleridge opens his selective reminiscence of his years at Stowey with a short tribute to its two principal figures, Poole and Wordsworth. It should be noted that at this point Chapter X resumes the autobiographical chronology of Chapter IV which left Coleridge in 1794 seeking "to understand . . . this excellence" in Wordsworth's writings" (1:60). However, the high degree of selectivity in these autobiographical sketches is noticeably operative here in Coleridge's treatment of his life at

³⁸See "To George Coleridge," 6 November 1794, Letter 69, Letters 1: 126, where Coleridge writes he had "made an intense study of Locke, Hartley, and others;" "To Thomas Poole," 16 March 1801, Letter 387, Letters 2: 106 where he claims to have "overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley."

Nether Stowey. In keeping with his reticence in the opening chapter of the Biographia,³⁹ Coleridge's great creative productivity in these years of 1796-98 is unmentioned, while his subsequent metaphysical study is charted in some detail. But at this point Coleridge's autobiographical recollection of his "retirement . . . [and] utter abstraction from all the disputes of the day" (1:122) is introduced and temporarily suspended for his present message concerning the necessary role moral principles must play in achieving national unity. So too did the realities of political fanaticism interrupt Coleridge's retreat into erudition, as the "Spy-Nozy" incident demonstrates.

In his transition to this extended political discussion, Coleridge explains his shift in subject as background necessary for the reader's understanding:

Now that the hand of providence has disciplined all Europe into sobriety . . . 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. . . (1:122).

In his call for national unity, won at the price of the French Revolution, Coleridge argues that its "preservation and continuance" can only be effected by "the disclosure and establishment of principles:"

For by these all opinions must be ultimately tried;

³⁹"From that period to the date of the present work I have published nothing, with my name, which could by any possibility have come before the board of anonymous criticism," (1:3).

and, (as the feelings of men are worthy of regard only as far as they are the representatives of their fixed opinions), on the knowledge of these all unanimity, not accidental and fleeting, must be grounded (1:124).

This conviction, which is identical to his approach to literary criticism,⁴⁰ is shared by Edmund Burke and exemplified in his writings to which "the scholar, who doubts this assertion," is urged to turn. The reader, who has been included in Coleridge's nationalistic appeal ("to us heaven has been just and gracious. The people of England did their best, and have received their rewards. Long may we continue to deserve it!"), is confronted by Coleridge in a series of questions which presume his audience's involvement with his subject as well as their intellectual responsibility:

Whence gained he this superiority of foresight? Whence arose the striking difference, and in most instances even, the discrepancy between the grounds assigned by him, and by those who voted with him, on the same questions? How are we to explain the notorious fact, that the speeches and writings of EDMUND BURKE are more interesting at the present day than they were found at the time of their first publication. . . (1:124-25).

The "satisfactory solution" to these questions is supplied by our author:

. . . Edmund Burke possessed and had sedulously sharpened that eye, which sees all things, actions, and events, in relation to the laws that determine their existence and circumscribe their possibility. He referred habitually to principles. He was a scientific statesman; and therefore a seer (1:125).

⁴⁰"But till reviews are conducted on far other principles, and with far other motives; till in the place of arbitrary dictation and petulant sneers, the reviewers support their decisions by reference to fixed canons of criticism previously established and deduced from the nature of man" (1:44).

Any reader who doubts Burke's influence on his age may "convince himself, if either by recollection or reference he will compare the opposition newspaper" written during the French Revolution with the journals of the present. Also, for any reader who wishes to know Coleridge's opinion concerning the incipient presence of the spirit of Jacobinism he provides the resource information. Coleridge at times seems to presume a great deal of his readers, but his stated expectations of their responsibility are also indications of the role they are asked to fulfill. In this case, the author's and reader's world is "of shared public acquaintanceship,"⁴¹ a world of public record outside this text to which the reader can go for confirmation of the things he learns within this text. Thus there is a reliable world beyond this work, of which both author and reader are members. Coleridge's suggestion to the reader that he "convince himself" by moving outside the text is actually a presumption of the reader's adult self-reliance. Coleridge invites the reader, by verification and participation, to make Coleridge's ideas his own experience. It is always to Coleridge's advantage, as he states in The Friend, to have self-reliant readers, those who do not ask the author "to carry us on his shoulders," but are willing to "strain our own sinews, as he has strained his; and make firm footing

⁴¹Walter Ong, "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," p. 15.

on the smooth rock for ourselves. . . ."42 Coleridge, the true teacher, also implies that his approach to the subject is not the end of the reader's education, but a stimulus for the continuation and deepening of his knowledge. Thus, in urging the reader to move beyond this text Coleridge hopes to leave "a sting behind--i.e. a disposition to study the subject anew, under the light of a new principle."⁴³

Coleridge now returns to the autobiographical mode, offering his encounter with the government spy as a ludicrous example of the prevailing "spirit of secret defamation" during the French Revolution. The comical story is rendered by Coleridge with a good humor which conveys his acute awareness of the rest of the world's vision of him and "the strange gentleman," Wordsworth. The local Sir Dogberry is sketched as the foolish loyalist, whose "grave alarm" stemmed from Coleridge's "haranguing and talking to knots and clusters of the inhabitants" and his "wandering on the hills . . . with books and papers in his hand, taking charts and maps of the country" (1:128). But both the spy "with his Bardolph nose" who at first mistook "Spy Nozy" for himself, and the landlord who, incredulous at Coleridge's talking "real Hebrew Greek," explains Coleridge's oddity with some local pride ("Why, folks do say, your honor! as

⁴²The Friend, p. 55.

⁴³"To J. Britton," 28 February 1819, Letter 1128, Letters 4: 924.

how that he is a Poet, and that he is going to put Quantock and all about here in print!") are rendered with a gentle humor free from any note of superiority. What Coleridge laughingly calls "this formidable inquisition" serves as yet another example of the glaring contrast between the world of ideas with which the dedicated author concerns himself and the more pragmatic world which surrounds him.

But such suspicion of thoughtful men who in good faith and with moderation convey their political ideas is to Coleridge a reality of partisanship, and one which he urges his audience to beware of: "At least let us not be lulled into such a notion of our entire security, as not to keep watch and ward, even on our best feelings" (1:130). What follows is Coleridge's impassioned exposure of the evils of fanaticism, the extreme chaotic state which ensues when there is no recourse to political or moral principles and human beings are left to their own tendencies. From his own experience and from the lessons of history Coleridge argues that reactionary fanaticism needs only "a favorable concurrence of occasions" (1:132) to occur again. The terrible paradox of such extremism is its reactionary power which justifies the retaliatory persecution of the persecutor. Coleridge's strong parallel style with its incremental juxtaposition of opposites expresses the insensible, lawless nature of fanaticism:

I have seen gross intolerance shewn in support of toleration; sectarian antipathy most obtrusively displayed in the promotion of an undistinguishing comprehension

of sects; and acts of cruelty, (I had almost said,) of treachery, committed in furtherance of an object vitally important to the cause of humanity; and all this by men too of naturally kind dispositions and exemplary conduct.

The only safeguard from this evil circle is, for Coleridge, "the established church . . . our best and only sure bulwark, of toleration!" (1:131), because, of course, of its perpetuation of eternal moral principles. Coleridge describes the fanatical transfer of vacuous revolutionary cries from one adversary to another:

At length those feelings of disgust and hatred, which for a brief while the multitude had attached to the crimes and absurdities of sectarian and democratic fanaticism, were transferred to the oppressive privileges of the noblesse, and the luxury, intrigues and favoritism of the continental courts. The same principles, dressed in the ostentatious garb of a fashionable philosophy, once more rose triumphant and effected the French revolution (1:131-32).

This short section on "the magic rod of fanaticism" can be seen as a contrasting companion piece to his treatment of Edmund Burke; together the two frame the autobiographical example of intolerance. Coleridge's historical explanation of fanaticism vividly demonstrates the resulting chaos and persecution which accompanies the utter lack of solid, operative principles. To Coleridge, "a Principle, carries knowledge within itself, and is prospective:"⁴⁴ its visionary or prophetic nature can free us from the repetition of history which Coleridge has charted.

The autobiographical incident of political extremism

⁴⁴Table Talk, 24 June 1827, p. 47.

in which Coleridge's withdrawal from the social arena was liable to suspicion, links this disquisition on the need for political principles to the rest of the chapter. The characteristic Coleridgean movement from a specific individual experience to an impersonal generalization is evident in this historical tracing of the recurring evil of reactionary fanaticism. Returning now to his intellectual history, Coleridge traces in some depth the crucial period in the later years of the eighteenth century which marked his disillusionment with the ideals of the French Revolution, his rejection of Hartleyan mechanism, and his slow transition from Unitarianism to Trinitarianism.⁴⁵ The disruption of autobiographical time and the ensuing compartmentalization of Coleridge's history which these middle chapters of Volume I are prone to come to mind now with his charting of his profound philosophical and religious skepticism. The two years of retirement at Nether Stowey (1797-98) are selectively condensed into a sharply focused tracing of his intellectual state of being; nonetheless, it is the process of his intellectual growth, with its failures and its realizations, which Coleridge stresses, and not the firm conclusions which ultimately resolved his doubts. Moreover, the skepticism and arduous questioning which is recalled in Chapter X constituted Coleridge's intellectual

⁴⁵Robert Barth, S.J., Coleridge and Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 8.

transition from associationism to idealism, a passage which is cursorily alluded to at the opening of Chapter IX:

After I had successively studied in the schools of Locke, Berkeley, 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? If possible, what are its necessary conditions? I was for a while disposed to answer the first question in the negative. . . . But I soon felt, that human nature itself fought up against this wilful resignation of intellect. . . .

The religious skepticism which is delineated in Chapter X involves a gulf between Coleridge's intellectual reasoning and his "moral feelings," a division which, he has informed us in Chapter IX, the writings of the mystics and the idealist philosophers helped to bridge. Coleridge in effect, then, offers his rescue from skepticism before his charting of the experience itself, a chronological disorder which can only be understood by viewing Chapter IX as a corollary to Chapter V-VIII. That is, the list of the idealist philosophers to whom he is indebted immediately follows his refutation of mechanism to provide a reassuring balance: the deadening effect of Hartleyan mechanism is immediately offset by the creative metaphysical approach which these idealist philosophers share. The ultimate guiding presence of the mystics, Kant, and Schelling in Coleridge's intellectual development is, as it were, offered as a reassurance before his charting of the "wandering through the wilderness of doubt." The reader is cognizant of their continued illumination and stimulation, for Coleridge's language attests to

their powerful effect. We recall that the mystics were "always a pillar of fire," that Kant not only "invigorated and disciplined my understanding," but "took possession of me as with a giant's hand," and that Schelling provided "a powerful assistance." Our knowledge of the outcome of Coleridge's passage, that we know the resting place of his transition to be the dynamic philosophy, does not for Coleridge preclude the importance of the process of change itself. Coleridge believed that the enlargement of one's vision involved "the course of unfeigned meditation" which he sketches in Chapter X:

no man will [hate and persecute their former opinion] who by meditation had adopted it, & in the course of unfeigned meditation gradually enlarged the circle & so got out of it/--for in the perception of its falsehood he will form a perception of certain Truths which had made the falsehood plausible, & never can he cease to venerate his own sincerity of Intention. . . .⁴⁶

The "enlarg[ing of] the circle" is the organic activity of the philosophic consciousness; the process of doubt and self-questioning which Coleridge now describes for his reader is integral to its ultimate resolution; for the knowledge gained from the experience of self-awareness is both the method and the goal of his vitalist philosophy:

Doubts rushed in; broke upon me "from the fountains of the great deep," and fell "from the windows of heaven." . . . it was long ere my ark . . . rested. The idea of the Supreme Being appeared to me to be as necessarily implied . . . I was pleased with the Cartesian opinion . . . but I was not wholly satisfied. I began to then ask myself, what proof I had of the

⁴⁶Notebooks 1 (May-July 1804): 2121.

outward existence of anything? . . . I saw, that in the nature of things such proof is impossible; and that . . . the existence is assumed by a logical necessity arising from the constitution of the mind itself . . . Still the existence of a being, the ground of all existence, was not yet the existence of a moral creator . . . For a very long time, indeed, I could not reconcile personality with infinity; and my head was with Spinoza, though my whole heart remained with Paul and John. Yet there had dawned upon me . . . a certain guiding light . . . I became convinced that religion . . . must have a moral origin . . . From these premises I proceeded to draw the following conclusions . . . These principles I held, philosophically, while in respect of revealed religion I remained a zealous Unitarian. . . . I confined it to the schools of philosophy . . . A more thorough revolution in my philosophic principles, and a deeper insight into my own heart, were yet wanting . . . While my mind was thus perplexed . . . the generous and munificent patronage of Mr. JOSIAH and Mr. THOMAS WEDGWOOD enabled me to finish my education in Germany . . . I was thenceforward better employed in attempting to store my own head with the wisdom of others (1: 132-137).

I quote this section at length because of the strong sense of progressive movement from defeat through the process of intellectual growth which it demonstrates: Coleridge's doubt is turned by him into a confrontation of discriminating questions which in turn yield, if not an answer, a strong insight. In other words, the posing of the question is not merely a means to a final answer, but is in itself the determining activity of philosophy. The "affectionate seeking after truth" yields its own truthful experience, else Coleridge would have dispensed with this elaborate charting of his intuitive and logical process which culminates in his recourse to the "wisdom of others." For example, his posing of the question "What proof I had of the outward existence of anything?" yields the insight ("I saw")

that there can be no proof, that is, that the question is moot, and further, that "by a logical necessity arising from the construction of the mind itself," outward existence is "assumed." However, the capacity of the mind to posit the idea of the Supreme Being as the ground of all existence does not address the question of the existence of a personal God with the "inherent attributes" of intelligence and will. But the final truth which Coleridge sensed was not the resolution of these contrasting ideas of God, but the significant disparity between his "mere intellect" and his "moral feelings," a division which, he intuited, bespoke the need for "a more thorough revolution in my own philosophic principles, and a deeper insight into my own heart." Coleridge's trust of his own psychological need for a reconciliation of the "head" with the "heart" became a touchstone of the worth of an aesthetic or metaphysical system. He wrote to Southey in 1810, "Believe me, Southey! a metaphysical Solution, that does not instantly tell for something in the Heart, is grievously to be suspected as apocry[p]hal."⁴⁷ At this time recalled in the Biographia, he possessed a clear understanding of the supportive relationship between intellectual powers of reasoning and the commitment of faith, but an even greater awareness of his own "perplexed" state of being which "confined" this understanding

⁴⁷"To Robert Southey," 7 August 1810, Letter 510, Letters 2: 961.

to "the schools of philosophy." "Nevertheless," as Coleridge now assesses the contribution of his philosophical inquiry to the "foundations of religion and morals," "I cannot doubt, that the difference of my metaphysical notions from those of the Unitarians in general contributed to my final re-conversion to the whole truth in Christ. . ." (1: 137). Kathleen Coburn concurs, "It will be seen that Coleridge's return to orthodox Christianity is through the Logos, not the Gospels, a metaphysical rather than a historical approach."⁴⁸

Coleridge now sketches his literary experience in Germany, providing a brief historical overview of the major German authors. In his listing of the works read and in his brief, personal evaluations Coleridge's gift for appreciative reading as well as his own pleasure in being a student of language and literature is highly evident. He recalls this year of his life "with the opportunities I enjoyed" (1: 141), above all others, "with . . . unmingled satisfaction," for "I made the best use of my time and means" (1:137). His description of himself as a reader suggests his assiduous and respectful work as well as his capacity for discriminating criticism, serving as a model to his young reader:

I read with sedulous accuracy the MINNESINGER . . . and then laboured through sufficient specimens of the master singers . . . not however without occasional pleasure from the rude, yet interesting strains of Hans Sachs . . . In Luther's own German writings . . .

⁴⁸Notebooks 2 (February 1805): 2445.

the German language commenced. . . . The High German is indeed a lingua communis, not actually the native language of any province, but the choice and fragrantcy of all the dialects. From this cause it is at once the most copious and the most grammatical of all the European tongues. . . . In the opinion of LESSING . . . and of ADELUNG . . . Opitz and the Silesian poets . . . remain the models of pure diction. A stranger has no vote on such a question; but after repeated perusal of the work my feelings justified the verdict, and I seemed to have acquired from them a sort of tact for what is genuine in the style of later writers. . . . With the opportunities which I enjoyed, it would have been disgraceful not to have been familiar with their [the contemporary classicists'] writings . . . (1:140-41).

Proceeding now to the end of 1799 and to 1800, Coleridge discusses his work for the Morning Post, chiefly to exemplify his standard of "fixed and announced principles" in journalism. Not only does "genuine impartiality," or "an honest and enlightened adherence to a code of intelligible principles previously announced, and faithfully referred to in support of every judgement on men and events" (1:144), ensure the integrity of the journal as well as stimulate critical thought; it also, as Coleridge is eager to point out, "will secure the success of a newspaper without the aid of party or ministerial patronage." Toward the close of this analysis of his participation in political journalism Coleridge asserts that his motive is neither "vanity" or "self-defense" (1:147), but the reader's enlightenment:

But I have mentioned it from the full persuasion that, armed with the two-fold knowledge of history and the human mind, a man will scarcely err in his judgement concerning the sum total of any future national event, if he have been able to procure the original documents of the past, together with authentic accounts of the

present, and if he have a philosophic tact for what is truly important in facts, and in most instances therefore for such facts as the DIGNITY of HISTORY has excluded from the volumes of our modern compilers, by the courtesy of the age entitled historians (1:148).

Invaluable and admirable guidelines, but the highly personal statements which surround this maxim suggest that with the close of his final autobiographical sketch Coleridge feels compelled to offer a self-explanation in the face of the highly personal criticism levelled against him for neglect of his genius. On the one hand, this autobiographical review from his mature point of view seems unquestionably aimed at self-defense:

Yet in these labours I employed, and, in the belief of partial friends wasted, the prime and manhood of my intellect. Most assuredly, they added nothing to my fortune or my reputation. The industry of the week supplied the necessities of the week. From government or the friends of government I not only never received remuneration, or ever expected it; but I was never honoured with a single acknowledgment, or expression of satisfaction (1:145).

More often, however, Coleridge's "retrospect" does remain free from any note of "regret," as he claims, and indeed conveys a strong sense of self-possession:

But I do derive a gratification from the knowledge, that my essays contributed to introduce the practice of placing the questions and events of the day in a moral point of view; in giving a dignity to particular measures by tracing their policy or impolicy to permanent principles . . . But I dare assume to myself the merit of having first explicitly defined and analyzed the nature of Jacobinism . . . I both rescued the word from remaining a mere term of abuse, and put on their guard many honest minds, who . . . admitted or supported principles from which the worst parts of that system may be legitimately deduced. . . . I regarded it as some proof of my not having laboured altogether in vain, that from the articles written by me shortly

before and at the commencement of the late unhappy war with America, not only the sentiments were adopted, but in some instances the very language, in several of the Massachusetts state-papers (1:146,148).

And finally, one is struck by the unmistakable presence of a straightforward, "impersonal" presentation of methodology:

On every great occurrence I endeavoured to discover in past history the event, that most nearly resembled it. I procured, wherever it was possible, the contemporary historians, memorialists, and pamphleteers. Then fairly subtracting the point of difference from those of likeness, as the balance favored the former or the latter, I conjectured that the result would be the same or different (1:147).

Still, there remains a disparity between Coleridge's somewhat extensive apologia and his expressed disavowal of self-defense. The apologia is sometimes accusatory, and other times expresses a painfully honest self-exposure. Coleridge stresses his reluctance to recall the charge of indolence, but his indignation stimulates his response:

But no one of these motives nor all conjointly would have impelled me to a statement so uncomfortable to my own feelings, had not my character been repeatedly attacked, by an unjustifiable intrusion on private life, as of 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 efficient exertion, either for his own good or that of his fellow-creatures, . . . injuries which I unwillingly remember at all, much less am disposed to record in a sketch of my literary life. . . (1:148,150).

Coleridge's defense, if bitter, is also thoroughly consistent with the self-portrait we have witnessed throughout the Biographia:

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. No one

has charged me with tricking out in other words the thoughts of others, or with hashing up anew the crambe jam decies cocta of English literature or philosophy. Seldom have I written that in a day, the acquisition or investigation of which had not cost me the previous labour of a month (1:149).

With the "excusable warmth of a man stung by an accusation," Coleridge defends himself by asking rhetorically:

But are books the only channel through which the stream of intellectual usefulness can flow? Is the diffusion of truth to be estimated by publications; or publications by the truth, which they diffuse or at least contain? . . . Would that the criterion of a scholar's utility were the number and moral values 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! (1:149).

With this fervent expression of his commitment to communicating "truths" by exciting minds "into activity, and suppl[ying them] with the germs of their after-growth!" we are recalled to the challenging and highly principled author-reader relationship in this book, a rhetorical element which is at this point altered by Coleridge's "exculpation." I have spoken earlier in this study of a background audience which is for the most part second to Coleridge's immediate readership of "young men of Genius and Literature."⁴⁹ In this conclusion to Chapter X, however, Coleridge directly addresses both audiences, his tone and content changing according to his stance before his imagined reader. Coleridge's detractors are ostensibly the more

⁴⁹"To Mr. Pryce," 14 April 1816, Letter 1003, Letters 4: 633.

immediate audience here, moved to the foreground in Coleridge's patent self-vindication. He confronts them openly:

To those, who from ignorance of the serious injury I have received from this rumour of having dreamed away my life to no purpose . . . or to those, who from their own feelings, or the gratification they derive from thinking contemptuously of others, would like Job's comforters attribute these complaints . . . to self-conceit or presumptuous vanity. . . (1:150).

His stance is challenging and combative:

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 love of paradox (1:149).

I would also include in this audience those whom, if not "severest critics" or blatant detractors, Coleridge regarded as his "judges," many of "long acquaintances," who remain disappointed with his use of his talents. These too he places in the spotlight in order to face them directly:

I will not therefore hesitate to ask the consciences of those, who from their long acquaintances with me and with the circumstances are best qualified to decide or be my judges, whether the restitution of the *sum cuique* would increase or detract from my literary reputation (1:150).

At the same time, however, we also sense the unthreatening presence of a participant to whom Coleridge directs his "criterion" for the "diffusion of truth," whose favorable response is presumed in the author's rhetorical questions, and to whom Coleridge directs his proverbial maxims gleaned from experience. I am suggesting that there is an additional, if not more crucial purpose underlying

Coleridge's apologia which arises from his consideration of his young audience, and that is to expose his situation as an instructive example for his young readers, to present himself "representatively"⁵⁰ as a means of forewarning them. For it is before this audience, the "gentle reader" whom he finally addresses, that Coleridge humbly exposes himself in prose and poetry, emphasizing the intimacy of the gesture:

. . . what I could have done, is a question for my own conscience. On my own account I may perhaps have had sufficient reason to lament my deficiency in self-control, and the neglect of centering my powers to the realization of some permanent work. But to verse rather than to prose, if to either, belong the voice of mourning for
 "Keen pangs of love awakening . . .
 And fears self-will'd that shunned the eye of hope,
 And hope that scarce would know itself from fear;
 Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
 And genius given and knowledge won in vain. . ." (l:151).

This intimate autobiographical performance before his "gentle reader" firmly aligns Coleridge's audience with him in a private compact to the exclusion of those insensitive censors whom he feels have forced "an unjustifiable intrusion on [my] private life." The autobiographical act creates an intimate bond; the autobiographer's self-exposure, which is here quite pointedly reserved for a select audience, confirms the reader's sympathetic loyalty. Reciprocally, this autobiography is not merely self-oriented, but carries within itself an end beyond its own life: "to win other friends among the rising generation for the remaining course of his

⁵⁰"To Lord Byron," 22 October 1815, Letter 981, Letters 4: 604; Coleridge writes, "To think of myself at all except representatively . . . was new to me."

life . . . to spare the young those circuitous paths, on which he himself had lost his way."

Thus, the close of Chapter X functions as a meaningful transition to the "affectionate exhortation" of Chapter XI. The rhetorical performance of Coleridge's "opening out his heart to such as he either knows or hopes to be of like mind with himself" creates the unmasked, intimate context appropriate to Coleridge's forthcoming, highly personal advice. His statement, "But an interest in the welfare of those, who at the present time may be in circumstances not dissimilar to my own at my first entrance into life, has been the constant accompaniment, and (as it were) the under-song of all my feelings" (1:152), is but a reminder of a concern which has been actively demonstrated throughout the work.

In part, Chapter XI is a condensed statement of opinions and principles which have been previously expressed or demonstrated:

Money, and immediate reputation form only an arbitrary and accidental end of literary labor. . . . Now though talents may exist without genius, yet as genius cannot exist, certainly not manifest itself without talents, I would advise every scholar . . . so far to make a division between the two, as that he should devote . . . his genius to objects of his tranquil and unbiassed choice. . . . But woefully will that man find himself mistaken, who imagines that the profession of literature, or (to speak more plainly) the trade of authorship, besets its members with fewer or with less insidious temptations, than the church, the law, or the different branches of commerce. But I have treated sufficiently on this unpleasant subject in an early chapter of this volume (1:152,153,159).

However, the uniqueness of this chapter marks the close of a phase of the Biographia. With the exception of the final chapter, Coleridge's biographical sketches conclude now with his remarks on political journalism and his self-vindication, an internal juncture of the work which will be discussed. The rhetorical engagement of the reader continues throughout the work, even with Wordsworth placed before both Coleridge and his audience, but the peculiar paternal intimacy of this chapter of direct address which alone is exclusively devoted to the two principal figures of this work, author and reader, is nowhere repeated. It is fitting and purposeful, I believe, that this chapter falls between the close of the autobiography and Coleridge's exposition of the Imagination, functioning as a kind of "landing-place" for the reader as well as the author who has expressly rendered his vocational autobiography as directed to his audience's welfare. Chapter XI confirms and is a culmination of Coleridge's personal interaction with his young readers; the suggestion of their lives extending and even in some way amending Coleridge's is implicit.

For years after writing this chapter Coleridge subscribed to its "sentiments," referring various correspondents to it for a "more general application" of the advice "addressed to a small and particular class."⁵¹ Complimenting

⁵¹"To Thomas Allsop," 30 September 1819, Letter 1205, Letters 4:952. See also: "To Mr. Pryce," 14 April 1816, Letter 1003, Letters 4:633; and "To Thomas Curtis," 12 July 1816, Letter 1017, Letters 4:652.

the audience by presuming not only their talents but their genius, he argues that the fostering and protection of such a gift is best accomplished by the disassociation of study and writing from paid labor:

Three hours of leisure, unannoyed by any alien anxiety, and looked forward to with delight as a change and recreation, will suffice to realize in literature a larger product of what is truly genial, than weeks of compulsion (1:152).

The subjection of the "genial power" to the burdensome necessities of "money and immediate reputation" will, "instead of exciting, stun and stupify the mind" (1:153). Initially Coleridge seems to advise "every scholar, who feels the genial power working within him" to, in effect, compartmentalize his life, to

make a division between the two, as that he should devote his talents to the acquirement of competence in some known trade or profession, and his genius to objects of his tranquil and unbiassed choice. . . .

In a self-quoted speech which attempts to bridge the distance of the written word, Coleridge addresses his reader directly and affectionately, evoking an ideal domestic scene of a blend of personal freedom and congenial harmony. His imaginative creation places the reader in a setting which would tempt many scholars of today:

"My dear young friend," (I would say) "suppose yourself established in any honorable occupation. From the manufactory or counting-house, from the law-court, or from having visited your last patient, you return at evening,

"Dear tranquil time, when the sweet sense of home
Is sweetest--"

to your family, prepared for its social enjoyments, with the very countenances of your wife and children

brightened, and their voice of welcome made doubly welcome, by the knowledge that, as far as they are concerned, you have satisfied the demands of the day by the labor of the day. Then, when you retire into your study, in the books on your shelves you revisit so many venerable friends with whom you can converse. Your own spirit scarcely less free from personal anxieties than the great minds, that in those books are still living for you! Even your writing desk with its blank paper and all its other implements will appear as a chain of flowers, capable of linking your feelings as well as thought to events and characters past or to come . . . But why should I say retire? The habits of active life and daily intercourse with the stir of the world will tend to give you such self-command, that the presence of your family will be no interruption. 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 (1:153-54).

We can perhaps ascribe the excessively sweet unreality of this picture to the sad, and more realistic, truth of Coleridge's personal inability to accomplish such an ideal. But it is telling and poignant that Coleridge goes to such manipulative lengths of evocative description to convince his reader. Underlying his advice is the bitter irony that for a man of genius the compartmentalization of his life is preferable to the literary profession.

However, the church provides a more suitable haven, for the ministry entails the least separation of capacities and labor. Coleridge first argues for the church's promulgation of humanitarian education and ideals:

to every parish throughout the kingdom there is transplanted a germ of civilization; that in the remotest villages there is a nucleus, round which the capabilities of the place may crystallize and brighten; a model sufficiently superior to excite, yet sufficiently near to encourage and facilitate, imitation. . . (1:155).

Moreover, this setting which "unite[s] the love of peace with the faith in the progressive amelioration of mankind" has a humanizing effect on the clergyman who "is neither in the cloistered cell, nor in the wilderness, but a neighbour and a family-man." Most importantly, the profession is unparalleled in its "encouragement of learning and genius," for:

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 (1:156).

Coleridge's enumeration of the "many and important" advantages of any profession over that of "a mere literary man" conveys a tone of sad resignation to the existing "lamentable . . . world of letters" which he deplored with far more vigor in Chapter II. His commendation of "whatever . . . profession or trade chosen" (1:157) is also a silent reproach of the present literary milieu, and certainly an unspoken admission of the ideal nature of his imagined intellectual community:

In the former a man lives in sympathy with the world, in which he lives. At least he acquires a better and quicker tact for the knowledge of that, with which men in general can sympathize. He learns to manage his genius more prudently and efficaciously. His powers and acquirements gain him likewise more real admiration; for they surpass the legitimate expectations of others. He is something besides an author, and is not therefore considered merely as an author. The hearts of men are open to him, as to one of their own class; and whether he exerts himself or not in the conversational circles of his acquaintance, his silence is not attributed to pride, nor his communicativeness to vanity (1:157).

Coleridge's "simple advice: be not merely a man of letters!" (1:158) is, in light of the reader's experience of this literary autobiography of a life of vigor and dedication, filled with poignant irony. To those who "from conscience" object to relegating literature to "an honorable augmentation" Coleridge offers himself, thinly veiled, as an instructive example:

Happy will it be for such a man, if among his contemporaries elder than himself he should meet with one, who, with similar powers and feelings as acute as his own, had entertained the same scruples; had acted upon them; and who, by after-research (when the step was, alas! irretrievable, but for that very reason his research undeniably disinterested) had discovered himself to have quarrelled with received opinions only to embrace errors, to have left the direction tracked out for him on the high road of honorable exertion, only to deviate into a labyrinth, where when he had wandered till his head was giddy, his best good fortune was finally to have found his way out again, too late for prudence though not too late for conscience or for truth! (1:158-59).

With the final clause, "to have found his way out again, too late for prudence though not too late for conscience or truth," we have the authorial expression of the personal impulse of the Biographia, the stimulus for Coleridge's re-entry into his literary milieu with "this present work" which, he announces in its opening pages, is the first publication in twenty years to be personally brought "before the board of anonymous criticism" (1:3). Coleridge writes of his life, "Time spent in such delay is time won: for manhood in the meantime is advancing, and with it increase of knowledge, strength of judgement, and above all, temperance

of feelings." We can, I believe, interpret Coleridge's hopeful assurance in the advancement of "manhood" to be a description of his commitment to his young reader; the Biographia is viewed by its author as a compensation for "time spent in such delay" because its readers may carry its truths into their world. There is an unmistakable sense here, because of its autobiographical mode and its authorially created audience, that the Biographia is Coleridge's personal legacy.

This legacy, which up to this point has been a blend of selective autobiography and the promulgation of principles, is unified by the continuing theme of vocation. Coleridge carefully composes his sketches to demonstrate the development of his principles and opinions, imparting to them a "suitable organic function."⁵² At the same time, Coleridge extends his "present" authorial self to his reader, engaging him as an active participant in this literary work which looks backward to personal experiences of genial reading and criticizes the current unprincipled practice of criticism. Also, of course, by its very nature, by this conferring of Coleridge's vocation, with all its attendant responsibilities and values, upon his readers, the Biographia looks to the future, while serving as a paradigm of

⁵²Shumaker, English Autobiography, p. 120. Shumaker distinguishes "emphasis" from "theme" by defining the latter as "some external problem or institution with which his subjective existence has become involved," p. 124.

his ideal literary fellowship.

We may ask, then, why the autobiographical mode is discontinued after Chapter X; why Coleridge concludes his story of his work with the one area which thwarted him the most, and closes his autobiographical "self-imaging"⁵³ in such a painfully honest, of not resigned tone. If we consider the purpose behind Coleridge's rendition of his experience with political journalism, that is, the advice of Chapter XI, then the autobiography functions as a device to affect his audience; by this gesture toward his reader's future Coleridge confers more prominence and meaning on their vocation than on his spent and imperfect "fortune." But in another, and not contradictory sense, Coleridge's vocation is revitalized at the close of his autobiography as he turns to his "application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism" (1:1). It is as if "the review of the past is a means to proceed more confidently with future work,"⁵⁴ for with the cessation of Coleridge's story of his work, the work itself recommences. And if these early years of the nineteenth-century mark the time of Coleridge's writing for the Morning Post, this period also includes Coleridge's proximity to Wordsworth and the publication of the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, the stimulus for Volume II of the Biographia.

⁵³Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts, p. 13.

⁵⁴Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p. 107.

CHAPTER V

In the two chapters which conclude Volume I of the Biographia, Coleridge elevates the active participation of his readers to a philosophical plane, rendering their capacity for reflexive and creative consciousness in the language of the imaginative principle, thereby transforming this essential aspect of their role into the power of philosophic consciousness. That the discovery of truth is synonymous with a deepening and expansive self-knowledge has, up to now, been demonstrated both by Coleridge's autobiographical review of a personal growth which culminates in the "present" of this work, and by his rhetorical demands on the reader which presume and encourage a heightened self-consciousness. In this philosophical interlude before his practical criticism it becomes clear that both Coleridge's self-reflexive autobiographical act as well as the reader's committed responsiveness (which is, of course, authorially planted and elicited) are rhetorical paradigms for the philosophic consciousness.

Coleridge's cautions and "premonitions" which open Chapter XII appear, on the surface, sufficiently strenuous to discourage the presumptuous reader who lacks the humility and discipline for philosophic inquiry. But Coleridge

poses the option of "pass[ing]over the following chapter altogether" far more as a means of stressing the uncompromising demands which he places, without apology, on the reader who will continue. Coleridge asserts his "daring" and "courage" in this pretense of excluding undesirable readers; his intended effect, however, is to bolster and confirm his highly selective audience in the continuation of their effort. They are undeniably an elite and privileged few (" . . . it is neither possible or necessary for all men, or for many, to be PHILOSOPHERS" [1:164]), but Coleridge's first "golden rule" is designed to preclude, from the beginning, any "want of modesty" which might accompany such lofty identification. His maxim, "'until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding'" (1:160), self-illustrated by his fulfillment of his own requirement in one case and his inability to penetrate Plato in another, is actually a concise formula for the genial criticism which Coleridge has urged and demonstrated throughout the Biographia. Above all, the reader should be an active, thoughtful participant in the work of literature, and by no means a passive recipient of ideas. Coleridge's verbs express the self-initiating quality of his reading: "I see clearly . . . I have a complete insight . . .and by application of received and ascertained laws I can satisfactorily explain to my own reason. . . ." Moreover, the attitude which stimulates such vigorous mental activity is

a combination of earnestness and impartiality, that is, a willingness to admire and appreciate which is nonetheless free from bias or personal needs.¹ Thus Coleridge can recognize the "hollowness" of the fanatic's supernatural claims "without suspecting him of any intentional falsehood" (1:160-61). With Plato, Coleridge's genial attitude approaches reverence, and it is this willing faith in the author's genius which precludes Coleridge's "contemptuous verdict." He uses similarly active language to describe his reading of Plato; but here the effort, though certainly as committed, is unyielding: ". . . I can attach no consistent meaning . . . I have sought in vain for causes adequate . . . I have no insight . . ." (1:161). The assessment that it is he the reader who is lacking and not the author, is confirmed by Coleridge's literary tradition, which has long honored "the name of PLATO with epithets, that almost transcend humanity" (1:161). But Coleridge is also reacting against a "fashionable" glibness when he adroitly distinguishes between a true understanding of an author which includes a contextual awareness of his flaws or weaknesses and a quick, self-satisfying dismissal of an author based on the reader's own impatience. Too often a sharp stab levelled against the flaws of a genius passes for "superior penetration," while Coleridge suggests that a

¹See Notebooks 2 (1807-08): 3220, where Coleridge describes his ideal "Judge" as "the earnest impersonal Reader."

perspective which views the flaws as organic to the author's work bespeaks a far more inclusive and true understanding. This seamless, indivisible relationship between flaws and excellencies, ignorance and wisdom reflects the natural organicism in a man's thought: as with Coleridge's life, an author's errors cannot be isolated, either for self-protection or for criticism, and be understood; they are, at all events, a part of, even an indication of the process of development. This natural growth which occurs in intellectual life is also duplicated artistically through the principle of organic form, an inseparability of part and whole and matter and form which Coleridge now claims for this work. Although Coleridge's request that the reader read the chapter as it was organically written refers specifically to Chapter XIII, his short explication of organicism is suggestive of the Biographia as a whole. With "delicate subjects" the organic theory does not merely prescribe that the form must be appropriately suited to the idea, but insists that the form alters the very idea which it "suits." Coleridge's metaphor of the skeleton idea which is "cloathed and modified" by its life-giving form also vividly conveys the inseparability of the part, or underlying skeleton, from its completed, contained whole.

Coleridge's exclusion of the intellectually satisfied and those who adhere to materialism from his audience (without "the least disrespect" he invites those to leave whose

minds are "completely at rest" concerning "the general notions of matter, spirit, soul, body, action, passiveness, time, space, cause, and effect, consciousness, perception, memory and habit") attests to the serious import of his forthcoming material. His uncompromising tone ("But it is time to tell the truth" [1:163]) reinforces the sense of a new urgency as Coleridge adamantly refuses to waste any more time refuting materialism or couching difficult metaphysical questions. The philosophy we are about to encounter is "the science of ultimate truths," and not a "mere analysis of terms." Its stringent demands render its benefits available only to "a few." Coleridge's analogy of the realm and reach of the philosophic consciousness, drawn from nature, conveys the mind's search for "higher ascents" which to "the multitude below" are either "hidden," or appear as forbidding "dark haunts," or as inaccessible "palaces of happiness and power" (1:165-66). But to the "true philosopher" who cannot "rest satisfied with . . . imperfect light" (1:167) the immediate, accessible truths are richly suggestive of their "sources [which] must be far higher and far inward." For transcendentalism to Coleridge, while a "pure philosophy" of eternal Truths beyond the limitations of time, space, and the narrowness of "common" perception, is nonetheless rooted in our highly cultivated human consciousness, and is therefore to be carefully distinguished from transcendence, "those flights of lawless

speculation which . . . transgress . . . the bounds and purposes of our intellectual faculties." That the transcendental philosophy springs from human self-consciousness allows Coleridge to claim: "This is . . . only so far idealism, as it is at the same time, the truest and most binding realism" (1:178). The richness of this paradox is symbolized in the philosopher's discovery of the sources of transcendent Truth in "the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls" and "even in the level streams" (1:166). Coleridge's metaphor of the stream accomplishes a dual motif: it conveys his idea of an ultimate truth which as a life-giving power "suppl[ies] in itself a natural connection to the parts, and unity to the whole" (1:129); and it also suggests, as a mirror image (the philosopher measur[es] and sound[s] the rivers" and "detect[s] elements" in the streams), the "self-intuition" which is the essence of the philosophic imagination. In effect, the stream or self is mined for its "potential." Coleridge does not extend the metaphor further; but his allusion to our sense of a "fuller knowledge" than spontaneous consciousness as a connection to "master-currents below the surface" (1:167) as well as his assertion, "On the IMMEDIATE, which dwells in every man . . . all the certainty of our knowledge depends" (1:168), reinforce the image of the philosopher's discovery of truths within himself which "neither the vale itself or the surrounding mountains contained or could supply."

The intellectual capacity which Coleridge posits is not

only organic to our human nature but is answered by a world correspondent to our mind. Thus Coleridge's metaphors from nature are not only vivid and attractive images of our human potential (particularly the "air-sylph"), but are also, on a literal level, existences correspondent to our consciousness, existences of the "same instinct." The natural world of sense and spirit answers to our creative perception, or conversely, our sense of the world begins in self-knowledge. Coleridge introduces the cohesion of self and nature, which he will later delineate by logical reasoning, with the rich and ageless metaphor of the butterfly:

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. They know and feel, that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them! In short, all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit: . . . (1:167).

After positing the depth and richness of our capacity for the "sacred power of self-intuition," Coleridge qualifies his exuberance, reiterating his claim that such spiritual intuition is reserved to few. For the development of this "ulterior consciousness," its strengthening, discipline, and direction is a matter of the will; an "act of freedom" is a necessary preliminary to the philosophic consciousness. Many do not extend their consciousness beyond

sensation, others may have a consciousness of a concept "or notion of the thing," and still fewer may grasp the logic and reasoning which sustains philosophy. But to Coleridge the pursuit of philosophical truth was a moral act which involved man's total being; philosophical self-consciousness was "the key to man's ascent to a more spiritualized identity."² Thus if the personal commitment to deepened self-knowledge is lacking, philosophic inquiry is "groundless and hollow, unsustained by living contact, unaccompanied with any realizing intuition which exists by and in the act that affirms its existence. . ." (1:173). But the power of the philosophic imagination is utterly creative and self-generated, uniting existence and knowledge:

With me, the act of contemplation makes the thing contemplated, as the geometricians contemplating describe lines correspondent; but I not describing lines, but simply contemplating, the representative forms of things rise up into existence.

In this first section of Chapter XII, which precedes his logical exposition of the two poles of the dynamic philosophy, Coleridge's stance frequently shifts from a warning of the unique character of the "philosophic organ" to a stirring testimony to its creative powers. He takes particular care to distinguish different levels of consciousness for the reader, to reiterate how few "among us" have the capacity and discipline for philosophic self-knowledge, in effect, to insure that the reader's sense of his ability to

²Patricia M. Ball, The Central Self, p. 6.

continue in this text and in this vocation is accurate. At the same time, however, Coleridge rhetorically includes the reader in this exclusive and heady activity, implicitly sanctioning his membership in the few "of all ages:"

The deeper, however, we penetrate into the ground of things, the more truth we discover . . . all these we shall find united in one perspective central point, which shows regularity and a coincidence of all the parts in the very object . . . (1:169-70).³

Coleridge's earlier warning tone bespeaks an attempt to dispel any notion of partial or simplistic involvement, while his use of metaphors and highly suggestive aphorisms seems an invitation to the reader to become engaged with this dynamic philosophy. The reader who has sustained Coleridge's unmitigating admonitions and is also attracted by the challenge of developing his self-potential is qualified for this self-demanding Coleridgean philosophy. This opening section of address to the reader, then, suggests a significant alteration in the reader's responsibilities and role: the intellectual demands which have been placed on him and the values which he has been asked to affirm are now raised to a metaphysical plane, and his capacity for self-reflection which has been urged and elicited by the author is now pre-

³For the most part, both those "to whom the philosophic organ is entirely wanting" (1:173) and those who activate this unique power are referred to in the third person, or generically as "men." However, Coleridge also makes an exception in the former case, using the first person plural to refer to those excluded. Presumably, this alerts the reader to the need for accurate self-assessment: he could easily be "many a one among us . . . who think themselves philosophers," but fail in the commitment.

sented as the exclusive and richly potent philosophic imagination or consciousness. The implication, then, is that the reader's engagement in this work is an imaginative, and now philosophical act; thus Coleridge takes great care to emphasize this meaningful alteration in the reader's involvement and to stress the total commitment of the philosophic act.

In the remaining two-thirds of the chapter the philosophic consciousness is reduced to its most basic form, "the act of knowledge." Coleridge's purpose is largely expository; thus his approach is direct and didactic. But we also hear a note of urgency in this material. Particularly in Coleridge's additions to Schelling do we sense that the purpose which underlies this exposition is the reader's "fundamental conviction" (1:65). The employed procedure is highly logical and formal, with its disjunctive syllogism which opens the analysis and its progressively ordered theses. This highly systematic analysis of the "concurrence [of subject and object in the act of knowledge], its possibility and its necessity" (1:174) is developed with clarity, the principles of formal logic establishing sharp and precise relationships among the terms of the argument. It is a somewhat regrettable task for the Coleridge scholar to glean Coleridge's statements from the mass of Schelling's, but it is interesting to note that Coleridge's additions either serve to concretize the thesis or to suggest the

ontological or theological extension of this epistemology: in short, his interpolations of Schelling reflect Coleridge's individual and, to some extent, contrasting concerns.

In Schelling's theory of knowledge as the unity of two opposing forces the one, self-consciousness, expands outward while the force of the consciousness of the external world streams inward. In order to convey the "coinstantaneous" concurrence of both the subjective and the objective poles, they are theoretically separated, each to its respective extreme. Yet both are posited as gravitating toward their opposite: nature possesses a "necessary tendence . . . to intelligence," while the subjective demonstrates an "irresistible" and "innate" "prejudice" toward the "existence of things without us" (1:175, 177-78). Coleridge's amplifications of both analyses of these extremes indicate his need to posit a principle which would allow for the individuality of the self while still providing for a universality of essence, a principle which would avoid both pantheism and solipsism. Accordingly, he inserts the following sentence into Schelling's account of the "highest perfection of natural philosophy," thereby avoiding Schelling's "unfortunate pantheistic implications:"⁴

The theory of natural philosophy would then be completed, when all nature was demonstrated to be

⁴J. A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, p. 235.

identical in essence with that, which in its highest known power exists in man as intelligence and self-consciousness; when the heavens and the earth shall declare not only the power of their maker, but the glory and the presence of their God, even as he appeared to the great prophet during the vision of the mount in the skirts of his divinity (1:176).⁵

And in defense of the realism of the "I AM," that is, that our self-consciousness presumes an objective world which exists independent of our perception, Coleridge attacks the "system of modern metaphysics, which banishes us to a land of shadows, surrounds us with apparitions, and distinguishes truth from illusion only by the majority of those who dream the same dream" (1:179). In other words, while materialism would appear to confirm the existence of an external reality, mechanistic associationism, to Coleridge, reduced our knowledge of an object to "extension, motion, degrees of velocity, and those diminished copies of configurative motion" (1:82), thereby removing "all reality and immediateness of perception, and plac[ing] us in a dream world of phantoms and spectres, the inexplicable swarm and equivocal generation of motions in our own brains" (1:92). But the "ground of all other certainty," the "true and original realism," is the act of knowledge in which "the real and very object" is present to, indeed is "coherent" with the

⁵For the identification of Coleridge's additions I am relying on Shawcross, "Notes, Chapter XII," pp. 268-70. Shawcross, in turn, depends heavily on Sara Coleridge; see "Note to Chapter IX," footnotes for Chapter XII, and "Appendix" in Biographia Literaria (1858), pp. 268-71, 322-56, 691-712.

subject.

The theses purport to demonstrate how this is possible, and before offering self-consciousness as the answer, Coleridge systematically deduces the nature of a first principle or absolute truth which is "self-grounded, unconditional . . . and is its own predicate . . ." (1:181).⁶ According to these requirements, self-consciousness is the ground of all knowledge, for "in this, and in this alone, object and subject, being and knowing are identical, each involving, and supposing the other" (1:183). Thus all knowledge is a form of self-knowledge, for in the creative apprehension of an object we duplicate self-consciousness by the act of constructing the object as object, that is, making real the table which is the not-me only to draw it to our self, to unite it with its apprehending subject. It is in this unifying act that knowledge for Coleridge is creative, for the mind initiates an original perception, one which is both self-determined and self-projective. The perception itself necessarily bears both the stamp of the perceiver and the reality of the perceived. Thus as John Hill paraphrases:

the product in any given act of perception is a modified combination of the percipient and the thing-perceived and is . . . neither a subject (perceiver) nor an object (thing-perceived) exclusively, but rather the most original union of both.⁷

⁶Shawcross states, "The first six of the following Theses and Scholia do not appear to contain any verbal quotations from Schelling . . ." (1:269).

⁷Hill, ed., Imagination in Coleridge, p. 3.

We can easily understand, when faced with the creative power implicit in this first principle of transcendental philosophy, Coleridge's revulsion at the passive and willess role to which the mind is relegated by associationism.

If this willed act of knowledge, or "primary ACT of self-duplication" (1:185), is a power common to all men, its application, or "the direction of the INNER SENSE" is most intense and refined in the individual who "attains to a notion of his notions--[who] reflects on his own reflections" (1:172), who, in short, executes the "philosophic imagination." This highest degree of the imagination is, according to Gordon McKenzie:

identical in kind with the activity which it contemplates. That is, the original act whereby pure intelligence objectifies and limits itself in order to contemplate itself in its limitation is an act of imagination; this act is common to all mankind, being repeated in the experience of every individual in becoming conscious of the world. But as we rise in self-knowledge the faculty . . . is only the property of very gifted minds.⁸

In Coleridge's brief and highly connotative descriptions of this "sacred power of self-intuition" (1:167) which open the chapter it is clear that his concept of the Primary Imagination is not simply psychological, nor solely epistemological, but is really ontological: this power infuses and defines human existence, makes the self the generative force in this universe, and renders this world not merely intelligible, but humanly meaningful or "correspondent" to

⁸ McKenzie, Organic Unity in Coleridge, p. 22.

the mind. Although Schelling expressly confines his exposition to the realm of epistemology, Coleridge, in his confirmation of the unity of existence, repeatedly extends the implications of the act of knowledge. As I. A. Richards suggests, Coleridgean self-consciousness is:

a mode of action, or of being, at the same time that it is a mode of knowing. It is that activity of the mind in which knowing and doing and making and being are least to be distinguished.⁹

This discrepancy between Schelling and Coleridge is clearly evident in the latter's insertions in the text. It is Schelling who states unequivocally:

We are not investigating an absolute principium essendi; for then I admit, many valid objections might be started against our theory; but an absolute principium cognoscendi. . . . For to us, self-consciousness is not a kind of being, but a kind of knowing, and that too the highest and farthest that exists for us (1:186,87).

But it is Coleridge who continually relates knowledge and being: who posited the "hypostasis" of the "scire" and the "esse" at the close of his refutation of associationism; who, before turning to Schelling, described philosophy as "neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether," and its "primary ground" or "postulate" as "KNOW THYSELF!"; and who now, in his additions to Schelling, directly contradicts him. It is Coleridge's vision of "the end and purpose of all reason, namely, unity and system"

⁹I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, p. 47

which stimulates his affirmation that "the principium essendi does not stand to the principium cognoscendi in the relation of cause to effect, but both the one and the other are coinherent and identical" (1:187).

Moreover, in his identification of the epistemological unity of subject and object with the absolute unity of the divine mode of being, the "great eternal I AM," Coleridge explicitly departs from Schelling. If Schelling posited the Absolute Ego and the identity of the One with the All, then Coleridge countered any suggestion of pantheism by "characteristically graft[ing] onto the latter stages of the argument an identification of the Absolute Ego with the personal God of Christianity."¹⁰ Coleridge makes this identification explicit in his "SCHOLIUM" to Thesis VI:

But if . . . he be again asked, how he, the individual person, came to be, then in relation to the ground of his existence . . . he might reply, sum quia Deus est, or still more philosophically, sum quia in Deo sum. But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality; the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical, Sum quia sum; I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am (1:183).

Coleridge's transcendental philosophy is rooted in the nature of God, the Jehovah who "in the very first revelation of his absolute being ["Sum quia sum"] . . . at the same time revealed the fundamental truth of all philosophy." Thus,

¹⁰Judson I. Lyon, "Romantic Psychology and the Inner Senses: Coleridge," PMLA 81 (June 1966): 256.

absolute being and absolute consciousness coincide in a personal God, the "ground of existence," and our human consciousness and its higher form, the philosophic or artistic imagination, are analogues of the divine creativity. If our self-consciousness is ultimately metaphysical, that is, the nature of our being, and if we posit God as absolute self-consciousness, then it follows for Coleridge that

philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy. We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD (1:186)

Scholars have pointed to this as a significant departure from Schelling, one which indicates Coleridge's intellectual anticipation of Schelling¹¹ and accounts for the "inconsequence of the use made of Schelling in the Biographia" in Chapter XII where "Coleridge translates a few pages, supposedly towards a theory of imagination, then unaccountably breaks off . . . and then begins to talk about literature, Schelling's systematic exposition having been left dangling in its first premisses."¹² Coleridge's additions to Schelling here suggest, not an inconsistency or irresolution within Coleridge's concept of self-consciousness,¹³ but his

¹¹See the following Notebook entries for evidence of the "genial coincidence" of the two authors before Coleridge had studied Schelling: 1 (February-March 1801): 921; 1 (November 1803): 1679; 2 (April 1804): 2057; 2 (March 1805): 2494.

¹²McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, p. 42.

¹³Grosvenor Powell makes this charge in "Coleridge's 'Imagination' and the Infinite Regress of Consciousness," ELH 39 (June 1972): 275.

original departure from Schelling's concept of the absolute as "a mere selfless identity or total indifference, prior to and behind self-consciousness, which was neither subject nor object, but the mere negation of both." In its place, Coleridge wished to accomplish the highest identification of being and knowledge, the identification of "Schelling's 'intellectual intuition' of subject and object in their absolute identity with the religious intuition, the direct consciousness of God."¹⁴

Nonetheless, there is an unevenness and discontinuity throughout Chapter XII which is perhaps most evident in Coleridge's closing remarks on the "Great . . . obstacles which an English metaphysician has to encounter" (1:191). Coleridge's opening descriptions of the philosophical imagination were, we recall, couched in an unsettling context; in the midst of conveying the rich and elite nature of this refined power, Coleridge seems to withdraw the very enticement he offers by, in the next breath, suggesting that this ideal is beyond the reader's capacity. A systematic delineation of the power follows, with Coleridge relying on Schelling only to surpass him. The chapter closes in Coleridge's voice, but it is an unpleasant tone, unsuited to the content and tenor of the earlier parts of the chapter.

The initial transition to Coleridge's assertions on

¹⁴Gordon McKenzie, Organic Unity in Coleridge, p. 27.

the necessity of new technical terms in philosophy is his purpose statement for the "ensuing chapter." He assumes, he says, the power of the mind to reconcile the opposing forces of subject and object "as my principle, in order to deduce from it a faculty" whose "generation, agency, and application" he will discuss (1:188). To this end, he introduces the word "potence, in order to express a specific degree of power" and "hazard[s] the new verb potenziare, with its derivatives, in order to express the combination or transfer of powers" (1:189). He then defends his right to introduce new linguistic forms: crucial to the study of metaphysics is not only a linguistic freedom from "vagueness, confusion, and imperfect conveyance of our thoughts," but also a freedom from the constraints of empiricism which, as Coleridge has stated in Chapter X, dominate "the vocabulary of common life." His concern that the reader's attention be weaned from the "DEGREES of things" and directed to the "KIND abstracted from degree" (1:108) is more specifically expressed here: new terminology may be demanded in the study of transcendental philosophy, for the vocabulary of "modern philosophers," that is, rational empiricists, embodies the bias of its creed, that the "conceivable" is limited to "the bounds of the picturable" (1:189). Alice Snyder remarks that this "despotism of the eye" enslaves the mind to the "delusive notion, that what is not imageable

is likewise not conceivable,"¹⁵ or in Kant's words, precludes the existence of "abstract notions derived from the pure intellect" in the misapprehension of "the limitations of the human faculties for the limits of things, as they really exist" (1:190n).

Coleridge means to stress the unusual demands of transcendental philosophy and to distinguish them from the pervasive and damaging implications of materialism. The suggestion is that the materialistic approach has ruined readers for any idealist study by either planting in them an "habitual aversion to all speculations, the utility and application of which are not evident and immediate," or by perverting "metaphysical reasonings to the denial of the mysteries and . . . doctrines of Christianity," or by deftly concealing logical errors "behind the mask of a plausible and indefinite nomenclature" to which its proponents cling tenaciously. Coleridge feels compelled to address these groups who have, in one way or another, been intellectually duped or damaged by materialism; he promises to supersede this "false metaphysics" with a "true metaphysics" which is "nothing else but true divinity," a "true metaphysics" based on self-knowledge with "reasoning . . . clear, solid, and pertinent" (1:191-92). Unquestionably Coleridge's acute awareness of the uncommon, and to many,

¹⁵Alice D. Snyder, Coleridge on Logic and Learning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 126-27.

unacceptable demands of transcendentalism accounts for the urgency of his tone and this repetition of his attack on popular philosophy as "the counterfeit and the mortal enemy of all true and manly metaphysical research" (1:192). But it remains nonetheless, repetitious of Chapters VII and VIII and, what is more to the point, noticeably out of place in this chapter, which begins the systematic exposition of the dynamic philosophy. Moreover, Coleridge's attention to these "class[es]" of readers who have been "prejudic[ed]" by materialism detracts from his careful and developing rapport with his constructed audience of young men of Genius. To reach this stage of his thesis and to focus on the formidable and "irremediable" impediments to his being understood or on unreachable readers seems an inorganic departure and a glaring diversion from his immediate purpose. Nor can this closing section be included under his "requests and premonitions," for his audience, which has been carefully limited and challenged throughout the work, can hardly be said to now include present or even former adherents of modern associationism. Coleridge finds his own righteous and scornful voice in this material, however, his aggressiveness here suggesting perhaps a compensation for his earlier abdication to Schelling:

This alas! is an irremediable disease, for it brings with it, not so much an indisposition to any particular system, but an utter loss of taste and faculty for all system and for all philosophy. Like echoes that beget each other amongst the mountains, the praise or blame of such men rolls in vollies long after the report

from the original blunderbuss (1:192-93).

Regardless of the stimulus for Coleridge's renewed attack on the "disease" of modern philosophy, it is jarring to his earlier rendering of the esoteric philosophic Imagination and discordantly out of place, betraying perhaps Coleridge's "doubt about his ability to make clear the forthcoming theory of imagination."¹⁶ The lack of controlled, progressive development throughout the chapter, evident in Coleridge's dependence on Schelling,¹⁷ does seem to suggest Coleridge's "uneasiness about a straightforward presentation of his theories," a hesitancy that is "evident in the title."¹⁸

Coleridge closes the chapter by placing his forthcoming deduction of the Imagination in its contextual background. Earlier, in Chapter IV, Wordsworth's poetry was credited with providing the stimulus for Coleridge's ". . . full conviction,) that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties . . ." (1:60). Coleridge's expressed "object" in the Biographia was "to investigate the seminal principle and then from the kind to deduce the degree," that is, to explore the philosophical

¹⁶Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, p. 189.

¹⁷McKenzie attributes the "chaotic, unfinished form of the chapter" to Coleridge's disagreement with Schelling and not to the "usual explanation of inability to pursue a subject to its logical conclusion," p. 26.

¹⁸Appleyard, p. 188.

principle of the Secondary Imagination while Wordsworth had explored the effects of the Imagination in his 1815 "Preface" to his collected poems. The only difference to which Coleridge alludes in Chapter IV is their contrasting "objects" or purposes, the one man tracing the faculty to its epistemological and metaphysical roots, and the other exploring the workings of the Imagination in specific poetic passages. But it is clear that the methodology and conclusions of the 1815 "Preface" reflect a difference in theory significant and disturbing to Coleridge--so much so, that he enunciates his firm disagreement with Wordsworth before defining the Imagination. Much of Wordsworth's description of the Imagination is in keeping with Coleridge's: it is "an endowing or modifying power . . . [which] also shapes and creates . . . consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number."¹⁹ But Wordsworth's distinction between Fancy and Imagination does not maintain such clear divisions as Coleridge's, for Wordsworth views both faculties as having the power to "modify, to create, and to associate." Not only is Fancy "an active . . . [and] under her own laws and in her own spirit, a creative faculty, but the Imagination is also associative: "To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine,

¹⁹William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Edition of 1815," in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, rev. ed. by Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 752.

belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy."²⁰ Coleridge replies unequivocally, "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. . . ." (1:194). As M. H. Abrams notes, the dispute is far more than a superficial argument concerning terminology:

But from Coleridge's point of view, Wordsworth's vocabulary showed a regressive tendency to conflate the organic imagination with mechanical fancy, by describing it once again in terms of the subtraction, addition, and association of the elements of sensory images; and in doing this, Wordsworth had incautiously given the key to their position away to the enemy. . . . But to Coleridge, the metaphoric failure to maintain the difference in kind between mechanism and organism, in the crucial instance of the faculties of fancy and imagination, threatened collapse to the dialectic structure of his total philosophy.²¹

In conclusion, Coleridge pointedly separates their intellectual differences from his admiration of Wordsworth, a distinction which is sustained throughout his forthcoming evaluation of Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice: "He will judge. Would to Heaven, I might meet with many such readers."

Coleridge later acknowledged what the reader senses in Chapter XIII, that "the metaphysical disquisition . . . is unformed and immature; it contains fragments of the truth

²⁰Ibid., p. 755.

²¹M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 181-82.

but it is not fully thought out."²² The promised systematic deduction of the Imagination is not here, but we can infer its nature from Coleridge's terse statements. The Primary Imagination is synonymous with the act of self-consciousness in which subject and object coalesce, the Imagination being the "living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception," since all knowledge is a form of self-knowledge. This human power which echoes the divine being "as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (1:202) is generated by two opposing primary forces, "both alike infinite, both alike indestructible" (1:197), which counteract and interpenetrate to effect a "tertium aliquid," a result which partakes of both forces, that is, the self in which subject and object are one. Coleridge's language suggests the thoroughly vital nature of this metaphysics: his key terms are "power," "forces," "generation," "living principle," and "process." He calls attention to the significance of the process of this reconciliation of opposing forces: "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" (1:196). Thus, the self is simultaneously the result of the inter-penetration of the two forces and the process of their reconciling. By definition,

²²T. Ashe, ed., The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, June 28, 1834.

the Coleridgean self cannot be at "rest or neutralization" (1:198); its nature is never fixed, but is one of continuous and vital renewal. Later, this dynamic concept in which self and self-construction are synonymous will be explored as the organic philosophical foundation for Coleridge's literary autobiography.

The secondary Imagination is the power of the philosophic or poetic "realizing intuition" which Coleridge has described in the previous chapter, the heightened, immediate, and willed consciousness which senses "the whole sustained by a living contact," and further, recreates fusion whether in philosophic self-consciousness or in artistic creation. The secondary Imagination is a refinement and intensification of the primary, identical "in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation." Its power is similarly one of reconciliation:

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Finally, Coleridge renders his concept of Fancy in the language of association; Fancy is not termed a "power," but merely the activity of connecting "fixities and definites" which are not altered in the process. The human faculty which achieves such connection is not truly creative in the Coleridgean sense; it is capable of adding, re-arranging,

re-collecting, and is sensitive to relations, but it is not the power of synthesis in which two opposing elements are utterly modified by their fusion. Thus for Coleridge Fancy does not depend on the will nor draw upon the essential self, but merely taps the less integral execution of choice. This activity does not involve, according to I. A. Richards,

the will as a principle of the mind's being, striving to realize itself in knowing itself, but [is] an exercise of selection from among objects already supplied by association, a selection made for purposes which are not then and therein being shaped but have already been fixed.²³

Despite the compositional unevenness of Chapter XII and the evident incompleteness of Chapter XIII, the aesthetic values and critical principles which Coleridge employs in the remainder of the Biographia can be traced to their metaphysical or, as I. A. Richards finds more beneficial,²⁴ their psychological articulation in these two chapters. Coleridge's highest criterion of poetic value, the Imagination, the power of reconciling opposites (among them the matter and form of a work of art) is grounded in its epistemological roots and framed in its metaphysical context in these two chapters. It has been suggested that Coleridge's relinquishing of his metaphysical background for the Imagination was wise and a welcome relief to the reader.²⁵

²³I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, p. 77.

²⁴Ibid., p. 66.

²⁵L. M. Grow, The Prose Style of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 145n.

However, the exposition of the Imagination, if not thoroughly complete, is, as Coleridge evidently sensed, sufficient to his ensuing literary criticism.

A final word should be offered on Coleridge's letter which he proudly claimed "was written without taking my pen off the paper except to dip in in the inkstand."²⁶ It summarily effects the reaffirmation of Coleridge's ethos as the benevolent, self-deprecating though committed author; at the same time, it stresses Coleridge's full reentry into the realm of authorship, calling attention, as he has repeatedly in these later chapters, to his forthcoming treatises on the Logos, "that greater work to which you have devoted so many years, and study so intense and various. . . ." (1:201). The deliberate guise of Coleridge's offering the completed chapter to more than one critical reader and his acceptance of the "practical judgement" of this friendly critic over his own "self-love" attests to Coleridge's concern for his readers: his submission of his own work for evaluation suggests his commitment to the educational value of the critical process. Also, Coleridge's metaphorical description of the unseen chapter conveys his delightfully ironic self-perspective. The intellectual effect is "as if I had been standing on my head," the emotional as if

. . . left alone, in one of our largest Gothic

²⁶"To Thomas Curtis," 29 April 1817, Letter 1055, Letters 4: 728.

cathedrals in a gusty moonlight night of autumn. 'Now in glimmer, and now in gloom;' often in palpable darkness not without a chilly sensation of terror; then suddenly emerging into broad yet visionary lights with coloured shadows of fantastic shapes, yet all decked with holy insignia and mystic symbols; . . . (1:199).

In the fictional reader's more pragmatic criticisms, Coleridge, who has wisely, we are led to believe, taken his friend's advice, in effect demonstrates his adherence to the formal demands of this work. The material does not fulfill its internal purpose: "you have done too much, and yet not enough." Nor is it appropriate to the central purpose of the Biographia:

. . . every reader who, like myself, is neither prepared nor perhaps calculated for the study of so abstruse a subject so abstrusely treated, will, as I have before hinted, be almost entitled to accuse you of a sort of imposition on him. For who, he might truly observe, could from your title-page, viz. "My Literary Life and Opinions," published too as introductory to a volume of miscellaneous poems, have anticipated, or even conjectured, a long treatise on ideal Realism (1:200-01).

Last, it is written without a sufficient awareness of the audience, its "abstruseness" being a flaw of the author and not a condemnation of the reader. Coleridge's "complete conviction" as to his friend's evaluation demonstrates his willingness to accept valid and thoughtful criticism. In the conclusion of the letter we overhear, as it were, a personal testimony to our author's character, admirable qualities which have been self-professed in his autobiography, but it is quite another thing to hear the assessment from this candid critic:

I could add to these arguments one derived from pecuniary motives, and particularly from the probable effects on the sale of your present publication; but they would weigh little with you compared with the preceding. Besides, I have long observed, that arguments drawn from your own personal interests more often act on you as narcotics than as stimulants, and that in money concerns you have some small portion of pig-nature in your moral idiosyncrasy, and, like these amiable creatures, must occasionally be pulled backward from the boat in order to make you enter it. All success attend you, for if hard thinking and hard reading are merits, you have deserved it.

This letter does seem a deus ex machina²⁷ in one respect--one wonders why Coleridge called such attention to his inability to render the metaphysical "nature and genesis" of the Imagination with clarity and perspicuity.²⁸ Watson's suggestion that Coleridge "set out to write a work of metaphysics to which he hoped the events of his life would give continuity: [but] he ended by producing a work of aesthetics"²⁹ addresses itself to the unmistakably aborted character of this chapter. The unresolved tension between Coleridge's pursuit of metaphysical truth and the pending demands of his immediately forthcoming literary criticism is evident in his acknowledgement of the excesses of the edited

²⁷M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber: Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria," p. 223.

²⁸Coleridge repeatedly points to his major weakness, "abstruseness," and later acknowledges again his failure in this chapter: ". . . but if I should ever be fortunate enough to render my analysis of the imagination, its origin and character, thoroughly intelligible to the reader" (2:124).

²⁹George Watson, ed., "Introduction," Biographia Literaria (London: Dent, 1956), p. xix.

"metaphysical disquisition." The letter unmistakably acknowledges Coleridge's miscalculation of his material: his analysis of the Imagination, obscure and far too erudite, was found to be inorganic to the Biographia and disproportionate to its audience's rightful expectations.³⁰

³⁰I cannot concur with Cooke's assertion that the letter "displaces . . . [Coleridge's] disability onto the Reader, in that it works as a profile of the unfit reader, and . . . is tantamount to a repudiation of the vision of the true reader earlier propounded in the work," p. 223.

CHAPTER VI

Coleridge's literary criticism in Volume II of the Biographia, founded upon the philosophy of Volume I, presents him at his most self-assured and deliberate. He consistently sustains the role of teacher and critic and as such, he maintains a certain intimacy with his audience of sympathetic students while retaining an aura of authority and certitude. Indeed, Coleridge's vivid presence, marked by self-possession and firm conviction, infuses and unifies this unhesitant and vigorous literary analysis. The rhetoric in these chapters in no way suggests the assessment that Coleridge's discussion of Wordsworth arose out of "a crisis of confidence" over the latter's disagreement with Coleridge's definitions of Imagination and Fancy. Nor is this sustained and closely reasoned analysis an "accidental . . . turning" to Wordsworth away from Coleridge's "proper subject of the nature and function of the imagination."¹ In the opening chapters of the Biographia Coleridge expressed his twin aesthetic purposes: to settle "the long continued controversy" by proposing his view of "the true nature of poetic diction; and at the same time to

¹M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," pp. 221, 223.

define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet. . . ." These aesthetic principles were to be grounded in "philosophical principles," and subsequently applied directly to poetry and criticism. Coleridge adheres to his plan: he uses his personal narration to introduce his "principles in Politics, Religion, and [particularly] Philosophy;" from these principles he forms his critical tenets; and finally he applies these tenets to the poetry of Shakespeare and Wordsworth. Moreover, Coleridge's manifold purpose is thoroughly his--self-initiated and self-projecting. Wordsworth is considered as the unwitting and inadvertent initiator and perpetuator of the controversy, and later his poetry is treated as exemplary of Coleridge's theory, but the theory of poetic Imagination (with its specific components of the poetic genius and his language) remains thoroughly Coleridgean. As George Watson has asserted, to call the second half of the Biographia the "'critique of Wordsworth' [is] highly misleading," for Wordsworth is used "to illustrate his [Coleridge's] mature views on the language and subject of poetry."²

Coleridge's attempt to distinguish himself from Wordsworth, first enunciated in Chapter IV, reaches its culmination with the opening of Volume II where Coleridge states firmly: ". . . I think it is expedient to declare once for all, in what points I coincide with his opinions, and in

²George Watson, "Introduction," p. ix.

what point I altogether differ" (2:8). It is the authorial "I" which, in the active, declarative mode, dominates this sentence, and not Wordsworth. Nor is Coleridge's poetic theory mere reaction against Wordsworth's associationist preface of 1802; "the frequent conjunction of my name with his," which caused Coleridge some personal and professional difficulty, is the immediate stimulus for Coleridge's articulated self-distinction, but the Coleridgean aesthetic, with its sophisticated psychological grounding and its metaphysical implications, exists unto itself quite apart from (in fact, quite beyond) its contrasting counterpart. The raison d'etre of this aesthetic is Coleridge's audience: we are continually aware of Coleridge's desire to communicate his convictions to the young reader who will carry them into the future. Coleridge's purpose is far more extensive and forward-looking than only the correction of Wordsworth. I do not mean to suggest, however, that Coleridge's poetic theory is unrelated to Wordsworth; it was his poetry which stimulated Coleridge's unsurpassed definition of the Imagination, and it was Wordsworth's poetic theory which stimulated Volume II of the Biographia. But I would suggest that in terms of Coleridge's life-long study of poetic creation Wordsworth's minimum articulation on poetic language assumes a percentage and not the whole of Coleridge's concern. To view Coleridge's critical theories as solely grounded in Wordsworth is to do an injustice to the metaphysical

comprehensiveness and psychological depth of Coleridge's thought. In the Biographia Wordsworth plays a meaningful and significant role--his theory and his poetry serve as a vehicle for Coleridge's far-reaching purpose, the communication and establishment of critical principles which are founded "in the component faculties of the human mind itself," that is, the mental processes of both the poet and the auditor.

The first three chapters of Volume II serve as a brief demonstration of Coleridge's individualistic canons of criticism; his definition of key terms in Chapter XIV and his "application of these principles to purposes of practical criticism" (2:13) in the following two chapters are an important prelude to his focus on Wordsworth. Here he reestablishes his primary role as reader/critic/teacher, using his evaluation of Shakespeare and his contrast of modern poetry with that of the Italian Renaissance as an individualistic demonstration of his theories before turning to his necessary disagreement with Wordsworth. Coleridge stands alone on his self-constructed platform for a brief period, offering the reader the critical tools with which to approach not only Wordsworthian poetry, but poetry of every age which is "more or less imperfect," while also suggestive of poetic genius.

Coleridge's articulation of the purpose of the Lyrical Ballads, its complementary aims of "transfer[ring] from our

inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth" to the emotions elicited by the "dramatic truth" of the supernatural, and of "giv[ing] the charm of novelty to things of every day, . . . by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us" (2:6) is an expression of his vision of a new "Romantic" poetry. Of crucial importance to Coleridge is the "exciting the sympathies of the reader," the "interesting of the affections," the "awakening the mind's attention," and not the imitative correspondence between the external world and the work of art. The audience's emotional and intellectual excitation, furthermore, is neither directed to an external, descriptive world nor to the inner psyche, but to subjects which are perceived by the poet as encompassing both: the supernatural incidents are considered for the truth of the human emotions which they dramatize, and the "things of every day" for their hidden "inexhaustible treasure" of truths and passions which "familiarity and selfish solicitude" obscure. The Lyrical Ballads then, in Coleridge's view,³ was a specific

³Shawcross notes the two men's differing accounts of the "experiment," p. 264. Wordsworth described it as an attempt "to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart," Preface to the Second Edition, "Wordsworth: Poetical Works" (1969), p. 734. See, however, the following Notebook entries which anticipate this far different articulation of the aims of the Lyrical Ballads by Coleridge: 1 (October 1803): 1622; 2 (April 1805): 2535; 2 (1807-08): 3213.

experiment in the exercise of the Imagination: both Coleridge's poetic approach and Wordsworth's would demonstrate within themselves the "balance or reconciliation of opposite . . . qualities," the one of "sameness, with difference," and the other "the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects" (2:12), while the alliance of the two styles in one work would embody the spirit of poetic unity which harmonizes opposites. Wordsworth's sense of the "experiment," however, differed significantly from Coleridge's: in one sense, Wordsworth's focus on poetic diction rendered his aims far more limited, but to Coleridge's way of thinking, Wordsworth's theory of natural language was applied, in its "extension . . . to poetry of all kinds" (2:7), far too generally.

Coleridge now specifies the method of his approach as philosophical: he will first "separate . . . distinguishable parts," adhering to the "process of philosophy," and finally "restore" these parts "to the unity, in which they actually co-exist," accomplishing the "result of philosophy" (2:8). Accordingly, Coleridge distinguishes between poetry and prose on the basis of the contrasting purposes which order their common elements. The presence of rhyme or meter, then, does not identify a poem as such; but the organic use of meter to unify and harmonize the parts of the composition which in turn "mutually support and explain each other" and are directed toward the "immediate object [of] pleasure"

distinguishes a "legitimate poem" (2:10). In fact, the pleasure which the reader derives from a poem is rooted in this harmonious, organic composition in which each part contributes to and sustains the whole, so that in reading, while enjoying the immediate moment of focus, one is also experiencing a suggestion of the whole poem. Coleridge's stress on the component parts of a poem, including meter, being composed toward one unifying object, the pleasure of the reader, establishes poetic creation as a deliberate and purposeful craft--not an exercise in narcissism meant to merely satisfy the poet's need for emotional release (the regrettable stereotype of Romantic creativity), but an art form which includes and is structured for an audience.⁴

Coleridge adjusts his definition of a poem to allow for a kind of poetry which is non-metrical and designed to convey truth before pleasure. Thus, his definition of poetry is more inclusive than his definition of a "legitimate poem;" if non-metrical poetry is to be included in a poem, it too must be subsumed to the purpose of the whole, particularly

⁴Coleridge's earlier definitions of Poetry anticipate this primary concern with the reader's pleasure. See Notebooks 2 (February 1805): 2431 where he defines "Poetry, in its higher and purer sense . . . which excites emotion not merely creates amusement, which demands continuous admiration, not regular recurrences of conscious Surprize, and the effect of which is Love and Joy;" and Notebooks 3 (March 1808): 3286: "In my last address, I had defined Poetry . . . to be--The art . . . of representing external nature and human Thoughts & affections, both relatively to human Affections; to the production of . . . as great immediate pleasure in each part, . . . is compatible with the largest possible Sum of Pleasure in the Whole.--"

in its language, which must be able to sustain and excite "a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at" (2:11). But to define poetry "in the strictest use of the word" Coleridge, in what M. H. Abrams calls a "significant and highly characteristic maneuver, . . . turns from the finished product to its etiology in the poet, and from a definition in terms of rational ends to a definition in terms of the combination and play of the mental faculties in composition."⁵ Or, as Coleridge states, he turns from the organic composition of the poem to the power which effects this "tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each" (2:12), the Imagination. The poet wields this synthesizing power with the "gentle and unnoticed, controul" of the "will and understanding." Its primary manifestation is:

the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.

Coleridge's movement from the product, that is the poem, to the process, the imaginative power in the poet, is in itself reflective of his critical theory, for the former is utterly

⁵M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 118.

a result of the poet's genius. Whatever may be called poetry issues not from technical conventions or external forms, but from poetic genius, a term which to Coleridge meant the "original" and powerful nature of both the writer and the man, even as this genius has the power to bring "the whole soul of man into activity."

Thus, the approach of Chapter XV, where poetry is viewed as reflective of the poet's power, follows this hierarchy which has been established in Chapter XIV; Coleridge's closing allegorical personification of poetic genius is a transition to his enumeration of the "promises and specific symptoms of poetic power" (2:13) evidenced in Shakespeare's poetry: "Finally, GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, FANCY its DRAPERY, MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole." Coleridge deliberately chooses the "earliest work of the greatest genius, that perhaps human nature has yet produced" to detect the "strong promises of the strength, and yet obvious proofs of the immaturity, of his genius" (2:13-14) certainly as a gesture to his young and promising audience. I can find no specified "proofs of the immaturity of" Shakespeare's genius, but surely this is a gentle concession to Coleridge's young men of possible genius who are implicitly challenged to measure themselves against his criteria. The first excellence which Shakespeare displays is the perfect

atunement of sound and rhythm in his verse to his subject, to Coleridge "a highly favourable promise in the compositions of a young man" (2:14). But as if to caution the reader from the onset, Coleridge reiterates his distinction between true poetic genius and "a man of talents and much reading, who, as I once before observed, has mistaken an intense desire of poetic reputation for a natural poetic genius. . . ." This gift, as well as those remaining, marks the irrevocable distinction between the two:

the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learned. It is in these that "poeta nascitur non fit."

Unattainable as this may seem to the reader, this conviction of Coleridge's that genius is the nature of the man and not an acquired talent, permeating his moral character, his integrity of intellect and feeling, and his principled and far-reaching vision, assumes as its corollary the unique and timeless power of genius.

The "second promise," one which Coleridge has explored earlier in Chapters II and III, is the selfless vision of the man of genius, evident not only in his choice of subjects, but in his concentration on the "whole" of human experience, "himself meanwhile unparticipating in the passions, and actuated only by that pleasurable excitement, which had resulted from the energetic fervor of his own

spirit so vividly exhibiting, what it had so accurately and profoundly contemplated" (2:15). Such a comprehensive and essentially humanitarian vision precludes narcissism; the insight of poetic genius arises from "the utter aloofness of the poet's own feelings, from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst. . ." (2:16). The "pre-dominant passion," then, which in its modification of images and reduction of "multitude to unity" is the third suggestion of poetic genius, is clearly not the unbridled effusion of the poet's private, self-interested feelings. Indeed, the scope of genius surpasses immediate, personal concerns; the "passion . . . from the poet's own spirit" is the unifying power of the Imagination which "moulds and colours" the imagery in keeping with the poetic "circumstances, passion, or character, present and foremost in the mind" (2:18).

Its corollary, the final indication of poetic genius, is "DEPTH, and ENERGY of THOUGHT" which "would prove indeed but little, except as taken conjointly with the former; yet without which the former could scarce exist in a high degree. . ." (2:18-19). Coleridge's assertion that "no man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher" is, at this point, an aphoristic articulation of the critical ideal which the Biographia demonstrates.⁶ Coleridge, in his role as poet-critic,

⁶In 1802 when Coleridge wrote to Sotheby that "a great Poet must be, implicite if not explicite, a profound Meta-physician," he meant, as he does here, a profound,

structures this work to reflect the comparable development of the poet-philosopher. Volume I of the Biographia is a deliberate precedent to the literary criticism of Volume II, charting as it does Coleridge's growth as a student of literature and a student of philosophy while also conveying the philosophical groundwork for his theory of poetry. Coleridge might equally say, "no man was ever a great critic of poetry, without being at the same time a profound philosopher." Moreover, although Coleridge maintains that genius is born and not acquired, the suggestion of the organic development of the poetic capacity, a theme of Coleridge's autobiography rendered in terms of the critical capacity, is similarly present in this analysis of the highest model of poetic genius. For Coleridge stresses that these four qualities are "promises" of genius; the development into mature "proofs," such as are unmistakable in Shakespeare's dramas, entails a life-long and active dedication and commitment to the training of the heart and intellect:

imaginative, and loving humanist. He explains:

". . . to send ourselves out of ourselves, to think ourselves in to the Thoughts and Feelings of Beings in circumstances wholly & strangely different from our own. . . he must have it [the capacity for profound Metaphysics] by Tact for all sounds, & forms of human nature he must have the ear of a wild Arab listening in the silent Desert [sic], the eye of a North American Indian tracing the footsteps of an Enemy upon the Leaves that strew the forest--; the Touch of a Blind Man feeling the face of a darling Child--/. . . I have read no French or German Writer, who appears to me to have had a heart sufficiently pure & simple to be capable of this or any thing like it." "To William Sotheby," 13 July 1802, Letter 444, Letters 2: 810.

What then shall we say? even this; that Shakespeare; no mere child of nature; no automaton of genius; no passive vehicle of inspiration possessed by the spirit, not possessing it; first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge, become habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings; and at length gave birth to that stupendous power, by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class. . . (2:19-20).

If in Chapter XIV Coleridge's singular presence is predominant as he proposes his long-held, philosophically grounded definitions of the poem, poetry, and the poet, all of which clearly are logical emanations of the Secondary Imagination, in this chapter the author and reader are more frequently aligned in the uniquely powerful and shared experience of Shakespeare's genius. Coleridge remains the intellectual tutor and experienced critic, asserting authoritatively his conclusions regarding the unmistakable signs of poetic genius, drawn from his singular and repeated reading of Shakespeare's ouvre. The authorial "I" is frequent and highlighted, the simple, assertive style noticeably free from self-righteousness or overbearing aggression:

. . . I have endeavoured to discover what the qualities in a poem are, . . . In this investigation, I could not, I thought, do better, than keep before me the earliest work of the greatest genius. . . . At least I have found, that where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences. . . . I think, I should have conjectured from these poems, that even then the great instinct, . . . was secretly working in him. . . . I have given this as an illustration, by no means as an instance, of that particular excellence which I had in view, and in which Shakespeare even in his earliest, as in his latest, works surpasses all other poets (2:13,14,15,17).

At the same time that the reader is undoubtedly being

challenged to undertake a difficult self-evaluation, he is also occasionally identified with the author in their common, genial and insightful reading of Shakespeare.⁷ That is, Coleridge presumes his reader's literary experience, rhetorically effecting their identification by including both himself and his audience in the generic label of "reader":

You seem to be told nothing, but to see and hear everything. Hence it is, that from the perpetual activity of attention required on the part of the reader; . . . The reader is forced into too much action to sympathize with the merely passive of our nature. . . . the reader's own memory will refer him to the LEAR, OTHELLO, in short to which not of the "great, ever living, dead man's" dramatic works? (2:15,16,18).

Also, Coleridge frequently uses the first person plural to convey to his readers how they are related to him, that is, to make his audience participants in his literary criticism:

We may perhaps remember the tale of the statuary. . . . or by diverting our attention from the main subject by those frequent witty or profound reflections. . . . The reader is forced into too much action to sympathize with the merely passive of our nature. . . . Unaided by any previous excitement, they burst upon us at once in life and power. . . . And yet we find in Shakespeare's management of the tale. . . . What then shall we say?

⁷In his Shakespearean criticism there seems a similar, almost pointed balance between the firm authorial "I" and the inclusive "we": Shakespeare is called "our poet;" the psychological effects which he elicits are universally shared ("he appeals to that which we most wish to be, when we are most worthy of being"), for this is his peculiar power of genius: "In the plays of Shakespeare every man sees himself, without knowing that he does so. . . ." Thomas M. Raysor, ed., "The Lectures of 1811-12," Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 2: 157, 163.

Nor is this not uncommon technique merely pro forma on Coleridge's part. For him reading was a kind of becoming, as William Walsh describes it, an "intense exercise of our highest capacities. . . ." ⁸ The creativity involved in reading produces the sense of pleasure; in his increased awareness of the imaginative power in, for example, Shakespeare, the reader seems:

to be discovering not only Shakespeare's meaning, but something which he, the reader, is himself making. His understanding of Shakespeare is sanctioned by his own activity in it. As Coleridge says: "You feel him to be a poet, inasmuch as for a time he has made you one--an active creative being." ⁹

To draw the reader into Coleridge's own demonstrated activity of creative and genial reading, he creates a rhetorical bond which unites them. The intimacy between author and reader is a necessary element in Coleridge's approach to criticism since for him the work of literature does not exist apart from the reader's experience of it; as Robert DeMaria states concerning Coleridge's criticism, "What is known of a book, and therefore what the book is, persists in an interpenetration of created work and creating reader." ¹⁰ Moreover, Coleridge's relationship with this reader of the Biographia serves as a symbol, or in rhetorical terms,

⁸William Walsh, Coleridge: The Work and the Relevance, p. 88.

⁹I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination, pp. 83-84.

¹⁰Robert DeMaria, Jr., "The Ideal Reader: A Critical Fiction," p. 467.

a performance of the critical approach he promotes. At the close of the chapter this literary fellowship of poets and readers is enlarged to place Coleridge's reader in the honored and nationalistic company of Milton and Wordsworth:

O what great men hast thou not produced, England!
 my country, truly indeed--
 "Must we be free or die, who speak the tongue,
 Which SHAKESPEARE spake; the faith and morals hold,
 Which MILTON held. In every thing we are sprung
 Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold!" (2:20)

Chapter XVI, which provides a demonstration of Coleridge's theories at work, serves as an appropriate transition between his specific delineation of the poetic Imagination in Shakespeare and his forthcoming focused treatment of poetic language which, in its adherence to his theory of the Imagination, must necessarily differ from Wordsworth's. His criticism of the poetry of the present age and his praise of its contrasting predecessors, the Italian Renaissance poets, follows faithfully the critical tenets laid down in the two preceding chapters. Moreover, the poetry of Wordsworth, having been placed in its historical context, appears all the more original and valuable because of the present poetic wasteland from which it emerges, alone in its unique power.

What contemporary poetry seems to consistently lack for Coleridge is the recognizable presence of a unifying purpose which subsumes all technique to the accomplishment of the poetic goal and proportions the parts into a

pleasurable, harmonious whole.¹¹ On the contrary, contemporary poetry seems to isolate for its "main object . . . new and striking IMAGES" for their own sake, while also ignoring, for the most part, the crucial role of diction and metre. What attention is paid to language seems to issue from "the writer's convenience" instead of any "justifying principle" (2:21). Thus, there is no evident "intelligible purpose" behind the composition of the modern poem, no interaction of its component parts, and no meaningful design.

As a transition to his brief analysis of the "more polished poets of the 15th and 16th century," Coleridge contrasts the analogous styles of painting of these two disparate ages. "Our common landscape painters" isolate the spectator's attention, oddly enough, on the background alone, rendering the remainder of the painting, the "foregrounds and intermediate distances," empty and meaningless canvas. Thus, no unified work of art exists: the viewer's eye is not deliberately directed from one point of interest to another to create finally a whole, integrated picture. The "great Italian and Flemish masters," however, in their

¹¹Cf. Coleridge's statements (2:21) with Notebooks 2 (May-August 1805): 2599; and 2 (November-December 1805): 2728: "Modern Poetry characterized by the Poets ANXIETY to be always striking . . . every Line, nay, every word stops, looks full in your face, & asks & begs for Praise. A Chinese Painting no distances no perspective/ all in the fore-ground/ and this is all Vanity."

directing of the eye, make the "front and middle objects of the landscape . . . the most obvious and determinate," so that the eye moves to the back of the painting only to return to the focus of interest, thereby unifying the parts into a complete totality. The painting exhibits a controlled purpose, accomplished by the "beauty and harmony of the colors, lines, and expression. . ." (2:23).

This principle of proportion which Coleridge has demanded of criticism is clearly drawn from the best models of art. Coleridge's critical principles are, as he claimed, principles of aesthetics, qualities consistently present in timeless art. The coincidence of the two--that the critic should view the work of art organically instead of, for example, isolating Raphael's "knitting-needles and broom-twigs" (1:43) for ridicule, in keeping with the necessary organic composition of a work of art--is far from solipsistic; for both the elements of an artifact and Coleridge's critical principles are rooted in our human nature, the "faculties of the human mind itself." Here Coleridge's explication of the power of Renaissance poetry demonstrates his formerly stated procedure: "According to the faculty or source, from which the pleasure given by any poem or passage was derived, I estimated the merit of such poem or passage" (1:14). The source of the pleasure afforded by the poetry of "our elder bards" is the purposeful subordination of imagery and diction "so that not only each part

should be [attractive and] melodious in itself, but contribute to the harmony of the whole. . ." (2:23), and the faculty which accomplishes this, the Imagination. Therefore, the critic's duty and gift, by logical implication, is as imaginative as the poet's: to recognize the power of the Imagination in the literary artifact we must recognize its presence in our human nature and cultivate the power of philosophic self-consciousness. Coleridge's criticism, in correspondence with his theory of imaginative literature, presumes the imaginative capacity of the reader, or in William Walsh's words, "both deploys and addresses itself to 'the whole soul of man'."¹²

The chapter closes with Coleridge's veiled allusion to his reader, whose contribution to the future of poetic excellence is urged:

A lasting and enviable reputation awaits that man of genius, who should attempt and realize a union; who should recall the high finish, the appropriateness, the facility, the delicate proportion, and above all, the perfusive and omnipresent grace . . . and who with these should combine the keener interest, deeper pathos, manlier reflection, and the fresher and more various imagery, which give a value and a name that will not pass away to the poets who have done honor to our own times, and to those of our immediate predecessors (2:24).

This stimulus quite pointedly includes the reader in this literary fellowship of genius while also projecting Coleridge's criticism into the future. If his principles of criticism are drawn from the "best models . . . by the

¹²M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 118.

consent of ages" (2:26n.), they are not limited to the past classics but are also meant to be a stimulant to future genius. As Coleridge later clarifies, "The ultimate end of criticism is much more to establish the principles of writing, than to furnish rules how to pass judgement on what has been written by others. . ." (2:63).

These opening chapters of Volume II, then, serve as a transitional plateau between the philosophic explication of the Imagination which closes Volume I and Coleridge's application of this cardinal critical tenet to Wordsworth's theories and poetry in Volume II. Within these three chapters a unifying pattern is evident: as we have noted, at the close of Chapter XIV Coleridge turns from his definition of a poem as an organic composition directed toward the reader's pleasure to a rendering of the mental power in the poet which accomplishes the unique and aesthetically pleasurable unity in the poem. Chapter XV further delineates this power of poetic Imagination, using Shakespeare as the model of poetic genius. And in Chapter XVI Coleridge returns to his focus on the poem itself, or product of genius, choosing the art and poetry of the Italian Renaissance as his example of poetic organicism. This movement from poem to poet and the final return to poem is a completed pattern which then unifies the three chapters.

Furthermore, the qualities of poetic genius which are generally stated in terms of the reconciliation of opposites

and specified with Shakespeare are to be found rearticulated in Coleridge's enumeration of Wordsworth's excellencies. Finally, the criteria which Coleridge deduces from the poetry of the Renaissance are the same which he calls for in his revision of Wordsworth's theory, the classical precepts from "the Old School"¹³ which he intended as early as 1802 to propose as corrective of the egotistical licenses in modern poetry.

¹³"To William Southey," 29 July 1802, Letter 449, Letters 2: 830.

CHAPTER VII

PART II

Chapters XVII-XXII of the Biographia, which are unified by their obvious focus on Wordsworth, are also tightly aligned by Coleridge's authorial presence, for it is in this material that he fully assumes his role as a critical authority in the midst of public controversy. In his employment of his practical criticism, his self-assured, unhesitant voice prevails; his promised reentry into the public forum, now specifically accomplished with his analysis of Wordsworth, is marked by an eagerness and self-confidence which render this material dynamic and forceful. The defensiveness and inadequacy which have occasionally surfaced in Volume I are nowhere present; in their place is an energetic quickness of thought which continually places Coleridge, the standard-bearer of the poetic Imagination, at the fore of our experience. In a sense, this material is the most intriguing of the Biographia in terms of authorial stance, for Coleridge's unabashed correction of Wordsworth's theories is as unremitting as his praise of Wordsworth's poetic genius.

The position which Coleridge self-consciously assumes before his audience is no longer "the cloistered man of

letters,"¹ but that of Wordsworth's defender in the face of the "fiction of a new school of poetry, and . . . the clamors against its supposed founders and proselytes" (1:50). Coleridge assesses the cause of this "bare and bald counterfeit of poetry" and the vicious criticism which has been evoked "for nearly twenty years" (1:55) as Wordsworth's poorly conveyed and misinterpreted statements in his "Preface" and not his poetry itself (with the exception, Coleridge allows, of a few "humbler passages . . . [which were] cited to justify the rejection of the theory" (1:51). Thus, Coleridge chooses in the Biographia to enter the long-standing controversy and expose the gross misinterpretations and misuse of Wordsworth's theory. As Shawcross remarks, "he felt no doubt that all things pointed to him as the right person to undertake the task . . . [of] rendering an important service to the public" (1:xciii-iv). But inseparable from his righteous defense of Wordsworth is Coleridge's desire also to correct the fifteen year old impression that the two men's "opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide."² It is this latter stimulus which operates throughout Chapters XVII-XX; Coleridge's reaction to Wordsworth's statements on poetic language is essentially

¹Richard Mallette, "Narrative Technique in the 'Biographia Literaria'," p. 38.

²William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, W. J. B. Owen and Jane Smyser, eds., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 1: 120.

revisionary: Wordsworth's thought is not generally refuted but is unapologetically superseded by Coleridge's psychological amendments and corrections. Nor does Coleridge shrink from acknowledging his metamorphosis of Wordsworth's ideas: his intention is not only to counter Wordsworth's arguments, but to provide "the substitution of more philosophical principles" (2:95). Thus, Wordsworth's defenders who object to the prevalent pairing of his "Preface" with the Biographia, resulting in a reading of Wordsworth only through Coleridge's eyes, are justifiably annoyed at the slighting of Wordsworth's individual purpose. Nonetheless, they attest to the force of Coleridge's presence: "Coleridge's rhetoric has been so effective that it has not merely refuted the Preface but re-created it."³ This is precisely what Coleridge does--corrects Wordsworth to the point that Coleridge writes, not what Wordsworth meant to say, but what Wordsworth should have said. Impertinent as this may be, it is Coleridge's recurrent technique, particularly in these four chapters, to use Wordsworth's misstatements as a stimulus for proposing his own more germane and correct restatement of the "true" state of affairs. Here it is Coleridge's theory of poetic diction which predominates, although in Chapters XXI and XXII, in defending Wordsworth's poetry Coleridge's attention is more respectfully

³Don H. Bialostosky, "Coleridge's Interpretation of Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads," PMLA 93 (October 1978): 912.

sustained on his colleague.

In light of the extensive critical rereading of both Wordsworth and Coleridge in this matter, this analysis will largely confine itself to a delineation of Coleridge's rhetorical posture by which he extricates himself from alliance with Wordsworth in order to emerge as a thoughtful and discerning critic in his own right, a critic who employs the very principles he has culled from his experience as a student of literature, psychology, and philosophy. A brief historical background provides a meaningful context for Coleridge's vigorous dissociation from Wordsworth in the Biographia. Wordsworth's purpose in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" is far different from what Coleridge had hoped for and, because of his own involvement in the theories, had anticipated. As early as 1802 he had expressed his disappointment with Wordsworth's discussion; Coleridge's immediate intention was to rectify the deficiency. To Sotheby Coleridge claimed his role in the theory, a contribution which he felt was misappropriated:

[I must] set you right with regard to my perfect coincidence with] his poetic Creed. It is most certain, that that P[reface arose from] the heads of our mutual Conversations &c--& the f[irst pass]ages were indeed partly taken from notes of mine/ for it was at first intended, that the Preface should be written by me--
 . . . 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 combination 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.⁴

Two weeks later he wrote to Southey of a plan to publish "one Volume Essays" on selected contemporary poets which would include a remedy of Wordsworth's omissions:

Of course, Darwin & Wordsworth having given each a defense of their mode of Poetry, & a disquisition on the nature & essence of Poetry in general, I shall necessarily be led rather deeper. . . . On the contrary, 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, Canons of Criticism respecting Poetry.⁵

Shawcross's faulting of Coleridge, then, for not rendering the "more important" service of clarifying "the real purpose which Wordsworth had at heart in writing his Preface" (1: xciv) seems to ignore the seriousness with which Coleridge regarded their "radical Difference;" Coleridge can hardly be faulted for not finding Wordsworth's ideas "more important" than his own philosophical theory of poetic imagination. Also, Coleridge does acknowledge, both at the beginning and toward the close of his discussion of Wordsworth, the poet's central conviction, one with which Coleridge "warmly accord[s]:"⁶

⁴"To William Sotheby," 13 July 1802, Letter 444, Letters 2:811.

⁵"To William Southey," 29 July 1802, Letter 449, Letters 3:830.

⁶"To William Sotheby," Letter 444, 2:811. Coleridge

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 pleasureable confusion of thought from an unaccustomed train of words and images; and that state which is induced by the natural language of empassioned feeling; he undertook a useful task, and deserves all praise, both for the attempt and for the execution (2:28).

Again, at the beginning of Chapter XIX Coleridge rearticulates what could fairly be called Wordsworth's "real purpose:"

What then did he mean? I apprehend, that in the clear perception, not unaccompanied with disgust or contempt, of the gaudy affections of a style which passed current with too many for poetic diction, (though in truth it had as little pretensions to poetry, as to logic or common sense), he narrowed his view for the time; and feeling a justifiable preference for the language of nature and of good sense, even in its humblest and least ornamented forms, he suffered himself to express . . . his predilection for a style the most remote possible from the false and showy splendour which he wished to explode. . . . But the real object which he had in view, was, I doubt not, a species of excellence which had been long before most happily characterized by the judicious and amiable GARVE. . . . "verses in which everything was expressed just as one would wish to talk, and yet all dignified, attractive, and interesting; and all at the same time perfectly correct as to the measure of the syllables and the rhyme." (2:70).

Wordsworth's "Preface" is self-termed a "defense" and the poetic practice against which he is reacting is repeatedly

writes: ". . . and it is likewise true, that I warmly accord with W. in his abhorrence of these poetic Licenses, as they are called, which are indeed mere tricks of Convenience & Laziness."

characterized by him: in place of "gaudiness and inane phraseology," "false refinement or arbitrary innovation," "gross and violent stimulants," "mechanical adoption of those figures of speech," "distorted language," "wanton deviation from good sense and nature," "a motley masquerade of tricks, quaintnesses, hieroglyphics, and enigmas," and finally, "extravagant and absurd diction," he proposes language and subjects which are "natural," "real," and "naturally connected" by an "animating passion." (1:123-162).

Wordsworth then, goes to some length to characterize exactly what it is he has "endeavoured to countenance," and in his "Appendix" he traces the degeneration of natural poetic language from the "earliest Poets" to the present day. Coleridge is precisely to the point in his assessment of Wordsworth's purpose as a "reformation;" M. H. Abrams illuminates it further:

. . . Wordsworth's chief concern is not with the single words or the grammatical order of prose discourse, but with figurative departures from literal discourse, and . . . Wordsworth's main intention is to show that such deviations are justifiable in verse only when they have the same psychological causes that they have in the 'artless' speech of every day. . . . In Wordsworth's theory the relation between the language of 'Tintern Abbey' and the speech of a Lake County shepherd is not primarily one of lexical or of grammatical, but of genetic equivalence. Both forms of discourse, he would claim, are instances of language really spoken by men under the stress of genuine feeling.⁷

With Wordsworth's attempt to return poetic language to the realm of the "natural language of impassioned feeling"

⁷M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 110.

Coleridge was in accord, and with Wordsworth's "Appendix" where he describes the "original" integration of natural language stemming "from passion" with figures of speech which he hopes to restore, a harmony of matter and manner expressed in the phrase "the original figurative language of passion" (1:161), Coleridge was particularly pleased: "In the new Edition of the L. Ballads there is a valuable appendix, which I am sure you must like," he wrote to Southey.⁸ But Wordsworth's extrapolations of this vision of "natural language" Coleridge found simplistic and easily conducive to obliterating crucial distinctions within the realm of poetic composition.

Coleridge's main concern, as he states, is with Wordsworth's diminishment of the difference between "the language of prose and metrical composition," a careless reduction which Coleridge views as a threat to the imaginative power of poetic creation. But other, more elementary differences between the two men, which underlie this crucial distinction, surface in the first chapter of Coleridge's "Examination of the tenets peculiar to Mr. Wordsworth" (2:28). Wordsworth's defenders are quick to point out that his choice of "low and rustic life" was a means to an end, and not a value judgement as to the ideal or even preferable nature of this mode of existence:

Wordsworth, however, does not consider rustic life

⁸Letter 449, Letters 2:830.

desirable in itself so much as he finds it desirable for the purpose of representing human passions in unimpeded and unconcealed operations, and what he is trying to do is not, like Coleridge, to prove a thesis about the causes of the rustics' sentiments and language but to justify his choice of these subjects to exemplify human emotions. . . . Wordsworth does not praise low and rustic life for its own sake or try to explain the characteristics he finds there; he explains why what he finds there is useful for his poetic purposes.⁹

However, Wordsworth's repeated use of comparative forms does suggest that his choice of "incidents and situations from common life" is based on a preference to be found, not only in Wordsworth's poetic re-creation of this life, but in this class of life itself. Surely such phrases as

the essential passions of the heart find a better soil . . . are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language . . . a state of greater simplicity . . . more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated . . . more easily comprehended . . . more durable . . . the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature (1:128)

betray consistent value judgements on Wordsworth's part.

That Wordsworth's subject is germane to his purpose to create a class of poetry that would "interest mankind permanently" in itself confers value on rustic life; to suggest its arbitrary nature is an injustice to Wordsworth's explicit desire to reintegrate "nature" and "art." Moreover, Wordsworth continues, implying even more strongly the inherent superiority of his subject matter in his remarks concerning the language which issues from this world:

⁹Don Bialostosky, "Coleridge's Interpretation of Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads," p. 915.

The language, too, of these men is adopted . . . because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because . . . being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language . . . is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets. . . (1:124).

Coleridge, I believe, objects to the associationist implications of this view of the stimulus of language,¹⁰ to Wordsworth's perhaps unwitting crediting of the external world with the power to mold a certain character and to create language. To Coleridge, the place, i.e. the country, cannot in itself wield the power with which Wordsworth credits it:

I am convinced, that for the human soul to prosper in rustic life a certain vantage-ground is pre-requisite. It is not every man that is likely to be improved by a country life or by country labors. Education, or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant (2:32).

Similarly, Coleridge cannot countenance Wordsworth's statement that the "best part of language" is "originally derived from the best objects" or even "abode," firmly countering it with his own: "The best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself" (2:39-40), and not, we might add, from any purely external cause whether nature, objects, or place. For

¹⁰John Hill in his "Introduction" to Imagination in Coleridge points to Wordsworth's dependence on Hartleyan associationism in the 1800 "Preface" as the heart of the "radical Difference," p. 20.

Coleridge, the "best" language is a symbolic, intellectual enterprise, the power of which resides in the Imagination and not in the external world.

Coleridge is at his most forceful when he straightforwardly counters one of Wordsworth's statements with his own, patterning his expression on Wordsworth's, but substituting, in this case, internal powers for external categories. He refutes Wordsworth, then, by superseding him, or by substituting his values for Wordsworth's. This technique predominates in Chapter XVII where the disparate attitude of these two men toward rural life is glaringly evident. For Wordsworth's attention to the "manners of rustic life" and the "necessary character of rural occupations" (1:124), "conditions" which he claims form his characters, Coleridge substitutes his two distinguishing elements of Wordsworth's characters, qualities which are utterly divorced from rural life, discoverable in

every state of life, whether in town or country . . .
INDEPENDENCE, which raises a man above servitude . . .
 yet not above the necessity of industry and a frugal
 simplicity of domestic life; and the accompanying unambitious, but solid and religious EDUCATION, which has rendered few books familiar, but the BIBLE, and the liturgy or hymn book (2:31).

This substitution deftly dismisses the poet's claim for his own work while negating the values upon which that claim is based. Wordsworth is simultaneously undermined on two counts: he does not do what he says he does, and what he wants to do is without merit. Thus, in place of Wordsworth's

attractive view of primitivism¹¹ Coleridge substitutes his own value of educated society. In place of Wordsworth's "simple and unelaborated expressions" Coleridge poses the rustic's intellectual limitation, due to "the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from the lower state of the cultivation," to "insulated facts" (2:39). To Coleridge the rustic's "plainer and more emphatic language" is merely a "very scanty vocabulary" stemming from his "distinct knowledge" of a "few things and modes of action." Moreover, the "condition" Wordsworth views as a freedom from "the influence of social vanity" and therefore conducive to a simple and honest sensibility, Coleridge sees as an isolation from the educated refinement of civilized society. Equating the rustic with the "uneducated," Coleridge relegates the language to the lowest status:

It [language] is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination, the greater part of which have no place in the consciousness of uneducated man; though in civilized society, by imitation and passive remembrance of what they hear from their religious instructors and other superiors, the most uneducated share in the harvest which they neither sowed or reaped (2:40).¹²

¹¹Abrams assesses Wordsworth's critical theory "as a form--though a highly refined and developed form--of cultural primitivism." Here, "in setting the standard of poetic diction, Wordsworth adopts and elaborates the old antithesis between nature and art and, like the aesthetic primitives of the preceding age, declares himself for nature" (pp. 105, 111).

¹²Coleridge's discrediting of rustic language stems from his conviction that the "best" part of language is to be credited to men of genius whose linguistic power finally yields its effects, sometimes years later, in common life. Thus, common sense "is when the Language has been so determined in

Finally, Coleridge's most firm and repeated revision of Wordsworth occurs in the replacement of Wordsworth's phrase "the language . . . of these men . . . (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust)" (1:124) with his own "lingua communis:" "For 'real' therefore, we must substitute ordinary, or lingua communis. And this, we have proved, is no more to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life than in that of any other class" (2:41-42).

Coleridge's technique is expeditious: the substitutions are first presented to demonstrate that Wordsworth does not fulfill his claim; they are then employed as proof that what Wordsworth claims to do is, as a "rule" for others to follow, "injurious." By the close of Chapter XVII Coleridge has revised Wordsworth's theory with such dispatch that in the next chapter he patently dismisses Wordsworth's point (a la Coleridge) that "there may . . . occur in prose an order of words, which would be equally proper in a poem . . . [and that] there are . . . beautiful lines and sentences of frequent occurrence in good poems, which would be equally becoming as well as beautiful in good prose" in order to pose and answer his own "true question [which] must be:"

whether there are not modes of expression, a construction, and an order of sentences, which are in their fit

its meanings by great men . . . that the very words of a language as used in common Life carry with them the confutation of an error or establishment of a Truth, then we call convictions so received common sense. . . ;" Notebooks 3 (July-September 1809): 3549.

and natural place in a serious prose composition, but would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry; and vice versa, whether in the language of a serious poem there may not be an arrangement both of words and sentences, and a use and selection of (what are called) figures of speech, both as to their kind, their frequency, and their occasions, which on a subject of equal weight would be vicious and alien in correct and manly prose (2:49).

Coleridge's question is admittedly more complex and essential than the one he attributes to Wordsworth,¹³ assuming as it does the generically different composition of prose and poetry; but more importantly, by his posing of it he utterly dismisses Wordsworth from the scene (except as a poet, of course) in order to take up the bulk of the chapter with his five systematic and closely reasoned proofs for the distinction between prose and metrical language. If this is high-handed, as those readers who wish for an elucidation of Wordsworth suggest, it is also highly effective in calling attention to Wordsworth's glaring omissions, a serious flaw which Coleridge does not articulate as such, but pointedly demonstrates with this substitution of the "true question [which] must be asked."¹⁴ Indeed, Coleridge

¹³Wordsworth did not agree that his call for an "affinity" between the language of "good Prose" and a "good poem" had never, as Coleridge claims, "been either denied or doubted by any one" (2:49). Wordsworth warns: "And if, in what I am about to say, it shall appear to some that my labour is unnecessary, and that I am like a man fighting a battle without enemies, I would remind such persons that, whatever may be the language outwardly holden by men, a practical faith in the opinions which I am wishing to establish is almost unknown" (1:137).

¹⁴Wordsworth allowed that his was not a "systematic defence." Had it been, he would have "develope[d] the various causes upon which the pleasure received from metrical

is frequently taken to task for amending Wordsworth's argument by asserting a point which Wordsworth had not addressed (such as Coleridge's focus on "style" where Wordsworth is concerned only with "words") or by proposing an idea which Wordsworth had not expressly contended,¹⁵ a criticism which ignores Coleridge's express purpose in this material. Coleridge had no intention of remaining within the limited sphere of Wordsworth's argument; his intention was, quite to the contrary, to, characteristically, probe "deeper," to "go to the Bottom of" their differences and "lay down some plain, & perspicuous, tho' not superficial, Canons of Criticism respecting Poetry."¹⁶

What I have called Coleridge's technique of substitution is accomplished, as one would expect, in the supremely confident and self-assured manner of our author whose dual purpose is to convey "my own differences" (2:29) from his colleague and further, to "set right" Wordsworth and "those who have adopted his sentiments . . . by the confutation of these arguments, and by the substitution of more philosophical principles" (2:95). Thus, in Chapter XVII Coleridge's stance is self-assertive and unobscured, his authorial voice

language depends" (54).

¹⁵See Don H. Bialostosky, "Coleridge's Interpretation of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," pp. 912-24; Shawcross, "Notes, Chapter XVIII," pp. 276-77.

¹⁶Letter 449, Letters 2:830.

firm and singly authoritative:

My objection is, first, that in any sense this rule is applicable only to certain classes of poetry; secondly, that even to these classes it is not applicable . . . and lastly, that . . . as a rule it is useless, if not injurious, and therefore either need not, or ought not to be practiced. . . . Now it is clear to me, that in the most interesting of the poems . . . the persons introduced are by no means taken from low or rustic life. . . . I am convinced. . . . However this may be, I dare assert. . . . If then I am compelled to doubt the theory . . . still more must I hesitate in my assent to the sentence . . . which I can neither admit as particular fact, or as general rule. . . . As little can I agree with the assertion. . . . Secondly, I deny. . . . Here let me be permitted to remind the reader, that the positions, which I controvert, are contained in the sentences. . . . It is against these exclusively that my opposition is directed. I object . . . (2:29-32, 36-41).

It is interesting to note, as Richard Mallette points out, that Coleridge's position as critic is so firmly and unequivocally secure that "he no longer merely quotes a classical authority to prove his point, but places himself on equal ground with the loftiest to say that 'I adopt with full faith the principle of Aristotle, that poetry as poetry is essentially ideal. . . .' (2:33)." ¹⁷

In Chapter XVIII, as we have noted, Coleridge's revision of Wordsworth continues more obviously, Coleridge's tone seeming to gather force and vehemence as he argues his own psychologically grounded analysis of meter. For support of his five proofs that poetic language entails severer demands and pleasures than the language of prose, Coleridge

¹⁷Richard Mallette, "Narrative Technique in the 'Biographia Literaria'," p. 39.

relies on Wordsworth's poetry itself as well as the compositions of other poetic masters, frequently challenging Wordsworth directly to act as an imaginative reader of his own and the poetry of other geniuses. Coleridge's disagreement is with Wordsworth the critic, and as substantial proof of the validity of his argument Coleridge effectively presents his opponent with his own compositions. Thus, Coleridge's stance, while inherently argumentative, is simultaneously complimentary. Moreover, Coleridge's argument for the "essential difference" of metrical language is conducted from the reader's point of view, analyzing as it does the psychological dimensions of the unique "pleasure" (2:10) which is the reader of poetry's primary experience. Thus, to convince Wordsworth of the inadequacy of his theory, Coleridge offers in contrast the reader's actual experience of Wordsworth's poetry; Coleridge, in effect, asks Wordsworth to become his own reader, to place himself in the reader's position in order to fully sense the imaginative power operating in his poetry. Coleridge's reader, meanwhile, has been retired to the position of silent observer, learning the lessons of the psychological dimensions of poetry from this staged, friendly confrontation of two masters, one the master-critic and the other the master-poet. Coleridge expresses his enjoyment of this self-assumed task of rescuing Wordsworth's practice from the cloud of his theory: "And I reflect with delight, how little a mere theory, though of his own

workmanship, interferes with the processes of genuine Imagination in a man of true poetic genius, 'THE VISION AND THE FACULTY DIVINE'" (2:45). This reverential acknowledgement of Wordsworth's "true poetic genius" is a significant prelude to Coleridge's following delineation of the unique power of meter, offsetting as it does any unpleasant competitiveness between the two men; Coleridge may find Wordsworth's concept of metrical language to be a "solipsism," by his "mere theory" cannot undermine his poetic gift.

Each of Coleridge's "proofs" (with the exception of the last, which is an appeal to authority) encompasses some aspect of his theory of the Imagination or of his previous definition of a poem; the consistent foundation of his argument is the psychological experience of the reader. Coleridge's first two proofs, both of which establish the power of meter, one an argument from cause and the other from effect, maintain the human-centered concern of Romantic aesthetics: to Coleridge poetry mirrored and answered to an inherent human need, just as the world of nature conformed to the operation of the human mind. After positing the "origin of metre" as psychological, or "a faculty of the human mind itself" (1:14), he defines meter as the poetic technique which recreates and corresponds to this "spontaneous effort" of our mind to create "balance" by holding "in check the workings of passion" (2:49). Thus, metrical language and figures of speech are indigenous to poetry because

the reader of poetry expects and finds in them a corollary for a power within his own mind, the blending of unusual passion and voluntary control. The poet recreates such a pleasurable balance in his use of metrical language by tempering the "natural language of excitement" with the designed control of meter, thus effecting an artistic reconciliation of opposites: the "interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose" (2:50). The pleasure we derive from poetry, then, is, like the activity of the human mind, essentially dynamic: we are continually surprised and appeased, excited and satisfied, "and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited. . ." (2:51). Having established the unique psychological power of meter, Coleridge argues for its appropriate use. If meter is merely "super-add[ed]" in isolation to other elements of the poem, as Wordsworth suggests (1:144), it is not only inorganic, but it cannot effect its intense "degree of pleasurable excitement" (2:50).¹⁸ Without its appropriate "combination with other elements of poetry" (2:51), the power of meter, like that of "yeast" which gives "vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionally combined" (2:52) will

¹⁸Wordsworth acknowledges a similar pleasure from the "co-presence" of the excitement in Poetry with the regularity of meter. There is no union of the two, however, and therefore there is not such an intensity of effect as Coleridge claims, but a kind of "half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition" (1:147).

be neutralized. Coleridge's rhetorical questions to Wordsworth, while calling attention to his occasional careless use of meter, more importantly presume Wordsworth's valid "own judgement" concerning the appropriate use of meter. For Coleridge couches his challenge by first alluding to Wordsworth's poetic genius and then stressing the infrequency of such prosaic language in Wordsworth's poetry:

I would further ask whether, but for that visionary state, into which . . . the susceptibility of his own genius had placed the poet's imagination, (a state, which spreads its influence and coloring over all, that co-exists with the exciting cause and in which "The simplest, and the most familiar things Gain a strange power of spreading awe around them,") I would ask the poet whether he would not have felt an abrupt downfall in these verses from the preceding stanza? . . . It must not be omitted . . . that these stanzas furnish the only fair instance that I have been able to discover in all Mr. Wordsworth's writings, of an actual adoption, or true imitation, of the real and very language of low and rustic life, freed from provincialisms (2:54-55).

This dual challenge and compliment provides a transition to Coleridge's third argument for the uniqueness of metrical language, the psychology of the poet, an essential dynamic of poetry with which both men concur. The "PASSION" essential to poetry, as "Mr. Wordsworth truly affirms," is not only to be found in the reader but also in the writer "of genius:"

. . . the very act of poetic composition itself is, and is allowed to imply and to produce, an unusual state of excitement, which of course justifies and demands a correspondent difference of language. . . (2:56).

Coleridge's fourth psychological argument seems to include

both reader and poet, for we share "the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment. . . ." Coleridge's theory of organic form is deduced from the inherent human "instinct" toward unity as well as the poet's unique power to "by a predominant passion . . . reduce . . . multitude to unity" (2:16).

Coleridge now relies on "the practice of the best poets, of all countries and in all ages" for his final argument, holding up examples to Wordsworth as proof that meter cannot be singled out as the "sole acknowledged difference" (2:62) between the style of verse and prose, but must be organically related to all other parts of the poem. Coleridge appeals to Wordsworth's judgement as a reader:

Yet will Mr. Wordsworth say, that the style of the following stanza [Spenser's] is either undistinguished from prose, and the language of ordinary life? Or that it is vicious, and that the stanzas are blots in the 'Faery Queen'? . . . Will it be contended on the one side, that these lines [Daniel's] are mean and senseless? Or on the other, that they are not prosaic, and for that reason unpoetic? (2:59,61).

Coleridge's purpose here is to demonstrate that in abandoning "any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (1:135) we lose a crucial critical tool; particularly with the poetry of other ages and classes we are left with little more than critical confusion if we choose to ignore this "practice of the best poets. . . ."

The chapter closes with Coleridge's fervent remarks on

the one subject with which he and Wordsworth are in complete agreement,¹⁹ the "viciousness" of false poetic diction. But the contrast in their responses to this present state of poetry is telling. Wordsworth, as we have noted, is in his "Preface" essentially reactionary, vowing to replace the current artificial style with his own more natural and humane kind of poetry. Coleridge, however, in anticipation of Matthew Arnold, looks to criticism as the guide and stimulus for future poetic excellence, a directive and inspirational role which the Biographia itself is designed to fulfill:

The ultimate end of criticism is much more to establish the principles of writing, than to furnish rules how to pass judgement on what has been written by others; if indeed it were possible that the two could be separated. But if it be asked, by what principles the poet is to regulate his style, if he do not adhere closely to the sort and order of words which he hears in the market, wake, high-road, or plough-field? I reply; by principles, the ignorance or neglect of which would convict him of being no poet, but a silly or presumptuous usurper of the name! By the principles of grammar, logic, psychology! . . . 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? (2:63-64).

The principles which Coleridge passionately espouses here have been presented as a legacy to his young readers who have adopted this vocation, and have been enacted in this

¹⁹See "To Thomas Wedgwood," 20 October 1802, Letter 464, Letters 2:877 where Coleridge writes: ". . . but in point of poetic Diction I am not so well s[atisfi]ed that you do not require a certain Aloofness from [the la]nguage of real Life, which I think deadly to Poetry."

"present" critical work. Coleridge now includes Wordsworth in this testimony to the "rules of the Imagination . . . [as] the very powers of growth and production," signalling the close of their disagreement:

There is not, I firmly believe, a man now living, who has, from his own inward experience, a clearer intuition, than Mr. Wordsworth himself, that the last mentioned are the true sources of genial discrimination (2:64).

The reunion, as it were, of Coleridge and Wordsworth is confirmed in the opening of Chapter XIX, where Coleridge again revises Wordsworth,²⁰ but this time to explicate his "real object," the promotion of a "species of excellence" which Coleridge demonstrates in this chapter is "by no means new, nor yet of recent existence in our language" (2:71). Thus, while Coleridge marks the cessation of his expressed quarrel with Wordsworth, he also maintains his control over his own material, continuing to shape it according to his individual purpose. Calling attention to his directive, authorial role, Coleridge reminds his readers of his self-conscious control over "these sketches":

. . . but if I had happened to have had by me the Poems of COTTON, . . . I should have indulged myself, and I think have gratified some admirable specimens of this

²⁰Significantly, Coleridge also revises Garve, whom he uses to paraphrase Wordsworth. Kathleen Coburn notes that Coleridge's translation is "far from being literal." Coleridge substitutes "just as one would wish to talk" (2:70) for wie man spricht, "(as people talk)," introducing "an element of idealization into the plain naturalism of Garve's statement--an interesting point in view of the argument for which Coleridge invokes Garve's support." Notebooks 1 (December 1803): 1702.

style. . . . I shall extract two poems. . . . The second is a poem of greater length, which I have chosen not only for the present purpose, but likewise as a striking example and illustration of an assertion hazarded in a former page of these sketches. . . (2:71,73).

If Chapter XIX, a continuation of Coleridge's final argument for the organic role of meter, that is, the "practice of the best poets, of all countries and in all ages," has demonstrated the universality of this excellence of style which it was Wordsworth's "real object" to promote, in Chapter XX Coleridge distinguishes Wordsworth further by asserting his surpassing of his own, now accurately stated theory:

I have no fear in declaring my conviction, that the excellence defined and exemplified in the preceding Chapter is not the characteristic excellence of Mr. Wordsworth's style; because I can add with equal sincerity, that it is precluded by higher powers. The praise of uniform adherence to genuine, logical English is undoubtedly his; nay, laying the main emphasis on the word uniform, I will dare add that, of all contemporary poets, it is his alone. . . . To me it will always remain a singular and noticeable fact; that a theory which would establish this lingua communis, not only as the best, but as the only commendable style, should have proceeded from a poet, whose diction, next to that of Shakespeare and Milton, appears to me of all others the most individualized and characteristic (2:77).

In a series of rhetorical questions Coleridge presents to the reader unmistakable instances of "a diction peculiarly his own, of a style which cannot be imitated":

Who, having been previously acquainted with any considerable portion of Mr. Wordsworth's publications, and having studied them with a full feeling of the author's genius, would not at once claim as Wordsworthian the little poem on the rainbow? . . . Or in the "Lucy Gray? . . . Or in the "Idle Shepherd-boys?" . . .

Need I mention the exquisite description of the Sea Loch in the "Blind Highland Boy"? . . . I might quote almost the whole of his "RUTH," but take the following stanzas. . . (2:78-79).

Wordsworth's unique excellence, then, lies expressly in his immunity from any "literal adherence to his theory" (2:84), Coleridge's final and most compelling argument against the "fiction of a new school of poetry." In these four chapters, then, which concern themselves with Wordsworth's misguided theory, Coleridge assumes his greater and more discriminating critical knowledge without smugness, but with the ease of certainty and confidence. For Wordsworth's "supposed" theory has also been misappropriated, and in the face of this larger context of contemptuous criticism Coleridge rises to the occasion, employing his critical acuity to defend Wordsworth by supplanting his indiscriminate ideas with Coleridge's own philosophical principles, by rectifying Wordsworth's well-intentioned theoretical position, and finally by elevating Wordsworth's poetry to its rightful preeminent status. Coleridge's critical knowledge and expertise unquestionably surpass Wordsworth's, but Coleridge adheres to his own highly principled view of the critic's role--he illuminates Wordsworth's unsurpassed poetic genius.

Chapter XXI, which frequently parallels Coleridge's objections to current critical practice in Chapters II and III, is logically positioned as a preparation for Chapter XXII, the culmination of Coleridge's defense of Wordsworth. As James Barcus maintains, this chapter "provides the

antithesis for the thesis of Chapter XXII. By providing a negative standard, Coleridge's description of the true nature of poetic genius of Wordsworth stands out as it never would have done against a lighter background."²¹ Moreover, the Edinburgh Review, which is specifically addressed in this chapter, had played a not insignificant role, Coleridge felt, in stimulating this controversy; the long-lived "eddy of criticism" had more recently been reactivated by Jeffrey's review of The Excursion in the November, 1814 issue. Coleridge had his own disappointments with the poem, but Jeffrey's extreme criticism which made no pretensions toward a justifying rationale drew Coleridge's wrath:

From this state of mind, in which I was comparing Wordsworth with himself, I was roused by the infamous Edinburgh Review of the Poem. If ever Guilt lay on 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.²²

His ire, however, is calmly controlled and firmly directed in this chapter where Coleridge faces his primary opponent, unprincipled and personal criticism, embodied by Jeffrey. First defining what he means by "fair and philosophical" criticism, Coleridge in effect describes particularly Volume II of the Biographia, while specifically announcing the

²¹James Edgar Barcus, "The Homogeneity of Structure and Idea in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Philosophical Lectures, and Aids to Reflection" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1968), p. 88.

²²"To Lady Beaumont," 3 April 1815, Letter 964, Letters 4:564.

rationale of his following chapter:

But I should call that investigation fair and philosophical, in which the critic announces and endeavours to establish the principles, which he holds for the foundation of poetry in general, with the specification of these in their application to the different classes of poetry. Having thus prepared his canons of criticism for praise and condemnation, he would proceed to particularize the most striking passages to which he deems them applicable, faithfully noticing the frequent or infrequent recurrence of similar merits or defects, and as faithfully distinguishing what is characteristic from what is accidental. . . . Then if his premises be rational, his deductions legitimate, and his conclusions justly applied, the reader, and possibly the poet himself, may adopt his judgement in the light of judgement and in the independence of free-agency. If he has erred, he presents his errors in a definite place and tangible form, and holds the torch and guides the way to their detection. (2:85).

The strong sense of responsibility evident in this self-description of his present work attests to the seriousness and the hopefulness with which Coleridge regarded the Biographia; we are reminded of Coleridge's fervent expectation of The Friend, "the hope of doing any real good."²³ For Coleridge's abhorrence of personal criticism stemmed from his life-long, deep personal esteem for the poetic vocation as well as the "honorable" and morally responsible role of the critic. His earlier delineation of the unparalleled commitment which the poetic discipline demands warrants repetition here:

There is no profession on earth, which requires an attention so early, so long, or so unintermitting as that of poetry; . . . Where then a man has, from his

²³"To Samuel Purkis," 20 October 1809, Letter 879, Letters 1:253.

earliest youth, devoted his whole being to an object, which by the admission of all civilized nations in all ages is honorable as a pursuit, and glorious as an attainment; what of all that relates to himself and his family, if only we accept his moral character, can have fairer claims to his protection, or more authorize acts of self-defence, than the elaborate products of his intellect and intellectual industry? (1:32)

In keeping with Coleridge's view of poetic Imagination as an analogue of divine creation, the world of poetic genius now assumes sacred overtones and the critic's "personal injury . . . [and] personal insults" are tantamount to a violation of the author and reader's hallowed world:

he steals the unquiet, the deforming passions of the World into the Museum; into the very place which, next to the chapel and oratory, should be our sanctuary, and secure place of refuge; offers abominations on the altar of the muses; and makes its sacred paling the very circle in which he conjures up the lying and profane spirit (2:87).

Then, in the same breath in which Coleridge proposes a body of critics, "learned men in the various branches of science and literature," who would "lay aside their individuality, and pledge themselves inwardly, as well as ostensibly, to administer judgement according to . . . a code [based] on the two-fold basis of universal morals and philosophic reason," he seems to undermine his own hope by creating a caustic metaphor for the more realistic, powerful indifference of the critical machine. This extended metaphor is worth quoting in full for the unmistakable evidence which it offers of the power of Coleridge's controlled and satirical prose:

Should any literary Quixote find himself provoked by its sounds and regular movements, I should admonish him with Sancho Panza, that it is no giant, but a windmill; there it stands on its own place, and its own hillock, never goes out of its way to attack anyone, and to none and from none either gives or asks assistance. When the public press has poured in any part of its produce between its mill-stones, it grinds it off, one man's sack the same as another, and with whatever wind may happen to be then blowing. All the two and thirty winds are alike its friends. Of the whole wide atmosphere it does not desire a single finger-breadth more than what is necessary for its sails to turn round in. But this space must be left free and unimpeded. Gnats, beetles, wasps, butterflies, and the whole tribe of ephemerals and insignificants, may flit in and out and between; may hum, and buzz, and jar; may shrill their tiny pipes, and wind their puny horns, unchastised and unnoticed. But idlers and bravadoes of larger size and prouder show must beware, how they place themselves within its sweep. Much less may they presume to lay hands on the sails, the strength of which is neither greater nor less than as the wind is, which drives them round. Whomsoever the remorseless arm slings aloft, or whirls along with it in the air, he has himself alone to blame; though, when the same arm throws him from it, it will more often double than break the force of his fall (2: 88,89).

By implication, the Edinburgh Review "and all other works of periodical criticism" operate as arbitrarily as the relentless windmill "with whatever wind may happen to be then blowing." Wordsworth's poetry has been subjected to criticism void of "a single leading principle established or even announced, and without any one attempt at argumentative deduction. . ." (2:92). Finally, Jeffrey's utter lack of proportion in his criticism is rendered both absurd and immoral by Coleridge's comparison of the critic with the Frenchman who, in ignorance of the universal symbolism of horns, interpreted those of Michelangelo's statue of Moses

as symbolic of a "'HE-GOAT and a CUCKOLD'" (2:93).

One wishes, in sympathy with Coleridge's purpose in the Biographia and cognizant of the practical exigencies which interfered with his planned composition, that the work closed with the final and climactic analysis of Wordsworth's genius in Chapter XXII, so exemplary is it of Coleridge's penetrating and illuminating criticism, so integral with his philosophical principles, and so reflective of his psychological insight into the reader's experience of poetry. His stated purpose in this chapter is to "announce decisively and aloud . . . the real characteristics of his poetry at large, as of his genius and the constitution of his mind," relegating the "supposed characteristics" as well as Wordsworth's "comparatively" infrequent failure at his own experiment to their rightfully insignificant place. Coleridge's procedure of moving from Wordsworth's faults to his excellencies, though it may seem a departure from his maxim "never to admit the faults of a work of Genius to those who denied or were incapable of feeling and understanding the Beauties,"²⁴ arises in part from his assurance of his audience's sympathy both for his position and for Wordsworth's genius. Moreover, it is conducive to his purposeful role in the lengthy controversy:

If in one instance (in my Literary Life) I have appeared to deviate from this rule, first, it was not till the

²⁴"To Thomas Allsop," 2 December 1818, Letter 1155, Letters 4:888.

fame of the Writer, (which I had been for fourteen years successively toiling, like a second Ali, to build up) had been established: and secondly, and chiefly, with the purpose and, I may safely add, with the effect of rescuing the necessary task from malignant Defamers and in order to set forth the excellences and the trifling proportion which the Defects bore to the excellences.²⁵

The primary defects which Coleridge exposes have been suggested in his confutation of Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, the first a fault of Wordsworth's style and the second of his subject matter. Coleridge approaches both errors from the point of view of the reader, arguing in both cases that what the reader has come to expect from his encounter with a literary work of art, particularly poetry, remains unfulfilled if the timeless conventions associated with the unique pleasure of poetry are not realized. The first defect is "only occasional" because of its complementary association with the third specified excellence of Wordsworth's style, "a sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs. . ." (2:121). Coleridge finds an infrequent "INCONSTANCY of the style" which results from Wordsworth's "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" (2:97). In effect, Wordsworth accomplishes in part what he claims as his creed in the "Preface": he occasionally writes in a style which to Coleridge "is only

²⁵Ibid., p. 888.

proper in prose," creating an unevenness and "disharmony" with his truly poetic style. His examples from other art forms and the talk of "real life" support his psychologically based contention that "there is something unpleasant in the being thus obliged to alternate states of feeling so dissimilar. . ." (2:98). Moreover, the poetic convention which the reader has entered into is violated, for our "pleasure . . . is in part derived from the preparation and previous expectation":

But in the perusal of works of literary art, we pre-
pare ourselves for such language; and the business of
the writer, like that of the painter whose subject
requires unusual splendor and prominence, is so to
raise the lower and neutral tints, that what in a
different style would be the commanding colors, are
here used as the means of that gentle degradation
requisite in order to produce the effect of a whole.

The second defect also effects a violation of the poetic convention: Wordsworth's "matter-of-factness in certain poems" (2:101) draws the reader's attention away from the essentially ideal focus of poetry. Such attention to portraying "accidental circumstances" with "minute accuracy" both misunderstands the reader's willingness "to believe for his own sake," an aspect of reader psychology which Coleridge has previously termed "the willing suspension of disbelief," and renders the reader's experience of the poetry laborious rather than pleasurable:

It seems to be like taking the pieces of a dissected map out of its box. We first look at one part, and then at another, then join and dove-tail them; and when the successive acts of attention have been

completed, there is a retrogressive effort of mind to behold it as a whole (2:102).

Furthermore, (Coleridge devotes more explication to this defect than any other since it recalls the "great point of controversy between Mr. Wordsworth and his objectors") Wordsworth's undue attention to the specific particularity of his characters interferes with his poetic purpose, to convey pleasure as the primary object (and moral truth only as a natural outgrowth) and, secondly, to portray the "universal in the individual" (2:33n). Coleridge is careful to dissociate himself from any suggestion of superiority; it is not the social class of Wordsworth's characters that is offensive, particularly in light of Wordsworth's deeply humanitarian goals. But in light of his apparently moral goal Wordsworth utilizes a specific profession to convey a moral sentiment, an arbitrary choice which he then compensates for by adding a number of particular and accidental details. Coleridge asks rhetorically:

Is there one word, for instance, attributed to the pedlar in the "EXCURSION," characteristic of a pedlar? One sentiment, that might no more plausibly, even without the aid of previous explanation, have proceeded from any wise and beneficent old man, of a rank or profession in which the language of learning and refinement are natural and to be expected? Need the rank have been at all particularized, where nothing follows which the knowledge of that rank is to explain or illustrate? (2:108).

Moreover, the reader is sensitive to this departure from the poetic canon that characters in poetry "amid the strongest individualization, must still remain representative,"

a timeless precept grounded, once again, "on the nature both of poetry and the human mind" (2:107). In trying to mask his own sentiments by stressing accidental circumstances of character, the poet disorients his discerning reader:

The reader not only knows, that the sentiments and language are the poet's own, and his own too in his artificial character, as poet; but by the fruitless endeavours to make him think the contrary, he is not even suffered to forget it. . . . For all the admirable passages interposed in this narration, might, with trifling alterations, have been far more appropriately, and with far greater verisimilitude, told of a poet in the character of a poet. . . (2:107, 108-09).

We note in this analysis of the first two defects the accomplishment of Coleridge's intention to propose canons of criticism which arbitrate "between the Old School and the New School"²⁶ in his equal attention to the classical precepts of the ideal nature of poetry and his more modern awareness of the reader's experience.

The final defect Coleridge explicates is, paradoxically, the opposite extreme of his initial criticism of a prosaic and unimpassioned style; here he points to "mental bombast, as distinguished from verbal: . . . a disproportion of thought to the circumstance and occasion . . . a fault of which none but a man of genius is capable." Coleridge takes some care to expose the difficulty which this inappropriateness of thought poses for the reader, summarizing his dilemma with, "we will merely ask, what does all

²⁶"To William Southey," 29 July 1802, Letter 449, Letters 2:830.

this mean?" (2:111). Coleridge's style reflects the reader's frustration:

In what sense is a child of that age a philosopher? In what sense does he read "the eternal deep"? In what sense is he declared to be "for ever haunted" by the Supreme Being? or so inspired as to deserve the splendid titles of a mighty prophet, a blessed seer? By reflection? by knowledge? by conscious intuition? . . . But if this be too wild and exorbitant to be suspected as having been the poet's meaning; if these mysterious gifts, faculties, and operations, are not accompanied with consciousness; who else is conscious of them? or how can it be called the child, if it be no part of the child's conscious being? (2:112).

Each of these defects is either "occasional" or found only "in certain poems."

The excellencies which Wordsworth consistently demonstrates are, of course, far more essential to Coleridge's theory of poetry than the technical lapses or occasional inappropriateness which have been explicated. Each of these poetic virtues has been extolled by Coleridge elsewhere in the Biographia, whether as a lesson learned in his literary life, or as a characteristic of poetic genius, or as an element of the imaginative power. Coleridge is vividly present in his praise of Wordsworth, rendering his acclaim in a highly personal mode which frequently places Coleridge, the advocate, in the foreground of our experience. For example, Coleridge expresses a particular interest in Wordsworth's first excellence:

an austere purity of language both grammatically and logically; in short a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning. Of how high value I deem this, and how particularly estimable I hold the example of

the present day, has already been stated: and in part too the reasons on which I ground both the moral and intellectual importance of habituating ourselves to a strict accuracy of expression (2:115).

For this is a lesson which Coleridge learned at a young age from Bowyer:

In poetry, in which every line, every phrase, may pass the ordeal of deliberation and deliberate choice, it is possible, and barely possible, to attain that ultimatum which I have ventured to propose as the infallible test of a blameless style; its untranslatableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning.

To this present moment, Coleridge remains convinced of its value not only as a criteria of the poetic genre but also as a tool for the development of the intellect. The study of language assumes an ethical role for Coleridge: it is beneficial "in the preclusion of fanaticism," to "the cultivation to judgement," and to "our success and comfort in life [which] depends on distinguishing the similar from the same. . . ." (2:116-17). In short, verbal precision is "a mean, already prepared for us by nature and society, of teaching the young mind to think well and wisely. . . ." Wordsworth is now explicitly included in Coleridge's extension of his intellectual and literary heritage to the young reader. Attesting to Wordsworth's potential influence over "youth and commencing manhood," Coleridge places him in the position which Bowles held for the young Coleridge:

Now how much warmer the interest is, how much more genial the feelings of reality and practicability,

and thence how much stronger the impulses to imitation are, which a contemporary writer, and especially a contemporary poet, excites in youth and commencing manhood, has been treated of in the earlier pages of these sketches. . . I have only to add, that all the praise which is due to the exertion of such influence for a purpose so important, joined with that which must be claimed for the infrequency of the same excellence in the same perfection, belongs in full right to Mr. Wordsworth (2:117).

The suggestion, which is later rendered more patently in Coleridge's final praise of Wordsworth, is that Wordsworth's poetry, and by implication this genial criticism, is futurist, signifying a new age of poetry for this next generation of readers.

With the second "characteristic excellence of Mr. Wordsworth's work" the Wordsworthian reader is specifically characterized; he is, of course, Coleridge's ideal reader whose sensitivity to Wordsworth's "weight and sanity of the Thoughts and Sentiments won . . . from the poet's own meditative observation" (2:118) arises from his own highly developed philosophic consciousness:

But the ode was intended for such readers only as had been accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their inmost nature, to venture at times into the twilight realms of consciousness, and to feel a deep interest in modes of inmost being, to which they know that the attributes of time and space are inapplicable and alien, but which yet can not be conveyed save in symbols of time and space (2:120).

Wordsworth's thought, born of "just and original reflection," is addressed, in Coleridge's opinion, to readers whose imaginative capacity closely parallels the author's. If in Wordsworth's first two cited defects the reader's experience

was used by Coleridge as proof of some failure on the poet's part, here in Wordsworth's initial excellencies the bond from poet to reader is restored to its full imaginative potential.

The fourth and fifth examples of Wordsworth's unique superiority confirm Coleridge's earlier approbation of Wordsworth's "remonstrance in behalf of truth and nature" as deserving "all praise, both for the attempt and for the execution" (2:28), for these powers Wordsworth had aspired to in his "Preface." He wrote of his intention to portray aspects of common life with "a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way" (1:123) and of his "hope that there is in these Poems little falsehood of description" (1:132), aspirations which Coleridge now asserts as accomplishments: "The perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions, as taken immediately from nature" (2:121). Acting the poet himself, Coleridge employs two similes which reflect the very quality they praise:

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 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 high road of custom.

Wordsworth's self-assessment in his "Preface" as well as his deeply humanitarian view of the poet's character and

vocation are confirmed by Coleridge as Wordsworth's fifth inestimable quality. Wordsworth had expressed his belief

that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If in this opinion I am mistaken, I can have little right to the name of a Poet. . . . Poems of which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply (1:126).

This Coleridge articulates as "a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility. . ." (2:122).

And Wordsworth's moving characterization of the poet as "a man speaking to men. . . . The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of the passions of men" (1:138,142n) is articulated by Coleridge in a tribute to his contemporary as:

a sympathy with man as man; the sympathy indeed of a contemplator, . . . from whose view no difference of rank conceals sameness of nature; no injuries of wind or weather, or toil, or even of ignorance, wholly disguise the human face divine. . . . Here the man and the poet lose and find themselves in each other, the one as glorified, the latter as substantiated. In this mild and philosophic pathos, Wordsworth appears to me without a compeer. Such he is: so he writes (2:123).

Coleridge is noticeably moved by his own tribute to Wordsworth, particularly in his final citation of Wordsworth's Imaginative power, which places him "nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own." Finally, Coleridge assumes a prophetic role, announcing Wordsworth's capacity to produce the "FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM" (2:129) and predicting: "His fame belongs to another age, and can neither

be accelerated nor retarded."²⁷ With a gesture which bespeaks his deep respect for Wordsworth as well as for the function of criticism, Coleridge closes the chapter with a humble rhetorical bow:

Were the collection of poems, published with these biographical sketches, important enough, (which I am not vain enough to believe), to deserve such a distinction; EVEN AS I HAVE DONE, SO WOULD I BE DONE UNTO (2:131).

Coleridge's self-assumed role as critic, the genesis and history of which is traced in Volume I, is climactically enacted in his evaluation of Wordsworth, a demonstration of practical criticism thoroughly consonant with the philosophy previously presented as its foundation. As Angus Fletcher has remarked, "The critique enacts the biography, and does so methodically, because this is a literary biography."²⁸ Substituting his own psychologically based principles for Wordsworth's unsystematic theories, Coleridge adopts an argumentative stance toward his opponent which is nonetheless respectful and fraternal. Thus, while he is superior to Wordsworth as a critic, Coleridge directs his criticism to the edification of Wordsworth's poetic genius. Moreover, this present performance of genial criticism takes

²⁷For Richard Mallette this is the ascent "of the mountain-tops where he . . . trumpet[s] forth the doctrine of the Imagination and herald[s] a new age of poetry," p. 38.

²⁸Angus Fletcher, "'Positive Negation': Threshold, Sequence, and Personification in Coleridge," in New Perspectives on Coleridge and Wordsworth, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 148.

place before a reader who has been trained in its criteria and is now specifically characterized as a reader of Wordsworth as well, whose poetry looks to a future beyond the Biographia.

CHAPTER VII

Part II

With Coleridge's terse and blatant admission of the mishandling of the publication of the Biographia which closes Chapter XXII, we are forced to acknowledge a breakdown in form. Although he feebly attempts a transition which recalls the close of Chapter XI, Coleridge strongly implies the extraneous nature of "Satyrane's Letters":

For more than eighteen months have the volume of Poems, entitled SIBYLLINE LEAVES, and the present volumes, up to this page, been printed, and ready for publication. But, ere I speak of myself in 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 (2:131).

Moreover, seventeen years earlier Coleridge abhorred the thought of publishing these letters, acknowledging their lack of literary value to Humphrey Davy:

I am compelled by the God Pecunia . . . to give a Volume of Letters from Germany/ which will be a decent Lounge-book--& not an atom more.²⁹
. . . this [Christabel] I publish with confidence--but my Travels in Germany come from me with mortal Pangs. Nothing but the most pressing necessity for the money

²⁹"To Humphrey Davy," 9 October 1800, Letter 356, Letters 2:631.

could have induced me--& even now I hesitate & tremble.³⁰

Again, at the opening of Chapter XXIII Coleridge acknowledges the inorganic nature of the annexation of the critique of Bertram, not to the Biographia as a whole, but to the letters from Germany, and notes its careless transposition:

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, written within the last twelve months: in proof, that I have been as falsely charged with any fickleness in my principles of taste.--The letter was written to a friend: and the apparent abruptness with which it begins, is owing to the omission of the introductory sentence (2:181).

Not surprisingly, Coleridge's comparison of Bertram with Don Juan, though exemplary of his reader-oriented, psychologically grounded criticism (Coleridge analyzes our attraction to the character of Don Juan in contrast to the unreasonable and implausible demands placed on us in Bertram), remains completely separable from the Biographia as a whole.

Thus, George Watson's conviction that "no defense can be made" for either of these inorganic additions and his subsequent decision to eliminate them from his 1956 edition is, if unduly sympathetic to the author's unrealized plan, also conducive to a more integral understanding of Coleridge's thoughtful purpose for the work:

They were no part of Coleridge's original intention; he added them when desperately in search of makeweights,

³⁰"To Humphrey Davy," 2 December 1800, Letter 365, Letters 2:649.

and they add nothing to the substance of the book. For these reasons they are excluded from this edition, which is therefore the first to present the Biographia as nearly as possible according to the author's intentions.³¹

Coleridge had succumbed to John Gutch's advice to divide the Biographia "into two volumes in order to prevent disproportion," a decision which Coleridge viewed as a capitulation: ". . . having divided the Life (or rather acceded to your plan of dividing the Life). . . ." ³² And during the two years from September, 1815 to 1817 Coleridge had endured the attacks on Christabel, Zapolya, and The Statesman's Manual which now monopolize his concern in the Conclusion.³³

This unorthodox closing chapter, a noticeably discordant conclusion to the Biographia, is tantamount to a relinquishment of the ideal community of authors and readers which Coleridge has envisioned throughout the work. Although he occasionally attempts to relate his self-defense to his readers, the self-absorption of this chapter isolates it from the central purpose of the Biographia. Moreover, this material, a brief synopsis of the "pain" and "confusion" which Coleridge has endured in the past three

³¹Watson, "Introduction," Biographia Literaria, p. xviii.

³²"To John M. Gutch," 6 August 1816, Letter 1022, Letters 4:661.

³³See "Headnote," "To J. J. Morgan," 16 July 1816, Letter 1020, Letters 4:657; "Introduction," Letters 3:li.

years, portrays the tragic supervention of life over art, as the thematic order which Coleridge has elicited from his past is dispelled by more recent experience. The elegaic tone which closed Chapter XXII dominates here, as Coleridge suggests his resignation from his career and from the hope of creating a sustaining alternative to anonymous criticism.

Coleridge's reference to a forthcoming autobiography, which critics have pointed to as proof of the inorganic nature of the autobiographical sections of the Biographia,³⁴ in fact distinguishes the exemplary and didactic nature of his narrative sketches from this projection of his history "of my own life." For the Coleridge who has endured "the last three years," his personal autobiography would culminate in a perception which excludes any sense of professional accomplishment and issues from a position of personal regret:

. . . my history would add its contingent to the enforcement of one important truth, viz. that we must not only love our neighbours as ourselves, but ourselves likewise as our neighbours; and that we can do neither unless we love God above both (2:210).

Indeed, Coleridge's opening analysis of undeserved punishment suggests the reassurance gained from the preceding autobiographical act, or the "perception and acknowledgement of the proportionality and appropriateness of the

³⁴George Watson, "Introduction," p. xx.

Present to the Past. . . ." (2:207). For Coleridge now, however, no sense of "proportion between antecedents and consequents exists." Thus, the accompanying "consolatory feeling," which, for example, was evident at the close of Chapter XI when he affirmed of his past deviations "into a labyrinth, . . . Time spent in such delay is Time won" (1:159), is now unavailable to him. Coleridge's extensive contrast of his present state with the "healing influence" which results from the detection of a pattern in one's life serves as a gloss for his controlled and selective autobiography.

The sense of Before and After becomes both intelligible and intellectual when, and only when, we contemplate the succession in the relations of Cause and Effect, which, like the two poles of the magnet manifest the being and unity of the one power by relative opposites, and give, as it were, a substratum of permanence, of identity, and therefore of reality, to the shadowy flux of Time (2:207).

In other words, the inexplicable critical treatment of his recent works has, as it were, undermined Coleridge's sustained artistic attempt to provide a continuum and a meaning to his literary life.

For this chapter, in direct opposition to the selfless purpose of his autobiography, is a dramatic rendition of professional defeat and resignation. Comparing his bewilderment at the recent abuse he has suffered with a mystical dream "in which there is no sense of reality, not even of the pangs they are enduring" (2:208), Coleridge abruptly closes his self-analysis with: "But these are depths, which

we dare not linger over." His experience with the disproportionate accolades for Christabel before its publication and the subsequent, equally excessive "malignity and spirit of personal hatred" with which it has been reviewed have led him from one personal extreme to its opposite:

. . . three years ago I did not know or believe that I had an enemy in the world: and now even my strongest sensations of gratitude are mingled with fear, and I reproach myself for being too often disposed to ask,-- Have I one friend?-- (2:210).

Also, in response to Hazlitt's charge of "potential infidelity" Coleridge expressly refrains from "defending myself," and instead somewhat resignedly "merely state[s] what my belief is, concerning the true evidences of Christianity" (2:215). His final, earnest wish for the conclusion of his life and this work, then, is a tragic but logical culmination of the tone which has infused the entire chapter, a tone which one critic describes as "the feeling of lost happiness. Living in a time of affliction and menacing shadows, the [autobiographical] writer takes [final] refuge in the memory of the happy hours of his youth."³⁵

Coleridge, however, in a characteristic gesture, seems to briefly take refuge not in a happier time in his life, but in the hope that he has had some permanent effect on his reader:

This has been my Object, and this alone can be my Defence--and O! that with this my personal as well as

³⁵Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," p. 292.

my LITERARY LIFE might conclude! the unquenched desire I mean, not without the consciousness of having earnestly endeavoured, to kindle young minds, and to guard them against the temptations of Scorners [of Christianity] (2:218).

But what Coleridge claims to have hoped to "show" young minds is a vision of a spiritual state which, for all its dramatic power,³⁶ does seem to suggest a "turning aside from a momentuous negative fact of human experience, from mortality:"³⁷

It is Night, sacred Night! the upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone: and the outward Beholding is fixed on the sparks twinkling in the awful depth, though Suns of other Worlds, only to preserve the Soul steady and collected in its pure Act of inward adoration to the great I AM, and to the filial WORD that re-affirmeth it from Eternity to Eternity, whose choral Echo is the universe.

Coleridge's legacy of a vision of a literary world where author and critic, personified by Wordsworth and Coleridge's ideal reader, achieve the status of recognized genius is, in effect, superseded by this religious vision. It is as if Coleridge's experience at the hands of Hazlitt and Jeffrey has irrevocably marred Coleridge's ideal of the literary

³⁶Bishop C. Hunt, Jr. calls attention to Coleridge's struggle to express the object of religion and philosophy as "an effort to articulate the ineffable." Since his object is

"beyond the reach of language, it should not be thought surprising if his language can only point toward that object, imperfectly and by a series of approximations. . . . The instant that philosophical prose approaches the subject of the transcendental, it necessarily begins to function paralogically: in other words, as poetry." "Coleridge and the Endeavor of Philosophy," pp. 834, 837.

³⁷M. G. Cooke, "Quisque Sui Faber," p. 227.

community. Whereas earlier experience with anonymous criticism was turned by Coleridge to the reader's advantage as a lesson to be learned, with this indignity Coleridge turns aside from the humanly meaningful goal of the Biographia to a solitary vision of an eternity in "other Worlds." Thus, his closing poetic affirmation of the transcendent unity of the human soul and the divine "I AM," although the metaphysical extension of his theory of self-consciousness, suggests an ultimate repudiation of and a final refuge from this world which he chose to reenter and reform at the opening of the Biographia.³⁸

³⁸The personal finality of this conclusion is confirmed by the almost identical sentiment in Coleridge's final words of dictation to Joseph Green for the Opus Maximus:

"And be thou sure in whatever may be published of my posthumous works to remember that, first of all is the Absolute Good whose self-affirmation is the 'I AM,' as the eternal reality in itself, and the ground and source of all other reality. And next that in this idea nevertheless a distinctivity is to be carefully preserved, as manifested in the person of the Logos by whom that reality is communicated to all other beings," quoted in Walter Jackson Bate, Coleridge, p. 236.

CHAPTER VIII

A close textual analysis of the Biographia Literaria reveals a unity and coherence which permeates the seemingly miscellaneous content of the work and its multiple genres of autobiography, argumentative discourse, and practical criticism. For the Biographia is not only a selective and intermittent autobiography, but also an argumentative discourse as well as a work of practical criticism. Coleridge's rhetorical presence in the Biographia, his stance toward his varying material and his purposeful direction of that material to his audience, yield an insight which addresses the richness and depth of the work while confronting its inherent difficulties. This study has rested upon the presumption that the author's express and operative relationship with his audience is intrinsic to, indeed, "constitutive of" the meaning of the work as a whole.¹ Moreover, this thesis suggests that Coleridge's inclusion of his reader in his material is a formal element of the Biographia which functions successfully in fulfillment of the purpose of the work. That Coleridge's construction of his audience was deliberate and thoughtful is, I believe, unquestionable, not only from his characterization of them in the Biographia, but also

¹E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 87.

from his extra-textual statements which express his life-long concern with creating a class of readers who, unlike the public, were committed to active, responsible, and genial reading. Moreover, in the Biographia this authorially characterized reader completes the impulse of the work:

Coleridge's purpose is to propose a critical approach based on principles, both psychological and metaphysical, which are deduced from the nature of man. Volume I of the Bio-graphia provides the foundation of these principles, both experientially through Coleridge's autobiographical sketches and deductively through his argumentative discourse; in Volume II these principles are applied to works of genius, principally Wordsworth's. But Coleridge's criticism, with his theory of the Imagination as its core, is revolutionary, foreign to its present social and literary context, and, most importantly, futurist. Thus, his engagement of his reader, the future author whose genius is posited by Coleridge but remains potential, is indigenous to Coleridge's purpose not merely to present his critical approach as a dispassionate exercise, but to project his criticism into the future. Coleridge intends to rectify the present deplorable state of criticism, vividly exemplified by the irresponsible violation of Wordsworth's poetry by anonymous critics; but he also assumes the radical mission of utterly revolutionizing the future of criticism, a goal which he undoubtedly instigated, if not accomplished. The ambitious

extent of Coleridge's purpose, then, the radical degree of his reform, necessitates a corresponding intensity of commitment from his audience who are to ultimately accomplish his futurist goal. Thus Coleridge's engagement of his audience is far from merely polite conventionality; their identification with, indeed, their conversion to his vision is central to his purpose.

The rhetoric which this study has chiefly explicated is the personal, intimate bond created between author and reader, the rhetoric of identification in which the author makes himself approachable and present to his reader. In part, this rhetoric of shared intimacy is accomplished through Coleridge's autobiographical sketches, but it is also consistently cultivated throughout the Biographia where Coleridge, who is highly conscious of himself in the eyes of the reader, continually presumes our forbearance, our sympathetic union with him, and our cooperation in the accomplishment of his goal. This rhetoric of emotional intimacy was surely a natural extension of Coleridge's personality, but he also considered this approach to the reader to be integral to the essentially humanitarian character of his profession. Early in his writing career he expressed his hope that the "intemperance of a young man's zeal" would not be misconstrued as "malignity," and so he borrowed "an apology from the great and excellent Dr. Hartley . . . 'I can truly say, that my free and unreserved

manner of speaking, has flowed from the sincerity and earnestness of my heart."² Throughout his life he repeatedly maintained the marriage of feeling and truth, an integrity which he viewed as the sign of genius ("the man of warm feelings only produces order & true connections"),³ and which he insisted was the duty of an author. In The Friend he hoped that "Winning, instead of forcing my Way . . . [would] disarm the Mind of those Feelings, which preclude Conviction by Contempt. . . ."⁴ For this quality of "open-heartedness which men of Letters ought to treat each other with"⁵ was not merely a form of politeness, but a species of truth which, in turn, inspired in the reader a "natural affection."⁶ Coleridge saw clearly that this extension of his thoughts "warm from my heart" effected a meaningful and powerful bond between author and reader:

By verbal truth we mean no more than the correspondence of a given fact to given words. In moral truth, we involve likewise the intention of the speaker, that his words should correspond to his thoughts in the sense in which he expects them to be understood by others.⁷

²"To Caius Gracchus," 2 April 1796, Letter 117, Letters 1:200.

³Notebooks 1 (December 1800): 868.

⁴"Prospectus," The Friend 2:17.

⁵"To Hans Busk," 23 April 1819, Letter 1196, Letters 4:939.

⁶Notebooks 2 (1808-10): 3302.

⁷The Friend 1:42-43.

Correspondingly, the reader of Coleridge and particularly of the Biographia, "comes very quickly to have the sense of a person in the writings . . . We recognize, we are familiar with Coleridge as a person . . . we are on terms of first-hand family intimacy."⁸ Specifically, the intimacy of the Biographia arises out of Coleridge's inclusion of his reader in an exclusive and erudite community marked by intellectual and personal admiration, support, and friendship. It is important to recall the reader's continued membership in this ancient and progressive literary fellowship, for Coleridge's initiation of his youthful audience into this humanitarian community of genius, while resting on the teacher-student relationship, also surpasses it in intimacy.

At the same time that the reader is welcomed into this long-standing community by virtue of his participation in the Biographia, his inclusion is also confirmed by his presumed fulfillment of certain moral and intellectual responsibilities. In part the reader is cognizant of his duties by Coleridge's negative contrast of the present, common state of public readership and anonymous criticism; the reader quickly comes to learn the uncommon qualities and attitudes attendant upon his elite membership. The essential demand placed on the Coleridgean reader is his willing and responsible pursuit of self-knowledge, a responsibility

⁸Walsh, Coleridge: The Work and the Relevance, p. 24.

and criteria which for Coleridge covered a multitude of virtues. First, the commitment to delve into one's own mind necessarily tapped the whole person. Coleridge's criteria of philosophic consciousness was, as he warns in Chapter XII, unavailable to most; but the reader who met this criteria, who cultivated his capacity to "reflect on his own reflections," would reap correspondingly holistic benefits. For this dedication to the growth of self-awareness also presumed active and creative reading, a non-egotistical search of other minds for stimulus of one's awareness. We recall that to Coleridge "To know is in its very essence a verb active" (1:180). Moreover, the expansion of self-knowledge was for Coleridge a moral act. Both the impulse to intellectual activity and the corresponding expansion of consciousness was moral. Kathleen Coburn remarks on a notebook entry concerning the pursuit of self-consciousness:

Presumably lack of consciousness of this "self-position" of the I, inhibits the I's sense of the truth both about itself and all others. "Selfishness implies the want of Self-Consciousness," he says. . . . The Soul is thus not at once given its complete entity, he thought; it has to be awakened to learn to develop its potential. Increasing our consciousness of self is a moral obligation, because the lack of it can be harmful to other persons, and destructive of that "continuousness" of interlocking and constructive relationships that is essential to the good society.⁹

Thus, Coleridge relies on self-knowledge as the essential

⁹Coburn, Self Conscious Imagination, p. 32.

responsibility of his reader, for the depth of this activity necessarily precluded egotism, vanity, insensitivity, and intellectual irresponsibility. Specifically, within the world of criticism, the capacity for genial and organic reading was tapped by the reader's extension of his self-knowledge to a knowledge of man, for the works of genius addressed the universal in human nature. In place of a criticism of personality Coleridge proposes a criticism based on "the faculties of the human mind itself" (1:14); his reader is groomed to carry on this criticism by cultivating its basic activity, the development of self-consciousness.

At the same time, then, that we hear Coleridge's approachable, intimate voice which draws his reader close to him through his autobiographical self-exposure and through the shared bond of fellowship, the elements of moral directiveness also enters into Coleridge's rhetoric. The commitment which Coleridge asks of his reader is personal, but also highly moral. While Coleridge's characterization of his reader as a "young man of genius" creates a strong mutual identification, it also afford Coleridge the position of instructor and guide who counsels the young from his position of mature experience. Particularly in the argumentative sections where Coleridge deplores the present state of criticism or the deadening effects of mechanistic psychology his stern, righteous tone issues from an

oratorical stance. For the Biographia has ultimately a didactic purpose, and the conversion of his reader in the face of the present lack of principles in not only literary criticism but society as a whole was for Coleridge a crucial and responsible task.

Robert DeMaria, Jr. has concisely articulated the formal significance of the author-reader relationship in his assertion that the identity of the ideal reader "as a 'character' is representative of the 'formal' qualities of the criticism within which he exists."¹⁰ Coleridge's construction of his audience, then, his engagement with them as well as his delineation and encouragement of their specified responsibilities, is not only rhetorically effective, but functions as a paradigm of his criticism itself. Coleridge's authorially created reader symbolizes his critical approach: the reader is, in a personal manner, an active participant in the work of literature; his concern is with the work as an organic whole and not with the author's personality or isolated faults; his attitude is one of respect and willing admiration; and his own continued self-awareness implies a corresponding selfless expansiveness of concern. In short, the ideal Coleridgean reader is a man of imaginative genius. Significantly, Coleridge further delineates him as a "young man of genius," a characteristic which also functions

¹⁰ DeMaria, The Ideal Reader, p. 463.

thematically in the Biographia.

Although the autobiographical mode of the Biographia is unquestionably intermittent, its function has been stressed in this study, in contrast to the prevailing insistence on its irrelevance, because of the rich and organic nature of its role. Certainly the autobiographical mode provides an avenue for authorial intimacy. Coleridge's affectionate, bemused acceptance of his youthful past conveys an aspect of his ethos: his lightly self-deprecating tone, the mild irony with which he presents his youthful naiveté, the honesty of his self-assessment, and the modesty with which he acknowledges his former accomplishments are all engaging and attractive. Also, the intermittent moments of intense self-exposure where Coleridge, the present autobiographer, appears immediately affected by his act of recollection create an almost painful intimacy with the reader who witnesses his author's vulnerability. Aside from these moments of present drama, however, we do not have the sense that Coleridge's sketches are directed toward his private self-discovery. Indeed, the force of these dramatic eruptions is all the more startling in light of their unusual occurrence. Frequently at the close of a chapter Coleridge warms to his subject so intensely that the characteristic control of his autobiography seems briefly shattered and the intensity of his emotional outcry resounds. For the most part, however, the

autobiographical sketches are intended as "introductory" to his principles, that is, they provide the experiential foundation of his critical philosophy. If we acknowledge the Primary Imagination as the core of Coleridge's metaphysics and the Secondary Imagination as the heart of his philosophy of criticism, and if his arguments against the present state of criticism and the prevalent psychology of associationism are seen as preparatory to his definition of the Imagination, then Coleridge's autobiographical sketches clearly provide the "lived" basis for his first principle. For his lessons from Bowyer, his reading of Bowles, and his experience of Wordsworth's poetry are presented as "three experienced facts about poetry"¹¹ which stimulated his search for the unique intermediary faculty of the Imagination. Furthermore, the "retirement" of his young adulthood, stimulated by his disillusionment with the literary world and entailing a severe process of doubt and questioning, as well as the subsequent haven and stimulation which German literature and idealist philosophy provided, are portrayed as contributory to his affirmation of the vital power of the Imagination. Finally, in the application of this first principle to the poetry of genius, the lessons learned in his youth and adulthood are rearticulated and reaffirmed in Wordsworth's poetry. If the roots of Coleridge's theory of the Imagination are to be found in his youthful

¹¹Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, p. 176.

experiences with literature, the refinement and development of the theory are traced to his adult studies.

The Biographia, then, purposefully frames Coleridge's philosophical principles as "summaries and distillations of his experience,"¹² and in this sense they are essentially autobiographical. For as William Walsh asserts:

[Coleridge's] convictions do not depend, do not simply derive, either from his idealistic philosophy or his Anglican theological beliefs, or from both. They are "a total act of the soul . . . the whole state of the mind." . . . They were more solid and more personal than any purely theoretical inferences or philosophical conclusions could have been.¹³

It is not merely that Coleridge's philosophy can be traced to explicit influences in his past, but that his philosophy reveals an attempt "to describe and make intelligible his own experience of himself in the universe."¹⁴ Moreover, what he came to affirm as the core of all human experience, that which unites being and knowing, is the inherently natural act of self-consciousness in which man is his essential "self" or "I AM." This primary activity of our being consists of man, the subject, becoming "a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject" (1:183). I would suggest that the autobiographical act, whether its purpose

¹²Walsh, Coleridge: The Work and the Relevance, p. 71.

¹³Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁴Haven, Patterns of Consciousness, p. 119.

be the discovery of the self or the reconstruction of the self into a model for others, is an artistic formalization of the Coleridgean doctrine of the Primary Imagination. For the autobiographer, regardless of the accuracy or irony with which he approaches his task, makes himself the object of his study and of his art even as he remains the subject or "I" who renders his life. In autobiographical criticism this inseparable but double persona is frequently delineated as the narrator who tells the story and the protagonist who enacts it. The author may purposefully try to separate them, but "these two figures are the same person, artist and model. . . . They share the same name. No longer distinctly separate, the artist-model must alternately pose and paint."¹⁵ If we recall Coleridge's consideration of 1803, "Seem to have made up my mind to write my metaphysical works as My Life,"¹⁶ and his accomplishment of this form of the Biographia which contains at its heart the "rudiments of Self-construction,"¹⁷ or the doctrine of the Primary Imagination, we are tempted to complete the enthymeme by positing the autobiographical mode as the artistic metaphor for Coleridge's epistemology.

¹⁵William Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," p. 364. See also Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p. 71 where he explicates the autobiographer's "double character" of subject and object.

¹⁶Notebooks 1 (1803); 1515.

¹⁷"To C. A. Tulk," September 1817, Letter 1077, Letters 4:767.

The autobiographical sketches are also expressly designed for the reader's benefit, as Coleridge frequently remarks. In fulfillment of his didactic purpose Coleridge presents highly selective, controlled, autobiographical "spots of time" which function as a kind of vicarious experience for the reader, teaching him the lessons necessary for the fulfillment of his role. In this sense, Coleridge's autobiography is teleological, designed not to accomplish self-discovery, but to provide an instructive exemplum of the development of an imaginative critic. Although this form of "teleological autobiography"¹⁸ is prone to the distortion and idealization which results from viewing the past for its foreshadowing of the future, we may recall that implicit in Coleridge's model literary life is the process of organic growth in which limitations are ultimately fruitful and failure is contributory to growth. Coleridge's autobiographical perspective affords him an organic vision of his life: his self-termed failure as poet is rendered as contributory to his development as a critic; his and Wordsworth's mistreatment at the hands of anonymous reviewers stimulates his commitment to a revolutionary criticism grounded on principles; and his philosophical and religious skepticism is presented as indigenous to the demanding process of arriving at a more

¹⁸See William Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," pp. 368-71.

encompassing vision. The reader, then, profits not only from Coleridge's unequivocal advice culled from experience, but also from his mature, and sometimes painfully realistic, self-knowledge. The climax of Coleridge's mature autobiographical perspective occurs in Chapter X when he acknowledges to the reader his personal "lament" concerning "the neglect of centering my powers to the realization of some permanent work." However, this brief and self-described "mourning" is transformed into an act of beneficence which captures the essence of his autobiographical sketches, when in Chapter XI Coleridge presents himself as an exemplum or model to the reader:

Happy will it be for such a man, if among his contemporaries elder than himself he should meet with one, who, with similar powers and feelings as acute as his own, had entertained the same scruples; had acted upon them; and who by after-research (when the step was, alas! irretrievable, but for that very reason his research undeniably disinterested) had discovered himself to have quarrelled with received opinions only to embrace errors, to have left the direction tracked out for him on the high road of honorable exertion, only to deviate into a labyrinth, where when he had wandered till his head was giddy, his best good fortune was finally to have found his way out again, too late for prudence though not too late for conscience or for truth! Time spent in such delay is time won. . . (1:158-59).

The Biographia is clearly Coleridge's "after-research," designed not as an apologia since his life is "irretrievable," but as a legacy to his reader whose genius is still vulnerable and potential.

With the notable but unusual exception of the concluding

chapter where the lived experiences of "the past three years" seem to defeat Coleridge's renewed sense of vocation, his overall performance as the critic of his own life, his ability to "come to grips with the period of adult awareness"¹⁹ in order to turn it to the benefit of others also renders the Biographia a monument to his present self. We recall that in the opening chapter of the Biographia Coleridge's commencement of the work signified a "new formulation of responsibility towards the self,"²⁰ for he explicitly announces his somewhat reluctant but unequivocal reentry into the literary world. Furthermore, it is with the close of his autobiography that Coleridge proceeds to his definition of the Imagination and, more successfully, to his present performance as a practicing critic. It is as though the autobiographical rendition, which has imparted a form and a unity to the life, as well as his direction of the meaning of his life to others, has renewed his confidence in the performance of his vocation. It is as though Coleridge's purposeful reconstruction of his past for the benefit of those who resemble his former self but will surpass it has effected a renewal of the self. For in his criticism of Wordsworth's poetry Coleridge's voice is most authoritative and self-assured, his

¹⁹Shumaker, English Autobiography, p. 46.

²⁰Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p. 183.

critical powers are at their height, and his vision of the future of poetry rests secure in his certain knowledge of Wordsworth's forthcoming fame in "another age." If the Biographia presents a life-model to the future critic of genius, it also serves as testimony to the humanitarian and powerful genius of its author.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by M. Sheila Bartle-Harrod has been read and approved by the following Committee:

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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 by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 18, 1980
Date

John R. Nabholz
Director's Signature