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The Treatment of Nature in the Poetry of Coleridge

Esther S. Brenton

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THE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN THE POETRY OF COLERIDGE

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of English
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FOREWORD

The treatment of nature by the English Romantic poets of the nineteenth century is commonly thought to be confined to the poetry of Wordsworth. Although the bulk of Wordsworth's poetry is concerned with nature, a study of the poetry of the period reveals that the other great Romanticists were also interested in nature. This thesis is written to show how great a factor the treatment of nature is in the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

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THE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN THE POETRY OF COLERIDGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The poetry of the age to which Samuel Taylor Coleridge belongs is marked by a new sensitiveness to the features of external nature. Nature poetry in the preceding age had been largely mere observation of physical phenomena. It lacked the imaginative touch necessary to lift it to a place of importance as a poetic theme. The English romantic poets of the nineteenth century bring the world of nature into the range of imaginative art, and give it a place of first importance in their poetic creations. They make nature alive, invest it with an indwelling sense or spirit. There, too, is a transfusion of the spirit of man into outward nature, of outward nature into the spirit of man. The soul of the Romanticist, dissatisfied with the world of fact and reality, finds an outlet in the world of external nature where, seeing through or beyond the forms of sense perception--trees, lakes, flowers, mountains, etc.--,it experiences a wonder, a joy, a truth of life, which is deeply satisfying. The vision of the poet is thus widened and his power of feeling increased, so that a new richness and

beauty marks the nature poetry of the Romanticist.

Coleridge does not depart from his contemporaries, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, Shelley, Keats, in his love of external nature, although his treatment of this theme has for some two or three reasons been unduly thrown into the shadow in most of the estimates of his poetry. In the first place, Wordsworth has been thought of as the great nature poet of the Romanticists, because his poetry is more exclusively devoted to the theme of nature than that of the others. In the second place, the unearthly splendors of the masterpieces of Coleridge in the realm of the supernatural have prevented many from seeing and appreciating the great amount of nature poetry written by him. Finally, a third reason for the failure to recognize Coleridge as a poet of nature arises from an inherent quality in his treatment of this theme. There is not the full and direct description of nature in Coleridge that there is in Wordsworth. It is to nature in her most delicate and minute aspects that Coleridge turns his attention. Because he does not give a solid, well-rounded portrayal of the form or object in the external world, some have failed to see him as a true nature poet. They have not caught the delicate and subtle charm which is the essence of his nature treatment, or, if they have, have tended to associate it with his supernatural verse. There is reason, of course, for thinking of the poetry of Coleridge in connection with the witchery and magic of his supernatural poems,

for it is here that his poetic genius reaches its highest and fullest expression, but among his work there are also some exquisite nature poems and many passages in other poems, including his supernatural creations, which reveal a keen interest in and knowledge of the forms and phases of external nature. To show how Coleridge has treated the theme of nature in his poetry is the aim of this study.

The study of Coleridge's poetry is a vast field, and this study is limited to the theme of nature. It is not intended to be a comprehensive study of Coleridge's poetry, but rather a study of the theme of nature in his poetry. The study is divided into two parts. The first part is a study of the theme of nature in Coleridge's poetry, and the second part is a study of the theme of nature in Coleridge's prose. The study is divided into two parts. The first part is a study of the theme of nature in Coleridge's poetry, and the second part is a study of the theme of nature in Coleridge's prose. The study is divided into two parts. The first part is a study of the theme of nature in Coleridge's poetry, and the second part is a study of the theme of nature in Coleridge's prose.

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CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTIVE TREATMENT OF EXTERNAL NATURE IN COLERIDGE

Every poet's treatment of nature, just as his treatment of humanity, the supernatural, or any other theme, is always governed by his creative temperament. We do not find in the treatment of nature by Keats, for instance, the spiritual quality which marks Shelley's treatment of the same theme. So in the poetry of Coleridge there is not the direct description of external nature that there is in the nature poetry of Scott or of Wordsworth. The reason for this lies in the fact that Coleridge is primarily interested in the effect that the scene from the outer world has upon his feelings, his inner soul. His reaction to the scene, rather than a description of it, finds emphasis in the nature poetry of Coleridge. It is in only a few of his poems that nature is treated in an objective way as a theme. There are, however, many passages, scattered here and there among his poetry, that describe nature directly and reveal the aspects of the external world that appealed to him. It is to these, in the main, that one must go to learn of the distinct manner which characterizes Coleridge's descriptive treatment of nature. What his manner of treatment was, and what his interests in the outer world of nature were, will be our first consideration in this study of the treatment of nature in the

poetry of Coleridge.

(1) Manner of Descriptive Treatment

The subtle psychology which underlies all of Coleridge's finest poetic expression is revealed in his descriptions of external nature. It is Coleridge who points out that "a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects and their positions as they appeared to the poet himself" is a defect in the poetry of Wordsworth.¹ He sees in such painting of imagery something unnecessary. Such close and full descriptions, he thinks,

too often occasion in the mind of the reader...a feeling of labor, not very dissimilar to that with which he would construct a diagram, line by line, for a long geometrical composition.²

So it is in exquisite hints and touches that Coleridge presents nature to us. There are evidences in his descriptions of a watchfulness for the rare and minute aspects of physical phenomena. Hence it is that he is able to call attention to many interesting features of the natural scene that would never be noted by one not gifted with the delicate sensibility and the keen and penetrating eye that are his. Such delicate images³ and sensations as the "stilly murmur of the distant sea", the

1. Biographia Literaria, XIV, p.101.

2. Ibid, p.102.

3. "The Eolian Harp" in The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Oxford University Press, London, 1931, p.100, l.11. (This will be the edition used hereafter in all references to the poems of Coleridge).

fragrance of the bean field¹ and furze,² the creaking of the rook's wing as it soars over head,³ the "little sun"⁴ peeping through the leaves and surrounded by "ten-thousand threads and hairs of light",⁵ the thin, pale cloud which as it nears the moon, is gradually colored until it is flooded with a "rich and amber light",⁶ the "fair electric flame"⁷ which is seen to flash from the marigold, the "tint of yellow green"⁸ seen in the sky at sunset, the trembling⁹ of the few damp yellow leaves in the breath of the waterfall, and the glint of the yellow moon light in the tear of his child's eye,¹⁰ will give some idea of the subtle manner that characterizes Coleridge's descriptive treatment of nature. Of his sensitive apprehension of the delicate and minute phases of natural scenery, Cazamain, in his account of Coleridge, says:

He reaps a richer harvest through the senses than Wordsworth. They invest his impressions of nature with an extraordinary freshness and splendor, and at the same time with a shrewd, minute precision which reveals the analytical mind. 11

The sensitiveness of Coleridge to color and light is a factor which influences his landscape painting to a considerable extent. The gloomy gray landscape such as Wordsworth portrays in his pictures of the solitary moor is scarcely touched by

1. The Eolian Harp, Poems, p.100, 11.9-11.
2. Fears in Solitude, p. 363, 1.204.
3. This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, p.181, 11.73-74.
4. The Three Graves, p.284, 1.507.
5. Ibid, 1.511.
6. Lewti, p.254, 11.15-21.
7. Lines at Shurton Bars, p.99, 11.92-93.
8. Dejection: An Ode, p.364, 1.229.
9. This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, p.179, 11.14-16.
10. The Nightingale, p.267, 11.104-05.
11. Legouis, Emile, and Cazamain, A History of English Literature, p.1044.

ferent method of treatment. Here the images are drawn from the outside world, but they are changed or colored by the imagination of the poet. In such treatment the transforming power of Coleridge's imagination empties objects of their substance, as it were, and leaves only the shadow, the glow, or the mist which remains. An example of this transforming power of Coleridge's imagination is found in Dejection: An Ode, where a stanza from the old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence serves as an introduction to the poem. Now in this introductory stanza--

Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,
 With the Old Moon in her arms;
 And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!
 We shall have a deadly storm-- 1

the "new moon with the old moon in her arms" is a real phenomenon; it can be observed with human eyes. Although it is rare, it belongs to the world of natural reality. In the course of the poem Coleridge refers to this same phenomenon, but his image has quite a different appearance from that in the quotation. The moon is transformed by Coleridge's imagination into a phantasm:

For lo! the new Moon winter bright!
 And overspread with phantom light,
 (With swimming phantom light o'erspread,
 But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
 I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
 The coming on of rain and squally blast. 2

Here there is no substance; we see only the outward properties. The emphasis is on the swimming light and the just barely visible

1. Poems, p.363.
2. Ibid, 11.9-14.

silver thread. These are the glories added to the scene by the "beauty-making power"¹ of the poet's imagination. Symons points to this aspect of Coleridge's descriptions of nature, when he says that there is

an aerial glitter in Coleridge which we find in no other poet, and in Turner only among painters. With him color is melted into atmosphere which it shines through like fire within a crystal. It is a mist of rain in bright sunshine; his images are for the most part derived from water, sky, and changes of weather, shadows of things rather than things themselves. 2

The "aerial glitter" here referred to is, of course, the added glory which the imagination imparts to objects of sense perception. Substances thus become phantasms which attract by their glitter, color, and delicacy. In Lewti the shadow of a star is seen on the water and attention is called to the thinness of the cloud vapor. In Christabel there is an almost identical cloud:

The thin grey cloud is spread on high
It covers but not hides the sky. 3

The sky is discernible through this cloud, but the cloud has enough substance or thickness to affect the appearance of the moon:

The moon is behind and at the full
And yet she looks both small and dull. 4

Many scenes from the Ancient Mariner are excellent examples of the phantasmal quality of Coleridge's natural description. In the description of the ice-berg covered sea in the following

1. Dejection: An Ode, p. 365, l.63.
2. The Romantic Movement in English Poetry, p.143.
3. Poems, p.216, ll.16-17.
4. Ibid, p.216, ll.18-19.

passage--

And now there came both mist and snow
 And it grew wondrous cold:
 And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
 As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
 Did send a dismal sheen--1

it is the mist, the cold, the color of the ice, and the "dismal sheen" which the poet emphasizes. In the picture of the moonlight as it shines through a mist in these lines--

Whiles all the night, through fog smoke white,
 Glimmered the white moon shine, 2

and in many similar descriptions this same tendency--the tendency to portray the enveloping mist, the shadow, the surface glitter of the object rather than the body and substance of the object itself--is marked. Thus nature as viewed through the eyes of Coleridge is filled with beauty and color of a most rare and delicate kind.

The unreal, unearthly aspect that is imparted to natural imagery by the imagination of Coleridge is largely a result of the dreamy tendency of his temperament. In him there was never a very sharp marking off of the real from the ideal, or of the waking hours from the sleeping hours, and either asleep or awake, he was always dreaming. It is in Kubla Khan that Coleridge has shown most fully the reality and vividness of his dreams. Not only the images, which he saw as "things", but the exact words with their harmony of sound, the wonderful melody, the very

1. Poems, p.188, ll.51-56.
2. Ibid, p.189, ll.77-78.

form, in fact, of this beautiful lyric were composed in sleep.¹

The natural imagery in this poem is transformed by the dreamy imaginative temperament of Coleridge into a supernatural landscape. The "stately pleasure dome" of Kubla Khan is to be built in Xanadu where

Alph, the sacred river, ran
 Through caverns measureless to man
 Down to a sunless sea.
 So twice five miles of fertile ground
 With walls and towers were girdled round:
 And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
 Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
 And here were forests ancient as the hills,
 Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. 2

Of the weird, supernatural aspect of the imagery pictured in these lines, the author leaves no doubt, when in the second stanza he describes it, or at least a part of it,--the "deep romantic chasm"--as

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
 As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
 By woman wailing for her demon lover! 3

This supernatural aspect of the scene is heightened by the stifled emotion of turmoil which nature exhibits. The pent-up emotion of the earth is pictured as being released in the "half-intermitted" burst of a mighty fountain which throws up huge rocks in the manner that the flail of the thresher sends up chaff. This fountain is the source of the sacred river which flows for five miles down to the "caverns measureless to man"⁴ where it sinks into a "sunless sea".⁵ The height of the supernatural is reached in the image of the shadow of the dome of

1. Poems, p.296.

2. Ibid, p.297, ll.3-11.

3. Ibid, ll.14-16.

4. Ibid, l.4.

5. Ibid, l.5.

pleasure which floats midway between the fountain and the caves where mingled sounds from each can be heard. It was indeed, as Coleridge says,

a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice! 1

The^{re} is a succession of images which at first give a sense of wonder, then one of horror, both of which feelings blend to give a sense of mystery to all at the end of the poem. Thus impressions drawn from nature are here fused by the imagination of Coleridge into a purely supernatural landscape.

(2) Phases of Nature that Appeal to Coleridge

The interests of the poet in the world of nature range from the smallest individual plant, animal, or bird to the broad elements of sky, earth, and the processes of nature. The flower, an animal, a landscape scene, the sea, or an atmospheric condition may make an appeal to the poet and thus become material for poetic treatment. A study of the nature poetry of Coleridge reveals his interest in (a) the landscape scene, (b) the broad elemental aspects of nature, and (c) animal, bird, and plant life. Let us look at these three phases of his interest as they find expression in his descriptions of nature.

(a) Features of the Landscape

Passage after passage in the poetry of Coleridge displays

1. Poems, p.298, ll.35-36.

the beauty of the English landscape no less faithfully than the poems of Wordsworth. Much has been written upon the close friendship of Coleridge and Wordsworth during the Nether Stowey period-- how they, in the high spirits of youth and hope, roamed over the beautiful Somerset hills, on the top of the Quantocks and among the sloping coombs. It is the charm of the Quantock district with its airy ridges, soft green dells, and wide view of sea that Coleridge paints for us. In his treatment of this scenery, there are two features of the landscape which particularly attract him-- tiny spots of beauty as they are seen close at hand, and the broad view of the hillside, valleys, and sea as they are beheld from the height of a hill top. Both of these features are treated in his Fears in Solitude.

The poem opens with a description of a dell, which he thinks "all would love" and in which the poet hides himself away from the noise of the world to muse and dream:

A green and silent spot amid the hills,
 A small and silent dell! O'er stiller place
 No singing sky-lark ever poised himself.
 The hills are heathy, save that swelling slope,
 Which hath a gay and gorgeous covering on,
 All golden with the never-bloomless furze,
 Which now blooms most profusely: but the dell,
 Bathed by the mist, is fresh and delicate
 As vernal cornfield, or the unripe flax,
 When, through its half-transparent stalks, at eve,
 The level sunshine glimmers with green light. 1

After he has reflected and dreamed on the dangers of war, the political questions of the day, and his love of England, he notes

1. Poems, p.256, ll.1-11.

the approach of evening--

But now the gentle dew-fall sends abroad
 The fruit-like perfume of the golden furze:
 The light has left the summit of the hill,
 Though still a sunny gleam lies beautiful,
 Aslant the ivied beacon, 1

and bids farewell to this "soft and silent spot" of beauty. Then he "winds his way homeward" along the sheep track up the heath-covered hill. He reaches the brow and is surprisingly startled by the prospect below, which he describes with glow and enthusiasm in these lines:

This burst of prospect, here the shadowy main,
 Dim-tinted, there the mighty majesty
 Of that huge amphitheatre of rich
 And elmy fields, seems like society--
 Conversing with the mind, and giving it
 A livelier impulse and a dance of thought! 2

In This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, in which these hills and dells of the Quantocks are truthfully and affectionately described, the two-fold beauty of the landscape is seen to appeal to the poet again. Here Coleridge laments the fact that he was not able to go for a walk with his friends, but even though he cannot follow them in body, he does travel with them in thought through the beautiful scenes which he loves. He beholds them first, in his mind's eye, wandering down from the "hill-top edge" to

that still roaring dell, of which I told;
 The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
 And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
 Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
 Flings arching like a bridge;--that branchless ash,

1. Poems, p.263, ll. 263-207.
2. Ibid, p.263, ll.215-20.

Unsun'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
 Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
 Fann'd by the water-fall! 1

Soon the friends, as he imagines them, are on the edge of the
 hill-top viewing

The many-steeped tract magnificent
 Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,
 With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up
 The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles
 Of purple shadow! 2

Of these quotations from Fears in Solitude and This Lime-
 Tree Bower My Prison, it may be said, in passing, that in the
 freshness and delicacy of the dell, bathed in mist, in the
 striking color of the sun shining through the flax stalks, in
 the close attention to detail by which he can search out the
 very spirit of a place, and in the sensitiveness to color seen
 in his image of the sea, one recognizes touches that mark this
 natural description as distinctly Coleridge's own.

Many are the testimonies of attachment to the Quantock
 region to be found in the poems of Coleridge. His Eolian Harp,
Dejection: An Ode, and The Nightingale are filled with beauti-
 ful passages of minute and subtle observations of the scenery
 about him. Even in two early poems, Lines Composed While Climb-
 ing Brockley Coomb and To a Young Friend-- poems which are not
 usually taken into consideration in an estimate of his genius--
 the joy that he felt in the features of the landscape, especially
 the wide prospect which the hill-top commanded, is shown. In

1. Poems, p.178, ll.9-18.

2. Ibid, p.179, ll.22-26.

the former poem the author records step by step the various objects that he sees as he climbs the steep hill, but the images are not lighted up by emotion nor are they bound into an imaginative whole until he reaches the brow and is deeply impressed by the wide landscape below. Then his verse does reflect the emotion he felt:

Ah! what a luxury of landscape meets
 My gaze! Proud towers, and Cots more dear to me,
 Elm-shadow'd Fields, and prospect-bounding Sea!
 Deep sighs my lonely heart: I drop the tear:
 Enchanting spot! O were my Sara here! 1

In the latter poem there is a similar description of the objects that meet the poet's view as he climbs a mountain, and an expression of his pleasure in the widening landscape as he nears the top:

A mount, not wearisome and bare and steep,
 But a green mountain variously up-piled,
 Where o'er the jutting rocks soft mosses creep,
 Or colored lichens with slow oozing weep;
 Where cypress and the darker yew start wild;
 And 'mid the summer torrent's gentle dash
 Dance brighten'd the red clusters of the ash;

.....
 Such a green mountain 'twere most sweet to climb,
 E'en while the bosom ach'd with loneliness--
 How more than sweet if some dear friend should bless
 The adventurous toil, and up the path sublime
 Now lead, now follow: the glad landscape round,
 Wide and more wide, increasing without bound! 2

Although of the two phases of the landscape which appealed to Coleridge--the dells and the broad prospect--the former does not find expression in these early descriptions, there is in them a clear expression of his love of a boundless landscape of hill and sea and sky.

1. Poems, p.94, ll.12-16.
2. Ibid, pp.155-156, ll.1-19.

Before leaving the subject of Coleridge's treatment of the landscape, mention should be made of his interest in night scenes. Frost at Midnight, A Night Piece, Christabel, The Nightingale, Love, and Lewti all have a night setting. In each instance the most delicate aspects of the night are observed. The treatment may consist of a rendering of an atmospheric condition such as the silent ministries of the frost, the balminess of a summer night, or the chill of late fall or early spring; a description of the landscape in which the thick growth of trees, small plants, and flowers or some rare aspect of nature such as the "one red leaf" is pictured; or a description of the sky with its moon, stars, and floating clouds. Lewti, for instance, the chief merit of which is derived from its delicate and subtle imagery of the night scene, shows the changing aspect of a thin cloud as it is affected by the moon. The cloud first changes its appearance as it nears the moon:

I saw a cloud of palest hue,
 Onward to the moon it passed;
 Still brighter and more bright it grew
 With floating colors not a few
 Till it reached the moon at last:
 Then the cloud was wholly bright,
 With a rich and amber light! 2

Then, as it moves away from the moon, its color fades:

Its hues are dim, its hues are grey--
 Away it passes from the moon. 3

The moon is an important feature in the majority of Coleridge's night pieces. Let us notice a few of them. The

1. Christabel, p.217, l.49.
2. Poems, p.254, ll.15-21.
3. Ibid, ll.31-32.

nightingales, in his poem The Nightingale, are pictured on "moonlight bushes",

"Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed".¹

A cold, dim moonlight falls over the wood, the bright lady, the sleeping dog, and the great old castle in the poem Christabel.

Again, the moonlight steals over the scene where the lover tells the old romantic story of the Knight and the Lady of the Land

to his guileless Genevieve.² Finally, although the scenes of

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner are drawn from both day time and night, there are in this poem many exquisite descriptions of moonlight scenes on the water. I have read somewhere a statement to the effect that the moon belongs to the soul of Coleridge, and I believe that one cannot read his descriptions of external nature without feeling something of the truth of this statement.

(b) Broad, Elemental Aspects of Nature

A few short poems and certain descriptive passages from the longer poems of Coleridge treat nature in its broad aspects of sea, sky, and atmosphere. The best illustration of such treatment is found in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, although the descriptions of nature in this poem do not constitute the element of chief interest but serve as a background for the human and supernatural elements. The descriptions are of wide range, covering practically every aspect of the elements of

1. Poems, p. 266, ll. 64-45.

2. Love, p. 332, l. 9.

nature that might be experienced on a sea voyage. There are descriptions of the heat of the tropics, of the mild weather of the temperate zone, and of the extreme cold of the polar region. How vividly and accurately he has pictured these three climatic conditions may be seen from the following quotations: the first, a scene from the tropics--

All in a hot and copper sky
 The bloody Sun at noon
 Right up above the mast did stand
 No bigger than the Moon; 1

the second, a picture of the temperate climate--

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew;
 The furrow followed free; 2

and the third, a view of the frigid polar weather--

And now there came both mist and snow,
 And it grew wondrous cold
 And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
 As green as emerald. 3

One might fill a page or more with verses from the poem which picture the sea in its various aspects as it is affected by the natural elements. There is the storm-blast which sweeps the ship over the sea, the ice-berg covered sea at the pole, the sea in fog and in mist, the fair breeze and the white foam of the sea as the ship, freed from the ice, begins its course northward, the silent sea in the scorching heat of the tropical calms, the fierce storm which breaks upon the sea causing the sails to "sigh like sedge", the gentle breezes of the temperate seas, and the white and silent harbor bay at home. Every one

1. Poems, p.190, ll.111-14.
2. Ibid, p. 190, ll.103-04.
3. Ibid, p. 188, ll.51-54.

of these pictures of the sea from this wide range of descriptions is not only true to nature but is made more^e impressive by the imaginative beauty in which it is expressed.

Another vivid picture is presented in this field of description in the treatment of the tropical squall seen in these two stanzas:

The coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
The rain poured down from one black cloud
The moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide. 1

Then, too, the quietness of the harbor is depicted in just as impressive a manner. The description in these lines is marked with the finest quality of truth and beauty of expression:

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn,
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock. 2

The skill with which Coleridge has set forth the broad spacious phases of nature in the Ancient Mariner is remarkable. Whole scenes are made to stand out clearly by the use of a few simple words. What general effect was ever presented more accurately than that of the coming of the tropical night, em-

1. Poems, p.199, ll.318-26.

2. Ibid,p. 204-05, ll.72-79.

bodied in these two lines:

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark; 1

or that of the moonlight flooding the bay and spreading in silence over the church and weathercock on the shore in the lines quoted on the preceding page? In a few carefully chosen words, Coleridge renders in scene after scene the sense of the vastness of all nature, the vastness which one feels when sailing upon the sea with the expanse of water under him, the winds blowing about him, and the great dome of the sky with its sun or moon and myriads of stars over him.

(c) Individual Objects

In addition to his interest in the landscape and in the broad aspects of nature, there is in Coleridge an interest in the individual objects of nature-- the flower, the animal, the bird, and the small creatures of the universe.

A study of the poetry of Coleridge reveals a general interest in flowers, their color, and fragrance, but nothing of the feeling of love for some particular flower such as there is in the nature poetry of Wordsworth. He has left no memorable poem which was inspired by a flower. There are two little poems entitled To a Primrose and The Rose, but as far as description of the flower or the poet's attitude toward it is concerned, both are disappointing. In the former the poet's attention is directed toward the flower because it is one of the first to peep

1. Poems, p.195, ll.199-200.

through the ground and thus is seen as a messenger of spring. We hear only of the paleness of its color and this paleness sets the poet to reflecting on sickness, hope, grief, and joy, on which note of meditation the poem ends. In the treatment of the rose in the second poem the emphasis falls on the little fairy, Love, which enfolded in the petals of the rose, is presented to the poet's sweetheart. The rose, however, is referred to as "the Garden's pride"¹.

Although the flower does not serve as a theme in the poetry of Coleridge, there is evidence in his poetry of his interest in flowers. Such interest is revealed in his pictures of the white-flowered jasmine,² the broad-leafed myrtle,² the fragrant bean flower,³ the purple heath blossoms,⁴ the never-bloomless furze,⁵ soft mosses,⁶ the dusky night-shade flowers,⁷ the dark green adder's tongue,⁸ king cups,⁹ and the scarlet flower of the churning plant.¹⁰ But the flower, in each case, is treated as a small or incidental part of a larger scene or view.

In his treatment of the individual objects of nature, Coleridge's interest in the life of the animal and the lower creatures of the universe is marked. His poetry reveals especially an interest in the close relationship of the life of the animal

1. Poems, p.45.
2. The Eolian Harp, p.100, l.4.
3. To an Unfortunate Woman at the Theatre, p.171, l.28.
4. This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, p.180, l.35.
5. Fears in Solitude, p.257, l.6.
6. The Foster Mother's Tale, p.183, l.24.
7. To a Young Friend, p.155, l.3.
7. To a Friend, p.159, ll.33-34.
8. Melancholy, p.74, l.6.
9. The Nightingale, p.265, l.54.
10. The Old Man of the Alps, p.250, ll.85-86.

and the life of man. Let us see the various ways in which such kinship is presented in his poetic treatment of this theme.

Coleridge's feeling of love and sympathy for the animal finds expression in his poem, To a Young Ass, written during the time he was dreaming of establishing an ideal society in America, his Pantisocratic scheme. Of this lowly animal that wonders if it has one friend, so miserably has it been treated, Coleridge says:

Innocent foal! thou poor despised forlorn!
I hail thee Brother--spite of fool's scorn;
And fain would take thee with me in the dell
Of peace and mild equality to dwell

How thou wouldst toss thy heels in gamesome play,
And frisk about as lamb or kitten gay.
Yea! and more musically sweet to me
Thy dissonant harsh bray of joy would be
Than warbled melodies that soothe to rest
The aching of pale Fashion's vacant breast. 1

Although the sentiment here expressed may seem a bit exaggerated, it indicates a strain of interest constant in Coleridge's poetry, namely his feeling of sympathy for the animal world.

In Christabel, the manner in which the animal is treated is the opposite of that which we have just seen; the attitude of the author is one of antipathy rather than of sympathy. The snake, the animal toward which such an attitude is adopted, is here used to symbolize the evil forces at work in human life. The snake is not directly described, but its appearance and nature are revealed in the form of an evil woman, Geraldine. The characteristics of the snake are seen in the dazzling surface

1. Poems, pp.75-76, ll.26-36.

glitter of Geraldine's person. She is pictured as a bright lady with such a sparkling beauty and dazzling charm as to be fascinating just as is the snake. Then, too, there is a false modesty and a seeming helplessness about her which bespeak the treacherous nature of the snake. She is able by such deception to weave herself into the affections of the innocent maiden, Christabel, and thus torment her soul with an unspeakable horror. The snake, then, as here presented in human form, symbolizes the deadly force of evil in life to which one may fall a prey because he cannot detect its ugliness which is hidden under its surface beauty and attractiveness.

In the second part of this poem a further use of the animal to symbolize an attribute of human life is presented in the vision of Bracy, in which he beholds a dove struggling in the coils of a bright green snake. His dream takes place just as Geraldine is working her spell on Christabel. The dove, then, would represent innocence and purity just as the snake represents evil. This scene from animal life is used to contribute to a clearer notion of a similar situation of human life.

The poet also shows his interest in animal psychology when, in this same poem, he pictures the old mastiff as being aware of the approaching evil before the human being is. As Christabel, ignorant of the true nature of her companion, passes across the yard to the castle with Geraldine, the old dog, Coleridge says,

did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make. 1

1. Poems, p.222, ll.147-48.

In the Ancient Mariner the animal is pictured as being an integral part of the great scheme of nature to which man belongs. Its life is important and sacred, for the eternal spirit of love is felt by Coleridge to bind all creation--man, bird, and beast--into one vast harmonious fellowship. So close is this relationship that man's attitude toward the life of all created things is indicative of his true worth, his character. This theme is presented in the form of a story in which the experiences of an old mariner on a sea voyage are the result of his attitude toward two forms of animal life-- an albatross and the water snakes of the great calm.

Near the first of the story the albatross comes through the fog to the Mariner's ice-bound ship and proves to be a bird of good omen, for the ice, soon after its arrival, breaks apart, and a "good south wind" carries the ship northward on its voyage. All goes well until the Mariner impulsively shoots the bird. Now to Coleridge the bird, as a part of God's creation, is sacred; it is a symbol of all life, and its wanton killing is viewed as a crime against life. The whole spiritual world of nature is pictured as being angry with this man who has no sympathy for the animal world, who kills without thought or reason. The Spirit of the South Pole (the guardian spirit of the albatross) and its fellow-daemons (invisible inhabitants of the elements, of which Coleridge says in his prose commentary, "there is no climate without one or more"¹) make the Mariner suffer from intense heat and thirst for his lack of

1. Poems, p.191.

appreciation of the beauty and worth of the animal world. It is through their workings that the death of the bird is avenged and that the Mariner is made to see the horror of his crime.

The Mariner's unsympathetic attitude toward the forms of nature is further revealed when, in his suffering, he sees the water snakes as loathsome and slimy. He turns away from the rotting sea, alive with its ugly creatures and tries to pray, only to find his heart "as dry as dust". Soon after this, he is attracted by the moon and notes the beauty of the light upon the water. From the awakening of his heart to this beauty, he sees the bright and flashing colors of the water snakes, the elfish light that "fell off in hoary flakes" as they reared in the moonlight. In the shadow made by the ship he sees their rich colors, "blue, glossy green, and velvet black", and notices the "flash of golden fire" made by their movements in the water. Thus it is that the creatures which were loathsome before are now seen as beautiful. They are seen to be as happy in their life as man is in his:

O happy living things! no tongue
 Their beauty might declare:
 A spring of love gushed from my heart,
 And I blessed them unaware;
 Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
 And I blessed them unaware. 1

The spontaneous response of the Mariner's soul to beauty awakens in his heart a feeling of love for all created things, and he comes to realize that

He prayeth best, who loveth best
 All things both great and small;

1. Poems, p.198, 11282-87.

For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. 1

Thus the treatment of the lower animals as presented in the Ancient Mariner shows the importance of all life and the close relationship that Coleridge felt to exist between man and animal.

Such kinship between man and animal is revealed in another way in a little poem, The Raven, in which the bird is given experiences, feelings, and thoughts similar to those of man. The story is told from the point of view of the raven, and it shows the sadness and despair that the animal world is made to suffer at the hands of thoughtless or unfeeling man. An explanation of the story will serve to show how Coleridge has, in this poem, humanized the raven.

The raven buries an acorn on the bank of a great river. After many years he returns with his mate and finds that the acorn has grown into a fine tall oak tree. Then the building of a nest in the top of the oak and the hatching of a brood of young birds follow. The happiness of the parent birds in their home in the tree-top is pictured. But the happiness does not last long, for the felling of the tree by the Woodman destroys the nest and kills the young birds. The mother bird dies of a broken heart. His great loss causes the raven to feel very bitter toward man who has been responsible for it. Later, he hovers over the ship that has been made from the oak, rejoicing in the fierce storm that seems to be about to shake the

Coleridge, p.171, ll.43-44.

1. Poems, p.209, ll.614-17.

vessel to pieces. At last, when the ship sinks and the men perish, the raven exults in the thought that his loss has been revenged. In the closing lines of the poem the bird speaks to Death, who is returning from the scene of destruction, to thank him for

this treat: 1

They had taken his all, and Revenge it was sweet!

In the treatment of natural objects, then, as here presented by Coleridge, the animal is made to share the experiences, feelings, thoughts, and actions of man.

... of upon his own wall. The ... of the ...
 ... which thus expresses the ...
 ... in the external object of ...
 ... of nature by ...
 ... of the feeling that ...
 ... direct image of the object.

(1) Interest of Coleridge in his own feelings

Coleridge is the most sensitive of all the humanists. He is interested in his own feelings and enjoys his own emotional states. He even thinks that he should feel in certain situations and endeavours to feel as he should. He is always getting his mind to know about itself, and it is of the opinion that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep
Poems, p.171, ll.43-44.

CHAPTER III

THE LYRICAL TREATMENT OF NATURE

Coleridge's chief concern in his treatment of nature, as has already been suggested in the preceding chapter, is not simply in a full and direct portrayal of the object or scene from the external world, but rather in the effect of that object or scene upon his own soul. The consideration of the nature poems which thus emphasize the subjective response of the poet to the external object of scene brings us to the lyrical treatment of nature by Coleridge, by which is meant the expression of the feeling that the object arouses in him, rather than a direct image of the object itself.

(1) Interest of Coleridge in his Own Emotions

Coleridge is the most subjective of all the Romanticists. He is interested in his own feelings and enjoys his own emotional states. He even thinks about how he should feel in certain situations and endeavors to feel as he should. He is always setting his mind to think about itself, and is of the opinion that "deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep

feeling, and that all truth is a species of revelation"¹. So it is that Coleridge takes the reader into his own inner dream world where he reveals the workings of his own soul. What, then, are the general characteristics of his creative spirit which are so revealed?

First, as the temperament of Coleridge is romantic, it is of his emotional disposition that we learn. So much, in fact, do his feelings mean to him that he pampers himself to develop his emotions, he tells us, in his Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement. In thinking about the luxurious sensations afforded him when living in the cottage at Clevedon, he wonders if it was right

That I should dream away the entrusted hours
On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart
With feelings all too delicate for use. 2

Again, it is a sense of the happiness of the poet, rather than a portrait of Sara or a description of the scene, that we catch as he sits by his wife in this same jasmine-covered cottage, while they watch the darkening clouds and the evening star as it shines forth:

How exquisite the scents
Snatched from yon beanfield! and the world so hushed!
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of silence. 3

Throughout all his poetry it is the emotional response, the effect of the outer stimulus upon his soul, in which Coleridge is interested. Loss of his power to feel the beauty of the

1. Symons, Arthur, The Romantic Movement in English Poetry, p.128.
2. Poems, p.107, ll.46-48.
3. The Eolian Harp, Ibid, p.100, ll.9-12.

world means the loss of his creative imagination.¹

Next, we learn that the emotional response of Coleridge is frequently of a quiet, dreamy character. We see how the poet loves to place himself in some environment of beauty, submit his mind to the suggestions of the time and place, and fall, as it were of free will, into a reverie in which his thoughts and images meander stream-like at their own pleasure. There are many direct references to his dreamy disposition in his poems. The music of the Eolian harp puts him in the same mood, he says, as when out dreaming on the hill-side at noon:

Whilst through my half closed eye-lids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquility;
Full many a thought, uncalled and undetain'd,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain. 2

In Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement, the poet refers to his mind as one that "waking loves to dream", and the small and silent dell is pictured as the ideal place in which to steal away from the noisy world, and

"In a half sleep dream of better worlds". 3

Finally, we learn that the sequences of thought and feeling are not always of this meditative, dreamy type, but that they are often of a spasmodic passionate kind. Such is the case in The Nightingale, where a tumultuous, easily-excited nature is seen, and in This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, where the poet describes the sudden joy he feels when he notes the beauty of

1. Cf. Dejection: An Ode, p.366, ll.82-86.
2. Poems, pp.101, ll.36-41.
3. Fears in Solitude, Ibid, p.257, l. 26.

the rich colors and the play of light in the nook in which he is sitting. In the latter poem his feelings change quickly from a pensive, dreamy state to one of happiness. He has been sad because of his being prevented from going on a walk with his friends, but now, as he notes the beauty of the little leafy bower in which he is sitting, he says:

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! 1

In these illustrations Coleridge is seen to be interested in his own feelings, and in the explanation of his own emotional response to scenes and incidents from the outer world. In other poems, where he does not refer directly to his feelings, his interest in the workings of his inner soul is still seen. Here he reveals his emotional nature indirectly by making his characters reflect his temperament. Both Genevieve and the Mariner share the emotional nature of their creator. So it is with the other characters that Coleridge has drawn. He has left no really human characters such as are found in Wordsworth. The reason for this is, of course, that Coleridge is an introspective rather than a descriptive artist. He lives with his own thoughts and fancies in dell or on upland. It is of these, whether the theme be of nature or of man, that the poet loves to tell.

1. Poems, p.180, ll.43-45.

(2) Coleridge's Philosophy of Nature

It is not the aim here to give a complete analysis of Coleridge's philosophy of nature but only to show the chief characteristics of his views of nature as they are reflected in his poetry. The two phases of his philosophy which we shall consider are (a) the mystical interpretation of nature, and (2) the relationship of nature to man.

(a) Mystical Interpretation of Nature

We have seen with what skill Coleridge could portray the delicate and minute phases of natural phenomena. Although these various phenomena do not lose their full value as sensation in his descriptive treatment, yet there is in Coleridge a tendency to pass beyond the sense impressions of nature to its indwelling spirit, to construct out of the data furnished by the senses a meaning intelligible to the spirit. His imagination, never stirred greatly by the outward, material aspect of things, was ever penetrating behind and beyond mere outward appearances to the hidden presence which informs all nature. In an early poem, The Destiny of Nations, Coleridge clearly refers to this tendency when, in explaining what freedom of man is, he says:

But chiefly this, him First, him Last to view
 Through meaner powers and secondary things
 Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze.
 For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
 For infant minds; and we in this low world
 Placed with our backs to bright Reality,
 That we may learn with young unwounded ken

The substance from its shadow. Infinite Love,
Whose latence is the plenitude of All,
Thou with retracted beams, and self-eclipse
Veiling, revealest thine eternal Sun. 1

An instance of his looking beyond the forms of sense impression to their spiritual reality is seen in a passage from This Lime Tree-Bower My Prison, where he recalls how he has stood in the presence of a beautiful scene "silent with swimming sense" and

gazing round

On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence. 2

Coleridge's belief that an inner spirit, veiled by the external, material aspect of things, pervades all nature and gives life to it bears some relation to that of Shelley's, but there is this difference: whereas in Shelley the spirit of nature is self-existent, in Coleridge it is conceived of as being divine, as coming from God. "Glory to Thee", he cries,

Father of Earth and Heaven!
All-conscious Presence of the Universe!
Nature's vast ever-acting Energy!
In will, in deed, Impulse of All to All! 3

(b) The Relationship of Nature to Man

To Coleridge, as we have seen, nature is ever alive in God, but his idea of the life of nature as it is related to man is not always the same. His two views in regard to this relationship follow.

1. Poems, p.132, ll.15-26.
2. Ibid, p.180, ll.39-43.
3. The Destiny of Nations, Ibid, p.146, ll.459-62.

(1') The First View: The Spirit of Nature as Separate from
That of Man

Coleridge, during a part of his life, adopts a view of nature very much in keeping with Wordsworth's philosophy, namely that nature is alive and has a separate spirit of her own which can communicate with the soul of man. Through such communication, nature can influence the life of man in many ways. First, nature is a power which can influence the moral life of man. This belief is expressed in a little poem called The Dungeon.

The idea of this poem is that a man who has committed a crime can best be led to see his error through the influences of love and beauty. Hence the prison is seen as a poor place for the offender, a place where his soul will become hopelessly deformed. He is sick in spirit and can be healed only through sweet and kindly influences. Nature, which sheds such influences on man, is believed to be wiser than the human being in her treatment of the one who has gone astray. The poet points out nature's method of treatment in these lines:

With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distemper'd child:
Thy pourest on him thy soft influences.
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and dissonant thing,
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit heal'd and harmoniz'd
By the benignant touch of Love and Beauty. 1

Thus nature, with its soft, gentle, healing powers, can lead man to see his folly; it is a power which can uplift the morals of man.

Again, nature may awaken a response in the heart by way of the thoughts that arise in the mind when one is in her presence. Such is the experience which the poet relates in his Fears in Solitude, where he beholds in nature the image of a perfect human society, which converses with his mind and gives it

"A livelier impulse and a dance of thought!"¹

His musing in the quietness of nature has also softened his heart. He has received from her tenderer and kinder feelings, and is "grateful", as he says,

that by nature's quietness
And solitary musings, all my heart
Is softened and made worthy to indulge²
Love and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.

Next that nature has the power to calm and soothe the troubled spirit or disturbed feelings of man finds expression in many of Coleridge's poems. In This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, the poet marks much that "soothes" him in the little nook which he has thought of as his prison, and comes to realize that

Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty.³

1. Poems, p.263, l.220.
2. Ibid, p.263, ll.229-32.
3. Ibid, p.181, ll.60-65.

In The Nightingale Coleridge tells how his child, who has awakened in a fretful mood, is calmed when he sees the moon. He "hushed at once",

"Suspend¹s his sobs and laughs most silently".

And of the small and silent dell, pictured in his Fears in Solitude, the poet says,

"Oh! 'tis a quiet spirit-healing nook"².

Finally, Coleridge believes in the educative influence of nature. He believes that the child may be educated and molded spiritually by association with the beautiful and noble forms of nature. This thought finds expression in the passage from Frost at Midnight which pertains to his plans for his own child:

But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.³

The education here is a spiritual one. The child learns of God through the "lovely shapes and sounds" of nature. Nature thus is felt to have a religious value.

It is not the child alone that nature may educate. She has a valuable lesson for the poet who will surrender himself to her influences. His fame, in this way, Coleridge says, may come to share in nature's immortality. His work will make na-

1. Poems, p.267, ll.102-03.
2. Ibid, p.257, ll.12.
3. Ibid, p.242, ll.54-64.

ture lovelier and "itself be loved like nature"¹.

Nature, then, as treated thus far in Coleridge's poetry, is thought of as having a distinct spirit of its own which can communicate with the soul of man. By such communication man's life is ennobled and enriched. This is Coleridge's first idea.

(2') Later View: Nature as the Reflection of Man's Soul

Coleridge's belief in the power of external nature to heal, guide, and inspire, represented in such poems as The Nightingale, Frost at Midnight, This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison, and Fears in Solitude was entertained during the period of his close association with Wordsworth at Nether Stowey. But even at this time Coleridge cares much less for objects as objects than Wordsworth. When in the presence of natural beauty he is always turning his thoughts in upon himself. So it is not surprising to find that Coleridge's idea of nature as it is related to man changes shortly after the Nether Stowey period.

From the thought that nature has a separate soul of its own Coleridge now changes to the idea that we (mankind) build up the world of external nature from ourselves. That which we call nature lives only in us; it is we who make it and it can only be called alive because we are alive. And when we receive impressions from it we receive not something distinct from us but our own thoughts. This idea finds expression in a poem of 1799, Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz

1. The Nightingale, p. 265, ll.24-34.

"We in ourselves rejoice"¹.

(3') Final View

The belief expressed in his Dejection: An Ode is usually thought to characterize Coleridge's nature creed throughout the succeeding years of his life. There is evidence in his later poetry, however, that this is not entirely true. In the few poems he wrote, when upon occasion he recaptured the old power of song, he does not always seem so sure that nature can give to the soul of man only what it receives from it, that it is the reflex of man's soul. In a little poem, To Nature, written in 1815, he seems to feel that nature has much to give to those who love her. Here he speaks of his own "deep, heartfelt, inward joy"² in all created things, and tells of the "lessons of love and earnest piety" he finds in the leaves and flowers about him.³ This attitude will be seen to be very much the same as that of his earlier days, namely that nature has a soul apart which can influence the life of man.

Then too, many of the passages from the notes of Coleridge published in the Anima Poetae set forth in a most definite and clear way his view of nature at this later period of his life. This one, which may be taken as representative of his expressions concerning nature, shows that he has not lost faith in the power of nature to heal and soothe the spirit of man. "She", he says,

1. Poems, p.366, l.72.
2. Ibid, p.429, ll.2-3.
3. Ibid, p.429, ll.4-5.

is the preserver, the treasurer of our joys. Even in sickness and nervous diseases, she has peopled our imagination with lovely forms which have sometimes overpowered the inward pain and brought with them their old sensations. And even when all men have seemed to desert us and the friend of our heart has passed on, with one glance from his "cold disliking eye"--yet even then the blue heaven spreads it out and bends over us, and the little tree still shelters us under its plumage as a second cope, a domestic firmament, and the low creeping gale will sigh in the heath-plant and soothe us by sound of sympathy till the lulled grief lose itself in fixed gaze on the purple heath-blossom, till the present beauty becomes a vision of memory. 1

Although, then, at the time Coleridge wrote the Dejection: An Ode, he felt that external nature had lost its beauty because of the decay of his creative soul, the "beauty-making power" of the earth, yet there were times in his later life when he was delighted by the beauties not bestowed by his imagination but existing in nature apart, times when his spirit was calmed and healed by the influences of external nature.

(3) Personal Response of Coleridge to Nature

That Coleridge was little interested in the objective treatment of nature as a theme has been shown. He was so deeply absorbed in his own thoughts and feelings that his mind did not dwell upon the external object for long at a time. His chief interest was in showing the effect of that object upon his own soul. Consequently it is in the form of the lyric that his treatment of nature finds an expression most characteristic of his creative genius, for this type of poetry is marked by an interweaving of the subjective with the objective. In it there is the portrayal of images drawn from

1. Anima Poetae, Coleridge, E.H., p.246.
 2. Poems, p.365, l.63.

sense perception of external objects plus the expression of the deep emotional response of the poet to those objects. The response tells of the poet's own personal reaction to some phase or form of nature. It may be that the stimulus from the outer world arouses a certain feeling in the poet or it may set him to thinking.¹ Examples of both types of response are found in Coleridge's nature lyrics. Let us now turn to a study of those lyrics in order to see the character of his personal responses to external nature as there treated.

(a) Response of the Feelings

In Coleridge there is always a deep sense of joy in everything beautiful. Frequently it is a sight or sound from nature that awakens this feeling in him. In his poem The Nightingale he tells of the joy that fills his soul upon hearing the song of this "most musical, most melancholy" bird. But, so happy is the poet, that he refutes the conventional melancholy associated with the nightingale in literature and thinks that

"In nature there is nothing melancholy".²

His high-pitched excitement and thrilling joy are reflected in his description of the song:

'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As that he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul

1. See "Nature as a Lyrical Stimulus" in The Vital Interpretations of English Literature by Harrison, John S., p.58.
2. Poems, p.264, l.15.

1

Of all its music.

The bird itself, pictured as sitting "giddily" on a twig which is swaying in the breeze and tuning its song to the motion, is

2

"Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head".

Next, the poet's excessive joy is reflected in his description of nature. All nature, like himself, is seen to be enjoying the beautiful song. The moon emerging from behind a cloud, "hath awakened earth and sky with one sensation", and the flooding of the scene with moonlight causes the nightingales to burst forth in "choral minstrelsy". Finally, the poet thinks of how greatly pleased his young child would be could he hear the song. In his keen and passionate delight, he portrays both nature and the child as experiencing sensations similar to his own. Thus the stimulus from nature--the song of the bird-- so stirs the feelings that they in turn give a heightened emotional quality to the description of the external world of nature. The objective scene and the subjective response are unified by the emotional atmosphere of joy.

But much of the time the mood in which Coleridge saw nature was one of saddened feeling--"a wan and heartless mood". In the poetry which reveals this feeling "the landscape", Cazamain says, "is interwoven with the feelings in accordance with an irresistible association, the wholly subjective quality of which he [Coleridge] perceives". Although it has a broader sig-

1. Poems, p.265, ll.43-49.

2. Ibid, p.266, l.86.

3. Ibid, ll.78-79.

4. Ibid, l.80.

5. Dejection: An Ode, Ibid, p.364, l.25.

6. Legouis and Cazamain, Op.Cit., p.1044.

nificance than just the lyrical treatment of nature, the Dejection: An Ode is the best example of such treatment. The poem is a self-analysis of the poet's creative genius and an explanation of the loss of his "shaping spirit of imagination", yet it shows Coleridge's state of feeling as it is related to external nature at the time of his writing. Here he paints a night scene under the spell of his dejection, and every image is colored by the feelings of his inner soul. He can see the delicate and beautiful aspects of nature which have formerly stirred his feelings such as the crescent moon, the clouds that "give away their motions to the stars", the blue sky, and the sunset bars, but it is with a "blank eye", for he cannot feel their beauty. His dejection arises from the fact that these beautiful forms of nature do not stir and thrill him as they were wont to do in the past. Thus he expresses his lament:

I see them all so excellently fair 4
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

A third feeling aroused in Coleridge by a stimulus from nature is love of liberty. He treats this theme in his France: An Ode, in which he recants his faith in the French Revolution. The poem is divided into sections each of which represents a phase of Coleridge's changing attitude toward the Revolution. The prose argument gives a statement of the thought of each division. The argument for the first stanza reads:

1. Poems, p.366, l.86.
2. Ibid, p.364, l.32.
3. Ibid, l.30
4. Ibid, ll.37-38.

An invocation to those objects in nature the contemplation of which had inspired the Poet with a devotional love of liberty. 1

The poem then opens with a call on the clouds, the sun, the sky--all that in nature is most free--to bear witness

With what deep worship I have still adored
The spirit of divinest Liberty. 2

Stanzas two, three, and four, show Coleridge's different feelings toward the Revolution. First, with his love of liberty already awakened by nature, it was with great enthusiasm that the poet at the outset hailed the principles of the French Revolution, but as the war for human liberty becomes a war of conquest, his revolutionary ardor dies away. Finally, when Switzerland is invaded by France, the supposed liberator of humanity, Coleridge completely loses his faith in France. Such disillusionment, however, has not caused his love of liberty to decrease. The last stanza is a noble address to liberty, in which it is pictured as "the guide of homeless winds and playmate of the waves"³. In his search for liberty, he now turns, he says, to the elements of nature where he first felt her spirit:

And there I felt thee!--on that sea-cliff's verge,
Whose pines, scarce travelled by the breeze above,
Had made one murmur with the distant surge!
Yes, while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
And shot my being through earth, sea, and air,
Possessing all things with divinest love,
O Liberty! my spirit felt thee there. 4

Thus God's beautiful mountains and forests and streams awaken the love of liberty in the soul of the poet.

1. Poems, p.244.
2. Ibid, p.244, ll.20-24.
3. Ibid, p.247, l.98.
4. Ibid, p.247, 99-105.

Nature which begins by inspiring Coleridge's love of liberty, later becomes a stimulus to patriotism. It is not a love of nature in general, but a love of English nature that he gives voice to in his poem Fears in Solitude. He is led to his thoughts of England through his fear for her safety in a time of national struggle and alarm. Sitting alone in one of the quiet, beautiful dells of the Quantocks, he thinks of how much these quiet dales, hills, lakes, rocks, and seas of England mean to him. Such thoughts awaken the most deep and tender feelings of love for his native land in his heart. This patriotic sentiment is expressed in these beautiful lines:

O native Britain! O my Mother Isle!
 How shouldst thou prove aught else but dear and holy
 To me, who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,
 Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,
 Have drunk in all my intellectual life,
 All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,
 All adoration of the God in nature,
 All lovely and all honourable things,
 Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel
 The joy and greatness of its future being?
 There lives nor form nor feeling in my soul
 Unborrowed from my country! 1

In the close of this passionate outburst of patriotic feeling his "Mother Isle" is seen as sacred--it is his magnificent temple in which he has sung the praises of God.

Running throughout his nature poems there are many evidences that much of Coleridge's delight in nature was derived from the "religious meanings" that he found in the world of external objects. This feeling of religious worship finds

1. Poems, p.262, ll.182-93.
2. Fears in Solitude, Ibid, p.257, l.24.

its fullest expression in his beautiful lyric, Hymn Before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni, in which the beauty and grandeur of Mount Blanc arouse in Coleridge a sense of the power and glory of God. As the poet gazes upon the dread and awful form, he is so deeply impressed that he forgets the mountain itself and in a trance-like state worships the "Invisible alone"¹. But he feels that he must do more than worship in this silent, passive way. He must sing the praise of God. Then he calls upon the mount and all the life about it--the wild torrents, the ice-plains, the pine-groves, the lovely blue flowers, the snows, and the lightnings--to join in his Hymn, so that they all may "utter forth God, and fill the hills with praise"². The climax of feeling is reached in the image of the mountain "rising like a cloud of incense from the earth" to tell the silent sky, the stars, and the rising sun that

"Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God"³.

(b) Response of Thought

A state of thought, which often characterizes Coleridge's response to nature, may be reached through the feelings which are first stimulated. Such is the case in his France: An Ode, discussed above, in which Coleridge's disappointment in the failure of the French Revolution to bring liberty to mankind and his own experience of finding liberty in the elements of

1. Poems, p.377, l.16.

2. Ibid, p.380, l.69.

3. Ibid, p.380, l.85.

nature, lead him to believe that liberty can be found by the individual in nature alone and not in human society.

In his poem The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree Coleridge's thoughts of his own life are awakened by a phenomenon from nature. Although the stimulus which gives rise to his thought is not mentioned in the poem, in an introductory note he tells of a statement that he has read about a date-tree which "year after year put forth a full show of blossoms, but never produced fruit, till a branch from another date tree had been conveyed from a distance of some hundred leagues"¹. This statement leads Coleridge to think of the incompleteness of his own life. He has enjoyed many gifts--imagination, honorable aims, communication with the great minds of the past through his reading, a childish delight in little things, the love of nature in all her forms--but all these cannot fill his heart with gladness, for he has no one to share them with. He needs love and companionship to make his life complete. Why, he cries,

"was I made for Love and Love denied to me?"²

In his treatment, then, he thinks of his own life experience as being parallel to a phenomenon of nature.

But the thoughts called up in the mind by the outward stimulus may be of the contrast of his life with some phase or form of nature. This manner of response is illustrated in Work Without Hope, in which the various activities and busy life of the

1. Poems, p.395.

2. Ibid, p.397, l.78.

little creatures of nature in early spring cause the poet to think of the idleness of his own life. "All Nature", he says, "seems at work"--

Slugs leave their lair--
The bees are stirring--birds are on the wing--
And Winter slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring! 1

Then this scene from nature brings this sad thought to Coleridge's mind:

And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing. 2

Again, the response of the mind to the stimulus from nature may be one of moralizing. Of such nature are the thoughts that rise in Coleridge's mind when he sees a little flower that has peeped through the ground in the "dark, frieze-coated, hoarse, teeth-chattering"³ month of February in his poem On Observing a Blossom on the First of February. The plight of the flower which has been flattered by a soft gentle breeze into coming forth when the cold wind may come and destroy it at any moment is seen as a symbol of human life. It is much like the fate of the girl who in the bloom of life falls a victim to consumption, or of Chatterton, "the wondrous boy", who is compared to an amaranth which "earth scarce seemed to own" till disappointment and wrong "beat it to earth"⁴, or of the hope of Poland, "killed in the opening bud"⁵. Human life, he thinks, is subjected to the same uncertainty, to the same danger of untimely blight or death as that

1. Poems, p.447, ll.1-4.

2. Ibid, ll.5-6.

3. Ibid, p.148, l.3

4. Ibid, p.149, ll.13-15.

5. Ibid, ll.16-17.

of the flower which he has observed.

Finally, Coleridge's response to nature as he sits in some quiet or secluded spot where the beauties and "goings-on" of external nature are keenly felt, frequently takes the form of meditation. The poems which reveal such a response are marked by certain characteristics that tend to set them apart in the field of nature lyrics. They are composed in a dreamy, half-awake state of feeling in which there is a gentle interweaving of the natural scene and the human thought. Nature is painted in a pensive mood, for the mood of nature harmonizes with that of the poet. The spirit of solitude is of the essence of such poems. Frost at Midnight, the finest poem of this group, will best illustrate Coleridge's meditative response to external nature.

This poem is marked by a most delicate blending of the external world and the world of the poet's thought. Coleridge, alone at midnight sitting by the cradle of his sleeping child, is left, he tells us, to "that solitude, which suits abstruse musings"¹. He then calls attention to the hush of all nature:

'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
 And vexes meditation with its strange
 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
 This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
 With all the numberless goings-on of life,
 Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
 Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
 Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
 Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.²

From this solitude and stillness of the external night scene, Coleridge passes to thoughts of himself. The motion of the

1. Poems, p.240, ll.5-6.

2. Ibid, ll.8-16.

fluttering film of soot, he thinks, bears some relation to him "who lives". The "sole unquiet thing" in the outer scene becomes a "companionable form"¹ to him. In this way the transition from the outer to the inner world is made. From thoughts of the present his mind wanders back over his past life, when a lonely, homesick boy at school, he had dreamed of his birth-place and hoped, as he gazed upon the "fluttering stranger"² on the grate for the arrival of some member of his family. Now after deploring his own education "'mid cloisters dim"³, Coleridge thinks that his child, sleeping so quietly in its cradle by him, shall be spared a like experience. He hopes that he may have an upbringing with nature. Thus the poet returns to the contemplation of nature with which he began. The poem ends with a general view of the whole year in miniature presented by the selection of a striking picture representative of each season. It is one of the most beautiful descriptions of nature found in all the poetry of Coleridge. Every part of the year, he thinks, will be dear to his child,

Whether the summer clothe the general earth
 With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
 Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
 Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,
 Or if the secret ministry of frost
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
 Quietly shining to the quiet Moon. 4

The quiet meditative mood of the poet harmonizes perfectly with

1. Poems, p.240, l.19.
2. Ibid, p.241, l.26.
3. Ibid, p.242, l.52.
4. Ibid, p.242, ll.66-74.

the hush and stillness of the external scene; as he watches all the secret ministry of the frost painting its pictures in the outer world, he paints in dreamy reverie the scenes of his inner life.

... the nature is neither the living, breathing creature, nor the cold, dead, and motionless object, but a mixture of the two, and is to be treated as a background. In such a situation, the artist's nature is not the primary element of the picture, it is secondary to the scene which, as a whole, is to be interpreted from the point of view of the artist. The artist's nature is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture. The artist's nature is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture. The artist's nature is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture.

... The natural background is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture. The artist's nature is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture. The artist's nature is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture. The artist's nature is to be treated as a background, and the scene as the primary element of the picture.

1. Harrison, *Art and the Artist*, p. 100.

CHAPTER IV

THE TREATMENT OF NATURE AS A BACKGROUND

When nature is neither the theme, directly described in and for herself, nor a subject for lyrical response, it may still be treated as a background. In such instances, the treatment of nature is not the primary concern of the poet; it is subordinate to the human element. Nevertheless, it has an important function in the total effect of the poem. It may help in the portrayal of character, or it may contribute to a clearer conception of the incidents in a story. We now turn to a consideration of these uses of the natural background as they are treated in the poetry of Coleridge.

(1) The Natural Background as Related to Character

"The natural background against which a character at one moment of his career may be placed, may be emotionally colored or charged with feeling radiating from the human center in the picture"¹. The scene from nature, then, as viewed through the eyes of the human figure serves as a means of conveying the mood, thoughts, or feelings of the character. An instance of

1. Harrison, John S., Op. Cit., p.65.

this use of nature as a background is found in Coleridge's Lewti.

In this poem the background is a night scene and the human character is a lover who comes out into the night in an effort to forget the girl he loves as she has been unkind to him. In every form and feature of the night scene which he beholds, he sees a likeness to Lewti or to his love for her. Thus the rock as it shines in the moonlight through the leafy branches of the yew tree reminds him of the forehead and dark hair of Lewti. He brushes away this image as the thought that "Lewti is not kind" returns. The next set of images reflects the lover's sadness. First he beholds a thin pale cloud which as it nears the moon becomes brighter and brighter until it is of a rich amber color. So the joy he feels in Lewti's presence, he thinks, can give color and life to his pale face. Then the passing of the cloud from the moon finds a similar parallel in his own experience. The cloud goes mournfully; all joy flees from its breast; it becomes as white as his face will be when he is dying for the love of Lewti. Finally, with this image of death in his mind, he thinks of a little delicate cloud vapor, which he now sees, as being the shroud of some fair lady who has died of a broken heart. A change from this sad pensive mood is revealed in the last scene from nature. The beauty and graceful movements of two swans, as they are seen gliding smoothly along the water, greatly delight the lover. In their happiness he sees a symbol of his own feelings could he only behold Lewti as she

now lies sleeping. His mind is now somewhat soothed; there is a feeling that all may yet be well; tomorrow Lewti "may be kind"¹. Thus the various scenes from nature reflect the changing moods and thoughts of the human figure in the picture.

In his treatment of nature as a background for character, Coleridge in one poem, The Old Man of the Alps, closely approaches a manner of treatment common in Wordsworth. I refer to the treatment of the human character as blended with the landscape. In Coleridge's poem an old man of the mountains tells the sad story of the life of his daughter. First, he pictures her as a young girl when she roams over the mountains, happy and care free, seeking out the groves and nooks of beauty or searching for some wild flower growing in the clefts of the rocks. The outdoor life of the mountain is reflected in her happy spirit and her graceful movements. She seems as much a part of the mountain as the flowers, rocks, trees, or mountain breezes. Of her, the father says that

Singing in woods or bounding o'er the lawn,
No blither creature hailed the early dawn.²

The last of the poem tells of the sadness that comes into the life of the girl, when overwhelmed at the news of her lover's death, she loses her mind, and wandering amid the scenes she had loved, now finds no delight except in the deep moan of the tempest or the sigh of the ice-covered chasms. In this sad state she continues to live outdoors both day and night until she loses her life in a great mountain storm. Thus there is

1. Poems, p. 256, l.83.
2. Ibid, p.248, ll.17-18.

in this poem, throughout life and even in death, a blend of the human character with the natural background.

The uses of nature as a setting for character found in the two examples just given, it should be explained, are rare in the poetry of Coleridge, for his special field of interest lay outside the familiar facts and incidents of human life. He was not interested primarily in character portrayal as such. The characters he has left have very little distinct personality. They reflect either the poet's own personality or his ideas of the reaction of the human mind in general to certain situations in life. In the explanation of his literary principles, Coleridge makes the statement that he adopts "with full faith the principle of Aristotle", that

the persons of poetry must be clothed with generic attributes, with the common attributes of the class; not with such as one gifted individual might possibly possess, but such as from his situation it is most probable beforehand that he would possess. 1

In Coleridge's poems, then, in which there are incidents and action, nature finds an important place as a background not so much for the portrayal of character as for the building up of an appropriate atmosphere for the action. It is to this use of nature that we now turn.

(2) The Natural Background as Related to Action

The use of the natural setting to emphasize in the reader's mind the incidents in the human story is treated in three slight-

1. Biographia Literaria, XVII, p.33.

ly varying ways in Coleridge's The Three Graves, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and Christabel.

In the first of these poems the theme is psychological. It concerns the effect on the imagination of an idea "violently and suddenly impressed" upon it. In the working out of this theme, Coleridge shows the effect of a mother's horrible curse--the curse brought about by the daughter's marriage to her own sweetheart, whom the mother had tried to take from her--upon the minds of three people--her daughter, her son-in-law, and a young girl, her daughter's friend. This curse drives them all insane. An old sexton who has buried the mother and the two girls tells the gloomy story. In order to make the horror of the curse more impressive, Coleridge builds up an unpleasant atmosphere in keeping with the theme.

Thus the story opens with a grave-yard scene which carries with it many unpleasant associations. The dock and nettles that grow about the thorn tree under which the three are buried, the toad that harbors in the place, and the fearful aspect of the tree that continues to bloom despite the fact that its bark is cut by ghosts each night--all contribute to a feeling of the unwholesomeness of the situation. Again, the description of the drizzly, misty atmospheric conditions of the outer world is in keeping with the gloomy mind of Mary, who has been cursed by her mother. Finally, the description of the wild, stormy weather just before the curse which is to blight Ellen's life takes place, arouses the feelings of the reader to a higher

pitch. Such lines as these:

The day was scarcely like a day--
The clouds were black outright; 1

or these:

The wind was wild against the glass
The rain did beat and bicker;
The church tower swinging over head,
You scarce could hear the Vicar! 2

portray an atmosphere in harmony with the wicked thoughts and withering curse to follow. Thus in this poem the natural background emphasizes in the reader's mind the effect of the incidents in the human story.

Although The Three Graves is a gloomy, morbid poem the characters and incidents in it, with the exception of the suggestion of the ghosts in the graveyard, are human. Such is not the case in the Ancient Mariner and Christabel. Here the supernatural element is dominant, and the natural background gives point or force to the human story through its relationship to the supernatural. What purpose, then, does the natural setting serve as it is related to the supernatural incidents in these poems?

Some light may be thrown upon this question if we look at the aim that Coleridge set for himself when he and Wordsworth were planning the composition of those poems which were later published as the Lyrical Ballads. Of their opinions upon poetry and their poetic aims at this time, Coleridge gives this analysis in his Biographia Literaria:

1. Poems, p.278, ll.302-03.
2. Ibid, p.278, ll.306-09.

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty to the modifying colours of imagination--the thought suggested itself... that a series of poems might be written of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence arrived at was to consist of interesting the affections by a dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves.

In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads, in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. 1

Coleridge was, we see, to give a sense of reality to the ideal. He chooses the supernatural as his field and sets out to invest it with human interest and a "semblance of truth". One means of giving this feeling of reality to his supernaturalism is by the introduction of imagery from the world of external nature. This use of nature as a background is best illustrated in the Ancient Mariner.

In this poem the Mariner relates the experience he has had with the supernatural when on a lonely sea voyage. It is a story of his crime at sea, his punishment by supernatural powers, and his later repentance. Now the horror and suffering which the Mariner experiences is heightened in the reader's mind because the strangeness and mystery are made to seem

1. Biographia Literaria, XIV, pp.5-6.

real. As it has been said before, it is the blending of images from the world of sense perception with those of a supernatural character that makes the reader feel the reality of the unreal as well as the real. An instance of such mingling of the real with the weird may be seen in these lines:

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out,
At one stride comes the dark,
With far heard whisper o'er the sea
Off shot the spectre bark; 1

or in these, in which the suggestion of the hoar-frost makes all the magical element seem real:

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread,
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charm'd water burnt alway
A still and awful red. 2

Again, these strange, unnatural sights and sounds of the elements prior to the inspiriting of the ship's crew, which are of the essence of the supernatural--

And soon I heard a roaring wind;
It did not come anear;
But with its sound, it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sear.

The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire flags sheen
To and fro they were hurried about!
The wan stars danced between; 3

are followed at the end of the song of the angelic spirits by this delightful contrast from the real world of natural landscape:

It ceased; yet still the ship made on
A pleasant noise till noon,

1. Poems, p.195, ll.200-04.
2. Ibid, p.197, ll.267-71.
3. Ibid, p.199, ll.309-18.

A noise like of a hidden brook
 In the leafy month of June,
 That to the sleeping woods all night,
 Singeth a quiet tune. 1

By such blending of the two sets of images the poet creates an atmosphere outside the known world which becomes as real as that of our natural world, yet retains a haunting strangeness. "Meadows white with April hoar-frost, sweet with the winds of Spring, glancing with myriads of filmy threads; pools with their rim of whispering sedges; bird-notes and flute-notes--that is the imagery", Professor Lowes says, "which gives as we read the sense of a known and familiar landscape, touched with the strangeness of some unwonted play of light"². He further points out that Coleridge, in his description of the polar seas, because of their "unassailable remoteness was free to smuggle into his stanzas fiction upon fiction. Yet in place of that", he goes on to say, "the most striking trait they actually show is an astonishing fidelity to fact"³.

In this regard for truth in the descriptions of physical phenomena, although in the midst of a world of wonders, lies, in part, the secret of Coleridge's handling of the supernatural. The feelings and the imagination of the reader are stirred by this very real piece of unreality. The wonderful experiences of the Mariner are thus made more impressive because they are made to seem very real.

In the Ancient Mariner the natural imagery is fused with

1. Poems, p.201, 11.367-72.
2. Lowes, John Livingston, The Road to Xanadu, p.216.
3. Ibid, p.139.

the supernatural to give a ring of truth to the supernatural, and thus heighten the effect of the human suffering in the mind of the reader. In Christabel, although the effect produced by the natural background as it is related to the human story, is similar to that in the Ancient Mariner, the method of treatment is different. Here the background consists wholly of imagery drawn from the world of nature, but selected so as to suggest the supernatural. The picturesque appearance of natural objects and the strange atmospheric conditions depicted in the "thin, grey cloud", with the full moon behind, but looking "small and dull", the chill of the night, and the green color of the moss and mistletoe clinging to the old oak, illustrate such use of natural imagery to excite the emotions of the reader. By purely natural means the author is thus able to awaken a feeling of suspense and foreboding in the reader's mind. So it is by subtle hints and touches such as those seen in the description of the atmosphere when the "lovely lady" enters, in these lines--

There is not wind enough to twirl
 The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
 That dances as often as dance it can,
 Hanging so light and hanging so high,
 On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky, 4

that the feeling of approaching danger is intensified by degrees up to the working of the evil spell, where a sense of vague horror at an unknown menace is felt in the hint that

1. Poems, p.216, ll.16-19.
2. Ibid, l.15.
3. Ibid, ll.33-34.
4. Ibid, p.217, ll.48-52.
5. Ibid, p.266, ll.306-07.

is given of the evil which befalls Christabel. Finally, the attitude of the birds during the working of the spell, expressed in these lines:

By tairn and rill,
The night-birds all that hour were still, 1

adds to the reader's sense of the greatness of the evil, of the horror of the human experience.

The natural background may be said to have an emotional value in each of the three poems just examined--The Three Graves, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and Christabel--in that in each instance it is a factor in impressing more deeply upon the mind of the reader the effect of an incident or action in the human story.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we have examined the subject of nature in the poetry of Coleridge with respect to his treatment of it as a descriptive theme, as a lyrical theme, and as a setting or background.

We have shown that Coleridge was a gifted watcher of the countenance of nature, that there was in him an extraordinary attentiveness to the rare and minute phases of physical phenomena, and that as a result of this faculty, his imagery is of the most delicate and subtle character. That the dreamy quality of his imagination which was ever turning substances into phantasms also contributed in a great measure to the delicacy and illusiveness of his imagery was seen. The field of his interest in nature was seen to include landscape beauty, chiefly valued for its broad prospect and its near view of the soft and silent dells; life of the animals, birds, and lower creatures, which is felt to be closely related to that of man; and the broad, elemental aspects of sea, sky, and atmospheric conditions.

Then, in the discussion of his lyrical treatment of nature the idea that Coleridge greatly enjoyed his own emotions and was interested in the reaction of his own soul to the outward stimulus was stressed. It was seen that as a result of such interest, his treatment of nature frequently takes the form of the lyric, in which form some of his most exquisite

nature poetry is to be found. It was pointed out that to Coleridge the universe is always alive in the spirit of God, but that his idea of the relation of nature to man is not always the same. External nature is sometimes felt by him to have a spirit of its own which can influence man, and at others to possess beauty and life only as they are given to it by the human soul.

At last, it was shown with what skill Coleridge has used nature as a background, especially in his supernatural poems in which the natural imagery serves to enhance the emotional atmosphere of suspense, mystery, wonder, etc.

With this survey before us, what can we conclude as to the distinct qualities that set Coleridge's treatment of nature apart from that of the other writers of his age--an age in which the poetry is filled with the love and interpretation of nature? In the first place, Coleridge's descriptions of external nature are pervaded by a fine sensuousness in which no other English poet quite resembles him. His touch has the voluptuous quality of Keats and the spiritual quality of Shelley. Although Coleridge's images retain their full value as sensation, yet they are pervaded with a dreamy semblance of something beyond sensation. They are full of illusive suggestions.

In the second place, Coleridge's mind was lured to rarer and remoter phases of natural phenomena than that of his contemporaries. Consequently there is in much of his imagery, particularly that employed for emotional effect in his supernatural poems, a weirdness and strangeness which stamps it distinctly as belonging to Coleridge.

For both Wordsworth and Coleridge the universe was mysteriously divine, but Coleridge recognizes more fully than Wordsworth frequently does a distinction between God and the "symbolic language" which he uses to instruct and inspire mankind. A sincere religious worship of God, who created all the beauties of the earth, is sung throughout the pages of Coleridge's nature poetry.

Another distinguishing characteristic is Coleridge's dreamy perception of nature which is seen in the meditative poems where nature is viewed through the half-closed eyes of Slumber. From these poems, one can see that much of Coleridge's joy in the beauty of the world is the joy of dreaming. This dreamy quality of his descriptions of nature is not shared by any of his fellow-Romanticists.

In the next place, Coleridge reveals more fully than any of the other Romanticists the workings of his own soul. His own emotional response, the effect of the external scene or object on himself, is a primary concern of Coleridge. His failure to give a full, well-rounded description of the outer world of nature is compensated for by the glimpse he gives us of his inner dream world.

Finally, it is in the nature poetry of Coleridge that the expression of love and sympathy for the lower animals is most marked. Although Wordsworth, Scott, and Shelley show an interest in animal life, in Coleridge the life of the animal---beast, bird, and the "happy living things" that are not

human-- is seen as sacred because it comes from God as does the life of man. The animal, to Coleridge, makes up a part of the beauty of the universe and his deep love of this beauty never fails him nor his sense of joy in it. His feeling of the immortal spirit of Love in nature is reflected throughout the whole of his nature poetry. The words of the Ancient Mariner describe very well the attitude of Coleridge throughout his life toward man, and bird, and beast--toward all the created things of the universe:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware. 1

It is in these respects that Coleridge, akin to the other Romanticists in his love of nature, has a place all his own in the nature poetry of his age.

1. Poems, p.198, ll.282-85.

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