

Coleridge's Primary and Religious Imagination

A Prescript

Graham Davidson

I have layed stress on the words, *human mind*—excluding thereby all results common to Man and all sentient creatures... (CN III 4397, f49).

If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God's Image, & that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the *Creator*—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system (CL II 709).

THE CONTENTION OF THIS PAPER is that the primary imagination has almost nothing to do with ordinary perception, and everything to do with *humanizing* those perceptions, informing what we perceive with a power which, imitative of the divine, renders the world God's transcript of himself, so that we can see, as Wordsworth saw, the power and the glory of the infinite.

But I begin with an account of the primary imagination as most scholars continue to understand it. From the 'unformed and immature' definition at the end of the first volume of the *Biographia* we learn that there are two orders of imagination, roughly distinguished by most critics as perceptive and creative, primary and secondary.¹ With the exception of Jonathan Wordsworth's article in *Coleridge's Imagination, Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, almost all discussions of Coleridge's formulation have been variations on that distinction, beginning with Shawcross who asserted that 'the primary imagination is the organ of common perception, the faculty by which we have experience of an actual world of phenomena, which he believed validated by Coleridge's own phrase describing the primary imagination as 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception'.² The two formulations contain small but significant differences, discussed later; but here it is sufficient to say that, thus considered, the primary imagination enables us to conceptualize sensory input

¹ TT I 491-492; 28 June 1834

² Jonathan Wordsworth, ' "The Infinite I AM": Coleridge and the Ascent of Being', in *Coleridge's Imagination, Essays in Memory of Pete Laver*, eds. Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe, (CUP 1985), pp.22-52. BL I 272, Shawcross. Further examples: "The Primary Imagination is normal perception that produces the usual world of the senses, "That inanimate cold world allowed/ To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd", the world of motor-buses, beef-steaks and acquaintances...', I A Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*, 1934, p. 58; 'Coleridge did indeed mean this "simple act of seeing" when he talked of the primary imagination...', Kathleen Wheeler, disagreeing with J V Baker in *The Sacred River*, 1957, *Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's 'Biographia Literaria'*, 1980; 'From a series of sense images not necessarily visual the primary imagination forms an intelligible view of the world', (James Engell, BL I lxxxix, 1983); '... we have only to note that in deducing the emergence of physical perception, we have deduced the equivalent of Coleridge's Primary Imagination', (Nick Reid "Coleridge and Schelling: The Missing Transcendental Deduction." *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (1994): 451-79, p.466); '... the idea that the aesthetic (secondary imagination) fashions a unity that consciousness and everyday perception (primary imagination) lack is extracted easily enough from a careful reading of the *Biographia*...', Christopher Stokes, *Coleridge, Language and the Sublime*, (Palgrave 2011), 162

to produce a world of phenomena, and the secondary imagination is the creative power of those involved in *poiesis*, the re-making or re-ordering of perceptions to a particular purpose, governed by the will and intellect.

We may take alternative and opposing moral or spiritual stances to the outcome of the work of the primary imagination, viewing it on the one hand with I A Richards as that 'inanimate cold world', belonging to us as members of 'the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd' (fn.2); or, on the other, by considering this act 'a repetition in the finite mind of the *eternal* act of creation in the infinite I am'—a phrase Coleridge was reputedly unhappy with (BL I 304 fn.3)—take product or educt as sacramental, since it re-presents to us the world God made, which is essentially the view of Helen Boyles and Malcolm Guite in their articles in this issue. But neither end of that spectrum questions the process itself.

Passive or active?

Is there reason to doubt this received reading of what the primary imagination does? Perhaps, if we accept Coleridge's dictum that any system built on the passiveness of the mind, must be false, as a system. Whatever our moral stance in respect of the world we perceive, our perception of it is largely involuntary, without an input from the will. The only easily conceivable function of the will in relation to the senses is the ability to close them down—shut one's eyes, stop one's ears—most of the time we see and hear and feel and taste, knowing what it is that thus affects us, without any regulation from the will. Although it is a question as to what degree the conscious will is present in the work of the primary imagination, there is no doubt that Coleridge considers the will in some measure involved: the secondary imagination, he wrote, 'I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency...'.³ The implication is that in some measure the primary imagination may function subconsciously—and I shall illustrate what Coleridge means by that further on. But its agency, the way it works, is of a '*kind*' with the secondary imagination, which Coleridge describes more fully in the next chapter as a 'power, first put into action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, controul (*laxis effertur habenis*)...'.³ The imagination is a power not itself the will, but guided by it, the two achieving a harmony through some mutual recognition of each other, as the horse is guided by, but does not derive its power from, the reins of the rider. One other word should be noticed—the secondary is an 'echo' of the primary; and this accords with the terminology assigned to each—one is principal, substantial and original; the other comparable and successive—an echo of the original. Because the primary imagination is often relegated to no more than common perception—whatever we make of that perception morally or spiritually—it is thus dismissed without further discussion, and the secondary or poetic, about which Coleridge wrote

³ See BL II 16, and fn.6: 'carried on with slackened reins'.

so much more, becomes the primary topic, tacitly reversing the order and importance he appeared to give the two orders in his definition.⁴

Experience tells us that perception happens, willy-nilly. If we assert that the primary imagination produces the world of common perception, we therefore neglect the function of the will both in Coleridge's definition here and in his thinking more widely. We may suggest that the imagination is always active, like the will of God, an immanent consciousness, which informs all our sense-based apprehensions, but this formulation requires no distinct activity, nothing that distinguishes a lazy looking on from an active engagement. Coleridge too seems sure that 'common perception' is not a willed or distinct act. In Chapter 5 of the *Biographia* he says that 'In our perceptions we seem to ourselves merely passive to an external power, whether as a mirror reflecting the landscape, or as a blank canvas on which some unknown hand paints it', which, he adds later in the paragraph, 'the school-men call the merely receptive quality of the mind' (BL I 90). We 'receive' the ordinary world of the senses; and its reception requires no act, willed or partially willed.

Common and human perception

Discussing Descartes as 'the first man who made a direct division between man and nature, the first man who made nature utterly lifeless and Godless' (LHP 565), that division which Coleridge was trying to heal, he notes that Descartes realized 'that there must be a difference in the perceptions of a mouse and a man, but this difference cannot be in the object perceived, but in the percipient'; which is to acknowledge that man and beast both recognize the existence of phenomena 'which are impressed upon us whether we will or no' (LHP 566). If we assert that the primary imagination is responsible for making sense of the phenomenal world, then the person walking down the street, and heading for the shops, is indistinguishable from the bird winging its way through the wood, and deciding on which branch to alight, and so makes nonsense of Coleridge's definition. If countered by the argument that we can conceptualize the world around us, and name, classify, and make discrete distinctions between objects and orders of being, Coleridge would remind us that this is the function of the Understanding, a power which we share to a greater or lesser extent with 'all sentient beings'; the dog sees its bowl, and so do we, but presumably we see it differently, not least because we can name it and, if we choose, describe its qualities.

Common to man and animal, Coleridge believes that, in human beings, this is the mode of perception which permits 'the ordinary exclusive attribution of Reality to the phenomena of the passive Sense', and then goes on to lament 'a Mind in this sensual trance' (CN IV 5428). The imagination, in any form, is evidently not at work. It should thus be clear that 'the simple act of seeing', passive perception, our quotidian contact with reality, the mariner setting sail,

⁴ However there are exceptions: in his article Malcolm Guite gives the primary imagination pride of place, though in my opinion he does not sufficiently distinguish between passive perception and that which is much rarer, a genuine act of primary imagination.

is not what Coleridge had in mind when describing the primary imagination. Those who wish to retain the traditional interpretation are bound to retort, but Coleridge said, 'The primary imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception'. Indeed he did, and in this he differs say, from Shawcross, who omitted 'human'; and in that word lies most of the difference between the accepted reading and the one I am proposing.

Reason and the imagination

It is wonderful how closely Reason and Imagination are connected, and Religion the union of the two. (LS 69 and F I 203n)

The continuity between animal and human lay for Coleridge in degrees of the Understanding. The absolute difference, so he conceived, was in the presence or absence of Reason and its powers. Therefore the word 'human' in Coleridge's sentence is not, I suggest, accidental, but making a distinction he would often and always make. Or to put it another way, perception by a human being is not necessarily *human* perception. He makes this distinction in the lecture note CN III 4397, published by Shawcross as 'On Poesy or Art', where he differentiates the world passively perceived, and that addressed by the qualities of our humanity: 'I have layed stress', he says, 'on the words *human mind*—excluding thereby all results common to Man and all sentient creatures...', a sentence forming one of the epigraphs for this paper. The second part of his definition of the imagination in the *Biographia*, which he appeared to repudiate later, illustrates how unlike the process of simple or passive perception the act of the primary imagination is—for, as we have seen, he declares it 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am.' Thus considered, it becomes a supreme act of the will, comparable to the original creation, quite incompatible with our barely voluntary recognition of the external world. Some words in that phrase merit closer consideration—'the *eternal* act of creation *in* the infinite I am'—not a one-off, not an externalized creation, a thing made and done with, but a continuity *in* the finite as in the infinite mind. He isn't actually talking about the visible or or natural world at all, but something going on in the mind, finite or infinite.

This I will come back to. But here it is worth noting that the phrase 'Coleridge's religious imagination', the title of the 2017 Study Weekend at Halsway, thus becomes a tautology. If the primary act of imagination is some kind of imitation of the divine, how can this act or process be described as anything but 'religious'? And though that may be a logical deduction, it fits ill with most of Coleridge's illustrations of the function of the secondary or poetic imagination, 'an echo of the former ... differing only in *degree*'—especially if we take, as an instance of the secondary imagination, his study of 'Venus and Adonis' in the second volume of the *Biographia*. The religious nature of that poem, or of 'The Rape of Lucrece', another of his favourites, would be hard to discover. But understanding that paradox is for another occasion.

What does this vicarious re-creation *in* the finite mind *mean*? Coleridge seems to emphasize that the process happens internally, and is not initially a re-making or re-visioning of the material world. The simplest explanation is that the imagination activates or employs the specifically human powers of Reason, prior to re-engagement with the world of the senses. If we remember that he was trying to re-unite what Descartes had divided, mind and nature, and that he described Art as ‘the Mediatress, the reconciliator of Man and Nature’ (CN IV 4397 f47v.)—so addressing a philosophical or general problem as a *poietic* or particular problem, an unsurprising conflation of primary and secondary imaginations given that he believed them identical in kind—then what he says in that note illustrates the growth and function of Reason, and how it relates to the information of the senses:

... the artist must first *eloign* himself from Nature in order to return to her with full effect... he must out of his own mind create forms according to the several Laws of the Intellect... Not to acquire cold notions, lifeless technical Rules, but living and life-producing Ideas, which contain their own evidence/and in that evidence the certainty that they are essentially one with germinal causes in Nature...

The key phrase is ‘living and life-producing Ideas’, the ideas of Reason. If so, this generation, or creation, in the finite mind is comparable to that undefined creation in the infinite mind, for, as Coleridge declared in *The Friend*, ‘God is Reason’, and as he said in the *Opus Maximum*, ‘to suppose God without Ideas, or the realizing knowledge of all the particular forms potentially involved in the absolute causativeness, would destroy the very conception of God’ (OM 223)—which ‘Ideas’ are surely one and the same as ‘living and life-producing Ideas’, a ‘realizing knowledge’, that knowledge which through the Logos ‘realizes’ creation. What are the ideas of Reason thus becomes the immediate question, to which he gave various answers at different periods of his life—ranging from the ineluctable truths of geometry, to specifically human ideas such as truth, justice, beauty and so forth;⁵ later, in the *Opus Maximum*, discussing ‘the Divine Ideas’, he refused to name these ideas, taking them as an experience of power, acting much like the Logos in the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel (OM 223). But Coleridge didn’t give up one answer in taking up another, and a couple of examples follow of how he used the ideas or power of Reason. And if this extract from ‘Poesy or Art’ seems principally to do with a particular or poetic method of looking at mind and nature, Coleridge soon turns, without acknowledging his transition, from the particular to the general, from the artist to everyone, defining Nature as whatever is objective, whatever we know through our senses:

Of all, we see, hear, or touch, the substance is and must be in

⁵ Cf. *Logic* 266: ‘...we cannot become mathematicians but by reasoning according to the laws and necessities of the primary imagination...’.

ourselves—and therefore there is no alternative *in reason* between the dreary (and thank heaven! almost impossible) belief that everything around us is but a phantom, or that that Life which is in us is in them likewise—

This idealist stance presumes that the laws or germinal causes in nature are at one with the mind and the ideas of Reason, those ideas which originate in the infinite mind, and which it is the business of the primary imagination to generate. If not, then that external life has no grounding, no reality, is a mere phantom, without meaning or purpose, separated from God, a possibility that Coleridge faced in 'On Human Life'. But where that external life is taken as the only life, it is condemned by Coleridge as a 'sensual trance' and by Wordsworth as the 'sleep / Of Death'. And just as Wordsworth, surprisingly to some, declared the mind as the haunt and main region of his song, so Coleridge believed that 'Poetry... is purely *human*—all its materials are *from* the mind, and all the products are *for* the mind' (CN IV 4397, f.48), or as he said of Christabel's bedchamber, 'All made out of the carver's brain.' If it is not to be a phantom, the sense-created world must become an expression of the internal reality of the mind, '...so that not the Thing presented, but that which is *re-presented* by the Thing, is the source of Pleasure' (f.49). The mind knows itself in the object, and the priority of mind, and the realization of mind in nature, are the keys to the imaginative process that Coleridge and Wordsworth understood alike. That there should be any connection between the mind and nature in their distinct organizations stems from their common growth, and the belief that mind is not a supervention, a gift from above or beyond, but 'Every step antecedent to full consciousness [is] found in Nature—' (f.51). Thus nature provides a language by which that evolving power is expressed, given externality, 'a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists' (CN II 2546); similarly in the Bible, 'the Imagination... that reconciling and mediatory power' incorporates 'the Reason in Images of the Sense... organizing the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of Reason', giving rise to a symbolic or sacramental vision of the experienced world (LS 29). He said that in 1816, and some ten years later, having taken up a careful study of the Scriptures, two books in particular evoke a comparable response.:

When the Ideas rise up within me, as independent Growths of my Spirit, and I then turn to the Epistles of Paul & John ... these seem a Looking-glass to me in which I recognize the same truths as the reflected Images of my Ideas—and when I begin with a meditative Reading of these divine Writings, then they become the Objective completing and guaranteeing the subjective Truths in myself—
(CN V 5624)

We can see that the rising up of 'Ideas' is not entirely voluntary, and may be comparable, as I suggest below, to the Mariner's experience of

prayer—something looked for but not under the command of the deliberate or conscious will. The process he describes here is of a kind with his experience in Malta, observing the objects of Nature through the window pane, which catalyse a consciousness of ‘something within me that already and forever exists’, a consciousness he thinks of as at one with the Logos, the objects of nature then becoming a symbolic language giving that power objectivity or externality. In his ‘meditative Reading’ (and we might remember that ‘meditation’ is a synonym for ‘imagination’ in Wordsworth) those Ideas, rather than being catalysed by what he reads, arise *de profundis*, and then he finds in those ‘divine Writings ... the Objective completing and guaranteeing the subjective Truths’ that his imagination has disclosed. It is a process that can be initiated by the objective or the subjective, but will always finally disclose the essential priority of the subjective.

The primary imagination at work

Thus the act and function of the primary imagination is the generation of the ideas of Reason, internally, in our finite mind; and however easily that generation comes to God, it does not come easily to us, and requires some voluntary or semi-voluntary process to lift us from our sleep of death into the world of life, rather as the Mariner at first tried and failed to pray—then found his prayer answered. One of the most beautiful examples of this process, Coleridge himself experienced in Highgate.⁶

7 August, 1826, ½ past 7—beautiful Sunset...—as I was pacing alongside the ivied wall that divides our Garden from Mr. Nixon’s Kitchen Garden... and musing on the ordinary exclusive attribution of Reality to the phaenomena of the passive Sense (*See*, the *reverse* of a Verb deponent...) ... and on the impossibility that a Mind in this sensual trance should attach any practical lively meaning to... living a *life of Grace by Faith*, in the present state... as opposed to those, who *live* without God in the World... and the consequent necessity of knowing and communing with an *other* world that now is... —the Question started up in my mind—but must such knowledge be explicit, and be conveyed in distinct conceptions. If so, what shall I think of *such* a Woman as *Mrs Gillman*? Can I deny that she lives with God?—At this moment my eyes were dwelling on the lovely Lace-work of those fair fair Elm-trees, so rich so softly black between me and the deep red Clouds & Light of the Horizon, with their interstices of twilight *Air* made visible—and I received the solution of my difficulty, flashlike, in the word BEAUTY! in the intuition of the *Beautiful* [Beauty is an educt of the primary imagination, an idea, a living truth]—This too is *spiritual*—and the Goodness of God this is the short-hand, Hieroglyphic of Truth—the mediator between Truth and Feeling, the Head & the Heart—... Beauty

⁶ Square brackets indicate interpolated comments.

is *implicit* knowledge—a silent communion of the Spirit with the Spirit in Nature [germinal causes] not without consciousness, tho' with the consciousness not successively unfolded!... Far other is the pleasure which the refined Sensualist, the pure Toutos-kosmos Man, received from a fine Landscape—for him it is what a fine specimen of Calligraphy would be to an unalphabeted Rustic—To a spiritual Woman it is Music—the intelligible [cf. WW's 'unintelligible world'] Language of Memory, Hope, Desiderium/the *rhythm* of the Soul's movements.

(CN IV 5428)

What is remarkable about this entry, as in his entries on the Bible separated by ten years, is that both in experience and idea, Coleridge has been there before: if not deliberately fighting to do so, he is nonetheless, in Eliot's words, recovering 'what has been lost / And found and lost again and again'—in this instance, in his relationship with Sara Hutchinson. He begins by considering a state which he considers too common a condition—'the ordinary exclusive attribution of Reality to the phaenomena of the passive Sense', comparable to the seeing not feeling of Dejection—a condition which makes the phrase, '*a life of Grace by Faith*' barely credible, the Eucharist mere superstition, and the concept of another world that now is impossible.⁷ Such language would thus appear to restrict Coleridge's interest to the specifically religious, and so we may think this a reductive version of his earlier powers, a limited recovery of what has been lost; but his life-time's argument is that without religion life is meaningless, what we are a 'Blank accident! nothing's anomaly!', all we do a 'drone-hive strange of phantom purposes' (PW 482).⁸ Limitation to the world of sense renders all phenomena 'unintelligible'—in his metaphor, unreadable, 'a fine specimen of Calligraphy... to an unalphabeted Rustic'. He had said much the same thing in 1795, when he was just 25: 'If we could suppose an Atheist educated from Infancy in the total disbelief of an intelligent first Cause, all this magnificent work would be a blank...' (LPR 338-9).

Coleridge accepts that the kind of religious knowledge he advocates is rarely consciously or continuously held. The woman he then loved almost never expressed her faith, never gave it words. But he cannot doubt 'that she lives with God' and therefore wonders whether that knowledge need be explicit, 'conveyed in distinct conceptions.' In other words, how does such a person, apparently stranded on the shores of sense, rescue the phenomenal world from being no more than 'a fine specimen of Calligraphy'? How is a lazy looking on to be distinguished from an active engagement? His answer comes to him through a combined meditation—in his consciousness of Anne Gillman, he sees, as if for the first time, 'the lovely Lace-work of those fair fair Elm-trees,

⁷ For this favoured phrase, see also C&S 117, 174

⁸ Cf.: 'Religion, in its widest sense, signifies the act and habit of reverencing the Invisible, as highest both in ourselves and in nature' (F I 440); and, 'The reverence of the invisible, substantiated by the feeling of love, this, which is the essence and proper definition of religion, is the commencement of the intellectual life, of the humanity' (OM 127).

so rich so softly black between me and the deep red Clouds & Light of the Horizon' and out bursts an idea, an infinite intuition of the finite mind. What renders the phenomenal world intelligible are the ideas of Reason, and in this instance the informing or irradiative idea is named, 'BEAUTY! ... the intuition of the *Beautiful*'⁹

The presence of Anne Gillman both catalyses and complicates the process, as did Sara Hutchinson in 'Dejection', and Hartley in 'Frost at Midnight'. In those poems and others the vision is beheld not by the poet himself, but imagined on behalf of a beloved. The intuition of the beautiful, 'the lovely shapes and sounds intelligible', arise from reflection on qualities of the beloved—'My babe so beautiful!', 'Sister & Friend of my devoutest choice! / ... O dear, as Light & Impulse from above'. Here 'the lovely Lace-work of those fair fair Elm-trees' seems to have gone unnoticed, was seen not felt, until Anne Gillman entered his consciousness, and then in that intuition of the beautiful, the spectacle becomes 'intelligible'. As in 'Dejection' his imagined vision is for her, the problem he is considering resolved in relation to her being, not apparently through or for himself, even though we might see her presence, as those of Hartley or Sara Hutchinson, acting as the evolving power in his consciousness, the logos.

I take this as a practical example of the primary imagination at work. He begins by remarking on the 'beautiful Sunset' of this particular evening; but he is aware, probably in himself as well as others, of habitually of doing no more than receive such sights as lovely phenomena, and that, he believes, is a passive reception not an active engagement—for though avoided in his description, he is clearly thinking of the verb *to see*, which he calls the reverse of a deponent verb—defined as a passive form with an active meaning—whereas in his view *to see* is an active verb with a passive meaning, and those who see in this manner are living in 'a sensual trance' or 'without God in the World'. The question in his mind, engaging his will and the focus of his meditation, is how does one escape this passive seeing, how redeem or recreate the glory of the vision? I put this in Wordsworthian terms, because I think Coleridge is asking a Wordsworthian question. His answer, via a consciousness of his kind saint, Ann Gillman, is comparable to Wordsworth's answer to a similar problem on a similar evening: 'From worlds not quickened by the sun / A portion of the gift is won'.¹⁰

The primary imagination reconsidered

Coleridge's use of the term 'primary' in relation to reason and the imagination occurs twice or thrice in his works. None of these less familiar references have been considered helpful in further explaining or unpacking the *Biographia's* definition, probably because they cannot be related to the cul-de-sac of simple

⁹ Cf. 'the reason as the irradiative power of the understanding and the representative of the infinite... judges the understanding as the faculty of the finite, and cannot without grievous error be judged by it.' (SWF II 841)

¹⁰ 'Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty'.

or common perception.¹¹ But one note, not often considered in relation to the primary imagination as it doesn't employ that term, nonetheless appears to track its function from the moment passive perception is left behind to the realization of 'a new Heaven & a new Earth'. But it is a long note and I have tried to distill three pages of sustained, digressive and sometimes aggressive reflection into the essence of his argument:

Metaphys. is Speculation : Phys. :: Observation. All metaphysic is in its origin poetic: and in Poesy, that highest in which Phil. and Poetry interpenetrate, & mutually co-inhere it must end. Hence all the so called Analysts ... from Aristot. to Locke ... attack all Speculation: for they leave off where Speculation begins, viz. at the precinct of IDEAS. And yet without these *their* Philosophy is either negative ... or a sensual dream...

But only as Man is capable of Ideas, is he a Philosopher by birth-right—and as far only as he is capable of an Ideal (practical product having its cause & impulse in *Ideas*...) is Man a *Religious* Being. — But neither one nor the other is possible except thro' the Imagination ... by force of which the Man

1. creates ... for the use and furtherance of his *Thinking*, Representations or rather *Presences* ...

2. feels Wants ... to think of which is ... to think and form the notion of a higher and purer Existence & a limitless Futurity ... The Alogist [i.e. a-logos, without the logos] ... who from this absence of facts of Experience, & because these Presentments ... and Aims flow out from the Imagination, would degrade them into mere Dreams ... does but betray his own sensual *matterish* ... notions of the Agency of the mind of man & the powers that constitute his proper humanity ... but if subjective is yet universally subjective—nay, farther yet—for this high dignity is possessed by the truths of pure Mathematics, & most awful on this account those truths are—if the Result be impregnated (& actualized) by the *Will*, which (as concentric with the absolute Will that is one with the universal Reason) is the source or index of all reality, and thus the *Objective* rise up, as a celestial Birth, in and from the universal Subject ... what a new Heaven & a new Earth, would begin to reveal itself ... The faith then in these Ideas, as the condition, ground, and cause of positive Religion, is necessary even to the continued existence of Man.

(CN IV 4692)

¹¹ 'I speak of a function which... supposes a power of conferring unity in the mind itself, which power in the very introduction of the work we have learnt to recognize as mental forms or primary moulds' (*Logic* 73); 'As we cannot become mathematicians but by reasoning according to the laws and necessities of the primary imagination, so neither can we become logicians or discourse logically, but according to the inherent forms and necessary data of the understanding or reflective faculty' (*Logic* 266); 'The Trinity is indeed the primary Idea, out of which all other ideas are evolved—or as the Apostle says, it is the Mystery (which is but another word for Idea) in which are hidden all the Treasures of Knowledge' (CN IV 5294).

The thought of an analytic philosopher is 'a sensual dream', the ordinary man or woman enjoying a sunset is stuck in 'a sensual trance'; both modes of apprehending Nature are passive. Where observation and perception end, metaphysics and the imagination begin. Which branch of the imagination is a question raised by the assertion that 'All metaphysic is in its origin poetic: and in Poesy, that highest in which Phil. and Poetry interpenetrate ... it must end.' Because he is discussing poetry, we might presume the secondary imagination. But that would be a mistake. He is also talking about the ultimate form of knowledge—'that highest'—which he denotes by the term 'poesy', inclusive of all the fine arts; what he has in mind is a mode of vision, not a method of writing. This is a discussion of the power which potentially belongs to us all as human beings, creative of our humanity, 'necessary even to the continued existence of Man', not the particular qualities of genius.

In sections 1 and 2, Coleridge does not simply rest in the assertion that the primary imagination educes the ideas of Reason, but tries to articulate what that process involves; and one can see, for instance, that in the term '*presences*' he is feeling his way from discrete ideas to a being with personcity, a power known through a presence; and in the phrase 'feels Wants ... to think of which is ... to think and form the notion of a higher and purer Existence & a limitless Futurity' one might remember not only Lamb's comment on Coleridge's last days—that he was hungering for eternity—but also his assertion of the presentness of that world in the phrase, 'an *other* world that now is', used as he meditated on the sunset in the Nixons's garden (CN IV 5428, above). The Ideas of Reason can include what we might call discrete concepts, such as are found in mathematics, which once understood, do not depend upon the will; but they move towards ideas which if no less true, yet require the will for their realization or activation. Such ideas—for instance, beauty, truth, justice, mercy, pity, peace and love—those ideas among others that constitute our distinct humanity—must 'be impregnated ... by the *Will*' in order to become the reality potential in each word. Coleridge here means the human will, but then asserts that it is 'concentric with the absolute Will that is one with the universal Reason' which is 'the source or index of all reality'. As we have seen the ideas of God, at one with the ideas of Reason, 'are the realizing knowledge of all the particular forms potentially involved in the absolute causativeness', (OM 127, above) and putting these statements together we can see the likeness of his thought to that of the definition in the *Biographia*. 'The finite human will is a repetition of the absolute will of the infinite mind, but 'the eternal act of creation' *in* the infinite mind is not the creation or perception of the physical world, but the generation of the ideas of 'absolute causativeness'. That is, the passively perceived world is the material upon which the ideas work, '...so that not the Thing presented, but that which is *re*-presented by the Thing, is the source of Pleasure.' (f.49) Or the invisible truth is made visible and truth and perception are co-ordinated to create a sacramental world. This is surely what Wordsworth meant when asking why Paradise and Elysian Fields should be no more, he asserted in a passage that

begins as a form of prayer—an invocation to his muse—that

... the discerning intellect of Man
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.

Coleridge came to view Nature not as innocent and benignant in itself, but as a wily old witch with a life of its own (CL V 497); in the margin of a copy of the *Lay Sermons*, he wrote 'No! Nature is not God. She is the devil in a strait waist-coat!' (LS 71, fn.6); or, we might say, a form of chaos which needs to be tamed by the god of love (CN II 2355). In 1828 he wrote that 'Nature is Hades rendered intelligible by the energy, which combining therewith makes it no longer Hades...' (CN V 5931). What energy is that? The energy of ideas, which 'exert an informant Power...'. Distinguished from, these ideas are nonetheless '*contained* in the Fullness' of, the Logos, and so we are close to what he had previously asserted, that 'The Trinity is indeed the primary Idea, out of which all other ideas are evolved—or as the Apostle says, it is the Mystery (which is but another word for Idea) in which are hidden all the Treasures of Knowledge' (CN IV 5294).

Finally, there is a very late note, September 1833, which sums up the strange power of what Coleridge called 'ideas', and which I believe consistent with the pattern of thought I have tried to outline above. The note compares the invisibility of the creative energies of a musician with the dependence on images of painters or architects. And it is that 'realizing knowledge' of these ideas that he is particularly conscious of, 'the Transcendents that give the Objectivity to all Objects'—an insight wholly counter-intuitive to our understanding of objects, but which is the core of Coleridge's thinking, a perfect example of what he meant by the primary imagination:

Music seems to have an immediate connection with my Life... It converses with the *life* of my mind, as if it were itself the Mind of my Life...—Yet I sometimes think, that a great Composer... must have been in a state of Spirit much more akin, more analogous, to mine own when I am at once waiting for, watching, and organically constructing and inwardly constructed by, the *Ideas* (living truths—the living Truths,) that may be re-excited but cannot be expressed by Words, the Transcendents that give the Objectivity to all Objects, the Form to all Images, yet are themselves untranslatable into any Image, unrepresentable by any particular Object, than I can imagine myself to be a Titian or a Sir C[hristopher] Wren—
(CN V 6742)