



Spiral stairways : towards defining a romantic map of identity  
by Virginia Lee Genito

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to define, interpret, and account for elements of a “Romantic map of identity” as set forth by Plotinus and adapted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and others in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition. The methodology explores interrelationships between the map’s components by defining the terms: (1) “Romantic,” (2) “map,” and (3) “identity,” drawing on the Christian Neoplatonic tradition of the early British Romantics, the Romantic transcendentalists of New England, and the related terms and concepts developed by C. G. Jung. Romantic characteristics are organized into four cardinal points: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul’s return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context. To explore the meaning of “identity,” Plotinus’s and Coleridge’s versions of the stages of identity development are outlined and compared in detail. This method demonstrates how synthesizing the four essentials with the Romantic mapping process generates a worldview, articulated by Coleridge, that echoes the Plotinian schema of the origin and creation of consciousness. This includes the theory that self-consciousness develops in stages through the circular process of the descent from the Source (through emanation) and the return (through soul evolution) within a larger macrocosmic context. These stages of development are schematized as a hierarchy, or the Great Chain of Being, and a holarchy, or inherent analogies between inner and outer experience. This approach generates an identity-mapping model that combines hierarchical and holarchical patterns, accounting for various mapping processes in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition. This model is egg-like with layers, the ovoid “sliced” into “horizontal” sections, which synthesizes the “flat” hierarchical ladder design with the concentric spheres of a holarchy. This paper concludes that mapping the Romantic scheme of identity is important and relevant today; for an individual can rise no higher than his or her self-conception, and a culture can evolve no further than its most enlightened and self-realized individuals.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to define, interpret, and account for elements of a "Romantic map of identity" as set forth by Plotinus and adapted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and others in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition. The methodology explores interrelationships between the map's components by defining the terms: (1) "Romantic," (2) "map," and (3) "identity," drawing on the Christian Neoplatonic tradition of the early British Romantics, the Romantic transcendentalists of New England, and the related terms and concepts developed by C. G. Jung. Romantic characteristics are organized into four cardinal points: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul's return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context. To explore the meaning of "identity," Plotinus's and Coleridge's versions of the stages of identity development are outlined and compared in detail. This method demonstrates how synthesizing the four essentials with the Romantic mapping process generates a worldview, articulated by Coleridge, that echoes the Plotinian schema of the origin and creation of consciousness. This includes the theory that self-consciousness develops in stages through the circular process of the descent from the Source (through emanation) and the return (through soul evolution) within a larger macrocosmic context. These stages of development are schematized as a hierarchy, or the Great Chain of Being, and a holarchy, or inherent analogies between inner and outer experience. This approach generates an identity-mapping model that combines hierarchical and holarchical patterns, accounting for various mapping processes in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition. This model is egg-like with layers, the ovoid "sliced" into "horizontal" sections, which synthesizes the "flat" hierarchical ladder design with the concentric spheres of a holarchy. This paper concludes that mapping the Romantic scheme of identity is important and relevant today; for an individual can rise no higher than his or her self-conception, and a culture can evolve no further than its most enlightened and self-realized individuals.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Samuel Taylor Coleridge first burst into my life when I was an English major at UCLA in 1984. I never quite forgot him, even when I left college a year later to join the workforce. Like the Ancient Mariner, he wandered in and out of my imagination. In 1998, I returned to college to complete my Bachelor of Arts degree at Montana State University. My interest in Coleridge and early British Romanticism gradually rekindled as an undergraduate and ignited as I went on to graduate school to pursue my Master of Arts degree in English. Yet I never considered Romanticism as a serious pursuit of study until I found it crouching in the corner of more than one graduate class. There Romantics were being trounced as failures and essentialists. One minute the Romantics were painted as failed, backward-looking gauzy sentimental escapists wallowing in confessional poetry. The next they were blamed, like sorcerer's apprentices, for the miserable, unenlightened concept of individualism and authorship. This view of Romanticism predominated in a class on literary history, where poststructuralist critics were (dis)crediting the late eighteen- and early nineteenth-century British Romantics, especially Coleridge and Wordsworth, for originating the lamentable "myth" of the individual author based on the supposed Romantic fiction of selfhood.

Yet, not only were these "essentialist" Romantics dismissed as clowns or ogres, the term "essentialism" was itself discarded, "always already" discredited and dismissed before it hit the turf—an antiquated stepping-stone in the construction of numerous

contemporary anti-essentialist theoretical arguments. Could it be true that essentialism had died along with Nietzsche's God and Barthes's author? Diana Fuss, in *Essentially Speaking*, demonstrates that there is still room for talking about essentialism in today's theoretical landscape, although she addresses the issue from a poststructuralist position. I will build on her well-taken points, albeit from another theoretical perspective.

In her book, Fuss raises the question: "Has essentialism received a bad rap?" She goes on to assert, "Few other words in the vocabulary of contemporary critical theory are so persistently maligned, so little interrogated, and so predictably summoned as a term of infallible critique" as essentialism (xi). Fuss reopens the discussion about essence versus social construction, reasserting the usual constructionist view of essentialism as a belief in universals, "in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (xi). Fuss quotes Roland Barthes as a chief representative of the anti-essentialism perspective: "This disease of thinking in essences is at the bottom of every bourgeois mythology of man" (xii). As Fuss indicates, most postmodernists present a clear binary opposition between essentialism (bad) and constructivism (good) (2). Fuss maintains, "Constructivism, articulated in opposition to essentialism and concerned with its philosophical refutation, insists that essence is itself an historical construction" (2). This anti-essentialist position seeks to deconstruct the Western view of essence, which poststructuralists trace back to its "origin" in Aristotle, who defines it as the "most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (Fuss 2).

Although anti-essentialists have their sights set on gender and race, one of the

primary targets of constructivists is the essential self, which they argue is not an essence at all but rather a social, linguistic construct. This poststructuralist reduction of the person from a “self” to a “subject,” according to Michael Ryan, is rooted in the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who challenged dominant Western assumptions of selfhood, or a “coherent human subject” (69). Rather, Nietzsche asserted, a person’s concept of his or her own selfhood is a “fiction” (365). These critical roots erupted as branch, bud, and flower of poststructuralist thought in the 1960s, with the writing of such theorists as Jacques Lacan (1901-81), Michel Foucault (1926-84), and Jacques Derrida (b. 1930). Together these thinkers claimed that a person’s concept of self is something added and invented to an open site by the process of socialization. In other words, the self and its characteristics do not have a preexistent origin, center, or essence. There is no unified being but only becoming. According to this reasoning, the “subject” begins to be constructed linguistically by symbolic and social forces. And the “I” is “nothing other than the instance of saying *I*”; for “language knows a ‘subject’ not a ‘person’” (Cuddon 874-75). Thus, what a person thinks of as *himself* or *herself* is nothing other than a mask for a network of linguistic structures powered by social animation.

According to Fuss, Lacan rejects any contention that accepts as “self-evident an essential, pre-given identity” (7). Instead, Lacan’s 1966 *Ecrits (Writings)* uses a psychoanalytic approach to explain how the subject is constructed. We become “subjects” by entering into society through the symbolic system of language, which positions us in the chain of discourse as an “I” and as gender within the family (Lacan 178-83). What makes “psychology or self-identity possible,” Lacan contends, is a

“language of norms and roles that assign us a sense of who we are by telling us what we cannot be” (Rivkin and Ryan 337). Parallel to Lacan’s views are French poststructuralist theorist Michel Foucault’s theories of the self, or subject. According to Foucault, the subject has no inherent characteristics but acquires a sense of identity as a result of the interplay of power relations within the sociohistorical system. Although Foucault did not attribute an essence to the self, in his later thinking he came to believe that individuals can turn themselves into subjects. At the same time, Foucault describes a historicized subject who cannot be autonomous because the self is social, constituted through relations to others in a network of discourses, institutions, and practices (1472-81; Ryan 71, 129).

Similarly, Derrida deconstructs what poststructuralists call the “metaphysical” signified and subject. In Derrida’s view, to be human is to experience oneself as a divided and de-centered subject. His critique of subjectivity also blurs the distinction between the subject and the other (Rivkin and Ryan 339). Thus, according to this thinking, the person is never “being” but only becoming--a subject made up by being divided from itself, difference before identity, self-becoming or self-concept by deferral. To sum it up, the individual is an effect of unconscious psychological processes, social-wide systems of symbolic construction, and cultural discourses beyond his or her control.

Still, Fuss points out, these theorists, particularly Lacan and Derrida, are, ironically, tied to the essentialism they claim to deconstruct (9). She argues that their “very staking out of a *pure* anti-essentialist position simply reinscribes an inescapable essentialist logic” (9). According to Fuss, Lacan follows Swiss linguist Ferdinand de

Saussure (1857-1913) in seeing both language and speech as “‘essential’ to the founding of the human subject” (9). Fuss also points out that Lacan’s theories reveal a desire to return to the essential truth of Freud’s psychoanalysis (10). Does Derrida “‘transcend’ essentialism more successfully than Lacan?” Not according to Fuss (12). She contends that “essence manifests itself in deconstruction in that most pervasive, most recognizable of Derridean phrases, ‘always already’” (15). The failure of Lacan and Derrida to extricate themselves from essence comes as no surprise to Fuss, who explains that “constructionism can only be built on the foundations of a hidden essentialism” (12-13). In other words, deconstruction “leans heavily on essence in its determination to displace essence,” thereby deploying “essentialism against itself” (Fuss 13). How can deconstructionists deconstruct what, at some level, they still believe in and rely on--perhaps as their very foundation? Fuss’s solution to getting off what she views as the merry-go-round of essentialism is to see “that there is no essence to essentialism, that essence *as* irreducible has been *constructed* to be irreducible” (4).

Fuss’s claim leads to its corollary, i.e., there is no essence to the essential self; the core of identity is merely an invention. Yet, despite the poststructuralists’ attempt to erase the “I” (or at least lowercase it), along with other essentialist words in academic discourse, interest in seeking and finding the essential self, according to Harold Bloom’s *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection*, persists--and has for the last two millennia, from Plato to the present (1-4). People still pursue the mystery of being: Who am I? How do I find my true self? How can I come to know that true self? How can I become who I really am? As the Victorians, Realists, and

Modernists slouch, along with Yeats' beast, into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the outdated "dead" Romantics with their notions of selfhood have continued to stir up interest and controversy, even today. Why won't they just go away? In order to address seriously the claims of both Romantic essentialists and social constructivists, it is necessary to examine what each claims for the self. It is not that the self is either essential or constructed, but it is vital to understand what these terms mean to get beyond stereotyping and reductionist thinking.

Standing chin-deep in the rise of postmodernism and cultural studies, I pondered this subject--but not for long. Flinging on the dusty cape of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I leapt into the fray. Social constructivists had presented their case over the last few decades. Now, in the mind of at least *one* student, the Romantics were back. It is interesting to note that once I began to research Coleridge, I found a surprising amount of current material, new scholarship, and even new films on Coleridge and the early British Romantics, as well as volumes defining and redefining the self, which signaled a renewed interest in Romanticism and its worldview. Slowly my thesis evolved from a general study of Coleridge and Wordsworth to what I would come to call the "Romantic map of identity," as articulated and illustrated by Coleridge--using the Plotinian concept of emanation, including the descent and ascent of the soul, as a conceptual framework. I found that prominent historical figures, such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Butler Yeats, and Carl Gustav Jung, have shared a version of this Neoplatonic view of consciousness development.

For my thesis topic, however, I chose to focus on Plotinus (205-70 CE) and

Coleridge (1772-1834), first, because of my compelling interest in Coleridge and, second, because together these thinkers illustrate how these universal,<sup>1</sup> or what Jung would call “archetypal,”<sup>2</sup> ideas of identity resurface in unique ways in different sociocultural environments. Thus, what has come to be labeled “Romantic,” and especially the principles behind my Romantic map, are ways of thinking and experiencing that existed before that term was invented, through the theories of Plotinus and other exponents of Neoplatonism, and continue to the present.

It is not my primary purpose here, however, to trace an historical lineage between the ideas of Plotinus and Coleridge. Doing so might include exploring the claim that Coleridge’s philosophy stemmed from collaboration with his contemporaries through the transmission and translation of Neoplatonist ideas from one thinker to another. Nor shall I track how he was influenced by his predecessors through a paper trail, for instance, in the writings of Thomas Taylor, the Platonist (1758-1835), and other translations of Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, and Porphyry. Moreover, I do not intend to develop the argument that these thinkers gleaned certain aspects of this philosophy through tapping into the shared nature of what Jung identifies as the collective unconscious<sup>3</sup> and archetypal images that cause Romantics to look for correspondences and come up with similar sounding doctrines that map identity in similar ways. Nor do I intend to prove that Plotinus and Coleridge recreated or experienced the same truths anew through a mystical or visionary transcendence of historical thinking and physical boundaries, which they then cast into a similar vocabulary. That is to say, I am not doing an historical analysis but rather a philosophical analysis. Still, this study does not strictly adhere to Jungian archetypal

psychology nor to Plotinian philosophy.

Rather, the specific purpose of my philosophical analysis is to define, interpret, and account for components of “the Romantic map of identity,” as articulated and illustrated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in comparison with the Neoplatonic map of identity set forth by Plotinus. Yet, ultimately I will not account for the components in Jungian or Plotinian terms, but I will examine how Coleridge accounts for them and will use that to clarify my own position. To explore the interrelationships between components of the map, I will first explain what I mean by the terms: (1) “Romantic,” (2) “map,” and (3) “identity.” I will organize Romantic characteristics into four cardinal points: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul’s return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context. I will also demonstrate how synthesizing these four essentials with the Romantic mapping process generates a worldview, articulated by Coleridge, that echoes the Plotinian schema of self-consciousness, which develops in stages or structures through the circular process of the descent from the Source (through emanation) and the return (through soul evolution<sup>4</sup>) within a larger communal or macrocosmic context. I will further outline and compare in detail Plotinus’s and Coleridge’s stages of identity development.

The definitions I am using in this paper, while deriving primarily from Plotinus and Coleridge, agree with the standard Jungian understanding of them. Thus, I also draw on Jung’s definitions to anchor the terms of the other two thinkers, since Jung’s terms are

the most recent and closest to familiar, more modern conceptions. Taken all together, these similar but not exactly equivalent vocabularies inform each other. In order to better understand the ideas of Plotinus and Coleridge and what they are describing, I will be clarifying similarities and distinctions in terminology, as I go, in the body of the text. Finally, I will discuss the implications of my findings, or why this process of mapping the Romantic scheme of identity is important and relevant today. As I will argue in my conclusion, an individual can rise no higher than his or her self-conception, and a culture can evolve no further than its most enlightened and self-realized individuals.

## CHAPTER 2

## DEFINING "ROMANTIC," "MAP," AND "IDENTITY"

Romanticism

Critics have used the terms "Romantic" and "Romanticism" in various ways. Any literature handbook can list characteristic attributes of Romanticism. These basic texts, moreover, often define Romantics in terms of what they reject, resist, avoid, or subordinate. *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, for example, asserts that Romantics reject Classicism and late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism and their "precepts of order, calm, harmony, balance, idealization, and rationality." This source also characterizes the Romantic movement as "a reaction against the Enlightenment," "eighteenth-century rationalism," and "materialism." That, apparently, is why Romantics subordinate "reason," "formal rules," and "realism" to "imagination" and "the wild, irregular, or grotesque" (Harmon and Holman 452; *Encyclopedia of Literature*).

Romantics are also portrayed as trying to get away from the present culture and back to nature or the past. M. H. Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms*, for instance, describes the Romantic reverence for nature as a form of cultural and chronological "primitivism" (146). Romantics are especially said to gravitate to the medieval age and Greek culture, with their purportedly "organic" societies. Therefore, they are fascinated with "folk culture, national and ethnic cultural origins," along with "the exotic," "remote," and "mysterious" (Harmon and Holman 452; *Encyclopedia of Literature*).

Part of this Romantic return to nature includes finding once again the pristine and natural man, or the true self, which in turn generates what is commonly acknowledged as the Romantic preoccupation with the self. This means delving into the whole psyche, or subjective interior, in “a heightened examination of human personality,” with its “moods,” “inner struggles,” and “mental potentialities” (*Encyclopedia of Literature*). But this self-reflection is sometimes characterized as a self-absorbed impulsiveness that indulges passions, natural feelings, and irrationality over rationality. J. Robert Barth, in *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition*, for example, points to how Charles Feidelson stereotypes Romantic self-centered “egoism,” which Edwin Honig inflates to “monstrous” egoism (131, 135). This immersion in interiority, which promotes susceptibility to the irrational and paranormal, in turn opens into “the weird, the occult, the monstrous, the diseased, and even the satanic” (*Encyclopedia of Literature*). Yet, Romantics are also famous for using their “unrestrained imagination” as a portal into transcendent and visionary experience and artistic creation, idealizing “the genius, the hero, and the exceptional figure” and “the artist as a supremely individual creator” (Harmon and Holman 452; *Encyclopedia of Literature*).

While acknowledging these and other characteristics of Romanticism, I will use the term “Romantic” to refer to the following cardinal points: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul’s return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context. These four categories cover most

characteristics attributed to Romantics; but, rather than casting Romantics as regressive, my approach emphasizes the progressive, early British Romantic worldview of “unity lost and integrity earned,” in the words of Abrams (*Natural Supernaturalism* 256, 260).

As Abrams puts it:

It is only by an extreme historical injustice that Romanticism has been identified with the cult of the noble savage and the cultural idea of a return to an early stage of simple and easeful “nature” which lacks conflict because it lacks differentiation and complexity. On the contrary, all the major Romantic writers . . . set as the goal for mankind the reachievement of a unity which has been earned by unceasing effort and which is, in Blake’s term, an “organized” unity, an equilibrium of opponent forces which preserves all the products and powers of intellection and culture. (*Natural Supernaturalism* 260)

The insistence on self and the development of self-consciousness through the descent (emanation) and the return (soul evolution) is especially characteristic of the early British Romantics Blake and Coleridge, along with their American contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson. Yet, as has been argued by other writers, these early Romantics derived many of their ideas about the origin of self and stages of consciousness development from Alexandrian philosopher Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, and other Neoplatonists.<sup>5</sup> Plotinus, following Plato’s wake by more than five hundred years, synthesized Plato’s Theory of Forms or Ideas, i.e., eternal truths and realities, and Eastern mysticism into a philosophy of origins that explained the creation, including the creation of consciousness, through emanation from a single transcendent Source.

Plotinus and the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantics who picked up the thread of his thinking are further linked by these “Romantic” essentials because each considered it his calling to perceive and express the soul’s emanation from

transcendent levels of being, to return to that origin of consciousness, and, in the process, to help others do the same. To do this Plotinus used spiritual means, including self-purification and identification with the Source. Coleridge and Blake, in the traditional persona of the philosopher-seer or the poet-prophet, believed their mission was to inspire and lead others to soul freedom and transcendent vision through what Coleridge called “self-realization.” Emerson sought a vehicle and method of return to experiential metaphysics, “grounded in direct awareness and experience” of ascending stages of being. Emerson pursued this degree of immanence as a form of “individualism, i.e., reliance on God, rather than conformity to the will of a political or social majority” (Kern 251). This process of self-development toward a conscious awareness of wholeness, which Carl Jung, a century later, would describe as “individuation,” was just one of many of the principles of the psyche observed and articulated by Coleridge, who anticipated many of the postulates of twentieth-century depth psychology. Key to these processes of self-actualization is productive interaction with, yet transcendence of, the personal environment and historical context. I will be discussing this further in the implications section.

### Mapping Process

My use of the term “map” here relates to the grammar, or cartographical principles, behind the schemes Plotinus and those in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition apply to the origin, creation, and experience of being and consciousness. This includes similar sounding doctrines based on a concept of emanation from the First Principle,

which unfolds in a “sliding scale” of stages. These stages have been described as a “holarchy” (to use Arthur Koestler’s term, which will be discussed below), or inherent analogies between inner and outer experience, as well as a hierarchy, or the Great Chain of Being, used in the Renaissance and seventeen and eighteenth centuries as a way to conceptualize the universe. According to this theory, God is linked to subsequent levels of the creation down to the lowest forms of existence, or being. This conception of how consciousness is created also espouses a return to the Source, or origin, through these interconnections. What connects these stages are correspondences, which are in turn often conveyed through symbolic expression.

### Emanation

Central to ideas on the origin of identity espoused by Romantics are theories that echo the concept of emanation, expounded by Plotinus, where the creation issues forth from an ultimate source, each subordinate derivation of being emanating from its immediate superior in “a scale of increasing division and multiplicity” (Copleston 466; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 147). Plotinus envisions this process as a ceaseless radiation, or outflowing, of light from the One that gradually dims as it moves outward from the center, “until it shades off into that total darkness which is matter-in-itself, conceived as the privation of light” (Louth 38; Copleston 469). As Frederick Copleston explains this idea, matter is “partially illuminated by [this influx] and does not exist separately in the concrete as complete darkness, [or] the principle of not-being” (469). Matter “at its lowest grade,” according to Plotinus, becomes “evil,” or “unilluminated

privation” (Copleston 469). Yet, to this “eternal ‘procession’ from the One,” Abrams notes, “Plotinus opposes a counter-process” of the “return to the source” (*Natural Supernaturalism* 148).

In conceptual schemes originating with Plotinus, the One is not only the source and center of outgoing emanations; it is also the whole circumference that embraces all, incorporating everything in existence. Moreover, the One contains yet transcends all being (Copleston 463). Thus, emanation may be mapped as moving outward from the concentrated center, as in concentric spheres, in stages of increasing diversity. According to this scheme, the return would be the reverse, i.e., the moving inward from the circumference back to the center. Still, since the return of the parts to the One, or original cause, is ideally an evolutionary process, the parts which emanated out do not simply retrace their steps. Rather, these self-organizing parts (each composed of smaller parts) are evolving into a larger whole. Koestler, in *The Ghost in the Machine*, coins the term “holons,” i.e., increasing orders of wholeness, to describe these developmental stages (48-58).<sup>6</sup> Koestler refers to this system of orders and suborders, or “evolutionary holons,” as a “holarchy,” in which each higher organizational level, or holon, enfolds its subordinate predecessors (171). While this holarchical scheme clearly applies to the evolutionary process of the return, it can also be used to describe the emanation, in which each higher organizational level, or holon, enfolds its subordinate successors. At the experiential level, increasing orders of wholeness are often described as more “inward” and subordinate stages as more “outward” (Louth 40).

Emanation can also be mapped as a linear hierarchy, or ladder, descending from

the One to the material creation. This hierarchical descent is a procession of levels of decreasing light and consciousness, a gradual stepping-down of currents in degrees and stages, similar to the process in electricity where the voltage supply is reduced through step-down transformers. Abrams maintains that “the philosophical history of this way of thinking,” which portrays the creation of the universe and being in terms of “gradation,” “continuity,” and “plentitude” “has in the main been a long series of footnotes to Plotinus” (*Natural Supernaturalism* 146; *Glossary* 73). Arthur Lovejoy adds that this theory of the Great Chain has been “the dominant official philosophy of the larger part of civilized humankind through most of its history” (26). The Great Chain theory also accounts for the idea of the return, or the ascent from lower to higher forms.

### Theory of Correspondences

Growing naturally out of the Plotinian idea of emanation is the doctrine or theory of correspondences, in which influx proceeds from the First Principle to descending levels of the creation, i.e., from high to low. As the creation emanates from the One in “increasing division and multiplicity,” degrees or levels of difference are created that join each emanation to its immediate superior. According to Juan Eduardo Cirlot’s *Dictionary of Symbols*, this theory is based on the presumption that “all cosmic phenomena are limited and serial and that they appear as scales or series on separate planes” (62). Cirlot continues, “This condition is neither chaotic nor neutral, for the components of one series are linked with those of another in their essence and in their ultimate significance” (62). Thus, correspondences are not only serial stages of

development with their own orderly procession of propensities to form, but they are also linked through essential not physical characteristics. “These correspondences are not revealed through physical resemblance,” Marvin Lansverk explains. “Instead they are purely analogical, created by spiritual force” (56, 57). Therefore, what corresponds between links in the series are core attributes and functions.

Great Chain theorists have conceptualized this idea of gradation, predominantly from the time of Plato through the Enlightenment, as the natural hierarchy of being (Abrams, *Glossary* 73). Cirlot asserts that much of the Greek, Kabbalistic, and Gnostic philosophy can be traced to the theory of correspondences (63). Kathleen Raine, in *Blake and Antiquity*, also gives a snapshot of the history and scope of this ancient doctrine:

[Emanuel] Swedenborg, the Alchemists, and the entire European esoteric tradition see the outward form as the signature, or correspondence of the informing mind, or life: a view that anticipates Teilhard de Chardin’s view of the “within” of nature that is inseparable from the “without.” (96)

According to this worldview, these correspondences, or links in the chain, provide a continuum of creation and being between planes of existence broadly categorized into Spirit and matter (in a macrocosmic sense) and mind and body (in terms of the microcosm of the individual). That is why Abrams describes the doctrine of correspondences as an “inherent analogy between the mind and the outer world, as well as between the natural and the spiritual world” (*Glossary* 198).

Another central claim of Great Chain theorists is that material orders subsist in Spirit. As Lansverk characterizes Swedenborg’s theory, all phenomena, including things and persons, are said to correspond to Spirit because the natural world derives from the

spiritual (56). Swedenborg summarizes his position:

In our Doctrine of Representations and Correspondences, we shall treat of both these symbolical and typical representations, and of the astonishing things which occur, I will not say in the living body only, but throughout nature, and which correspond so entirely to supreme and spiritual things, that one would swear that the physical world was purely symbolical of the spiritual world.

(qtd. in Lansverk 57)

As Baudelaire explains, “Everything, form, movement, number, color, perfume, in the *spiritual* as in the *natural* world, is significative, reciprocal, converse, *correspondent*” (qtd. in Abrams, *Glossary* 198). Thus, the nature of this hierarchical correspondence is also mutual interaction, i.e., the lower depends on the higher for existence, while the lower acts as a receptacle to contain the higher. In other words, they need each other in order for the correspondence to occur. These mutually interconnecting orders compose what some have called the web of life, or in the words of Mircea Eliade, “The universe is [not] sealed off, nothing is isolated inside its own existence: everything is linked by a system of correspondences” (qtd. in Cirlot xiv).

Since corresponding levels of the creation proceed from the “Original Cause,” the relation between correspondents is said to be causal. This includes descending levels in Spirit and matter, i.e., the more spiritual, or higher, “causes” the lower manifestations, which are in turn their “effects.” Jung, on the other hand, takes exception to this “causal connection” in what he calls “the old theory of correspondences,” where items are in “constant connection though effect” (*Synchronicity* 115, 98). Instead, he translates the theory of correspondences into his own idea of the “acausal connecting principle,” in which he asserts that “the only recognizable and demonstrable link between [parallel

natural and spiritual events] is a common *meaning* or equivalence” (*Synchronicity* 115; Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 146). That is to say, Jung posits an “inconstant connection through contingency,” or what he calls “synchronicity”<sup>7</sup> (*Synchronicity* 98). Whether correspondences are causal or acausal, Romantics believe they are interrelated in repeated patterns that are not due to chance.

These interconnecting systems are often conveyed through symbolic expression. With the coming of Jung’s acausal approach to the idea of correspondences, or what he calls “meaningful coincidences,” the source of corresponding links is sought in an unconscious “hierarchy of archetypes” (*Synchronicity* 78, 79). The archetypal nature of these connections presupposes that they originate in levels of consciousness that are for the most part beyond the conscious awareness of the human mind and may in some cases be “*a priori* in relation to human consciousness,” existing “outside man” in “transcendental images or models of empirical things,” i.e., “forms” “whose reflections we see in the phenomenal world” (*Synchronicity* 85-86). As these underlying patterns move from the unconscious to consciousness, they are translated symbolically by the mind from one level of existence and consciousness to another, emerging as ideas and forms, words and visual images. As Jung puts it:

An archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors. If such a content should speak of the sun and identify with it the lion, the king, the hoard of gold guarded by the dragon, or the power that makes for the life and health of man, it is neither the one thing nor the other, but the unknown third thing [the archetype] that finds more or less adequate expression in all these [symbols]. (*Psychology of the Child Archetype* 76)

Yet, returning to the traditional theory of correspondences, what corresponds are

not the phenomena themselves but their attributes, characteristics, and functions. So, for example, it is not the king who corresponds to the sun, but rather the principles of kingship that correspond to the position of the sun. In other words, the preeminent position and sustaining relationship of the king to his kingdom corresponds to the centrality and life-giving, nurturing, and sustaining relationship of the sun to the solar system. In this way, correspondences are different from representation or signification. The king as a person can be said to represent (or “re-present”) the sun; for, just as the light of the sun is cast upon the earth, the illumination of the king shines on his subjects. In this context, the word “king” may present to the mind images of the sun. The term “king” could also be said to signify<sup>8</sup> (“sign-ify”) the sun. Since the ruling function and office of kingship does correspond to the “ruling” position of the sun, “king” signifies the sun in the same way. Thus, symbolic expression can take many forms, depending on the degree of resonances between similar things on different planes (Cirlot 326).

### Identity

Just as Plotinus and Romantic thinkers map the origin and stages of being and consciousness through the theories of emanation and correspondences (or the related concept of synchronicity), each also identifies comparable stages of development, using similar descriptions, definitions, and terminology to articulate his understanding of these stages. Yet, precisely because Romantics are unique as individuals and often highly original, each tends to reinterpret or recreate his own version of these basic patterns, adapting them to his personal and sociocultural environment. Blake, for instance,

translates Neoplatonism and other ideas into his own myth and theory of emanation and correspondences, which he presents as novel poetic personae and symbols through his prose, poetry, and visual art. Jung's thinking about emanation and synchronicity evolves as a holarchy based on archetypes. Taken together, the terms and concepts of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic Romantics inform each other and provide a comprehensive understanding of Romantic thought and the stages of identity they are describing. The term "identity," as I am using it, derives from this larger Neoplatonic Romantic understanding of these stages and structures, with their distinguishing characteristics. Therefore, I am including here an overview of prominent Romantics who clearly follow their own version of the Neoplatonic process of identity mapping, each of whom would deserve an entire chapter in a longer version of this study.

Plotinus posits that from the undifferentiated One, issues *Nous* (approximately translated as "Spirit," "Intelligence," or "Mind"); Soul (higher and lower); and finally the physical body, with its biological, cognitive, and personal self, which interacts with the material universe. Blake, Coleridge, and Emerson agree with Plotinus that the One, or the transcendent source of emanation, is the First Principle. Emerson mirrors Plotinus's terminology, describing "the One" as "ineffable cause" ("Experience" 267). In Blake and Coleridge, however, the Plotinian ineffable One takes on Neoplatonic Christian colorings, while Jung declines to define the transcendent God, which he refers to as the "unfathomable Being" (qtd. in Dyer 11).

Plotinus clearly differentiates between the first and second emanations, *Nous* and the Universal or World-Soul, envisioning a higher soul and a lower soul, with the

Universal or World-Soul as the higher. Blake, Coleridge, Emerson, and Jung, however, are not always as specific in their delineations, and their portrayal of the first and second emanations must be discerned by carefully reading their terms and descriptions in the context of their larger writing. For instance, Plotinus's description of *Nous* as "Mind" is reflected in Emerson's description of God as universal Mind. Blake portrays this aspect of divinity as Divine Man, Divine Humanity (God), and Jesus as God, which is another way of saying God who never falls but descends for the incarnation. The Plotinian *Nous* and the higher soul are similar to Coleridge's "primary and secondary Imagination," and combined they resonate with Jung's archetypal "Self" or "God-image." In Blakean terms, the higher soul, or Coleridge's secondary Imagination, is described as the Imagination, often personified, taking various forms and identities. Again echoing Plotinus, Emerson refers to the second emanation as the universal "Over-Soul."

Plotinus, Blake, Coleridge, and Emerson also describe an embodied individual soul of the phenomenal world, which has fallen from primal unity. Jung's writings about the soul, characteristically, are more nebulous. Coleridge, Emerson, and Jung, unlike Plotinus, focus on what they call the "ego," or in Emerson's terminology, "egotism." Blake's self-assertive reason, sometimes personified as Urizen ("Your-reason"), is essentially like the ego. According to Blake and Coleridge, a pivotal point in the emanation of identity is the fall of the soul from primal consciousness, which occurs with the differentiation of the ego, or the individual "I," from its immediate source. Blake, Coleridge, Emerson, and Jung also picture the human being as a fusion of soul, ego, and body. Plotinus, however, simply refers to this amalgamation as "self" or "man." Those

who espouse this worldview tend to stress the continuity of a self that contracts, expands, and metamorphoses between egocentricity and a broader, deeper transcendent self. To complete this circular process of identity development, all five thinkers see the soul's returning to the Source through the ascent, if seen hierarchically, or through moving inward to the center, if seen holarchically.

In order to account for these similarities and differences, I have developed my own overarching "Romantic map of identity," which combines the theories of these thinkers and includes hierarchical and holarchical patterns. Rather than concentric spheres or a ladder design, this model is more like an egg with layers, the ovoid divided, or "sliced," into "horizontal" sections. In this scheme, the One, or transcendent God, is the outer ovoid that transcends and encompasses the rest. The next ovoid in would be the connective field of the collective unconscious. *Nous*, or the personification of God as Mind--Blake's Divine Man and Coleridge's primary imagination--occupies the next ovoid, yet, as the first emanation of God as being, retains a direct connection to the One.

The next inward ovoid, emanating from and tied to *Nous*, would contain the Plotinian World-Soul, Emersonian Over-Soul, Coleridge's secondary imagination, and Blake's poetic personae illustrating the visionary or divine imagination, the creative principle. Jung's Self, or God-image (*Nous* and World-Soul combined), forms a "higher" unconscious field of identity. The next inner ovoid would be the individual soul. Some of these "ovoids" branch off or interpenetrate in a hierarchy of their own. Both the body and the inner layer of the ego emanate from the soul, retaining a connection to the soul and Self, to use Jung's term. The outer layer of the ego emanates from the inner layer of the

ego and the body. In this process the soul, ego, and body become intermeshed in the form we recognize as “human,” an ovoid of its own. A field of conscious awareness, at the midline of the ovoid, emanates from the human being but is most closely related to the ego. The “lower” personal unconscious, containing what Jung calls complexes<sup>9</sup> and the “shadow,”<sup>10</sup> is an emanation of the human, settling to the bottom of the human ovoid.

With this overall conceptual framework in mind, I will explore in detail the analogies between Plotinus’s and Coleridge’s individual schema and mapping processes. Using the hierarchical approach, these stages or structures of consciousness development correspond to each other according to a top-down scheme of emanation. My map shows their analogies between levels of being look like this.

Figure 1. Overview of the Romantic Map of Identity of Plotinus and Coleridge.

Plotinus	Coleridge
the One	Infinite I AM, Great I AM
<i>Nous</i>	Primary Imagination, Ideal Imagination
Universal or World-Soul	Secondary Imagination, philosophic imagination, Logos
soul	soul
“I,” self, man	ego

## CHAPTER 3

## PLOTINUS'S MAP OF IDENTITY

Plotinus's Theory on the Creation of the Universe

What I have identified as the cardinal points of early British Romanticism can be traced at least as far back as *The Enneads* of Plotinus, a collection of his treatises.<sup>11</sup>

Again, these Romantic essentials are: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul's return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context. These fundamentals focus on the origin and creation of identity—being, consciousness, and self—through the process of emanation.

Plotinus, in his tractate "The Heavenly System," also uses the metaphor of emanation to explain how the origin of self-consciousness is connected with the creation of the Cosmos itself (*Enneads* 2.1.1-6, 80-84). As Copleston explains this account, the world issues from the ultimate Principle "by necessity," rather than a conscious creative act, since the One must remain "untouched, undiminished, [and] unmoved" (466).

Through this process of emanation, "every nature" makes "that which is immediately subordinate to it . . . , unfolding itself, as a seed unfolds itself, the procession being from an undivided source or principle to a goal in the universe of sense" (Copleston 466).

Plotinus divides this "entire ordered universe" into heavenly and earthly systems

(*Enneads* 2.1.1, 80). The heavens, which “have persistence as a whole,” emanate levels of self-consciousness and stages of identity that move from the celestial to the “sub-celestial,” i.e., the material plane (*Enneads* 2.1.6, 84).

Thus, once self-consciousness moves into the sub-celestial realms, it must develop through the process of evolution. That is to say, what issues forth from undifferentiated Being in the One goes back as individual identity. This process can be charted as the hierarchical descent and ascent or as the holarchical outgoing and return. It is contextual because each stage of consciousness at the microcosmic level of the individual is evolving into a larger whole that is situated within larger contexts in the collective or communal macrocosm. These interconnections occur in many dimensions, from Spirit to matter.

In order to understand Plotinus’s ideas about these stages of consciousness development and relationships between stages of identity, one must understand his terminology and how it operates. As we have seen, Plotinus posits that self-consciousness emanates from the causal One, as Creator, to *Nous* (“Intelligence,” “Thought,” “Mind” or “Spirit”) to Soul (higher and lower) and finally to “man” (Copleston 464-69). Plotinus’s tight definitions of these structures of consciousness are, in a sense, the source and blueprint for “emanating” theories of identity that continue to expand in Coleridge and other writers in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition. Let us examine Plotinus’s procession of self-consciousness into stages or structures of subordinate being.

The One

Plotinus describes the eternal One, or the Good, as absolutely transcendent, ineffable, and incomprehensible--indivisible primal unity beyond duality and the realm of Intelligence (Copleston 464-65; Louth 38). The creation of stages of consciousness occurs through emanation, where light radiates from the eternal One to lower stages of being in a sliding scale of "different degrees of distance from the One" (Kirschner 118). Yet, in this scheme, God is omnipresent, or immanent, in his creation because the causal One, as Creator, is simultaneously the center, source, and circumference of the outgoing emanations. Thus, according to this thinking, God's immanence in successive stages of being and consciousness is present by degrees. The ineffable One, however, is not "identical with the sum of individual things," for the One is "beyond all distinctions" and transcends the sphere of creation and "all being of which we have experience" (Copleston 464, 465). In the words of Plotinus, "The Good is that on which all else depends, towards which all Existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself" (*Enneads* 1.8.2, 67). So paradoxically, God is qualitatively distinct from his creation at the same time he is immanent in it (Oakes 319). Robert Oakes remarks that this antinomy has been described by Jewish sages and Christian theologians alike as "the mystery of mysteries" (320).

Nous

Since the One, or ultimate Deity, is beyond all being and transcends what Oakes

calls “pervasive immanence” itself, it follows that our concepts of God as being and immanence derive from that hypostasis of which we can conceive or experience (318). The first such emanation from the undifferentiated causal One, Plotinus believed, is *Nous*,<sup>12</sup> the source of what Plato called eternal ideal forms (Kirschner 118). While *Nous*, like the eternal One, is a transcendent, albeit less-infinite causal God, it is in *Nous* where being first appears. As Plotinus describes it:

The divine remains . . . unchanging . . . , but from its perfection and from the Act included in its nature there emanates the secondary or issuing Act which—as the output of a mighty power, the mightiest there is--attains to Real Being as second to that which stands above all Being. (*Enneads* 5.4.2, 402)

Still, as Louth points out, “*Nous*” is nearly impossible to translate. To better understand what Plotinus was getting at, we can look at the biblical God, keeping in mind that any attempt to apply Plotinus’s system to Christian doctrine is speculative since, according to Copleston, Plotinus was silent about Christianity (464). Even so, Karen Armstrong, in *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, points out similarities between the Plotinian *Nous* and the Christian concept of God the Father. For instance, while the ineffable One has no gender, *Nous* is “grammatically masculine” (103, 104). Moreover, Plotinus describes the One as impersonal and oblivious of the creation. Yet *Nous*, like the Christian God, is portrayed as the Presence of God, the perfect yet more intelligible God to whom humans attempt to relate, either through supplication, revelation, or mystical union. Thus, the first emanation of God, like the First Person of the Christian Trinity, appears to individuals, speaks to them, and guides them home (Armstrong 104). Armstrong, however,

emphasizes that Plotinus did not envision this God as “out there” somewhere. Rather, the Plotinian *Nous* is a God individualized in each one, i.e., “God [is] all in all” (103). Thus, Plotinus declares:

We have all the vision that may be of Him and of ourselves; but it is of a self wrought to splendour, brimmed with the Intellectual light, become that very light, pure, bouyant, unburdened, raised to Godhood or, better, knowing its Godhood, all aflame. (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 623)

It was with this God, I believe, that Plotinus is reported to have realized transcendent union at least four times during his life (Copleston 464). Since *Nous* is the more intelligible God, immanence applies to *Nous* to the extent that it possesses the Substance of the One as well as to the soul who experiences mystical union with the Presence of God, in varying degrees and for longer or shorter periods of time. This experience of immanence is possible because, as Louth notes, the lower emanation is more “outward” and the higher more “inward,” so God could be thought of as the center of the soul (40). Thus, as Plotinus reports, even as the soul experiences immanence or mystical union, the individual is still aware of itself as a distinct component of identity:

In our self-seeing There, the self is seen as belonging to that order, or rather we are merged into that self in us which has the quality of that order. It is a knowing of the self restored to its purity. No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities, seen and seer, instead of, boldly, the achievement of unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme. (*Enneads* 6.9.10, 624)

#### Universal or World-Soul

As an emanation of *Nous*, Plotinus envisioned a “higher” soul, which he called

“the Universal or World-Soul,” and a lower soul that is more directly connected with the physical body. The higher soul, which like *Nous* is eternal, is “universal” because it is common to all beings, acting as an intermediary between *Nous* and the lower soul and moving between dimensions of timelessness in Spirit and the time-space continuum in matter. Kirschner notes that “the [World-Soul] is ambiguous or ‘two-faced’ because it can turn away from the *nous* and the One--toward matter (bodily existence)--as well as towards the Absolute” (118). This second emanation, as Kirschner puts it, is “the individual life-principle or movement-principle of all beings,” which sets the matrices for forms in the planes of matter as well as infusing them with life and action through spiritual influx (118). As Plotinus asserts:

Our being is the fuller for our turning Thither; this is our prosperity; to hold aloof is loneliness and lessening. Here is the soul’s peace . . . ; here it has its Act, its true knowing; here it is immune. Here is living, the true; that of today. . . . Life in the Supreme is the native activity of the Intellect; . . . for of all these the soul is pregnant when it has been filled with God. (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 622-23)

At the individual level, the World-Soul can also be experienced as the incarnate Logos, an intimate guiding presence, or the “voice” of God. Thus, Plotinus’s Universal or World-Soul is roughly equivalent to the Christian “Christ,” or Second Person of the Trinity, but in a Neoplatonic sense applied to every person. This metaphysical vision of a universal term *Christ*, or its equivalent, referring to an emanation of God, seemed perfectly natural to the Greek Plotinus as it would to later Romantics.<sup>13</sup>

### The Soul

From the Universal Soul issues an individual soul of the phenomenal world. In

Plotinus's thought, "Individual . . . souls proceed from the World-Soul, and, like the World-Soul, they are subdivided into two elements," "a higher element which belongs to the sphere of *Nous*" and "a lower element, which is directly connected with the body," i.e., the embodied soul that we experience as "human" (Copleston 468). Just as the soul emanates from God, it is the soul that must return. Thus, the embodied soul has the potential to break through to transcendental forms beyond time and space as well as to experience incarnate nature in matter, the "furthest limit of the One's emanation" (Louth 39). Yet, at this stage of the descent, since "the soul pre-existed before its union with the body," according to Plotinus,<sup>14</sup> incarnation is represented "as a fall" (Copleston 468). The embodied soul is "fallen" because, in its self-centeredness, it now identifies with the physical body and its senses rather than its spiritual origin and consciousness as World-Soul and *Nous*. In the words of Plotinus:

The [s]oul that breaks away from this source of its reality, in so far as it is not perfect or primal, is, as it were, a secondary, an image, to the loyal [World] Soul. By its falling-away—and to the extent of the fall—it is stripped of Determination, becomes wholly indeterminate, sees darkness. Looking to what repels vision, as we look when we are said to see darkness, it has taken Matter into itself. (*Enneads* 1.8.4, 69)

Still, according to Plotinus, by breaking away from God, we are actually breaking away from ourselves. For God is the origin and true identity of the soul and exists "outside of none" (*Enneads* 6.9.7, 621). "This state [of the soul] is its first and its final," Plotinus asserts, "because from God it comes, its good lies There, and, once turned to God again, it is what it was" (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 623). To the degree that God dwells within (or the soul identifies with the indwelling God) will the individual soul gain glimpses

into infinity:

[T]he soul takes another life as it draws nearer and nearer to God and gains participation in Him; thus restored it feels that the dispenser of true life is There to see, that now we have nothing to look for but, far otherwise, that we must put aside all else and rest in This alone, This become, This alone, all the earthly environment done away, in haste to be free, impatient of any bond holding us to the baser, so that with our being entire we may cling about This, no part in us remaining but through it we have touch with God. (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 623)

Although this drawing nearer to God can be conceptualized hierarchically, it is probably

best understood holarchically as moving inward back to the source and center. As

Plotinus states, "In the looking [for God] beware of throwing outward; this Principle does not lie away somewhere [in some place]" (*Enneads* 6.9.7, 621). Plotinus adds:

From none is that Principle absent and yet from all: present, it remains absent save to those fit to receive, disciplined into some accordance, able to touch it closely by their likeness and by that kindred power within themselves though which, remaining as it was when it came to them from the Supreme, they are enabled to see in so far as God may at all be seen. (*Enneads* 6.9.4, 618).

### Self as Man

According to Plotinian thought, "the furthest limit of the One's emanation is matter, which is on the brink . . . of being and non-being" (Louth 39). Plotinus called this stage of self-consciousness "man." In contemporary terms, we would call this stage of consciousness "human nature," the "ego"<sup>15</sup> and its persona, or "the subject," because at this level perception is "material," i.e., it identifies with the physical body and perceives with the senses. Plotinus, however, does not seem to clearly distinguish between soul awareness and ego consciousness, which is one more step removed from the divine original. Rather, he refers to these "baser" stages as the "self" and "man," which comes

across as a soul that is bound to “body-nature” and ego awareness, concerning itself with material existence and the earthly environment. As Plotinus affirms, “All living apart from Him, is but a shadow, a mimicry” (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 622). Yet even at this outpost of identity, Plotinus claims, “We have not been cut away; we are not separate, what though the body-nature has closed about us to press us to itself; we breathe and hold our ground because the Supreme does not give and pass but gives on for ever (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 622). Again, Plotinus exhorts: “We must withdraw from all the extern, pointed wholly inwards; no leaning to the outer; the total of things ignored . . . ; the self put out of mind in the contemplation of the Supreme” (*Enneads* 6.9.7, 621).

#### Plotinus’s Message of the Return

As a teacher and writer, Plotinus’s purpose in defining these stages of identity and the circular procession of the outgoing and the return was so the soul could once again “know its own true source and identity—its highest and ‘*true self*’ as of [and in] the One, instead of “its literal identity with it or with the rest of the intelligible world,” and to follow that way (Kirschner 121). As Kirschner puts it, “All entities revert back towards the source, striving to be reunited with it; the soul moves back towards the One by means of a ‘turning inward,’ a turning away from material existence, to contemplate the Good” (120).

## CHAPTER 4

## COLERIDGE'S MAP OF IDENTITY

Romantic Mapping of Identity

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), a founding figure of what would come to be identified as early British Romanticism,<sup>16</sup> articulated the theory, vision, and experience of what I have called Romanticism's cardinal characteristics: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul's return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context. This worldview emphasizes an essential self whose consciousness develops in stages through the circular process of the descent and the ascent within a larger communal or macrocosmic context.

To the greatest extent possible, Coleridge committed his entire being to these precepts, or in his own words, brought his "whole soul" into exploring these ideas and the interrelational aspects of the components of the "total Man as a whole" that they involve (*Biographia* 1: 237; Lockridge 273, 275). That is why he personally tested these ideas through sense experience, introspection, empirical awareness, abstract speculation, and transcendental experience and recorded his attempts to unify different aspects of his own consciousness (Richards 37). As J. Robert Barth asserts, in *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition*,

It was impossible for Coleridge, with his passion for unity of apprehension of the world, to accept a merely “formal correspondence” between “ideas” and “things.”<sup>17</sup> Not only must he affirm the reality of both because both are part of his experience, but reality most emphatically does consist in their interaction.

(131; Feidelson qtd. in Barth 131)

For Coleridge, all knowledge—including the psychological, metaphysical, or philosophical—was one, or interconnected, and the ultimate goal of this knowledge was to know God (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 37). In his pursuit of knowledge, Coleridge drew upon a Neoplatonic tradition. Coleridgean scholars are familiar with his well-established connections with Neoplatonic thinkers, including Plotinus (whom he translated at the age of fifteen), other Neoplatonic and Hermetic philosophers, such as Giordano Bruno and Jakob Bohme, and the German transcendentalists of his time (*Biographia* 1: 144, 273; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 265). It is also significant to note that Coleridge was profoundly influenced by his understanding of the Christian Bible. Through blending these and other philosophical ideas with his own version of Christianity, Coleridge found a way to integrate matter and Spirit and to explain the development of consciousness in stages of identity, which he defined most clearly in *Biographia Literaria*, his famous work on the imagination.

### Romantic Focus on the Whole Self

Coleridge, like other early Romantics, concentrated on the whole self, not merely the self as egocentricity or even as Kantian subjectivism. Rather, Coleridge’s “whole one Self” included the interdependency of all components of being in all dimensions,

especially the soul's encounter with the numinous:

'Tis the sublime of man,  
Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves  
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole!  
This fraternises man. . . . But 'tis God  
Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole.

(*Religious Musings* 127-31)

This emphasis on the individual soul who searches for wholeness and transcendence through union with higher aspects of being stems in part from a "need of some imperishable bliss," in the words of Wallace Stevens ("Sunday Morning" 62). Isaiah Berlin, in *The Roots of Romanticism* expresses it this way:

Friedrich Schlegel, the greatest harbinger, the greatest herald and prophet of romanticism that ever lived, says there is in man a terrible unsatisfied desire to soar into infinity, a feverish longing to break through the narrow bonds of individuality. Sentiments not altogether unlike this can be found in Coleridge.

(15)

Barth calls Coleridge's entire life "a quest" for that unity which is God (*Symbolic Imagination* 40). Coleridge, in his Mystery poem "Kubla Khan," expresses numinous experience this way: "Close your eyes with holy dread, / For he on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise" (52-54). John Beer, in "The Languages of *Kubla Khan*," argues that these lines suggest "the original paradisaal spring of which all earthly fountains are pale copies" (224).

Suzanne R. Kirschner, in *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis*, interprets "Romantic 'moments' of illumination and transcendence" as "secular descendants of the Neoplatonized Christian doctrine of the inner light" (175). Kirschner explains: "The reunion or 'divine marriage,' of the soul and God became the reunion of

mind and nature or subject and object; the illumination of the soul with the Divine Spark was translated into this-worldly acts of creative imagination" (175-76). According to Abrams, this experience of secular inner light naturalizes the supernatural and humanizes the divine (*Natural Supernaturalism* 68). Harold Bloom similarly maintains that Romantic self-realization and "self-exaltation" is more than "a metaphysic"; it is a vision of how to live "a more human life" (*Visionary Company* xxiii-iv). I would argue, however, that in the case of Coleridge, along with other early British Romantics, this vision is neither exclusively transcendent nor secular. Rather, it is both--a comprehensive vision of divine and human reality. For Coleridge took a dim view of the unknowable Kantian transcendent that was beyond human experience. As Coleridge explained, Kant used terms like "border" and "demarcation" to delineate a boundary beyond the phenomenal realm, which our senses and rational awareness cannot penetrate (*Biographia* 1: 237), i.e., which can neither be seen *with* nor *through* the senses in a Blakean sense (Singer 65).

Coleridge, on the other hand, strove to expand his own vision of what he termed "interpenetrating" dimensions to realize transcendental states of consciousness, even fleetingly, and to carry this vision and method of perception to the experiential level through symbolic thinking and expression. In other words, Coleridge sought to bridge the gap between the eternal and temporal through symbol, which, Coleridge claims, "always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while [a symbol] enunciates the whole, [it] abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative" (*Statesman's Manual* 30). Moreover, Coleridge reasoned, symbol has the power to

project the light of the eternal into the temporal through what he calls its “translucence” (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 124, 128). Coleridge illustrates this concept with the Bible: “[There] Persons must of necessity have a two-fold significance, . . . a temporal and a perpetual, a particular and a universal application. They must be at once Portraits and Ideals,” i.e., they are “characterized by . . . the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal” (*Statesman’s Manual* 30).

Coleridge further explains, “In the Bible every agent appears and acts as a self-subsisting individual: each has a life of its own, and yet all are one life” (*Statesman’s Manual* 31). All are one life because the One is the whole circumference that embraces all, incorporating everything in existence. All are one life because the emanation is connected to its source: “The root is never detached from the ground” (*Statesman’s Manual* 32). Furthermore, because both the human and the divine are illumined by the light of God, through symbol they can be “apprehended” at the same time (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 124). As Barth makes clear, “When light passes through a translucent medium—a stained-glass window, for instance—the light and the window, however distinguishable, are not separate” (*Symbolic Imagination* 123).

Coleridge, through his innovative amalgamation of Neoplatonism and Christianity, found a way to integrate divine and human reality as immanence, or the transcendent in man. “Is it possible,” Barth asks, that the objective, transcendent God of eighteenth-century Enlightenment, as well as the mystical God of religious experience, “has been ‘relocated’” and “rediscovered where it has always been, in the . . . heart of humankind?” (*Symbolic Imagination* 142). Coleridge’s “consubstantiality” (of one

essence) offers “a renewed perception of the oneness . . . of all being,” Barth maintains.

It is possible, therefore, to speak meaningfully of the numinous—whether it be the transcendent deity, . . . or the sacred glimpsed in the depths of oneself—by true analogy with sensible reality. No longer is the sacred awesomely apart; it is awesomely present. The numinous that is glimpsed in our natural and human worlds (“quick now, here, now, always”) gives true, if limited, reports of an ideal, transcendent reality. More than that, it is itself experience of that reality.

(*Symbolic Imagination* 159)

In Coleridgean terms, immanence means experiencing the whole self as human and divine or, as William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* describes it, having a “consciousness possessed by the sense of a being at once *excessive* and *identical* with the self: great enough to be God; interior enough to be *me*” (553).

#### Transcendent Vision of the Emanation and Fall of the Soul

Even to conceive of immanence, with its translucence and interpenetrating dimensions of being, Coleridge needed to possess a visionary mind steeped in a complex and expansive living, spiritual philosophy (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 24-25).

Describing this process of integrative perception Coleridge wrote, in a variant of *Religious Musings*, “As I muse, / Behold a VISION gathers in my soul” (qtd. in Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*). His was a mind that could envision the origin, creation, and experience of being and consciousness through emanation in a Neoplatonic sense and the fall of the soul from its source in a Christian sense. Yet combining the Neoplatonic ideas of emanation of the soul, as a necessary fulfilment of the One’s own potentiality, together with the Christian fall (viewed either as fortunate or unfortunate), is problematical. Coleridge, in his writings, attempts to synthesize these views in the

Romantic vision of the descent of the soul from primordial unity of being and consciousness, the emanation of the creation in stages of increasing diversity, and the interdependence of elements of emanation through correspondence. Thus, Coleridge posits a Plotinian scheme of emanation in which the creation issues forth from an ultimate source through “the natural doctrine of . . . influx” (*Biographia* 1: 131).

According to his own account, Coleridge also gleaned some of his emanationist ideas from Proclus (c 410-85), a prominent Athenian Neoplatonist writing two centuries after Plotinus, who believed that “universal consciousness” precedes and transcends all individual consciousness (*Biographia* 1: 144).

Moreover, Coleridge mined the writings of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1775-1854), whose ideas were noted by *Biographia Literaria* co-editor James Engell,<sup>18</sup> as follows: “The unity that pervades the varied phenomena of the universe is God—at once the ‘immanent cause’ of all things and yet above them, as the universal permits and sustains the particular but is simultaneously distinct from it” (1: 145). Coleridge was fascinated with these notions of “the One and the Many” and the idea of individuality’s subsumption within a greater whole, yet abiding “itself as a living part in the Unity, of which it is the representative” (*Statesman’s Manual* 30). In his own words: “[This mystery] contemplated under the relations of time” appears as “an infinite ascent of Causes, and prospectively as an interminable progression of Effects”; contemplated in space, it is seen as “a law of action and re-action.” Coleridge continues, “This same mystery freed from the phenomena of Time and Space, and seen in the depth of *real* Being, reveals itself to the pure Reason as the

actual immanence of ALL in EACH" (*Statesman's Manual* 49-50).

This indwelling oneness-in-diversity occurs through what Coleridge calls "consubstantiality," which is akin to the idea of corresponding essential substances or natures that link levels, or gradations, of being and consciousness, where each derivation of being issues from its nearest superior. Coleridge states this idea simply: "I am because God is." "I am because I exist in God" (*Biographia* 1: 274). As Barth observes, Coleridge's consubstantiality echoes the Great Chain of Being theory (*Symbolic Imagination* 36). Coleridge asserts:

That the self-consciousness is the fixt point, to which for *us* all is morticed and annexed, needs no further proof. But that the self-consciousness may be the modification of a higher form of being, perhaps of a higher consciousness, this again of a yet higher, and so on in an infinite regressus [retreat or ebbing] . . . , must lie beyond the possibility of our knowledge. (*Biographia* 1: 284)

The infinite regressus fades from our knowing because the ceaseless outflowing of light from the One dims as it moves outward from the center. Still, Coleridge contends, "In all ages there have been a few, who measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls have learnt, that the sources must be far higher and far inward" (*Biographia* 1: 239).

Inevitably, however, the Neoplatonic idea of the emanation of the soul from God, which includes the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, clashes with the orthodox Christian view that the soul is created *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") at the same time the body is created (Armstrong 110-11). According to I. A. Richards's *Coleridge on Imagination*, "Coleridge used to say that everyone is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian," and Coleridge counted himself among the Platonists (18). Thus, Coleridge

was familiar with the Platonic doctrine of pre-existence, noting that “Synesius was censured for his doctrine of the Pre-existence of the Soul”<sup>19</sup> (*Biographia* 1: 246).

Undoubtedly, like all Christians, Coleridge was also affected by the fate of Church Father Origen of Alexandria (185-254 CE), who was persecuted for his version of Christian Neoplatonism<sup>20</sup> and whose teachings on pre-existence of souls were anathematized by fifth- and sixth-century church councils. Probably for these and other reasons, Coleridge, a professed Christian, could not bring himself to accept the claim for the pre-existence of the soul, as opposed to the orthodox belief in its survival after death.<sup>21</sup> Still, in *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge does allude to a fall prior to incarnation: “I could have entered into the momentous subject of a Spiritual Fall or Apostacy *antecedent* [i.e., prior] to the formation of Man—a belief, the scriptural grounds of which are few and of diverse interpretation, but which has been almost universal in the Christian Church”<sup>22</sup> (290-91).

Some of Coleridge’s views on this subject come to light in his critique of William Wordsworth’s *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, where the poet addresses a six-year-old child as an immortal “philosopher” with a “heritage,” a “mighty prophet” and “seer” “haunted for ever by the Eternal Mind.” Wordsworth writes:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,

But he beholds the light, and whence it flows.

.....  
 Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie  
     Thy soul's immensity;  
 Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep  
 Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,  
 That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,  
     Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,--  
 Mighty prophet! Seer blest! (58-69, 108-14)

Coleridge counters: "Children at this age give us no such information of themselves; and at what time were we dipped in the Lethe, which has produced such utter oblivion of a state so godlike?" (*Biographia* 1: 138-39). Responding to contemporary criticism that Wordsworth was claiming the pre-existence of souls, Coleridge continues:

The ode was intended for such readers only as had been accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their utmost nature, to venture at times into the twilight realms of consciousness, and to feel a deep interest in modes of inmost being, to which they know that the attributes of time and space are inapplicable and alien, but which yet can not be conveyed, save in symbols of time and space. For such readers the sense is sufficiently plain, and they will be as little disposed to charge Mr. Wordsworth with believing that platonic pre-existence in the ordinary interpretation of the words, as I am to believe, that Plato himself ever meant or taught it. (*Biographia* 1: 147)

Here Coleridge does not seem to take Plato at his word about pre-existence. Yet, neither does Coleridge explain what he means by "twilight realms of consciousness" of one's "utmost nature" and "inmost being" that transcend time and space nor his own lines in *Religious Musings* that summon the "dim recollections" of the soul's lost "nobler nature" (34-36).

Yet a closer look at Wordsworth's *Ode* complicates Coleridge's position even further. What Coleridge does not mention, or perhaps consciously notice, is that Wordsworth's rendering of this poetic experience not only resembles Neoplatonist views

that the memory of the unborn soul, “trailing clouds of glory,” fades upon its descent into the darkness of matter, but it also suggests reincarnation. For not even the Neoplatonists suggest that the fresh pre-existent soul is already a full-blown philosopher or mighty prophet, which presupposes maturity and extensive experience in the world. After all, being “dipped in the Lethe” (Coleridge’s choice of words) causes “souls about to be reincarnated in new bodies to forget their past lives” (Harris and Platzner 207).

Furthermore, how does one interpret Coleridge’s statement about “the collective experience” of the soul’s “whole past existence”?

If the intelligent faculty should be rendered more comprehensive, it would require only a different and apportioned organization, *the body celestial* instead of *the body terrestrial*, to bring before every human soul the collective experience of its whole past existence. . . . Yea, in the very nature of a living spirit, it may be more possible that heaven and earth should pass away, than a single act, a single thought, should be loosened or lost from that living chain of causes, to all whose links, conscious or unconscious, the free-will, our only absolute *self*, is co-extensive and co-present. (*Biographia* 1: 114)

Henry Crabb Robinson, in 1819, interprets this as follows: “Coleridge has the striking thought that possibly the punishment of a future life may consist in bringing back the consciousness of the past” (Sadler 2: 129). Coleridge himself answers this question and perhaps explains some of his own unwillingness to confront his conflicting belief systems: “But not now dare I longer discourse of this, waiting for a loftier mood, and a nobler subject, warned from within and from without, that it is profanation to speak of these mysteries”<sup>23</sup> (*Biographia* 1: 114).

Mission to Facilitate the Soul's Return through Unity

At whatever point the soul is created and descends or falls, i.e., begins to identify with the physical body and its senses, according to Romantic thinking the ultimate destiny of soul evolution is reuniting with its Source, the transcendent God. Coleridge imagines this transformational process as circular yet progressive, a pattern that can be envisioned as an upward spiral. This image combines the concepts of holarchy and hierarchy, as the soul circles back to reconnect with the center but evolves in ascending levels, or holons, i.e., increasing levels of wholeness. As Abrams and Kirschner point out, this Romantic upward-spiraling narrative pattern repeats in Coleridge's poetry and prose (Kirschner 162; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 271). Thus, Coleridge reasons:

The common end of all *narrative*, nay of *all*, Poems, is to convert a *series* into a *Whole*: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a *strait* Line, assume to our Understandings a *circular* motion—the snake with it's Tail in it's Mouth. (*Collected Letters* 4: 545)

The concern of writers such as Coleridge was not only the vision, experience or realization of transcendence and immanence, but it was also to reawaken others to that same vision and opportunity for transformation. In this regard, Coleridge viewed himself as a seer and poet-prophet whose mission it was to envision the circular path of soul evolution, from the descent into lower planes of consciousness to the ascent back to God. A poet-prophet, according to Coleridge, uses the imagination as a portal to transcendental experience and spiritual truth, going beyond what appears to be linear history to see a higher reality and “sublime whole” of past, present, and future of the human race as well as each individual. This vision of the whole enables the poet-prophet

to inspire and lead others to soul freedom (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 271-72). Coleridge represented himself as such a metaphysical bard who was able, "with plastic might," to mold the "chaos" and "confusion" of a degenerating culture "to such perfect [transcendental] forms" of eternal Ideas as they perceive in their "bright visions of the day" (*Religious Musings* 245-48). Coleridge, through what he called the "imagination," a creative unifying faculty, forged this vision of identity development into his own symbolic system.

As we have seen, the symbol itself was an integral part of Coleridge's view of reality. Briefly stated, Coleridge ascribed a role to symbol analogous to Plotinus's One, i.e., symbol is all encompassing, yet it is an essential part of what it represents. Within this system, symbol links corresponding elements in the macrocosm and microcosm. Thus, symbol taps into the very foundation of the entire creation--the "depth of humanity itself and the height and breadth of all the world, in and out of time," as Barth proclaims, hence the power of symbolic knowledge to invoke the whole person (*Symbolic Imagination* 34). For Coleridge, the symbol unites the paradox of the One and the many, or difference that emerges from the original wholeness. Similarly, symbol is also "the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part," i.e., it "partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible" and visible ("On Poesy or Art" 24; *Lay Sermons* 30). That is why Coleridge calls the symbol "a living momentary revelation of the Inscrutable" (qtd. in Fletcher). According to Coleridge this happens because symbolic expression links corresponding elements in the macrocosm and microcosm, including Spirit and matter, the universal and particular, words and things, God and the soul, and

unconscious and conscious. Furthermore, these connections, created by the process of emanation, often become polarities or opposites as they move into different dimensions.

Symbol, for example, connects the opposites Spirit and its emanation, matter, through what Coleridge calls “an IDEA.” Coleridge writes: “An IDEA, in the *highest* sense of that word [as an ideal form], cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*” (*Biographia* 1: 156). Ideas as ideal forms are perceived through Reason, the faculty of transcendent perception, or direct apprehension of reality.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in the human psyche, symbols appear in images through the understanding, the faculty that knows according to sense perception. Thus, the expression of ideas in a spiritual and human sense grows out of the collaboration between the polarities Reason and understanding through reconciling aspects of consciousness (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 25-26, 136). Once the idea passes into the dimension of the imagination or human psyche, it is subject to connection through association born in time and space as well as to correspondence. As Coleridge maintains:

Be it observed . . . that I include in the *meaning* of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls. For language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood and intentions of the person who is representing it. (*Biographia* 2: 142)

That is why, although the inscrutable symbol as a universal language is “impervious to local limitations,” the symbolic representation of a universal idea may manifest differently from culture to culture (Fletcher 17). Coleridge wrote to his friend Godwin in 1800 about the “power” of symbols and words and “the process by which human feelings form affinities with them,” asking the question:

Is *thinking* impossible without arbitrary signs? &--how far is the word "arbitrary" a misnomer? Are not words & c[onsciousness] parts and germinations of the Plant? And what is the Law of their Growth?--In something of this order I would endeavor to destroy the old antithesis of *Words & Things*, elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too. (*Collected Letters* 1: 625-26)

At the microcosmic level, the individual experiences the correspondences and polarities between matter and Spirit as connection and difference between the soul and God. The matter/Spirit and soul/God polarities are often portrayed as feminine and masculine. From a psychological perspective, these opposites are translated into the unconscious and the conscious. Coleridge posits a symbolic process that builds a bridge between these polarities. Coleridge's writing, "at its most intense, is essentially a 'search for the numinous,'" as Barth explains.

It may be only a glimpse of the sacred within one's deepest self, or the aspiration for an ideal world beyond the self, or a moment of vision of the numinous. . . .

We should add at once that the search for the numinous that is expressed in symbol is at the same time more than a search. It is an encounter; it is a search that is already in some measure successful. The "search" is a struggle to articulate what has already been grasped without words--what has been felt in the bones, what has been dreamt, what has been glimpsed in vision. The search is for words, words to express this numinous "other." The search is to articulate an encounter, an encounter with the sacred, which has already taken place and yet takes place still in and around the symbol. (*Symbolic Imagination*, 144-45)

In Coleridgean thinking, the correspondent linking process that "takes place in and around the symbol" is made possible by consubstantiality, archetypes (organic forms that shape the symbol), and participation mystique. Together these weave the web of life. Consubstantiality means that corresponding elements are coessential: having the same substance or essence. "Once we admit the universal transcendence of being itself and of the transcendental properties of being," Barth explains, "the way is open" for the

“sharing of reality on many levels. Something like this, I believe, is what Coleridge means by the consubstantiality of the symbol” (*Symbolic Imagination* 37). Barth traces the origins of the term “consubstantial” to the 325 CE Nicene Council’s declaration that the Son is of the same substance of the Father. Barth asserts, “It is somehow fitting that Coleridge’s prime analogate for this word should be an expression of the deepest and highest unity possible (the unity of the Godhead), together with the most meaningful and closest relationship of difference (the Persons of the Trinity)” (*Symbolic Imagination* 37-38).

Barth adds that symbols in Romantic thinking are archetypal, not only in a Platonic sense “in the noumenal<sup>25</sup> world, the world of the ‘Divine Ideas,’” but also in a depth-psychology sense (*Symbolic Imagination* 138). “‘Archetype,’ for the Romantics, must be taken to include the inner archetypes as well, the archetypes of the self as well as the archetypes of eternity,” Barth contends. “The poet is always searching for deeper and broader reality, and symbol is the mode of that searching” (139). For Coleridge, symbols of eternity, sown in the psyche, continue to evolve out of what he calls inner “organic” form within human nature, i.e., a symbol is an expression of what is “innate” or unconscious in the psyche (Selden 152). Coleridge posits that organic form “shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form” (Fletcher 16).

Thus, according to Coleridge, a symbol grows by an innate energy of the psyche into the organic unity that makes up its achieved form, making “the internal external” (“On Poesy or Art” 26). Based on this thinking, symbols have an inherent connection

with the original impulse. According to Angus Fletcher's *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, this process supposes what Levy-Bruhl termed a "participation mystique," or mysterious connection between the symbol and what is symbolized (17). As Coleridge sees it, through the symbol, the reader perceives this connection directly without going through a series of rational, logical steps (Fletcher 18). In John Coulson's view, the Coleridgean poet-prophet "confronts us with a use of language in which words do not stand for terms possessing a constant meaning but are to be seen as components in a field of force that take their value from the charge of the field as a whole" (13). Coulson's "field of force" extends through all dimensions and into the world.

#### The Individual in His or Her Personal Environment and Historical Context

Barth emphasizes that the world was "sacramental" to Coleridge, "truly an 'embodiment of God's presence.'" Coleridge's ideas about symbol, Barth explains, express "'God's immanence in the world, and the consequent capacity of that world to be, in itself, revelatory'" (*Symbolic Imagination* 2). Thus, in the framework of "this fleshly World," man "inly armed" strives "toward a higher integrity" that he "must earn, by the full exercise of all the faculties which make him human," "adult," and "civilized" (*Religious Musings* 46, 59; *Natural Supernaturalism* 270). Not only does "the dynamic process of growth in time" toward unity include transcending the time-space continuum altogether, but at the same time it means forming a more perfect unity here on earth—with oneself, nature, and the communal whole, in Spirit and matter (Wilkie 31).

Ronald C. Wendling's *Coleridge's Progress to Christianity* underscores

Coleridge's "peculiarly empirical transcendentalism" (10). According to Wendling, "In Coleridge, continued awareness of the transcendental, even though it begins and ends in God, occurs only through the sensible world and exists to improve experience of it."

While his "transcendentalism" is "demandingly otherworldly," Wendling continues, it is also emphatically "of this earth" (10). Similarly, Abrams maintains, part of Coleridge's unity and soul freedom is to be found in an earthly utopia, in communion "with the 'earth, sea and air' of the natural world," as well as with the brotherhood of humankind (*Natural Supernaturalism* 339). As Coleridge affirms, "Not for myself but for my conscience--i.e. my affections & duties toward others, I should have no Self--for Self is Definition; but all Boundary implies Neighbourhood--& is knowable only by Neighbourhood, or Relations" (*Notebooks* 2.1: 3231). Thus, in Coleridge's vision of a "Pantocracy," the experimental utopian society he sought to establish, he saw a "rebirth in which a renewed mankind" would "inhabit a renovated earth" where he could feel "thoroughly at home" (Holmes, *Early Visions* 62; Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 12).

### Identity

The Romantic focus on the whole self, beginning with the embodied soul's ascent to higher, former states of being, walking up "steps, that upward to [the] Father's throne / Lead gradual"-- starts with an attempt to retrace the origin of being through a Neoplatonic map of identity (*Religious Musings* 52-53). As we have seen, Plotinus maintains that self-consciousness emanates from the causal One, as Creator, to *Nous* to Soul (higher and lower) to "man." Yet Neoplatonic thought is only one of the many

sources that Coleridge used to structure and explain his ideas about the emanation of self-consciousness into hierarchical levels of being. Thus, an historical analysis of Coleridge's thought is not my primary goal here. Rather, I intend to create philosophic clarity by defining, interpreting, and accounting for components of "the Romantic map of identity," as articulated and illustrated by Coleridge, in comparison with the Neoplatonic map of identity set forth by Plotinus. The following sections in this chapter will provide evidence for the distinct similarities between Plotinus's and Coleridge's respective maps of identity, along with a few differences. I will show that their maps are similar because they are talking about the same things.

Both Plotinus and Coleridge, for example, view the transcendent source of emanation as the First Principle. Yet, while the Plotinian ineffable One is beyond being, the Coleridgean "infinite I AM," or the "Great I AM," has being and Neoplatonic/Christian colorings. Plotinus further posits that from the undifferentiated One, issues *Nous* ("Spirit," "Intelligence," or "Mind"). I will argue that this stage of self-consciousness is similar to Coleridge's primary imagination, which he describes as an echo of the "infinite I AM." According to Plotinus, in the same way that *Nous* emanates from the One, the higher Soul emanates from *Nous*. I will show how this stage of consciousness, the Universal or World-Soul, is similar to Coleridge's "secondary imagination" and its correlates symbolic imagination, philosophic imagination, reason, Logos, and communicative intelligence. Just as Plotinus outlines a lower soul that is directly connected with the physical body, Coleridge also describes an embodied individual soul of the phenomenal world. Like Plotinus, Coleridge describes a soul that has fallen from

primal consciousness, which occurs with the differentiation of the individual "I," from its immediate source. To complete this circular process of identity development, Plotinus and Coleridge see the soul's returning to the Source. Although Plotinus does not clearly distinguish between the embodied soul, the ego, and the human being, but lumps them into the concept of "self" or "man," Coleridge portrays the human being as a synthesis of the soul, the ego, and the body. Coleridge further breaks down the ego into faculties that he calls "fancy," "understanding," and "rationality." Let me explore these concepts in more detail.

#### The Infinite "I AM"

Like Plotinus, Coleridge posits an absolute God as the eternal One, or the Good, as completely transcendent, ineffable, and incomprehensible--indivisible primal unity beyond duality and the realm of Intelligence (*Biographia* 1: 285). As Coleridge expresses it, "the One, the Good," i.e., "the ONE and ALL of . . . Plotinus" is "the Highest, the Increased Spirit," and "the Father of spirits" (*Destiny of Nations* 5; *Biographia* 1: 246; *Aids to Reflection* 129). According to Coleridge, this "Principle & Fountain" of "the Spirit" "alone is truly *one*," having "the Ground of his own Existence within himself" (*Biographia* xciv, 1: 153). Just as Plotinus claims that God is absolutely transcendent and ineffable, beyond all being, so Coleridge asserts that this transcendent God is unknowable and incomprehensible to human beings (*Aids to Reflection* lxxxvi). Coleridge holds this primal unity to be beyond duality, or "initial undifferentiated One," "one and indivisible" (Kirschner 162; Fruman, *Coleridge's Rejection of Nature* 71). This

is the “primordial origin” “whose eternal reason is the ground and absolute condition of the ideas in the mind” (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 15; *Biographia* lxxxix). This is “a truth self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own light,” Coleridge asserts. It is “a somewhat which *is*, simply because it *is*” (*Biographia* 1: 268).

Unlike Plotinus, however, Coleridge ascribes being and self-consciousness to God. That is to say, Coleridge conceives of the One as the “one great Being,” “the absolute self” who is the origin, or “cause and effect,” of self and self-consciousness (*Biographia* lxxxix; 1: 275, 285). According to Coleridge, “This [first] principle . . . manifests itself in the . . . I AM” (*Biographia* 1: 272). Thus, Coleridge refers to the ultimate God as the “infinite I AM,” the “absolute I AM,” and “the great eternal I AM” (*Biographia* 1: 277, 275). Not only is “I AM” the name of God, Coleridge claims, but the “I AM” illustrates that it is “an absolute subject,” having no predicate other than self (*Biographia* 1: 276, 278). In other words, the infinite “I AM” originates “not in an ideal ‘I am,’ but in the absolute origin of self-consciousness which is God (*Biographia* 1: 276). James D. Boulger, in “Coleridge on the Imagination Revisited,” points out that “the ‘I AM’ of the later Coleridge is specifically Christian” (21-22). For in his Neoplatonic/Christian amalgamation, Coleridge gives precedence to Christian terminology and concepts, at least in this case.

Just as Plotinus maintains that consciousness emanates from the ineffable causal One, Coleridge proposes a system that searches for the origin “in an ABSOLUTE, which is at once causa sui et effectus [‘cause and effect’]” (*Biographia* 1: 261, 285). Jonathan Wordsworth’s essay “‘The Infinite I AM’: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being,” a

remarkable study of Coleridge's definitions of identity from the *Biographia Literaria*, notes that Coleridge changed Milton's assertion that all things proceed from God, created out of "one first matter all" to "all things proceed from God, created out of 'one first nature'" (39). In other words, Wordsworth goes on to explain, the cosmos is created out of "the spiritual nature of God" (39). Coleridge describes this origin of things as "the absolute principle of causation" of "that one great Being whose eternal reason is the ground and the absolute cause of all the correspondent realities in nature" (*Aids to Reflection* 553; *Biographia* lxxxix).

Thus, in *The Friend*, Coleridge maintains, "Every faculty, with every . . . minutest organ of our nature, owes its whole reality and comprehensibility to an existence incomprehensible" (1: 519). For, as Barth explains, God as Creator "brings order or 'cosmos' out of the 'chaos' that existed before Creation," dissolving "its identity with itself and all objects" of creation and becoming "conscious of them" through lower stages of being or consciousness (*Symbolic Imagination* 19, 14). Coleridge adds: "The noblest gift of Imagination is the power of discerning the *Cause* in the *Effect*," i.e., the power of seeing the Creator in his creation. Coleridge goes on, "We see our God everywhere--the Universe in the most literal Sense is his written Language" (*Lectures* 1795 338, 339). In a series on Revealed Religion, Coleridge asserts: "The existence of [the] Deity, and his Power and his Intelligence are manifested. . . . The Omnipotent has unfolded to us the Volume of the World, and there we may read the Transcript of himself" (*Lectures* 1795 94). Not only can one read the effect of the causal Almighty One in this creation, but Coleridge, as Plotinus, believes that God is omnipresent, or

immanent, in his creation, which includes man. As Jonathan Wordsworth puts it, Individual monads are “informed, empowered, interfused, by the ‘eternal self-affirming act’ of God--‘the infinite I AM’” (42). Coleridge expresses it this way: “[Spirit] can be conceived neither as infinite or finite exclusively, but as the most original union of both” (*Biographia* 1: 280).

In Plotinian fashion, Coleridge also portrays the causal One, or Creator, as simultaneously the source, center, and circumference of the creation. In the words of Coleridge, “God is a Circle,” “a common and central principle,” “the centre of which is every where” (*Aids to Reflection* 233; *Biographia* 1: 267). That is to say, the “*all* [is] a Whole,” or the “omnipresent Center of that infinite Circle, whose only Circumference is its . . . own Self-comprehension” (*Aids to Reflection* 234). Coleridge further claims that this “one central power, which renders the movement [of the cycle of existence] harmonious and cyclical,” produces a synthesis or unity to the entire, diverse creation, with its multiple variations (*Biographia* 1: 267). As Coleridge affirms: “Tis God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole” (*Religious Musings* 130-31). In October 1803, he wrote: “How the *one can be many!* Eternal universal mystery! It seems as if it were impossible; yet it *is--&* it is every where!--It is indeed a contradiction *in Terms:* and only in Terms!--It is the co presence of Feeling & Life, limitless by their very essence” (*Notebooks* 1.1: 1561). In a more Christian context, Coleridge sees all things in God, “in whom ‘we live, and move, and have our being’”<sup>26</sup> (*Biographia* 1: 277).

Just as Plotinus asserts that God’s immanence in successive stages of being and consciousness is present by degrees, Coleridge’s idea of a transcendent Creator who is

omnipresent in his creation, through correspondent consubstantiality, implies a relationship between the One and successive lower stages of being and consciousness, from subject to object. Coleridge also believed with Plotinus, however, that God is not identical with the sum of all things, nor is he matter but is rather the living spirit that dwells in all things (*Biographia* 1: 152; J. Wordsworth 41). Yet while God is immanent in his creation, he is also qualitatively distinct from it. According to Engell and Bate, Coleridge was probably influenced by Bruno's philosophy that "the unity that pervades the varied phenomena of the universe is God—at once the 'immanent cause' of all things and yet above them, as the universal permits and sustains the particular but is simultaneously distinct from it" (*Biographia* 1: 145). Thus, Coleridge attempts to articulate his vision of immanence, within the realm of human experience, as well as the otherness of the ineffable, transcendent God, the "infinite spirit," who dwells in his creation yet elsewhere (*Biographia* 1:120).

### Primary Imagination

As I have shown, for Plotinus and Coleridge the ultimate Deity is incomprehensible and beyond all human experience. In keeping with their idea of emanation, Plotinus and Coleridge also propose a subordinate stage of consciousness, deriving from that ultimate Source, of which humans can conceive or experience. For Plotinus, this was the *Nous*; and Coleridge, aware of the Plotinian concept of *Nous*, wove it into his own thinking. Coleridge's interpretation of *Nous* can be gleaned from his annotations on a fragment of Speusippus,<sup>27</sup> which reads: "The *Nous* is not the same as the

One or the Good, but has a nature of its own.” John Beer, editor of Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, notes that Coleridge comments: “The intelligential powers, by the [ancients] called the *Nous*, . . . is indeed invisibly united with, but not the same as the absolute principle of causation” (553).

Coleridge elsewhere offers distinctions in consciousness that correspond to the Plotinian *Nous*, which he calls “the original unific Consciousness, the primary Perception,” “the necessary Imagination,” “the Ideal Imagination,” or “pure imagination, i.e., imagination uncontrolled by will” (*Biographia* 1: 305; Engell and Bate, Introduction lxxxix; Lockridge 264; Erdman 156). His most well-known designation is primary imagination. Yet according to Jonathan Wordsworth, “for all the prominence he gives to it, Coleridge uses the term ‘primary imagination’ only once” (33). Wordsworth also remarks that despite Coleridge’s “eclectic and passionate reading, he remained broadly consistent in his beliefs throughout the twenty-year period between the first definitions of imagination in 1795,” and his *Biographia* definitions, with their corollaries (Gravil, Newlyn, and Roe 1).

Coleridge’s Description of Primary Imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. In

*Biographia Literaria*, chapter 13, Coleridge articulates his famous definition of the imagination:

The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency and different only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. (1: 304)

What Coleridge actually means by his distinction between primary and secondary imagination has long been debated by scholars. Barth points out that, despite Coleridge's choice of words in the *Biographia* definitions, most commentators on Coleridge conclude that the secondary imagination is a higher faculty than the primary. Barth notes, however, that two authors in particular—Jonathan Wordsworth and W. Jackson Bate—with whom he agrees, argue that primary imagination is the higher of the two (*Symbolic Imagination* 7). Jonathan Wordsworth explains that “since the Oxford edition of [*Biographia* edited by Shawcross] in 1907 an orthodoxy has grown up among scholars which holds that the secondary imagination, despite the usual force of words, was more important to Coleridge than the primary” (23). Among these arguments are the following put forth by Engell, who takes this position in his introduction to Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*:

1. Primary is a lower number than secondary, i.e., the author works up from the primary to the secondary, as primary grades progress to secondary school (xcii).
2. The primary imagination is more basic and primitive than secondary, as primary colors are to secondary colors (xcii).
3. Primary imagination, “the living power and prime agent of all human perception,” is the faculty of sense perception, while secondary imagination interprets, rearranges, and reconciles these perceptions through creativity (xci-ii).

In response to these claims, Jonathan Wordsworth asks:

Is it seriously to be thought that the man who had earlier linked God's “one eternal self-affirming act” with a view that “Infinite myriads of self-conscious minds / Are one all-conscious Spirit” . . . -- who in *Biographia* itself had considered Jehovah's self-naming to reveal “the fundamental truth of all philosophy,” . . . and gone on to claim that “true metaphysics are nothing else but true divinity,” . . . should bring the philosophical section of his great work to a close by claiming that sense-perception (of all things) is “a repetition in the finite

mind of the eternal act of creation"? Few people have rated the evidence of their senses lower than Coleridge, or would have been less inclined to celebrate it in exalted biblical language. . . . The primary in its full potential showed man at his closest to God. (48)

Even before I was aware of the controversy, it was perfectly clear to me that *primary* meant "primary," i.e., that the secondary imagination is a subordinate derivative of the primary. Coleridge's idea of emanation into levels of self-consciousness and his description of the imagination "in all its degrees and determinations" and of "a superior degree of the faculty," helps us interpret his account of these levels of imagination (*Biographia* lxxxv; Beer, "Coleridge's Originality" 150). As Jonathan Wordsworth puts it, "Looking merely at the words on the page, one would surely conclude that Coleridge was scaling from the godlike primary at the top, downwards" (25). Primary imagination, as a higher level of wholeness than secondary imagination, is the foundation of human perception and experience and an initiator of creative acts. Wordsworth explains: "With the primary imagination man unknowingly reenacts God's original and eternal creative moment"--unknowingly, because for the most part, primary imagination remains in the unconscious, or beyond conscious awareness (25). Beer, in "Coleridge's Originality as a Critic of Shakespeare," similarly contends that the primary imagination "resembles the mysterious power in the organism which unfolds it according to its preordained form" (150).

As "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception," Engell and Bate describe primary imagination as "spontaneous, involuntary--what Coleridge calls 'the *necessary* Imagination'" (Introduction lxxxix). Primary imagination is also the living

power underlying what Coleridge names as “the mystery of perception,” because it is the unconscious source of conscious or human perception (Engell and Bate, Introduction lxxxix). As Engell and Bate explain, “primary imagination forms an intelligible view of the world” from “images not necessarily visual” (Introduction lxxxix). Not only is primary imagination the source of human perception, but it also orders perception and sensation into compartments, descriptions, and categories that help to interpret the evidence of the senses. And Jonathan Wordsworth reasons, “As ‘the prime Agent of *all* human perception,’ the primary imagination does have to include sense-perceptions--or at least the faculty that orders them” (47). Barth further explains, in *Symbolic Imagination*, that primary imagination is the living power “by which we perceive the world as ordered, much as gestalt psychology has taught that we naturally shape our experience into meaningful patterns” (19). According to Barth, these patterns contain “a deep underlying unity” that is the essence of all form, because they all participate in the eternal reality underlying the creation (18).

Still, Barth continues, these dynamic patterns are different from each other, with a difference “that would appear to us chaotic” and in absolute flux if we could not discern that they fall into distinct categories and “shape them into meaning” (18). As Engell and Bate put it, primary imagination organizes “disparate sensations and stimuli” and gives to consciousness “larger units and complex associations of what we experience” (Introduction lxxxix). Jonathan Wordsworth adds, “There can be no doubt that the primary [imagination] is . . . the power that enables us to interpret the evidence of the senses [and] make . . . sense of our surroundings” (27). As Coleridge explains it,

“For sensation itself is but vision nascent, not the cause of intelligence, but intelligence itself revealed as an earlier power in the process of self-construction” (*Biographia 1*: 286). In other words, our personal perception is but the peephole into transcendent reality beyond all form, not the origin of intelligence, but God-as-Intelligence, a prior source of self-consciousness and transformative self-construction.

Thus, not only does primary imagination relate to human experience and perception, but it also relates to divine experience and perception. “May not ‘the supreme Power and prime Agent of *all* human Perception’ enable us to perceive God as well as ‘the routine world?’” Jonathan Wordsworth asks. “There had certainly been a time when Coleridge thought so” (27). As Coleridge writes, in the Oxford edition of *Shawcross*: “We are conscious of faculties far superior to the highest impressions of sense,” excluding “mere objects of taste, smell, and feeling” (*Biographia 2*: 234, 237). Primary imagination, an emanation of the infinite I AM, enables us to perceive God because it connects with and repeats itself in the core of self-consciousness or “I-am-ness” in subsequent levels of self in the individual.

In other words, primary imagination is the essential nature of humans created as an echo of the infinite Self-consciousness of God, or in Coleridge’s words, “that *image of God* in which man . . . was created” (*Aids to Reflection* 516). As Coleridge quotes from John Smith, “As the Eye cannot behold the Sun . . . unless it be *Sun-like*, . . . neither can the Soul of man behold God . . . unless it be *Godlike*” (*Aids to Reflection* 253). Coleridge similarly quotes Plotinus: “Never could the eye have beheld the sun, had not its own essence been soliform’ (*i.e., pre-configured to light by a similarity of essence with that of*

*light*)” (*Biographia* 1: 115). That is why we are simultaneously human and divine, or as Barth describes it, we are “a truth that is both ourselves and not ourselves, both ourselves and the ultimate source of ourselves” (*Symbolic Imagination* 126). That is also how the power of primary imagination “operates through the most direct contact” with the human psyche (Engell and Bate, Introduction lxxxix).

Finally, the primary imagination is “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” According to Jonathan Wordsworth, Coleridge’s thinking behind this definition partly stems from British Neoplatonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-88), when Coleridge, in *Religious Musings*, posits “Monads of the infinite mind,” creative powers that constitute parts of the mind of God (40). Wordsworth explains that for Coleridge “the sublime of the primary at its highest” as a “repetition of this eternal act [of creation] in the finite mind is possible only in that the tertium aliquid is God”<sup>28</sup> (48, 49). Yet, as Barth puts it, Coleridge’s description presumes “a connaturality between the human mind and the divine mind. Or rather, it implies, even more than connaturality, an actual participation of the finite mind in the activity of the infinite mind, a ‘repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation’” of the infinite I AM (*Symbolic Imagination* 20).

#### How Coleridge’s Primary Imagination Correlates with the Plotinian *Nous*.

Coleridge blends the Plotinian idea of *Nous*, as the first emanation of the undifferentiated causal One, with his reading of Jakob Bohme (1575-1624), the German mystic who “developed a conception of God as the *Ungrund* (the ‘undifferentiated Absolute’) whose

will to self-intuition" generates lower hypostases "in which will is identified with the Father" (*Biographia* 1: 146). As Jonathan Wordsworth explains,

God in his self-naming--I AM--creates himself as both subject and object, and, in Coleridge's later explanation, "becometh God the Father, self-originant and self-subsistent, even as the Logos or Supreme Idea is the co-eternal Son, self-subsistent but begotten by the Father." (43)

Elsewhere Coleridge alludes to a difference between "the absolute God who cannot be known by human beings and the God whom they address as Father" (Beer, Introduction xxxvi). Wordsworth argues that Coleridge scaled downwards from God and primary imagination at the top, in his definitions, "because he was thinking in terms of human achievement, and the primary in its full potential showed man at his closest to God" (48).

As Laurence Lockridge puts it, in "Coleridge and the Perils of 'Self-Realization,'" "Coleridge speaks as usual of a dialectical interdependency of faculties, and in so doing preserves a hierarchical scale of being and value within a force field imaged as the circle of the self" (262). Coleridge refers to this level of the imagination as "the Ideal Imagination," where, according to Lockridge,

there is no longer a mediating symbol to image the deep truth of things of the eye of God. Rather there is direct intuition of the Ideas in their full literality. . . . The primary [function] is found in the Imagination's response to the [Divine] Will's power of self-origination, which recapitulates on the level of the person the self-origination and self-naming of God. . . .

. . . [T]he Ideal Imagination in its primary function gives us a direct, unmediated intuition of "the one Life within us and abroad." [One of its purposes] . . . is directed, I suggest, to the "*total Man*" of the circle of self.

(263-64)

Just as Plotinus sometimes describes *Nous* as "Spirit" or "Intelligence," so Coleridge applies Schelling's "spirit or Intelligence," or "I am," "directly to God as a

self-affirming being" (*Biographia* 1: 275). Coleridge explains that he expresses this principle, manifest in the "I AM," by the terms "spirit, self, and self-consciousness" (*Biographia* 1: 272-73). Engell notes that in Kant, Fichte, and Schelling—whom Coleridge read extensively—the terms "*Geist* ['Spirit'], *Ich* ['I'], and *Selbstbewusstsein* ['self-awareness'] are often used as equivalents for the *Ich bin* ['I AM'] or for the general approach developed by accepting the *Ich bin* as the first principle" (*Biographia* 1: 273). Engell further notes Schelling's conclusion (which he parallels to Coleridge's) that "the concepts of subject and object are themselves guarantors toward the absolute, unconditional self" (*Biographia* 1: 273). Coleridge also believed that "Schelling's position concerning the *Ich* or self-consciousness must" point to God, or what Coleridge called "an already perfected Intelligence," "revealed as an earlier power in the process of self-construction" (*Biographia* 1: 274, 286).

Having aligned *Nous* with primary imagination, Coleridge goes on to equate *Nous* with Reason, variously describing God as "Supreme Reason," "pure reason," "Imagination," and "Ideal Imagination." Jonathan Wordsworth maintains that "references to the divine reason in the years just before and just after *Biographia* have an especial importance because they draw attention to higher and lower powers that are linked in the ascent of being, and resemble the primary and secondary imagination" (38). Coleridge equates Reason with God in the following passage: "I should have no objection to define Reason . . . as an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the Universal, the Eternal, and the Necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phaenomena (*Friend* 1: 155-56). "But then," Coleridge adds, reason is "an organ

identical with its appropriate objects. Thus, God . . . [is] the [object] of Reason; but [it is itself] *reason*.” That is to say, “God [is] the Supreme Reason” (*Friend* 1: 156). Beer notes that when Coleridge, in 1827, comes across Claude Fleury’s “equating *Nous* with Understanding,” Coleridge remarks: “No! *Nous* = Reason” (*Aids to Reflection* 554). Six pages earlier, Coleridge was even more specific: “*Nous* = the pure Reason” (Beer, *Aids to Reflection* 554).

Like Plotinus’s *Nous*, Coleridge’s primary imagination is transcendent, causal, and unified in nature. As Fruman’s “Ozymandias and the Reconciliation of Opposites” notes, in Coleridge’s *Biographia* definitions of primary and secondary imagination, “‘absolute creation belongs only to the primary imagination,’ the power that brings the world to consciousness” (55). Similar to Plotinus’s one undivided essence of God inherent in the *Nous*, Coleridge describes an “original unific Consciousness, the primary Perception,” which he refers to as the “one DIVINE WORD” (*Biographia* 1: 305; *Aids to Reflection* 554). Engell asserts that Coleridge especially valued K ant’s position that the “‘Ich bin’ or ‘*pure original* apperception’ (also called the ‘transcendental unity of self-consciousness’) can alone provide to our thought that unified sense of self which is necessary to give our existence an individual wholeness” (*Biographia* 1: 145). According to Engell and Bate, Coleridge emphasizes that “the imagination, ‘in all its degrees and determinations,’ always . . . remains one *kind* of [unified] power” (Introduction lxxxiii).

But not only are *Nous* and primary imagination a kind of invisible power, both Plotinus and Coleridge relate how the first emanation of the One, like the First Person of the Christian Trinity, may appear in a godlike form of being according to the individual’s

capacity to perceive him. As Coleridge proclaims in *The Friend*:

Elevation of the spirit above the semblances of custom and the senses to a world of spirit, . . . in the supreme and Godlike, [this] alone merits the name of life. . . . This alone belongs to and speaks intelligibly to all alike, the learned and the ignorant, if but the *heart* listens. For alike present in all, it may be awakened, but it cannot be given. But let it not be supposed, that it is a sort of *knowledge*: No! it is a form of BEING. . . . But as this principle cannot be implanted by the discipline of logic, so neither can it be excited or evolved by the arts of rhetoric. For it is an immutable truth, that WHAT COMES FROM THE HEART, THAT ALONE GOES TO THE HEART: WHAT PROCEEDS FROM A DIVINE IMPULSE, THAT THE GODLIKE ALONE CAN AWAKEN. (1: 524)

According to Coleridge, this Godlike aspect of being, “present in all,” coincides with self-consciousness and its self-naming, “I AM” (*Biographia* 1: 272, 266). Coleridge believed that God first revealed his absolute being, “not confined to individuals,” when, as recorded in Exod. 3.14, a voice spoke to Moses out of the burning bush that was not consumed: “And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM:’ and he said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, ‘I AM hath sent me unto you’” (*Biographia* 1: 275). This God, who appeared to Moses in the form of a flame, is a self-naming God that speaks to individuals and guides them. Thus, according to Engell, Coleridge relates the “I AM” “directly to God as a self-affirming being” (*Biographia* 1: 275). As Jonathan Wordsworth declares, whatever the point of Coleridge’s statement on primary imagination, “the prose exultantly proclaims an incarnation of the eternal in . . . a personal reenactment of God’s original, and endlessly continuous, moment of self-naming” (24).

Just as the Plotinian *Nous* is more intelligible to humans than the ineffable One, Coleridge describes this stage of consciousness, i.e., primary imagination, as an

“intermediate faculty” between the “infinite I AM” and secondary imagination (*Biographia* lxxxiii). Thus, Coleridge cast this level of being as a more accessible gift from “Our Almighty Parent,” which enables us to fix “our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness still [urging] us up the ascent of Being” (*Lectures 1795* 235). According to Nicholas Roe’s “Imagining Robespierre,” “This is one of Coleridge’s most important statements about the imagination, and it foreshadows the definitions of primary and secondary imagination in *Biographia*” (172). Jonathan Wordsworth also contends that Coleridge associates this level of the imagination “with fulfilment of the self through the attainment of godlike power,” two decades before *Biographia* (28).

Coleridge’s writing alludes to the highest aspect of primary imagination as one’s true self, a superconscious selfhood that “is of a higher nature and power than the individual *Soul*, which cannot of itself return to re-inhabit or quicken the *Body*” (*Aids to Reflection* 302). This degree of selfhood, which Beer calls “a higher, subconscious power,” though needed for “thought and perception,” is “not directly available to the analytic powers” (“Coleridge’s Originality” 151, 149). Thomas McFarland’s *Originality and Imagination* hails this superconscious selfhood “as functioning in the . . . spiritual realm” (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 6). Similarly, Coleridge refers to this dimension of Spirit as a “state above time,” or beyond the time/space continuum (*Aids to Reflection* 306). “Above time” would mean this realm is usually “above” conscious awareness; thus, it is a “higher,” rather than a “lower,” unconscious. J. R. de J. Jackson’s *Method and Imagination in Coleridge’s Criticism* maintains that during the time Coleridge was

writing *Biographia*, he was engrossed in the idea of “Revelation through the [higher] unconscious” (qtd. in J. Harding 137). That is to say, Coleridge pursued how the creative activity of God’s spirit works through the human unconscious (J. Harding 137).

Just as Plotinus experienced ecstatic union with the Presence of God, “the Romantic encounter with the numinous—whether in transcendent deity” or “in the primal self,” in the words of Barth, can also be interpreted as union with the godlike primary imagination (*Symbolic Imagination* 148). Jonathan Wordsworth describes “the primary imagination at its highest [as] the supreme human achievement of oneness with God,” or the consummation of the individual soul’s ascent to God (50, 29). As Coleridge affirms, “It is never well with the soul, but when it is near unto God, yea, in its union with Him, married to Him” (*Aids to Reflection* 129). According to Coleridgean thought, the soul strives for mystical union through the vehicle of “consubstantiality,” or corresponding essential substances that link together “these two seemingly disparate stages” of being (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 122). Nevertheless, even in its union with God, the soul maintains its own sense of identity and power of choice or free will, which, like corresponding essence itself, emanates from the Universal Will of God, the source of our individual being (Lockridge 264). As Engell points out, “[Coleridge] connects free-will (as opposed to passive materialism) with the essence of individuality. It is the evidence of the divine in man” (*Biographia* 1: 114).

Thus, the marriage of soul and God is an interpenetration, not a homogeneity, of human and divine. Barth examines Coleridge’s stance on interpenetrating human and divine powers and the issue of free will versus predetermination:

If [human and divine powers] are indeed “two forces of one power”—then the paradox of divine foreknowledge and human freedom may be perceived as less vexing. Perhaps there can be a divine “leading of the Spirit” without loss of what we perceive as our freedom to choose, since the divine knowledge and the human action would be two “forces” of a single “power,” which has its origin in God—the human action being “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” (*Symbolic Imagination* 24)

Barth further explains that Coleridge’s ideas of “consubstantiality” and “translucence” allow him to assert “the closest possible unity between the human and the divine, while still affirming their essential distinction.” Barth goes on, “Both in action and in being, I shall contend—with Coleridge, I believe—that God and man may be distinct from each other without being separate” (*Symbolic Imagination* 8). Hence, immanence applies to primary imagination as it possesses the essence of the infinite I AM, as well as to the soul who experiences union with God. Coleridge believes that “we do not fashion our self ex nihilo” but rather imbibe of our “own radiating centrality,” with man evolving ““out of his essences”” to unite with ““his Being”” (Lockridge 261).

### Secondary Imagination

I have argued that Coleridge’s concept of the absolute God and its first derivative, primary imagination, is similar to the Plotinian ineffable One and its first emanation, *Nous*. I have also contended that this stage of self-consciousness corresponds to the Presence of God with whom the soul seeks mystical union. Plotinus and Coleridge have proposed a second derivative stage of self-consciousness that mediates between *Nous*/primary imagination and the embodied soul. As we have seen, for Plotinus, this is the Universal or World-Soul. Coleridge too refers to a “universal soul,” which is

different from the individual soul that is clothed upon with flesh (“and man became a living soul”<sup>29</sup>) (*Aids to Reflection* xciv). In chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria*, however, Coleridge specifically designates the second emanation of the infinite One as “secondary imagination,” which is “identical” in “*kind*” with the godlike primary imagination, differing “only in *degree*.” There he describes this level of imagination as a creative faculty or stage of consciousness that co-exists with the conscious will and idealizes as well as unifies. Yet, according to Engell and Bate, Coleridge anticipates the primary and secondary distinctions in chapter 7, when he refers to the imagination “in all its degrees and determinations,” without using the words “primary” and “secondary” (Introduction lxxxix-xc).

Furthermore, when Coleridge comments, “In common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name [imagination] to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary controul over it,” he means the secondary imagination is “co-existing with the conscious will” (*Biographia* 1: 125, 304). In chapter 14, Coleridge again underscores “the instigation and control of the will,” maintaining that the “power” of secondary imagination is “first put into action by the will and understanding” (Introduction xc). Engell and Bate explain that, unlike primary imagination, which is the power and prime agent of all human perception, access to secondary imagination, together with this degree of self-will, is limited to “a select number of individuals” (Introduction xc). Yet “such exclusivity bothered Coleridge,” they continue, who asserts that “the spiritual organs [manifest in secondary imagination] show themselves first in the *moral* being, and, though not equally developed in all, exist

in all”” (*Biographia* xc). In other writings, Coleridge gives different versions of this distinction in self-consciousness, including symbolic imagination, philosophic imagination, reason, Logos, and communicative intelligence.

Coleridge’s Description of Secondary Imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. As we have seen, Coleridge’s theory of Imagination differentiates between primary and secondary imagination. About secondary imagination, Coleridge writes:

I consider [it] as an echo of [the primary IMAGINATION], co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency and different only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. (*Biographia* 1: 304)

Coleridge further explains:

[Secondary Imagination] dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (*Biographia* 1: 304).

What does Coleridge mean when he refers to secondary imagination as an echo of primary imagination? According to *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, the first definition, or the main meaning, of the noun *echo* is as follows: “A repetition of sounds, which is produced by the reflexion of the sound-waves due to their incidence on something denser than the aerial medium in which they are propagated; hence . . . a secondary or imitative sound produced by reflected waves, as distinguished from the original sound caused by the direct waves.” Coleridge was undoubtedly aware of this definition, since the earliest run-on-entry dates back to 1340. Applying this sense of the term to Neoplatonism could produce a definition like this: “A repetition of self-consciousness produced by the reflection of essential characteristics on something denser

than the ethereal medium in which they are propagated; hence a secondary or imitative consciousness produced by reflected waves, or 'outflowing' through emanation, as distinguished from the original state of consciousness caused by the direct waves."

A specifically Coleridgean definition could be further rendered as: "An echo of self-consciousness descending in stages through denser planes of being from its source; hence a secondary or derivative imagination (which must draw on the primary or necessary imagination for its creative substance) produced by correspondence, as distinguished from the original absolute creation of the godlike primary." Simply put, secondary imagination, part of the self-consciousness in the individual psyche that produces finite meaning different in "degree" and operating "mode" from primary imagination, is still part of the infinite meaning of God and echoes its essence.

This "echo" of primary imagination, we are told, co-exists with the conscious will, just as the Divine Will, an issue of the Universal Will of God, is identified with primary imagination. Lockridge explains: Coleridge "agrees with Fichte that 'Will' is 'the Being itself, the absolute I or Self, not a modification or faculty,'" i.e., will and its respective level of self-consciousness are fundamentally linked (259). Thus, in secondary imagination, the conscious "I," or "the essence of individuality," co-exists with conscious free will, which is innate<sup>30</sup> (*Biographia* 1: 114). Moreover, Coleridge equates the conscious will with the function of imagination that "idealizes the perceptions of sense, reconciles opposites," and unifies (Lockridge 262; Magnuson 197). This will is also experienced as the power to make choices and the power to do or to express oneself, differing "only in *degree*" from the "WILL, or primary ACT of self-duplication" in primary

imagination (Engell and Bate, Introduction xc; *Biographia* 1: 281). Thus, according to Coleridge, secondary imagination “becomes the fullest exercise of the self and of its inner powers. It is ‘the free-will, our only absolute *self*,’ that controls and directs . . . creative activity” (Engell and Bate, Introduction xc).

Coleridge further asserts that secondary imagination is identical with primary imagination in the *kind* of its agency, which is causal and creative. Thus, primary and secondary imagination are not independent; rather, this hierarchical structure remains a relational “unity which encompasses division while still remaining a unity” (Dugas 58). Jean-Pierre Mileur, in “Deconstruction as Imagination and Method,” further suggests that “secondary imagination can partake of and perhaps even in some measure manifest the power of divine creativity while still remaining fully in the world” (74). On the other hand, while secondary and primary imagination are identical in *kind*, they differ “in degree” and “in the *mode*” of their operation. This idea of self-consciousness that descends in degrees grows out of Plotinian thought and the theory of correspondences, where distinctions-within-continuity are created between levels of the imagination. Jonathan Wordsworth elaborates: “Because it can be directed consciously, the secondary imagination might be expected to be different in kind from the spontaneous primary, but we are told that in fact that two shade into each other--are different merely in degree and mode” (25).

Coleridge’s portrayal of secondary imagination as the stage of consciousness that “dissolves, diffuses, [and] dissipates” is puzzling. What exactly is happening here? Engell and Bate assert that secondary imagination “dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates”

perceptions of the senses in the perceiver (Introduction xci). Anthony John Harding attempts to relate Coleridge's claim to postmodern deconstruction: "Another facet of imagination . . . must be recognized: its ability . . . to explore not the unity of a work but its *disunity*, its disjunctions and discontinuities," replacing this "expectation of organic unity fulfilled" by choosing "to subvert and deconstruct the ostensible unity of a work" and by dissolving and dissipating "its objects" (141-42). These contentions of how secondary imagination dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates things in both perceiver and perceived imply that it disunites, reduces to formative elements, and disperses perceptions of elements in the material plane, whether perceptions of the senses or conceptions of the mind.

Since the secondary imagination is in direct contact with the causal primary, as well as with the individual human mind, this dissolving process also suggests the "liquefying" of base elements in the psyche and its perceptions to prepare for their transformation or re-creation as something new or different. Thus, as Coleridge points out, secondary imagination dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates, in order to "re-create" what has already been created or produced. That is to say, secondary imagination does not create in an absolute sense, Fruman asserts, "'because absolute creation belongs only to the primary imagination,' the power that brings the world to consciousness. The secondary . . . imagination is thus an 'echo' of the former" ("Ozymandias and the Reconciliation of Opposites" 55). This re-creative faculty leads into Coleridge's view that secondary imagination is related to genius, originality, authorship, organic creation, and symbol making.

Coleridge believed that genius--an extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, or intellectual power--is a higher faculty of the imagination. According to *OED Online*, this sense of *genius* seems to have developed in the eighteenth century. Prior definitions refer to *genius* as a "tutelary god" or "attendant spirit" or, in the Renaissance, "a person's good or evil genius," "by whom every person was supposed to be attended throughout his life." This indicates that the eighteenth-century sense of *genius*, as a source of inspiration, had shifted from the supernatural to an individual attribute. By 1873, H. Rogers was referring to "certain transcendent geniuses--the Bacons, the Newtons, the Shakespeares, the Miltons." As Magnuson maintains, "Nature's gift . . . at birth is [the] imagination" and its "*genius*, as defined in its root meaning in classical literature, where genius is always an individual possession" (197).

This understanding of the term *genius* coincides with Coleridge's belief that secondary imagination, deriving from the divine primary, retains that connection to "the infinite I AM," with its "eternal act of creation" in the creation of the universe. Jonathan Wordsworth notes Engell as saying that "Schelling defines the human creative genius as 'the indwelling divinity in man . . . , a portion of the absolute nature of God,'" adding that "Coleridge was undoubtedly aware of [Schelling's] views" (27). Creative genius and secondary imagination, in turn, give rise to originality. This, however, does not mean the creation of unique works that are original. Rather, Thomas McFarland, in "Imagination and Its Cognates," contends, "*originality*" in this context is "a numinous term," indicating "the sacredness of origins, and thus, in its reciprocity with the work, means not

priority” but “individuality” and “the holiness of individuation” (15, 18).

Growing out of Coleridge’s secondary imagination, with its genius and originality, was the idea of authorial identity--a new view of the artist as individual creator, whose creative spirit transcends strict fidelity to formal rules and traditional procedures. *OED Online* defines *author* as a “person who originates or give existence to anything.” In Coleridgean thinking, this means that the “I” orchestrates creative impulses that come from the imagination, the unconscious, and other nonmaterial aspects of being. Thus, through the creative process of transforming the creative urge into symbols, the author produces organic creation.<sup>31</sup> For Coleridge, this ideally means an author-genius receives inspiration from the creative spirit of the divine mind. Furthermore, the author, though an inspired medium of divine writing, consciously deals with creativity in the material world, transferring “life to images from the poet’s own spirit” through the symbolic function of secondary imagination (Byatt.35; Beer, “Coleridge’s Originality” 153).

Lockridge describes Coleridgean authoring as “working with perspectives on universals and uniting partial perspectives into a whole, the symbol, or altering the givens of ordinary perception to heighten perception in [one’s] own way” (263). Barth adds, “Perceiving” or “making symbols” is “a finite participation in the infinite creative act of the supreme symbol-maker, the supreme symbol-perceiver, just as creation itself is . . . the supreme symbol” (*Symbolic Imagination* 38). Thus, the creative or symbolic imagination, according to Engell and Bate,

becomes a completing power. It is synthetic in the highest sense. The synthesis of

synthesis, it reconciles the products of perception with those of inner perception or intuition, consciousness with self-consciousness, and the whole mind—on every level—with the whole of nature, a symbolic presence itself, the artwork of God.

(Introduction xciv)

Just as God dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates in order to idealize, recreate, and unify the universe, so the author, through imagination, diffuses, and dissipates in order to idealize, recreate, and unify his or her own world of sense experience and perceptions. Yet also Coleridge insists that secondary imagination *struggles* to idealize. This means that the author must practice the disciplines required to glimpse the numinous, or sacred, “within one’s deepest self, or the aspiration for an ideal world beyond the self,” which leads to perceiving ideal, archetypal Forms as Ideas in a transcendent reality (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 144). “Such a ‘living,’ ‘almost mystical’ ‘vision, and only such a vision,” Barth asserts, “can encompass immanent and transcendent, human and divine, the reality of the self and the reality of God, in a single act of knowing” (*Symbolic Imagination* 24-25, 99).

Such a vision, according to Coleridge, also coincides with what he calls the “philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition,” or transcendent intuitive knowledge (*Biographia* 1: 241). Coleridge fills chapters 12 and 13 of the *Biographia* with allusions to this “transcendental power” whose “sources must be far higher and far inward,” describing this power as a “*philosophic consciousness*,” or “philosophic imagination” that “relies on (or actually is)” the “intuition” of secondary imagination (Engell and Bate, Introduction xcii). Jonathan Wordsworth further explores the power of philosophic consciousness or imagination: “[This spirit’s] potential-- ‘the sublime of

man'--is realized only in those who have the imaginative capacity to 'see into the life of things,' to lose their individuality and find in God the oneness that is the true self."

Wordsworth continues, "Quoting Plotinus (but with Milton, and his own approaching definitions in mind)," Coleridge portrays philosophic self-consciousness or imagination as "the sacred power of self-intuition," which begins with "the I KNOW MYSELF in order to end with the absolute I AM" (49). It is the philosophic imagination that allows us to understand ideas "by intuiting these ideas or by receiving them from an intuitive reason and then transferring them to the understanding" (Engell and Bate, Introduction xciii). Engell and Bate add, "Coleridge might say that it is his own philosophic imagination that produced a theory and explanation of the imagination on all its levels" (Introduction lxxxiii).

On the other hand, Anthony John Harding asserts, struggling to idealize also means bringing the temporal (including sense perceptions) into congruency with eternal, or perpetual ideals, by assembling impressions of the senses and using them to create "a coherent inward picture of a 'world'" that reflects inner worlds. In other words, imagination becomes a "world-making' faculty within the individual" ("Imagination, In and Out of Context" 134). Blending the temporal and eternal through the idealizing faculty of the imagination, in Boulger's words, "leads to poetry of the original moment, the special insight of the soul, expressed in nature symbols which mediate by partaking of the numinous or sacred as well as the physical through the power of the artist's imagination" (21).

Since Ideal forms are perceived through the faculty of transcendent perception, or

direct apprehension of reality, blending the temporal and eternal through the idealizing faculty of the imagination also requires reason, which Coleridge characteristically portrays as an interconnected hierarchy. Thus, his concepts of reason correspond from level to level, i.e., from the pure Reason of primary imagination to the intelligential reason of secondary imagination to ordinary reasoning in human beings. "If God is, as Coleridge insists, the Supreme Reason," Barth asserts, "the human being has a share in the same reason; it is precisely in this way, in fact, that humankind, alone within creation, was 'created in the image of God'" (*Symbolic Imagination* 124). While *Nous* is pure Reason, for Coleridge, "*Logos* is *understanding*,"<sup>32</sup> "intelligential Imagination or Reason manifesting itself in forms" (*Aids to Reflection* 553, 554). Coleridge also refers to reason that manifests in forms as "Practical Reason"--"reason substantiated and vital" (*Aids to Reflection* 469; *Lay Sermons* 69).

Coleridge further believed that reason, as an integral part of being, is innate, just as will is innate (*Biographia* 1: 121). Reason, Coleridge maintains, "is neither a sensation nor a perception, that which is neither individual (that is a sensible intuition) nor general (that is a conception) which neither refers to outward facts, nor yet is abstracted from the forms of perception contained in the understanding" (qtd. in Richards 183). "Reason," Coleridge contends, "either predetermines Experience, or avails itself of a past Experience to supersede its necessity in all future time and affirms truths which no Sense could perceive, nor Experiment verify, nor Experience confirm" (*Aids to Reflection* 233).

Just as Coleridge equates pure Reason with the ideal imagination, placing it on the level of primary imagination, Lockridge indicates that Coleridge also equates a lower

form of reason with what he calls symbolic imagination, ranking it below ideal imagination (262). Symbolic imagination struggles to unify because of a “high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment,” according to Coleridge, which creates “the principle, that *all* the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more *important* and *essential* parts” (*Biographia* 2: 72). Simply stated, secondary or symbolic imagination joins together and synthesizes to balance and harmonize. As Coleridge asserts: “[The poet] diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination” (*Biographia* 2: 16).

All reality with which the individual has experience is drawn together by this underlying unifying force of the imagination, including the microcosm and macrocosm, with their dynamics of unity, expansion, division, and polarities, or opposite forces. In Coleridge’s words, the imagination “reconciles and unifies” “two forces or concepts in dynamic tension,” e.g., “the subjective” and “the objective,” the “self or mind (‘I am’)” and “nature or the cosmos,” “the ideal” and “the real,” and “the spiritual” and “the concrete” (*Biographia* 1: 299; Engell and Bate, Introduction lxxxix). Secondary or symbolic imagination synthesizes opposite forces through a paradoxical joining of polarities, which at the level of self-awareness retain their own integrity in interrelationship. To ensure this balance is not static, however, reconciling opposites may mean a subsuming of one over the other or transforming both into a new whole at a new level, in a concentration of distinct patterns that come and go. As Lockridge explains,

Coleridge's "passion for well-defined unity," together with "expansiveness" that evolves in increasing levels of wholeness, is satisfied in his theory of organic creation (259).

A further extension of the unifying property of secondary imagination is how it applies to self-realization or individuation, the process of self-development toward a conscious awareness of wholeness. Lockridge takes the position that Coleridge most likely introduced the term "self-realization" into the English language<sup>33</sup> (264). We can infer that "the 'self' for Coleridge," Lockridge continues,

is determinate, unified, relational, transformational, functional, and conscious—most of which characteristics are for him mutually implicating. It easily fulfills Piaget's well-known criteria for a structure: wholeness (Coleridge like Piaget distinguishes an integral whole or unity from a mere "aggregate").  
(260-61)

Coleridge believed that the germ of self, or the "real" self within, "who is the core of personality" unfolds according to an inner blueprint that seeks unity by harmonious growth (Lockridge 268).

Lockridge notes, however, the apparent contradiction between Coleridge's "pre-determined essence that can healthily grow in only one way" and his insistence on free will (269). This dilemma, Lockridge argues, "is resolved, in theory, by equating the germ itself with freedom," or "free-agency" (269). For Coleridge, free will means the freedom to choose the will of God in a "free obedience" to God's Law (*Aids to Reflection* 285-86). In Coleridge's sense, Lockridge reasons, self-realization, or "the full evolution of self ('I = Self = Spirit') from sensate awareness to individuality to integrity to a full self-declaring in the spiritual 'I AM'—supersedes in value even our highest mediated construction, the system of symbols that is the poem" (264).

Coleridge concludes his *Biographia* definition on secondary imagination by declaring it “essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (1: 304). Jonathan Wordsworth points out that this sentence is designed to lay the groundwork for Coleridge’s next distinction, i.e., between the imagination and fancy. Wordsworth explains, “In a tacit reference back to ‘the living Power’ of the primary, Coleridge first reaffirms the link between the two degrees of imagination, and then moves on to oppose the vitality found in both to the mechanical nature of fancy” (25). Vitality for Coleridge meant growth, production, development, and change but, above all, “the self’s ‘germinal power’ . . . experienced in love” (Lockridge 260). Barth, in “Coleridge’s *Dejection*: Imagination, Joy and the Power of Love,” recounts how Coleridge insisted “imagination cannot exist without love” (189). Coleridge’s view, though based on his own experience, is consistent with Bohme’s identification of the heart with the Son, who issues from the Father (*Biographia* 1: 146).

Coleridge’s belief in the power of love is also consistent with the Neoplatonic concept of the “*circuitus spiritualis*,” identified by Abrams as

a powerful current of “love,” or cohesive and sustaining supernatural energy, which flows ceaselessly from God down through the successive levels of ever remoter being and circles back to God—the force that holds the universe together and manifests itself to human awareness as the yearning to return to an undivided state. (*Natural Supernaturalism* 152)

Thus, the living power of the primary, “the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence from the glory of the Almighty,” is passed on through love, reason, and the organic vitality of secondary imagination (*Statesman’s Manual* 69). It is noteworthy that Virginia Woolf, in “A Room of One’s Own,” observes this vitality in imagination’s

evangel: "When one takes a sentence of Coleridge into the mind, it explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas, and that is the only sort of writing of which one can say that it has the secret of perpetual life" (2492).

How Coleridge's Secondary Imagination Correlates with the Plotinian Universal or World-Soul. Coleridge's descriptions of secondary imagination bring to mind much of the Plotinian Universal or World-Soul. For Plotinus, this higher soul, eternal like the *Nous*, is "universal" because, although it has individual self-consciousness, it is also common to all beings. Similarly, Coleridge writes of "the one universal soul, which, by virtue of the enlivening BREATH, and the informing WORD, all organized bodies have in common," i.e., the spirit is communal in all beings (*Aids to Reflection* 15). Coleridge further asserts, "The [universal] soul is all in every part" (*Aids to Reflection* 233). Still, according to Coleridge, the consubstantiality of the universal soul in the highest sense is "the Universal in the Individual, Individuality itself--the Glance and the Exponent of the indwelling Power" (*Notebooks* 3.1: 4397). Peter Larkin, in "Imagining Naming Shaping: Stanza VI of *Dejection: an Ode*," characterizes this as "Coleridge's universal I of I-magination" (194). As Lockridge puts it, the "imagination has a crucial role in 'declaring the self' in its relatedness to others" (259).

Although this universal spirit is present at all stages of identity, the scope of awareness is limited by the particular level of consciousness; for example, the ego must expand from the particular to the universal through the imagination. Describing this process of passing beyond the egocentric position, Coleridge asserts that the "desire of

Distinction,” wishes “to remain the same and yet to be something else and something more.” Thus, the individual is “impelled and almost compelled to pass out of himself in Imagination, and to survey himself at a sufficing distance” (qtd. in Lockridge 259).

Plotinus also holds that the Universal or World-Soul, moving between dimensions of timelessness in Spirit and what we would call “the time-space continuum” in matter, acts as an intermediary between *Nous* and the lower soul. Coleridge, believing that the infinite spirit and the finite were originally unified, similarly posits a level of self-consciousness that moves between the Spirit and the individual in the material realm, reconciling the opposites of Spirit and matter (*Biographia* 1: 280, 281). Barth recognizes this uniting power as the imagination, which he claims is “a faculty . . . capable of perceiving and in some degree articulating transcendent reality—the reality of higher realms of being, including the divine” (*Symbolic Imagination* 21). Noting this transsensory aspect of imagination, Coleridge adds that intuitive apprehension “of the *spiritual* in man (i.e., of that which lies *on the other side* of our natural consciousness) must needs have a great obscurity for those, who have never disciplined and strengthened this ulterior consciousness” (*Biographia* 1: 243). Only such a living, “interpenetrating” vision of “two distinct realities,” Barth claims,

can encompass immanent and transcendent, human and divine, the reality of the self and the reality of God, in a single act of knowing. It is no accident that the *Biographia Literaria* ends with a paean of praise to the Logos, the pattern of Creation, through whom . . . mankind and God most fully “interpenetrate.”

(*Symbolic Imagination* 24-25)

Plotinus further describes the Universal Soul as the individual life-principle and movement-principle that infuses consciousness with life and action through spiritual

influx. This relates to Coleridge's idea of the imagination's vitality and organicism whose "power of self-origination" expands and grows through an "increase of consciousness," self-transformation, and activity (Lockridge 260, 261; Richards 139). The vitality of self-consciousness at this stage "is like an active transitive verb governing its objects and miraculously aware of itself," Lockridge explains. Through the very principle of life itself, the self-consciousness of the imagination "can remain the same and yet absorb new information and experience, producing, as Coleridge says, 'fruits of its own'" (260, 261). "To develop the powers of the Creator is our proper employment," Coleridge adds. "But we are progressive and must not rest content with present Blessings. Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination" (*Lectures 1795* 235). Just as the Plotinian life-and-movement principle of the individual, the Universal Soul, sets or re-creates the matrices for forms perceived or conceived in the planes of matter, Coleridge extolls the "shaping spirit of Imagination," which nature gives man at birth (*Dejection: An Ode* 85-86).

According to Plotinus, the higher soul can also be experienced as the incarnate Logos at the individual level. As we have seen, Coleridge associates the Logos with "intelligential Imagination or Reason" that brings out "the necessary & universal truths in the infinite into distinct contemplation" (*Aids to Reflection* 553, 554). Coleridge also describes the Logos as God within and as communicative intelligence (*Biographia* 1: 136). In this sense, the individual Logos incarnate is another way of saying "immanence." "In looking at objects of Nature, while I am thinking," Coleridge reflects, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to

be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phaenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature/It is still [i.e., always] interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is [*Logos*], the Creator! <and the Evolver!>. (*Notebooks 2.1: 2546*)

In other words, “the imagination is inevitably divine,” as Jonathan Wordsworth explains it, and “man in his turn is enabled to partake of the inner reality that is the Logos” (47). Beer notes that Coleridge quotes Cicero to support his stance that “the best Philosophers have alwaies taught us to inquire for God within our selves” (*Aids to Reflection 253*). And, “in the language of the Platonists,” Coleridge revises “He is that true light which enlightens every man” (John 1.9) to “the Eternal Word is the light of Souls” (*Aids to Reflection 253*). The divine imagination, like the Universal or World-Soul, can be conscience, an intimate guiding presence, or the internal “voice” of God. According to Mileur, at times Coleridge discusses the shaping perception “as an immanent intentionality, the intuition of a Being beyond individuation that initiates and guides a quest that culminates, ideally, in the recognition of god’s providential design” (68). Coleridge himself refers to the “still small voice” that tells him what ought to be, yet cannot, adding, “How deeply seated the conscience is in the human Soul” (*Aids to Reflection xlv, 127*).

### The Soul

Coleridge’s writings sketch the circular journey of the soul, from descending levels of self-consciousness into matter to the ascent back to Spirit. Yet the question remains: What exactly is the soul? In chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge

asserts, "If a man receives" the ideas of "soul" and "consciousness" "as fundamental facts"; "if he feels his mind completely at rest concerning . . . these, and is satisfied . . . : to such a mind I would as courteously as possible convey the hint, that for him the chapter was not written" (1: 234-35). Coleridge, sharing his friend William Wordsworth's view that it is a hard to analyze the soul,<sup>34</sup> defines "soul" as he conceptualizes, experiences, and senses it. Yet, since the soul remains mostly in the subconscious or unconscious--because the embodied soul now lives as and believes itself to be a human being--most people consciously perceive, not from the level of the soul, but from their conscious self.

Moreover, because the soul is the furthestmost nonmaterial emanation from the One, the soul is apt to forget its origin and feel lost in the "flux and reflux" of its own fluidity and depths that appear to have no beginning (*Biographia* 1: 147). "Believe thou, O my soul," Coleridge writes, "Life is a vision shadowy of Truth" (*Religious Musings* 396-97). Thus, the conscious self has even less awareness or memory of his or her origin and center than does the soul. "We roam unconscious," Coleridge confesses, "or with hearts / Unfeeling of our universal Sire" (*Religious Musings* 117-18). Still, according to Lockridge, the self through its various stages of development retains continuity, with "the movement from potential to actual or from unconscious to conscious not constituting a quantum leap" (265).

For Coleridge, the soul may be recognized in nonmaterial aspects of the psyche or human experience, e.g., feeling, heart, intuition, or spirit. That is why he often uses these terms interchangeably; for example, another word for the soul or self may be "feeling."

In a letter to Robert Southey, August 7, 1803, Coleridge characterizes the soul as a state of feeling (*Collected Letters* 2: 961). Elsewhere he describes soul awareness as a “feeling [that] is deep and steady, and this I call *I*-identifying the percipient and the perceived” (qtd. in Richards 69). Feeling or soul is also connected with the heart; and keeping “alive the *heart* in the *head*” is, according to Coleridge, vital to “deep thinking” and true knowledge, which comes by revelation (Kirschner 160). Thus, it is clear, Coleridge reasons, that *Othello*’s Iago lacks a self, or soul, because he lacks heart. Iago, Coleridge maintains, “could not have uttered the ‘To be or not to be . . .’ soliloquy, for it would have suggested ‘too habitual a communication with the heart’” (Beer, “Coleridge’s Originality” 156).

Whatever the difficulty in pinning down the nature of the soul, the Neoplatonic view represents the Universal or World-Soul’s emanation as an individual soul interconnected with the physical body. Coleridge similarly portrays a soul that proceeds from God, created in his image, to inhabit a human body (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 122, 124; Beer, Introduction xciv). Furthermore, according to Coleridgean thinking, the individual soul is in part shaped by the secondary imagination, taking on its essential characteristics (J. Wordsworth 35). Thus, when Coleridge uses the term “man,” he means an individual with a dual nature, inhabited by a soul that is part of matter and part of Spirit. This resembles the Plotinian view that souls are divided into a higher element belonging to the sphere of *Nous* and a lower element directly connected with the body.

Coleridge explains how the soul partakes of both the human and the divine: The “earthly body” is

the appointed form and instrument of [the soul's] communion with the present world; yet [the soul is] not "terrestrial," nor of the world, but a celestial body, and capable of being transfigured from glory to glory, in accordance with the varying circumstances and outward relations of its moving and informing spirit.

(*Aids to Reflection* 31, 32)

Thus, "it is the World, that constitutes our outward circumstances," Coleridge continues, while "the Form of the World" is "evermore at variance with the Divine Form (or Idea)" and "the Divine Image in the Soul" (*Aids to Reflection* 438). "The Soul within the Body," Coleridge asks, "can I [in] any way compare this to the Reflection of the Fire seen thro' my window on the solid Wall, seeming of course within the solid wall?" (*Notebooks* 1.1: 1737).

The soul's reflection blends characteristics of both *Nous* and the Universal Soul, or primary and secondary imagination. This includes being, intelligence, reason, and autonomy. For Coleridge, the being of the soul is self-consciousness and individuality, even to the extent that the soul has a "face" (*Aids to Reflection* 127). Still, the soul having descended into form forgets its true inner being, the body celestial, and begins to identify with the forms of the world, the body terrestrial. As Coleridge explains:

The moment, when the Soul begins to be sufficiently self-conscious, to ask concerning itself, & its relations, is the first moment of its *intellectual* arrival into the World—Its *Being*—enigmatic as it must seem—is posterior to its *Existence*—-. Suppose the shipwrecked man stunned, & for many weeks in a state of Ideotcy or utter loss of Thought & Memory—& then gradually awakened.

(*Notebooks* 3.1: 3593)

In chapter 8 of *Biographia*, Coleridge notes Descartes' premise of "the absolute and essential heterogeneity of the soul as intelligence, and the body as matter" (1: 129).

Coleridge, quoting Milton, further asserts that the soul, like God, is reason: "Whence the

Soul *Reason* receives, and Reason is her Being” (*Friend* 1: 156). According to Coleridge, the soul chose to separate out from its primordial oneness with the Divine precisely because it has reason, free will, and a certain degree of autonomy (*Aids to Reflection* 516). As Coleridge reasons:

[Free will] is also a *Fall* of Man, inasmuch as his Will is the condition of his Personality; the ground and condition of the attribute which constitutes him *Man*. And the ground-work of *Personal* Being is a capacity of acknowledging . . . the Law of the Spirit, the Law of Freedom, the Divine Will.

(*Aids to Reflection* 285-86)

And because the soul has autonomy, or free will, it is self-determining. Yet this freedom is relative. According to Lockridge, Coleridge maintains that to forge one’s selfhood in the material plane

is to draw an expansive but containing circle, to set limits, to differentiate the self from others in the very act of increasing one’s awareness of them. Where we might have expected [Coleridge] to say that man is potentially infinite, he has written instead that “Man is a finient being,”<sup>35</sup> self-determining and shaping.

(269)

Just as Plotinus believed that the lower element of the soul is housed in the body, Coleridge refers to the body as a “fearful and wonderful”<sup>36</sup> “mechanism,” “the perishable Tabernacle of the Soul”<sup>37</sup> (*Aids to Reflection* 47). “God transfused into man . . . a soul having its life in itself,” according to Coleridge. “He did not merely *possess* it, he *became* it. It was his proper *being*, his truest *self*, *the man in the man*,” i.e., the embodied soul that we experience as “human” (*Aids to Reflection* 15). Thus, to some extent, the soul must conform to this material body, or temporary dwelling, with its fixed plurality and patterns. As Larkin comments on Coleridge’s “Nightingale”: a natural birth bears

a natural babe rather than the babe as original self, one which lisps not shapes,

mas by imitation rather than articulates origin. That such contingency appears benign in "The Nightingale" suggestions that natural birth . . . becomes the fixing place . . . of original power lost. (197)

Still, Coleridge suggests that the numinous soul shines through the physical eye: "Is this what you *mean* when you well define the Eye as the Telescope and the Mirror of the Soul, the Seat and Agent of an almost magical power?" (*Aids to Reflection* 397-98).

According to Plotinus, just as the soul emanates from God, it is the soul that must return. As in the parable of Psyche and Cupid, this aspiration to mystical union is often represented as a "feminine" soul longing for her transcendent "masculine" counterpart (*Aids to Reflection* 285, 284). Coleridge's Crewe manuscript of "Kubla Khan"<sup>38</sup> also suggests such a relationship. There Coleridge places a feminine figure in a "deep romantic chasm" of the earth, "wailing for her Daemon Lover" (12, 16). According to *OED Online*, the word "daemon" was often spelled this way to distinguish it from "demon." In ancient Greek mythology, daemon referred to "a supernatural being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men; an inferior divinity, spirit, genius."<sup>39</sup> This parallels Coleridge's description of secondary imagination, the immediate predecessor of the soul. Furthermore, "daemon" is sometimes used to refer to "an attendant, ministering, or indwelling spirit," mainly referring to the "daemon of Socrates," who "claimed to be guided" by a "divine principle or agency, an inward monitor or oracle" (*OED Online*). Again, this sounds like the intimate guiding presence of the World-Soul or secondary imagination.

Later in the Crewe manuscript of "Kubla Khan," Coleridge alludes to another feminine figure:

A Damsel with a Dulcimer  
 In a Vision once I saw:  
 It was an Abyssinian Maid,  
 And on her Dulcimer she play'd  
 Singing of Mount Amara. (37-41)

The singing damsel with a dulcimer echoes Coleridge's poem "Genevieve," where a maid sings with a "Voice" within the soul, sweet "as Seraph's song" (4). These poems suggest the soul who sings of the eternal world, touching Coleridge's wish to revive within himself the Abyssinian Maid's "Symphony and Song," or the soul's memory of her heavenly origin ("Kubla Khan" 43). Just as Plotinus believed the embodied soul has the potential to break through the material world to transcendental forms, Coleridge believed that the soul could blend with "some sweet beguiling melody" and "life's own secret joy,"

Till the dilating Soul, enrapt, transfused,  
 Into the mighty vision passing--there  
 As in her natural form, [should swell] vast to Heaven!  
 (Hymn: Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni" 17-23)

Whatever the potential of the embodied soul, Coleridge, like Plotinus, portrays the soul's descent into incarnate nature as a fall. "It seems as if the soul said to herself," Coleridge exclaims, "from this state hast *thou* fallen!" (*Statesman's Manuel* 71). By explicitly denying the pre-existence of souls, however, Coleridge sidesteps the issue of precisely where and when each soul comes into self-consciousness and descends from heaven, or falls from immortality to mortality. Coleridge views the "historical circumstances of the fall of man" as an allegory and the first man, Adam, as symbolical as well as actual (Beer, Introduction cxxii). "In Genesis the word, Adam, is distinguished

from a proper name by an Article before it," Coleridge reasons. "It is *the* Adam, so as to express the *genus*, not the Individual—or rather, perhaps, I should say, *as well as* the Individual" (*Aids to Reflection* 290).

Although Coleridge writes, "The doctrine of Original Sin concerns all men," he adds:

The corruption of my will may very warrantably be spoken of as a *Consequence* of Adam's Fall, even as my Birth of Adam's Existence; as a consequence, a link in the historic Chain of Instances, whereof Adam is the first. But that it is *on account* of Adam; or that this evil principle was, a priori, inserted or infused into my Will by the Will of another—which is indeed a contradiction in terms, my Will in such case being no *Will*—*this* is nowhere asserted in Scripture explicitly or by implication. It belongs to the very essence of the doctrine, that in respect of Original Sin *every* man is the adequate representative of *all* men.

(*Aids to Reflection* 290, 289)

Coleridge also makes it clear that the fallen soul, represented by Adam, loses immortality as in the allegory of Adam and Eve:

*Adam* turned his back upon the Sun, and dwelt in the dark and the shadow; he sinned, and fell into Gods displeasure, and was made naked of all his supernatural endowments, and was ashamed and sentenced to death, and deprived of the means of long life, and of the Sacrament and instrument of Immortality, I mean the Tree of Life; he then fell under the evils of a sickly body, and a passionate, ignorant, uninstructed soul; his sin made him sickly, his sickness made him peevish, his sin left him ignorant, his ignorance made him foolish and unreasonable: His sin left him to his [human] nature. (*Aids to Reflection* 424)

Because the initial fall is prior to incarnation, the body is not the cause of the fall, and human imperfection already exists in the unborn child. In the words of Coleridge, "I profess a deep conviction that Man was and is a *fallen* Creature, [and] not by accidents of bodily constitution," but "I believe most stedfastly . . . that from our mothers' wombs our understandings are darkened" (*Aids to Reflection* 139; *Collected Letters* 1: 396).

Coleridge often describes the embodied soul as distanced from God and nature, wandering the earth, lonely and lost, and, like the Ancient Mariner, doomed not to “Death . . . eternal, but [to] a certain quantum of suffering” (*Aids to Reflection* 306-07). “A sordid solitary thing,” Coleridge writes,

Mid countless brethren with a lonely heart  
Through courts and cities the smooth savage roams  
Feeling himself, his own low self the whole;  
When he by sacred sympathy might make  
The whole one self! self, that no alien knows!  
Self, far diffused as Fancy’s wing can travel!  
Self, spreading still! Oblivious of its own,  
Yet all of all possessing! . . . . .

(*Religious Musings* 149-58)

What Lockridge interprets as Coleridge’s lack of self-definition and “vacancy of self” (258), I would describe as his experiencing his own soul in one of its lost and untethered moments. For instance, 1810 finds Coleridge recording in his notebook how he feels “whirled about without a center—as in a nightmare—no gravity—a vortex without a center” (*Notebooks* 3:1: 3999). As Kathleen Coburn, editor of Coleridge’s notebooks, comments, “The vortex image [recurs] in [Coleridge’s] descriptions of despair or guilt” (3:2:3999).

Still, Plotinus asserts that the soul, an emanation of God, once turned back to its true inner nature, will gain glimpses of infinity and regain immortality. In a similar way Coleridge believes that the soul, though fallen, gains “an immediate Consciousness, a sensible Experience, of the Spirit in and during its operation on the soul,” which provides entree to the higher realms through the inner sense, intuition, and reason (*Aids to Reflection* 83). Thus, the soul’s drawing back to its Source produces

that most glorious birth of the God-like within us, which even as the Light, its

material symbol, reflects itself from a thousand surfaces, and flies homeward to its Parent Mind enriched with a thousand forms, itself above form and still remaining in its own simplicity and identity!" (*Statesman's Manual* 50)

Not only does the embodied soul draw nearer to God, but Coleridge believed that the soul does not perish with the death of the body but continues on in its evolutionary journey back to its Source. In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge asserts, "The Soul of Man does not die; that though things were ill here, yet to the good who usually feel most of the evils of this life, they should end in honor and advantages"<sup>40</sup> (*Aids to Reflection* lxxxvi).

Coleridge adds:

The notion of a rational, and self-conscious Soul, perishing utterly with the dissolution of the organized Body, seems to require, nay almost involves the opinion that the Soul is a quality of Accident of the Body—a mere harmony resulting from Organization.

But let this pass unquestioned! . . . [We] are now endowed with Souls that are not extinguished together with the material body. (*Aids to Reflection* 306)

Like Plotinus, Coleridge expresses soul evolution both hierarchically and holarchically. In the ascent of Being, for example, the soul climbs a ladder back to God. Coleridge also holds holarchical concepts of the inward or circular journey, or withdrawing the smaller self into the larger Self. "Coleridge says full consciousness," as Lockridge explains,

empowers us "to beget each in himself a new man." No longer enclosed by circumstance, one begins to "construct a circle by the circumvolving line"—to "be a Self"—embracing the experiential world through power of consciousness instead of "forming narrower circles, till at every Gyre [the Soul's] wings beat against the personal Self." (261, 262)

Ultimately, Coleridge envisions a union with "the infinite Spirit" as "a total act of the soul," in which the soul re-emerges with the consciousness of God (*Statesman's Manual*

90; *Friend* 1: 315). It leads “the drowsed Soul” to feel again “its nobler nature,”

Coleridge affirms,

and centred there  
 God only to behold, and know, and feel,  
 Till by exclusive consciousness of God  
 All self-annihilated it shall make  
 God its identity: God all in all!  
 We and our Father one!” (*Religious Musings* 34, 35, 40-45)

### Ego

Plotinus takes the view that man, whom he calls the “self,” is the furthestmost emanation of self-consciousness, extending into matter itself. Coleridge, as Plotinus, represents this stage of consciousness as man and the self, adding the term “ego” to the discussion. While Plotinus does not clearly distinguish between the embodied soul, the ego, and the human being nor does he explain how these interior dimensions are interrelated, Coleridge portrays the human being as a unity of the soul, the ego (its outer face), and the body. These three, he believes, are synthesized by the secondary imagination, causing the “*Heart [soul] & Intellect [ego]*” to be “*intimately combined & unified, with the great appearances in Nature*” (*Collected Letters* 2: 864). In his *Biographia* definitions, Coleridge further singles out a function of the ego that he calls “fancy,” which, like rational understanding, is a derivative, subordinate faculty of the mind.<sup>41</sup>

Coleridge’s Description of Fancy in *Biographia Literaria*. In chapter 13,

Coleridge writes:

FANCY [in contrast with secondary Imagination] has no other counters to

play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory [the Fancy] must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. (1: 305)

This faculty of fancy, playing with “fixities and definites,” reveals itself as distanced from the creative imagination and functioning according to its own context-specific rules (Larkin 195). Thus, fancy manipulates conventional words and concepts, products of “past creation” and “earlier acts of perception,” or “units of meaning” already put together by what Coleridge called “the *modifying*, and *co-adumating* Faculty”<sup>42</sup> of imagination (Richards 59, 75; *Collected Letters* 2: 865-66). According to Coleridge, fancy, an “aggregative and associative power” mechanically collects and puts together pieces that are then merely assembled or rearranged (*Biographia* 1: 293). As a result, Coleridge maintains, these pieces “have no connexion natural or moral, but are yoked together” by “some accidental coincidence” (qtd. in Richards 77).

Despite its limitations, however, fancy can assemble disparate images in several ways. Coleridge observes, for example, that fancy brings together dissimilar images by at least one point which they might share in common (Richards 77). He also asserts that fancy may join two distinctly different things “in solution & loose mixture . . . in the shape of formal Similies” (*Collected Letters* 2: 864). Barth further remarks that “the merely ‘mechanical’ mind of fancy can see . . . the juxtaposition of separate realities” and “oppositions” (*Symbolic Imagination* 24). Yet images thus assembled or invented, by the whims of fancy, remain as a collection of separate pieces that shows its seams (*Biographia* 1: 293; Richards 77; Simpson 216). That, says Coleridge, is how fancy

fractures and dilutes the natural, organic connection between words and consciousness and their archetypal origins.

Likewise, fancy as a “mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space” is similarly limited and linear, replaying sensory and perceptual elements stored in the mind. Yet, fancy is also “blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of [free] will, which we express by the word CHOICE.” That is to say, the conscious mind selects between words available through past association and chooses how it will assemble and rearrange them. Nevertheless, fancy “must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association,” like constructing a prefabricated house, by diagram, from ready-made building components. Coleridge’s theory of fancy “is both a development of associationist ideas and a strong reaction against them,” Raman Selden explains. Coleridge demonstrates that David Hartley’s associationist concepts “reduce the human mind to a passive victim of mechanical process.” Thus, Selden continues, Coleridge “reserved the term ‘fancy’ for the older, mechanical, associationist account,” where rearranging materials “is a poetic function but is not enough to account for genius” (127, 128).

Still, Barth adds, “For all the distinction” and “priority given to imagination and to symbol,” “Coleridge never ceased to respect” fancy, “when it functions well” and works “at its best” (*Symbolic Imagination* 79, 56). It is interesting to note that Richards identifies fancy as today’s “commonplace” thinking. That is to say, “the mind is just certain ways of [the] operation of the body,” Richards observes (60). “Every mental event” depends on “former mental events. . . . The activities of the self,” he continues,

“are the results of past activities. . . . And this prior experiencing determines how it will experience in the future (61).

How Coleridge’s Rational Ego Correlates with the Plotinian Self or Man. Coleridge’s rational ego, the source of fancy, is similar to what Plotinus calls “self.” Just as Plotinus believed that “man,” i.e., the body with its consciousness of self, issues from the Soul (higher and lower), Coleridge believed the finite human to be linked symbolically with the infinite through corresponding elements—matter with Spirit, the particular with the universal, the self with God (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 133). I might add that since the pre-existent soul (an emanation of the higher Soul) precedes the “self,” or “man,” in a Plotinian sense, the conscious ego could be seen as deriving from the higher and lower soul as well as from its connection with the body. Coleridge, in his assertion that “the primary IMAGINATION [is] the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception,” further adds the notion that the ego is directly tied to primary imagination. Likewise, although ego’s fancy may differ in degree and kind from the imagination, Richards argues that Coleridge’s ideas “must not be translated” into the idea that “the step from Fancy to Imagination is across a critical point like that between ice and water” (34). Coleridge’s “theory kept closer to the facts,” Richards observes, “and relied not upon popular analogies but upon an observable difference between instances of mental process” (34). Thus, all prior states of being, with their particular characteristics, would appear to converge in the human form.

Despite the ego’s connection with its origins, Plotinus considers the physical

body, with its consciousness of “I” or “me,” as treading the line between being and non-being, however much the self believes in its own existence and continuing sense of personal identity. Coleridge similarly describes this level of consciousness as “the conditional finite I,” which, though a construct, holds on to the illusion it is an independent being (*Biographia*, 1: 277; Richards 182-83). According to Plotinus, at this level of quasi-being, perception is “material” because it identifies with the physical body and perceives with the senses. This is consistent with the notion that the ego is constructed along with the development of the body and its senses—or in the words of Coleridge, “the eye, the ear, the touch,” and “all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense,” generating that part of man’s nature and consciousness that comes from and judges according to the senses and external impressions (*Biographia* 1: 293, 242, 251; *Aids to Reflection* cxix).

Thus, Plotinus’s “material perception” is akin to Coleridge’s “fancy” and “understanding” of the rational ego—the ordinary thinking and logical faculties of the human mind. Simply put, man is rational because he is human. Yet Coleridge suggests that man is human because he was first rational, depicting nascent rationality and egocentrism as a pivotal stage in the fall (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 268). At first this assertion seems puzzling if the soul fell prior to incarnation and the ego develops as a result of incarnation. Yet this idea can be explained if one considers that the soul, as a self-consciousness with free will, has agency, or the power to affect the course of its personal existence. Rationality is also an application of free will. If one further supposes the soul and the ego to be interconnected by a continuity of self-consciousness that

develops over time, the seeds of ego rationality could be latent within the soul itself. Therefore, the origin of human rationality could be at that point when the soul chose to separate out from God by entering a lower state of ego, or "I," consciousness closer to the material plane. As Coleridge reasons,

The rational instinct, . . . taken abstractly and unbalanced, did, *in itself*, ('ye shall be as gods!' Gen. iii 5.) and in its consequences, . . . form the original temptation, through which man [i.e., the soul] fell: and in all ages has continued to originate the same. (*Statesman's Manuel* 61)

Thus, Jonathan Wordsworth asserts, humans are now mainly restricted to the level of rational understanding (37). This, Coleridge claims, is "*the mind of the flesh*," "a faculty of abstracting and generalizing" (*Aids to Reflection* 239, 517). Like fancy, rational understanding is a "mechanical" "analytic" faculty that deals with "parts" and "sense impressions" (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 127; Barth "Coleridge's *Dejection*" 186). As Wheeler puts it, rationality "can only enumerate, divine, and analyze. It is confined to the realm of what is already known, or perceived, or experienced" (99). Coleridge explains, "As soon as [the mind] is fixed on one image, it becomes understanding" (qtd. in Thorslev 109). Thus, understanding and fancy, unlike the imagination, limit the individual's ability "to shape his experience of the world into a meaningful whole" (Barth, "Coleridge's *Dejection*" 186). The understanding, Coleridge further observes, "snatches at truth, but is frustrated and disheartened by the fluctuating nature of its objects; its conclusions therefore are timid and uncertain, and it hath no way of giving permanence to things but by reducing them to abstractions" (*Statesman's Manuel* 20).

Thus, Coleridge reasons that the rational understanding “deals not with things-in-themselves, but only with names,” “words,” and abstract ideas<sup>43</sup> (A. Harding 141, 140).

Summing up the rational ego, Coleridge exclaims,

The poor worthless I! The sum total of my moral and intellectual intercourse dissolved into its elements are reduced to *extension, motion, degrees of velocity*, and those diminished *copies* of configurative motion, which form what we call notions, and notions of notions. . . .

. . . We only fancy, [when] we act from rational resolves.

(*Biographia* 1: 119, 120)

Yet for all its limitations, rational understanding still works “under the aegis of the reason, . . . the highest human cognitive faculty, and which itself contains sense, understanding, and imagination” (Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 21). In the same way, Coleridge argues, “the mind contains its thoughts, and is present in through them all” (*Statesman's Manuel* 69-70).

Just as Plotinus pegs man as perceiving himself as separate from others and from his Source, Coleridge considers man as distinguished by egocentrism, or a tendency to separate from “the other” and move toward self-sufficiency. According to Jonathan Wordsworth, Coleridge “would have named [egocentric] selfhood as the great impediment” to knowing ““ourselves / Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole”” (32; *Religious Musings* 127-28). As Abrams characterizes it, for Coleridge, “evil consists in man’s attempt to be self-sufficient, which shatters the whole into a chaos of disinherited, solitary, sensual, and mutually alienated selves” (*Natural Supernaturalism* 266). “We think of ourselves as separated beings,” Coleridge asserts, “and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought” (*Friend* 1: 520). Speaking

of “the Fichtean Egoismus” Coleridge writes: “[Fichte’s idealistic] theory [of the self or I] degenerated into a crude egoismus, a boastful and hyperstoic hostility to NATURE, as lifeless, godless, and altogether unholy” (*Biographia* 1:158-59).

For Coleridge, this kind of egocentrism accords with subjective individuality. Taking into account the subjectivism of Kant, or the theory that persons order their perceptions according to their own internal predispositions, Coleridge admits that “our perceptions actively create at least some of the harmonies and relationships evident to us; [although] these harmonies and appearances are not necessarily innate to the things or phenomena themselves” (Engell, *Biographia* 1: 118). Barth elaborates on the Kantian subjective:

For Kant, all our ideas beyond mere sense experience (whether the transcendental ideas of pure reason or the ideas of practical reason) remain merely regulative—a means of ordering our experience of the world. Neither through the a priori categories of sense experience (space and time) nor through ideas can the human mind be said to “know” reality beyond the self. (*Symbolic Imagination* 137)

Coleridge further pictures the narrowness of this kind of subjectivity as “that fluttering stranger”

Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit  
By its own moods interprets, every where  
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,  
And makes a toy of Thought. (“Frost at Midnight” 25, 20-23)

As the ego develops along with the maturing body, the human being concerns itself more and more with measured material existence and the earthly environment of time and space. In other words, the ego deals with realities of personal identity, the human condition, and adapting to the environment. According to Lockridge, Coleridge in

his pursuit of self-realization, believed that self at this level of development “is realized in both acts and ‘activity,’ both pivotal decisions and the daily pursuit of goals. Acts and activity ex-press the self in the sense of leading it out of potentiality” (266). Abrams further asserts that the high Romantics were not dissociated from the material world, as they are often portrayed, but were rather “almost obsessively occupied with the reality and rationale of the agonies of the human condition” (*Natural Supernaturalism* 443).

In his picture of the “toy-bewitched” ego, “made blind by lusts,” and “disherited of soul,” Coleridge foreshadows the poststructuralist constructed self, or subject, dwindled into a limited awareness of personal boundaries (*Religious Musings* 46, 47). As Lockridge points out, in an unpublished notebook, Coleridge portrays “man as ‘a finient [i.e., limited] being, an intelligence, which by power of his Will dat sibi finem [gives himself a boundary], *determines* the relations of his own being & of that being to Nature’” (qtd. in Lockridge 262). That is why the more socially oriented parts of the ego do not experience unity with core being. That is to say, they do not refer to a beginning, or pre-existent self, in God. Nor does this egocentric “construct” expect to find any unified dimension or eternity transcending the rational mind. Larkin refers to this level of consciousness as “an empty self (that seems to underly fancy)” (195). Thus, the externally oriented ego’s *self*-perceptions are, in part, a product of social symbolic construction and cultural discourses.

Coming back to Coleridge’s discussion of Iago from this angle yields the following interpretation. Not only does Iago lack a soul, but his identity seems to match whichever mask his ego (“Ee-ah-go”) chooses to wear--“a congeries of energies with no

relationship to an organic center” (Beer, “Coleridge’s Originality” 156). From this perspective, Iago would not have delivered the “‘To be or not to be . . .’ soliloquy, for it would have suggested ‘too habitual a communication with the heart’ [as focal point of the essential self]” (Beer 156). At the outer limits of this constructed subject, Coleridge describes a “dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses [that] . . . render[s] the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism” (Shawcross, *Biographia* 1: 19). “It must in truth be a land of darkness, a perfect *Anti-Goshen*,” Coleridge writes,

for men to whom the noblest treasures of their own being are reported only through the imperfect translation of lifeless and sightless *notions* [and] . . . through words which are but the shadows of notions; even as the notional understanding itself is but the shadowy abstraction of living and actual truth.  
(*Biographia* 1: 243)

Here Coleridge’s thinking resonates with Plotinius’s idea of the materialistic ego that identifies with the body and its senses and counts the experiences of the external world as the only “reality.” Thus, by abstracting images from the body, Coleridge reasons, the ego-bound “proselyte” of philosophy “contrives a theory of spirit by nicknaming matter, and in a few hours can qualify its dullest disciples to explain the omne scible [everything knowable] by reducing all things to impressions, ideas, and sensations” (*Biographia* 1: 235). Coleridge adds that “this non-coincidence” of matter and the spirit “seduces the incautious to mistake the limitations of the human faculties for the limits of things, as they really exist,” that is, to mistake “the *conditions* of a thing for its *causes* and *essence*; and the process by which we arrive at the knowledge of a faculty, for the faculty itself” (*Biographia* 1: 289, 123). As Beer explains,

If always directed to the objects of the external world, [human perception] will necessarily diminish: eventually, indeed, if devoted solely to the perception and management of objects which are themselves dead, it will become the process which Coleridge terms "Fancy." ("Coleridge's Originality" 150)

Yet, even in the hinterlands of matter, Plotinus claims, "We have not been cut away; we are not separate, what though the body-nature has closed about us to press us to itself; we breathe and hold our ground because the Supreme does not give and pass but gives on for ever" (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 622). Similarly, for Coleridge, the ego, like the soul, is tied to the divine mind by emanation. And although Coleridge believed the ego, with its limited faculties, needs to defer to the godlike imagination, the ego still plays a pivotal role in mediating between conscious awareness and the unconscious. This creates an interdependency between fancy and the imagination. Coleridge believed that to understand Hamlet's character, we needed to "reflect on the constitution of our own minds," as Beer explains. "In healthy processes of the mind, a balance was maintained between the impressions of outward objects and the inward operations" of the higher mind (qtd. in "Coleridge's Originality" 157). This relationship between fancy and imagination is patterned after hierarchical correspondences. No matter how these two faculties may be distinguished by definition, the ego-based fancy depends on the imagination for existence, while the lower-order faculty acts as a receptacle to contain the higher. In the words of Coleridge, "Genius must have Talent as its complement and implement, [just] as Imagination must have Fancy; in short, the higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower" (*Table Talk* 1: 426).

Coleridge's Message of the Return

Plotinus and Coleridge shared the vision of the circular procession of the descent and the ascent of the soul. Similarly, they also shared the purpose of defining distinctions between mutually interconnecting orders that make up self-consciousness so that the soul could regain knowledge of its lost estate before its fall from primal unity into “rupture, division, opposition, and differentiation” (Kirschner 167). Such knowledge of these stages of identity that gyre in an expanding circle “from the One back to the One by way of the many”—readies the individual to return to the fullness of being from whence it originates (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 272). This process occurs in reverse order, in Plotinian terms, from the “embodied soul to [the Universal] Soul to *Nous* . . . to the One” (Louth 39).

Yet, even though both Plotinus and Coleridge espouse the soul's reunion with God, each emphasizes different aspects of the process. As a mystic, Plotinus focuses on the soul's return to the simplicity of the Divine (*Enneads* 5.1.5, 373). Since self-consciousness results from emanation from the One, Louth explains, it is viewed as “evidence of duality, of unlikeness, in the soul” (43). As the soul ascends back to its Source, however, “this self-consciousness will evaporate” (Louth 43). Thus, for Plotinus, the divine mind is merely a stepping-stone to the nonduality of the One (*Enneads* 5.1.3, 371; 5.1.5, 373). Still, according to Louth, “the capacity for self-consciousness is not just evidence of lack of simplicity, for as self-awareness, it provides a means by which the soul may reach a level of interior simplicity that transcends self-consciousness” (43). To

attain to this simplicity, Plotinus advocates purification and identification with the Source (Louth 44, 45).

Coleridge, on the other hand, a visionary Romantic, characteristically emphasizes individuality and personal identity. Although Coleridge prizes union with the “one wondrous whole,” he continues to ascribe “being” to the First Principle in his designation of the One as “the infinite I AM.” The emphasis is on being returning to Being. Thus, Coleridge seeks not to dissolve the Many in the One but for the self “to individuate” and reconnect with God, where “thesis and antithesis, position and counterposition” “unite in a synthesis” (Coleridge qtd. in Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 267). This, Coleridge believed, could be attained only through a vision that encompasses and unites all aspects of reality, the eternal and the temporal. Thus, reuniting of disunited elements of being does not mean a “return to undifferentiated unity” in the beginning (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 269). Rather, according to Coleridge, the “self” evolves into “an organized unity” where individuation and diversity survive” “as distinctions without division,” or what Abrams calls “a reversion to a higher unity” “at a higher level than the original unself-conscious, ‘innocent’ unity” (Kirschner 167, 166, 174). Coleridge terms this evolved state of self-consciousness “multeity-in-unity” (*Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature* 2: 220).

## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

Summary

In this thesis, I have defined, interpreted, and accounted for elements of what I call “the Romantic map of identity” as set forth by Plotinus and adapted by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and other Romantics. My primary method has been to compare the maps of Plotinus and Coleridge to gain a deeper understanding of how Coleridge accounts for these components of identity and then to use these concepts to develop my own mapping system. To investigate these ideas, I first spelled out what I meant by the terms, drawing on the Christian Neoplatonic tradition of the early British Romantics, the Romantic transcendentalists of New England, and the related terms and concepts developed by C. G. Jung. To clarify what I mean by “Romantic,” I distilled Romantic characteristics into four cardinal points: (1) a focus on concepts and representation of the whole self, (2) a transcendent vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source, (3) a sense of the mission to facilitate the soul’s return through unity, and (4) an emphasis on the creative, self-expressive individual in his or her personal environment and historical context.

I explored the Romantic mapping process that Plotinus and those in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition use to delineate the origin, creation, and experience of being and consciousness. This includes the theory that consciousness is created by a

series of descending emanations from the First Principle through intermediate stages to the terrestrial body. These stages of consciousness development have been schematized as a hierarchy, or the Great Chain of Being, as well as a holarchy, or inherent analogies between inner and outer experience. According to this system, these stages are connected through correspondence or, in Jung's terms, synchronicity, which is often expressed through symbol. I also explained how the Neoplatonic Romantic worldview posits the return of the soul to the ultimate source through these same interconnections.

I also developed an overarching "Romantic map of identity," combining hierarchical and holarchical patterns, that accounts for the various mapping processes in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition. This model is like an egg with layers, the ovoid divided, or "sliced," into "horizontal" sections, which synthesizes the "flat" hierarchical ladder design with the concentric spheres of a holarchy. To explore the meaning of "identity," I set side by side Plotinus's and Coleridge's versions of the stages of identity development. Both begin with the undifferentiated One as the ineffable, transcendent source of consciousness, which Coleridge terms "the infinite I AM." The Plotinian *Nous* ("Spirit," "Intelligence," or "Mind") corresponds to Coleridge's primary imagination, which he also refers to as "the original unific Consciousness" and "the Ideal Imagination." Plotinus's Universal or World-Soul resonates with Coleridge's secondary imagination and its correlates symbolic imagination, philosophic imagination, and Logos. Similarly, both Plotinus and Coleridge describe an embodied individual soul of the phenomenal world. Plotinus further refers to the lowest emanation of the self as "man," while Coleridge pictures the human being as an amalgamation of soul, ego, and body.

Overall Synthesis and Application of Findings

Romantics typically cast cosmological, psychological, and autobiographical elements into symbol, archetype, and myth in their prose and extended poems. These concepts are frequently couched in recurring plot structures. One such plot unfolds as a circular or spiral journey that begins in the primordial mists before time and space. The traveler, or protagonist, is the figure of the self, who will assume many guises before reaching the destination. The journey passes through many dimensions, from pure Spirit and gradations of Spirit to the material plane, with its own cyclic trials and challenges, and back again to Spirit, the point of origin. As Abrams points out, Schelling favored Plotinus's analogy of the Homeric hero's circular voyage to illustrate the course of life and human evolution. According to Plotinus, Homer's twofold epic of "departure and return" is illustrated in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (*Natural Supernaturalism* 191). Echoing this Neoplatonic philosophy, Coleridge asserts the "evolution of humanity [as its] final aim":

Man sallies forth into nature—in nature, as in the shadows and reflections of a clear river, to discover the originals of the forms presented to him in his own intellect. Over these shadows . . . Narcissus-like, he hangs delighted: till . . . he learns at last that what he *seeks* he has *left behind*, and but lengthens the distance as he prolongs the search. (*Friend* 1: 508, 509)

For Romantics, the road or path for this descent and return is mappable. Without the map there is no memory of origins of consciousness in Spirit and no continuity of being, and the soul is "asleep," lost, or exiled--a stranger in the egoic realm of terrestrial life. Thus, in "The Gates of Paradise," Blake refers to "the lost Traveller's Dream under

the Hill.” Abrams maintains that this Romantic protagonist is often “a compulsive wanderer” (193). A prime example is Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, where a sea captain embarks on an ocean voyage, only to be stranded “alone on a wide wide sea” after his entire crew dies (233). Surviving this dangerous and agonizing journey, the mariner returns to wander the land, for he must impart the knowledge he has gained through these initiations into the mysteries of the psyche. Coleridge’s poem opens as the mariner, now an old man, seeks out one of three youthful wedding guests, whom the mariner senses must hear the tale of his experience at sea. The Ancient Mariner has not selected the bride or groom, because they, unlike their guest (one presumes), have prepared themselves for the bridal union, a common Romantic symbol for the union of the soul with its transcendent source.

The pilgrimage and quest plot also recurs in Romantic literature, where the protagonist undertakes a journey or heroic quest only to eventually arrive back at the place of origin (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 193). Blake’s “Ah! Sun-flower” portrays a sun-flower, turning its face to the circular motion of the sun:

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the Sun:  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
Where the travellers journey is done. (1-4)

Without the “steps” of the sun’s orbit or the stones on the homeward path, there is no return for the sun-flower or the soul who must follow the map all the way back to its original home.

The poet-prophet, who sees past, present, and future,<sup>44</sup> is granted the transcendent

vision of the emanation and fall of the soul from its source and the mission to facilitate the soul's return. That is why the poet-prophet is also a map maker, our "reminder" who charts the origin and destiny of the soul. The poet-prophet, sometimes assuming the form of bard or artist, labors in the arts to create a unique version of the Romantic map in order to "awaken" the soul who has fallen into cycles of generation here on earth and to restore its ancient memory of what Emerson termed "the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded" (*Self-Reliance* 46). This map of identity may be crafted as a hierarchy or a holarchy. Yet, in reality, the soul goes nowhere, navigating the interior landscape of its own being. From a Neoplatonic Romantic point of view, "up" or "down" and "in" or "out" are states of consciousness.

The hierarchical picture of the ladder, however, serves a purpose. The ascent of being is a precise, orderly progression from lower to higher stages of consciousness. The steps must be clearly seen and the foot placed firmly on the next rung, so the climber will not slip and fall. The idea of holarchy, however, where one stage of consciousness enfolds another in increasing levels of wholeness, appeals to those with spherical vision who intuit rather than plot in linear fashion the elusive "veritable ocean" of the psyche and unconscious (Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West" 27). A holarchical view puts one nearer to the idea of the One, the holon that encompasses all others, as simultaneously the circumference and center of the creation as well as of the self—the center by virtue of Coleridge's "consubstantiality." Since all are of one essence and one in that essence, each contains the whole just as the whole contains each—hence Blake's

To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
 And Eternity in an hour. ("Auguries of Innocence" 1-4)

As the poet-prophet has labored to conceptualize and inscribe the map of identity, the embodied soul, map in hand, contemplates the very next step. The soul, now clothed with a coat of skin<sup>45</sup> and navigating through the lens of the ego, must understand the map to interpret it and then be able to apply the map to the territory. The journey will carry the embodied soul through the material plane, with all its subtleties and nuances, where the soul works out its destiny. Which way to go? How does one find heaven in a wildflower or traverse interpenetrating dimensions through a portal in time? Through symbol, the earth anchors the juncture between two worlds, Spirit and matter. The map lays out the distances and illumines every crossroad. Take each new road, says the poet-prophet, all the way home.

#### Romantic Focus on Concepts and Representation of the Whole Self

I began this study with a number of questions about the self, including: How do I find my true self? How can I become who I really am? Because of their essentialist nature, these are questions long ago dispensed with by poststructuralist proponents who assert the death of God, the author, the self, and perhaps even the subject. But to those who still seek the answer to these questions, the Romantic mapping process, made explicit in the writing of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, offers a credible and comprehensive answer even today. For these individuals, distinctions between levels of selfhood matter, because climbing back up the ladder of Being is a precise process that reverses the fall.

The first step is seeing the map laid out for us. The next step is learning the characteristics of each staging point, or station, in our journey, so we will be clear about exactly where we are and how to avoid the pitfalls of a misstep that tumbles us back into an increasingly mortal nature. In this section, I will present my overall synthesis of the mapping processes of Plotinus and Coleridge, with an emphasis on Jungian definitions, to explain my own interpretation of these components of identity and why it is important to understand them.

According to this Romantic mapping scheme, the ego, or the personal self at the center of the conscious mind, is the lowest stage of selfhood. It is important to note that complexes and subpersonalities<sup>46</sup> are not the self, even though they masquerade as such. The more the ego identifies with one of these "masks," the more it leans toward an external orientation. Thus, a weak ego may be dominated by internal complexes and subpersonalities or by societal forces. Therefore, the first point of distinction is between the self and these multiple "selves" that form in the psyche and shape the "faces" which the ego presents to the social world. On the other hand, the radically inflated ego, or what Coleridge termed the "Egoismus," does not cave into internal and external forces but becomes a god unto itself. In extreme cases, it also becomes blind to "higher" elements of identity beyond conscious awareness from which it emanates, such as the soul or what Coleridge terms primary and secondary imagination, and thus unable or unwilling to respond to them. It should come as no surprise, then, that the earthbound ego can so easily dismiss, as not existing, the Romantic "myth" of the whole self.

Let us recall that nascent rationality and egocentrism caused the fall of the soul,

according to Coleridge, just as the developed ego results from the fall. Thus, the ego, who now dominates identity in the material world, becomes crucial in hindering or facilitating the soul's return. Only the soul can regain immortality (the ego cannot return, being a construction of the material plane), but it is the ego that must navigate in the here and now. It is the ego that must accept or reject the Romantic map of identity that clearly denies its place as the center of its own universe. A further complication is, what one experiences as "self" at this level is a combination of body, ego, and soul that cannot easily be separated. This amalgamation called the "human being" traverses the realms of the postmodern landscape. In order for this "committee" to work well, the ego must be taught that the soul exists and how to hear its subtle promptings.

Because the "I am" of the personal ego is also directly tied to the "I" of primary and secondary imagination, it is also in a position to hinder or facilitate the creative process and the possibility of rising to more transcendent levels of consciousness. Thus, it behooves one who journeys homeward to higher levels of being and wholeness to know the self that is the ego and to know it well. For the individual who equates his or her identity with persona or ego is not likely to pass beyond the egocentric stage. According to those in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition, only by identifying with higher levels of selfhood can people free themselves from egocentrism and proceed toward the more advanced stage of self-realization.

Vision into higher dimensions is imperative for the individual who strives for the next level of wholeness (Coleridge's secondary imagination), with its free will, originality, creativity, symbolic thinking and expression, the ideal, and universal Logos.

Only when “man” merges with the Logos can one experience immanence, or the whole self as human and divine. For the Romantics, this intersection between heaven and earth occurs in the mind, through the symbol, and in the heart, the seat of what the Gnostics refer to as “*gnosis*.”<sup>47</sup> This juncture forms another crossroad. One road leads to the Universal Soul. The other leads to the labyrinth of the ego-constructed God-substitute. Again the ego is key to the progress of the traveler. Just as the ego could accept or deny the intimations of the soul, it must be a willing participant in this process and defer to the secondary imagination.

As Engell and Bate point out, Coleridge believed that intercommunion with the secondary imagination was granted only to the few who actively pursued it. If a person wished to rise above the level of the ego, it was necessary to build the conceptual framework and structure in the conscious mind to understand and discern levels of consciousness, especially between the Logos and the exalted ego. This latticework becomes etched in the mind through learning precise definitions of the stages of identity and their particular characteristics delineated in the Romantic map. Through this process, the facets of the mind’s chalice are defined, sharpened, and clarified. The design must be intricate, precise, and geometric in order to correspond to and contain, through symbol, definite ideal forms and divine or spiritual archetypes originating in the *Nous*. Aligning the consciousness with these forms produces more precise and accurate definitions in the mind, even as they descend into denser more indefinite dimensions of the material world. Another route to the divine is through the transforming, transcendent fires of the heart, which clears the passageway to *gnosis*.

The Romantic map of identity also illustrates the connection between the secondary imagination (Plotinus's Universal Soul) and its immediate superior, the primary imagination (Plotinus's *Nous*). Although Plotinus claims to have experienced mystical union with this God, Coleridge did not experience union with the godlike primary, believing in it as a matter of faith (J. Wordsworth 48; Barth, *Symbolic Imagination* 122). For just as few sustain a connection with the secondary imagination or World-Soul, even fewer directly experience this transcendent level of consciousness, where God as being first appears.<sup>48</sup> Yet, knowing that this level of self-consciousness exists is vital if one is to recall one's divine origin and ultimate goal in the return. For the embodied soul on earth, it also helps to realize that this transpersonal "essential Self," beyond experience and conscious awareness, is not only the center but also the whole circumference of selfhood. This whole Self, which encompasses both the conscious and the unconscious and all levels of the emanation of self-consciousness, presides over an individual's entire life as a constant subliminal and cohesive guiding presence.

#### Romantic Emphasis on the Individual in the Personal Environment and Historical Context

Let us consider, for a moment, the argument that focusing on the self produces a kind of egocentrism that resists making concessions to the group, whether families, communities, nations, or the international network of communication. This may manifest as the self who pushes away the "other," unable to meet the demands of the outer world. Then there is the Romantic "myth" of the eccentric, solitary genius, an exalted figure far above the common people. And what about the self-serving individual who uses society

to feed personal needs for control? These describe an ego--preoccupied with individual fear, desire, or power--who refuses to relinquish its privileged position as the "center" of identity.

The poststructuralist alternative to this "Romantic" foregrounding of the self is to flatten the self-based hierarchy and de-center the holarchy of the self. According to this thinking, leveling an oppressive hierarchy, built on personal consciousness and privileged selves, fosters lateral bonding between subjects and achieves pluralism or consensus. This allows the community of socially constructed subjects, based on values consensus, to evolve past personal knowledge and backward-looking organicism. The answer to Romantic holarchy, merely a disguised form of hierarchy, is for the subject to de-center, or leap outside one's own lived experience and "essential truth" and to project oneself into unfamiliar modes of difference, either circumstantial or hypothetical. This includes the ability to acknowledge and examine the constructed the narratives of oneself or another. If, for example, the subject reflects on his or her conceptual and emotional underpinnings of instinct, superstition, colonialism, internalized systems of authority, and sources of "rational" thinking, he or she might begin to deconstruct a constructed "selfhood." Thereby the subject relinquishes selfish, individual autonomy, with its boundaries, and is ready to fuse with others in a pluralistic relativism, or egalitarianism. According to this thinking, such a process frees the community from the divisiveness of egocentrism. In theory at least, subjectivity responds well to this worldview.

But don't count on it. From the Romantic perspective, the ego (the poststructuralist "subject"), most obvious in "the terrible twos," characteristically insists

on its own way. Moreover, the ego cannot be deconstructed or it will cease to exist, because without its essential underpinnings, like Iago, it has an empty center. An ego that attempts to de-center by equating itself with the other, through projection, risks loss of identity, on the one hand, or ego inflation on the other. Both ego inflation and identity loss inhibit the process of de-centering. Thus, no matter how much the “subject” mentally deconstructs itself, the ego will not be able to de-center. On the other hand, the ego may fall back on discourses that celebrate diversity and pluralistic “collagism,” in a somewhat Modernist fashion that once again tends to promote division, fragmentation, and separation.

The Romantic answer to these postmodern solutions is, of course, the Romantic map of identity. The ascending scale of consciousness from ego to *Nous* switches the lens of perception and experience from egocentricity to the vision of the Universal or World-Soul, or secondary imagination. This visionary power, i.e., what Blake called seeing *through*, not *with*, the eye or “I” expands into transcendent dimensions until the individual “communicative intelligence” merges into the World-Soul and thereby sees through the “I” that transcends the ego. Rather than de-centering, the ego breaks open into higher emanations of increasing levels of wholeness, where the many aspects of self converge in a point of self-transcendence. Thus, the “I” is no longer confined to the ego but is transformed into the whole Self. According to this thinking, only by identifying with the higher aspects of self beyond the ego can people free themselves from egocentrism and comprehend the ideas, values, and experience of another person. This does not involve shifting outside one’s frame of reference or projecting oneself into

unfamiliar conditions. Rather, the individual understands the other by achieving the perfect whole through the "I" of the individual. Thus, a shift in cognition corresponds to different levels of self-consciousness. The traveler, somewhere between ego and essential selfhood, moves into interdependence, multiple levels of consciousness and interaction, and the integrative realm of natural hierarchies. Furthermore, the Romantic answer to the postmodern idea that promotes diversity and plurality is to move from differentiation to an organized unity in which individualism and diversity survive, not through consensus or conformity, but through what Coleridge calls "distinctions without division," or "multeity-in-unity."

The moral insight gleaned through the moment of cosmic unity leads to the Romantic idea of self-realization and evolutionary transcendence as the most effective means of social betterment. This communal progress is generated not by collectivism or "losing oneself" in the larger cause but by a universal perspectivism and a visionary sense of reality. This idea echos Kant, who espoused the moral independent self, free to act for the benefit of the communal whole (49-62). William Ellery Channing, a contemporary of the early Romantics, also advocated this position: "What is common to men and revealed by Jesus transcends every single individuality, and is the spiritual object and food of all individuals" (qtd. in Kern 255). Thinkers in this tradition have argued that the rise or fall of society, a culture, and even civilization itself depends on those who have become self-realized and inspire or lead others through their example of compassionate individuality. For holarchical systems evolve together, each depending upon the others. One has only to look at diverse examples of self-realized individuals,

throughout history and across cultures around the world, in the arts, sciences, and religion, who were strong catalysts for cultural evolution. These extraordinary individuals did not conform to the common trends or inertia of their social order. Instead, they stood out, foregrounded as it were, and made a difference.

### Theoretical Implications in Today's World

I also began this study with the question of whether the self is essential or constructed. For the Romantics this is a false either/or, because the self, paradoxically, is both. As the Romantic map of identity illustrates, the edges of an artificial binary distinction between essence and social construct dissolve upon closer inspection. Similarly, Diana Fuss asserts (albeit from a different theoretical perspective), “Essentialism underwrites theories of constructionism and . . . constructionism operates as a more sophisticated [rational] form of essentialism” (119). From the Romantic viewpoint, the whole self includes its first inception as self-consciousness in the primordial One, all the way through “man,” i.e., the physical body, with its biological, cognitive, and personal self, which interacts with the material world. According to the Romantic symbolic tradition, a version of this self is transferred from one stage of consciousness to another, retaining its core essence through consubstantiality. Yet the further self-consciousness issues from the Source and the divine ideal, the more constructed it becomes, until it reaches the level of the poststructuralist subject, or the outer layers of the ego, with its personal unconscious. Very few theorists today would deny that this stage of consciousness is mainly a social and linguistic construct and that

most people operate from this level.

Still, Romantics and poststructuralists continue to point the finger at one another, each accusing the other of reductionist and stereotypical thinking. Casting their opponents into stereotypes and “straw figures” is indeed a ploy that both Romantics and poststructuralists use, but this kind of thinking also filters down to those in their own discipline who gravitate toward “binarism,” whether concrete, mythic, or rational. These are likely to take a reductionist and stereotypical approach to their own theories, until they are snared in its limitations. In other words, this is partly a question of theorizing and partly a matter of stages of consciousness development. As Coleridge would say, this is how “fancy” copes with a world it can’t hope to understand. The best way to get beyond these dilemmas is by understanding the Romantic mapping process, which represents a comprehensive worldview whose enduring legacy continues to shape a kind of Neo-essentialism in a theoretical landscape that has, for the most part, rejected traditional Aristotelean essentialism yet acknowledges the limitations of a purely constructivist position. As Fuss puts it: “We need both [essentialism and constructionism] to theorize essentialist spaces from which to speak and, simultaneously, to deconstruct these spaces to keep them from solidifying” (118).

Why won’t the Romantics just go away? They won’t go away because their work and mission are far from finished. The words of Coleridge and others in the Neoplatonic Romantic tradition ring down the centuries, proclaiming a vital message for our world today. For the “incurable Romantics” are uniquely qualified to tackle these complex issues through the transforming, imaginative spirit and creative spark that holds the

transcendent vision for self-realization in a new utopia here on earth and in the transcendent world yet to come. As Virginia Woolf so aptly put it, Coleridge's writing is the "only sort . . . of which one can say that it has the secret of perpetual life."

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## NOTES TO THE TEXT

<sup>1</sup> By “universal” I mean “archetypal” rather than “uniform,” or based on abstract, mechanical, formulaic or linguistic categories that ignore individuality, particulars, and differences.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Jung posited that *archetypal images* derive from *archetypes*. He conceived an archetype as “an innate potential pattern of imagination, thought, or behavior that can be found among humans in all times and places,” i.e., a ubiquitous energy configuration, or blueprint, in the unconscious (Stein 233; Samuels 26). That is to say, archetypes are “the fundamental energetic patterns underlying psychic functioning” (M. Harding, Introduction xvii). Some post-Jungians have further seen archetypal structures and patterns as recurring across time and “acquiring a history of forms based upon a widening of [collective] consciousness” (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 27). Thus, contemporary references to archetypes refer to them as “shifting” (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 28).

An archetypal image differs from an archetype in that it is “a psychic pattern, mental or behavioral, that is common to the human species. [Recognizable] archetypal images are found in dreams and in cultural materials such as myths, fairy tales, and religious symbols” and even in recurring patterns in nature (Stein 233). Thus, archetypal images are symbolic or structural representations of archetypes. The underlying archetype can be inferred through studying forms and patterns of archetypal images in various cultures, but it cannot be known because an archetype is a hypothetical entity irrepresentable in itself (Samuels 26).

Both archetypes and archetypal images are housed in the collective unconscious that surrounds and interconnects individuals through their personal unconscious, which contains “higher” and “lower” degrees of consciousness. Thus, archetypal images can range from the spiritual and symbolic to the intuitive and instinctive. Moreover, archetypes and archetypal images are neither static nor flowing; they are both, the changing dynamic patterns of archetypes forming and dissolving again in various archetypal images, or symmetric patterns, that correspond to stages and structures of consciousness development. Thus, although archetypes are cohesive as psychic energy fields, they are anything but fixed and unchanging.

<sup>3</sup> Jung developed the theory of a “collective unconscious as the repository of man’s psychic heritage,” i.e., “of all that may have been at some time individually expressed, adapted or influenced” (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 32). The collective unconscious is made up of instincts, archetypal images, and material that has never been conscious (Stein 234-35).

<sup>4</sup> I am using the phrase “soul evolution” as a shorthand to describe how the embodied soul, having fallen or descended through emanation, develops or evolves through its life on earth until it is prepared, through discipline, purification, regeneration, and wisdom gained through experience, to return to the godhead.

<sup>5</sup> That the early British Romantics and the nineteenth-century Romantic transcendentalists of New England were immersed in Plotinus and incorporated Neoplatonism into their thinking and writing has been demonstrated by a number of scholars and by the writers themselves. The following is a list of some of the most important sources on this

Plotinus-Romantic relationship.

M. H. Abrams, in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, and Suzanne R. Kirschner, in *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis: Individuation and Integration in Post-Freudian Theory*, include a general overview of the Plotinian roots of much of the Romantic worldview. George Mills Harper's *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* and Kathleen Raine's *Blake and Antiquity* demonstrate how Blake drew upon a Neoplatonic tradition in developing his own mythology, which he translated into his unique system of poetic personae, symbols, and synecdoche in his prose, poetry, and visual art. Among Coleridge's prolific writings on his Neoplatonic sources are his *Aids to Reflection* and *Biographia Literaria*.

According to Arlen J. Hansen's "Plotinus: An Early Source of Emerson's View of Otherworldliness," "an impressive and thorough discussion of Emerson's early access to Neoplatonism is Vivian Hopkins, 'Emerson and Cudworth,'" "John Harrison, *The Teachers of Emerson*," and "Kenneth W. Cameron, *Emerson the Essayist*," among others (185). An additional source is Stanley Brodwin's "Emerson's Version of Plotinus: The Flight to Beauty."

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Koestler constructs the word "holon," from the Greek *holos* ("whole"), with the suffix *on*, which "suggests a particle or part" (48).

<sup>7</sup> Jungian analyst Murray Stein defines "synchronicity" as "the meaningful coincidence of two events, one inner and psychic and the other outer and physical" (234). Jung believed that these events coincide without a traceable cause-and-effect relationship in time and space (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 146).

<sup>8</sup> I am not using the term *signify* as Ferdinand de Saussure described it when he claimed that no inherent connection exists between “signifier” (the sign or word) and “signified” (the referent or concept referred to) (Cuddon 829).

<sup>9</sup> Jung thought of a complex as an “autonomous entity,” an emotional subpersonality formed around a core archetype, usually as a result of “psychic injury or trauma” (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut, 33-34; Stein, 233).

<sup>10</sup> Jung defines the shadow as “the rejected and unaccepted aspects of the personality that are repressed and form a compensatory structure of the ego’s self ideals and to the persona” (Stein 234). The shadow can be seen as “the negative side of the personality, the sum of all the unpleasant qualities one wants to hide, the inferior, worthless and primitive side of man’s nature, the ‘other person’ in one, one’s own dark side” (Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 138). Jung pointedly describes the shadow portion of the unconscious as “the thing a person has no wish to be” (qtd. in Samuels, Shorter, and Plaut 138).

Jung’s “shadow” resonates with Plotinus’s idea that light issues from the Source, moving outward and gradually dimming, “until it shades off into that total darkness [evil] which is matter-in-itself, conceived as the privation of light” (Copleston 469).

<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that Plotinus is the origin of the ideas that we designate today as “Neoplatonic.” Suzanne R. Kirschner, in *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis*, remarks that scholars have noted elements of Plotinus’s thought in previous thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, and in Stoic, Persian, and Hindu doctrines. Kirschner concludes, however, that Plotinus seems to have combined Greek and Indian thought in an original way (117).

<sup>12</sup> Although Plotinus sometimes described *Nous* as “Intelligence,” “Thought,” “Mind,” or “Spirit,” Andrew Louth claims that *Nous* is “impossible to translate” (37).

<sup>13</sup> One notable example of applying the term *Christ* universally is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who sent shock waves into the institutionalized Unitarian worldview with his 1838 Address to Harvard School seniors, when he asserted the inner divinity of man, or “oneness with God,” and the ability of anyone to “be the Christ” (Kern 251; Whicher 97; “Divinity School Address” 99). Emerson’s “radical” views, however, were more ancient and traditional than new and revolutionary. For they stemmed from a Neoplatonic metaphysical and philosophical tradition with which he was familiar, as well as from his own transcendent experiences with inner divinity.

In his writing, Emerson describes how he experienced a stage of consciousness remarkably like Plotinus’s Universal or World-Soul:

My head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, –all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.  
(*Nature* 24)

Emerson refers to this level of self-consciousness as “the Over-Soul.” In his “Divinity School Address,” Emerson maintains that “anyone” who attains to this transcendent extension of identity, beyond egocentricity, can imbibe in or become this universal aspect of God, or “the Christ” (99). The phrase “transparent eyeball” may sound odd and confusing. But the point is, as Emerson put it, “persons are nothing” in the Christ-consciousness, i.e., “the [Over-]soul knows no persons” (“Divinity School Address” 99, 106). In that way, Emerson’s Over-Soul, together with Plotinus’s Universal or World-

Soul, is roughly equivalent to the Christian *Christ* but applied to every person.

While the idea of a universal term *Christ*, or its equivalent, referring to an emanation of God was acceptable to Emerson, it is not surprising that his contemporaries, nineteenth-century orthodox Christians, would rail against the idea of anyone but Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ or, in some cases, against the suggestion that Jesus was anything less than God incarnate. The two latter Christian positions had been debated since the Council of Nicaea, held in 325. During Nicene Council debates, Greek theologian Arius articulated a Christian interpretation of emanation, together with its implications for immanence, that the Son, a creation of the Father, became a “second God, under God the Father” (Louth 75; *Encyclopædia Britannica*). Arius, of course, was referring to Jesus, yet his claim was fundamentally distinct from Nicene Orthodox views that the Son was *not* an emanation of the Father but the two were of one substance and Jesus was fully God (Louth 75). This was a pointed example of the “mystery of mysteries” debate that would continue to part the waters in Christian theology. When Emerson asserted that, as an emanation of the Father, anyone could have access to the divine and potentially be the Christ, he had simply picked up the thread of the “immanence by emanation” argument and applied it to his own generation.

<sup>14</sup> Plotinus takes up Plato’s belief that the soul existed before the body. Plato maintained that the soul originates in “the realm of the Forms . . . above the heavens” (Louth 2). For Plato, “the soul belonged to the [spiritual] realm in contrast to its body which was material: the soul belonged to the divine . . . realm and was only trapped in the material realm by its [subsequent] association with the body” (Louth 77).

<sup>15</sup> The term *ego* comes from the Latin word meaning "I."

<sup>16</sup> As Harold Bloom points out, in *The Visionary Company*, no writer of the Romantic era labeled his own work or that of his contemporaries as "Romantic" (xvi).

<sup>17</sup> Here Barth is alluding to Charles Feidelson's discussion of Romanticism in *Symbolism and American Literature*. Feidelson asserts, "The allegorist avails himself of a formal correspondence between 'ideas' and 'things,' both of which he assumes as given" (8).

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, citations of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* come from the Engell and Bate edition of 1983. James Engell edited and annotated volume 1 (chapters 1-13), while W. Jackson Bate was responsible for volume 2 (chapters 14-24).

<sup>19</sup> Synesius of Cyrene (date of birth uncertain) was the Neoplatonic Bishop of Ptolomais. In a letter to his brother, Euoptius, he wrote: "Philosophy is opposed to the opinions of the vulgar. I certainly shall not admit that the soul is posterior to the body." Synesius died around 414 CE (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

<sup>20</sup> Origen was a fellow townsman of Plotinus in Alexandria, where he had studied under Plotinus's teacher, the philosopher Ammonius Saccas (Louth 53).

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that William Blake did not share Coleridge's resistance to the pre-existence of souls. According to George Mills Harper's *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, Blake asserted pre-existence as early as 1789 (66). Like Plato, Blake believed that "only by virtue of preexistence in a more perfect state than the soul can know on this 'fluctuating Globe' is the soul able to recall the ideal Forms of things" (Harper 64).

Harper contends that while Blake used the idea of pre-existence as the metaphysical and metaphorical basis for *The Book of Thel*, he discusses literal pre-existence in an 1800

letter to Flaxman. Blake maintains, "In my Brain are studies & Chambers fill'd with books & pictures of old, which I wrote & painted in ages of Eternity before my mortal life" (66). In the following paragraph, Blake claims to recall knowing his friend in the divine world: "You, O Dear Flaxman, are a Sublime Archangel, My Friend & Companion from Eternity; in the Divine bosom in our Dwelling place. I look back into the regions of Reminiscence & behold our ancient days before this Earth appear'd in its vegetated mortality to my mortal vegetated Eyes" (qtd. in Harper 66).

<sup>22</sup> John Beer, editor of *Aids to Reflection*, notes that Coleridge, in his allusion to a fall prior to incarnation, "is less likely to be referring to the fall of Satan and his angels than to his interpretation of Gen. 1.1-3 as of a fall involved in the creation, an apostasis antecedent to the chaos, the state of fluidity in Gen 1.2" (291).

<sup>23</sup> Jean Hall, in *A Mind That Feeds upon Infinity*, notes that Coleridge's wife admonished him to limit his interpretations and their implications to orthodox religion and that Coleridge privately worried that his spiritual pursuits were inappropriate in the social world (67, 79).

<sup>24</sup> Coleridge's *Reason* is not "the ordinary thinking faculty of the human mind," "logical faculties," or "rationality," as it is commonly used today (*OED Online*). He borrowed the terms *Reason* and *understanding* from Kant, adapting *Reason* from Kant's agency (*Vernunft*) "by which first principles are grasped *a priori*, as distinguished from understanding (*Verstand*)," which is confined to sense perception (*OED Online*; Putz 621, 622-23, 625; Cascardi 201). For Coleridge, Reason, i.e., "the entire operation of the mind," according to Alice Synder, "is concerned with *Ideas*" (qtd. in Richards 138).

Coleridge defines reason as follows:

Those truths, namely (supposing such to exist), the knowledge or acknowledgment of which require the whole man, the free will, not less than the intellect, and which are not therefore merely speculative, nor yet practical, but both in one. (qtd. in Richards 138)

<sup>25</sup> “The noumenal” refers to that which can be perceived only by the mind or spirit, not by the senses. It is not phenomenal (*Aids to Reflection* 230).

<sup>26</sup> Acts 17. 27-28. “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: / For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’”

<sup>27</sup> Speusippus, a Greek philosopher, succeeded Plato as head of the Greek Academy after Plato’s death in 347 BCE. Speusippus died around 339/338 BCE (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

<sup>28</sup> In chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria*, “On the Imagination,” Coleridge asserts that the “tertium aliquid can be no other than [the third something that is] an interpenetration of the counteracting powers [of opposites], partaking of both” (1: 300).

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 2.7. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

<sup>30</sup> Engell notes that by claiming free will as “innate,” Coleridge’s thinking did “not square with” the “material systems” of his times and “their corresponding theories of association” (*Biographia* 1: 121).

<sup>31</sup> The theory of correspondences, which provides a continuum of the creative impulse

between different planes of existence and levels of consciousness, helps to explain Coleridge's concept of organic creation, or the emanation and transformation of germinal impulses through sounds, images, and ideas from a numinous source. This creative process is evolutionary. It is "not static, fixed, or predetermined," nor "a closed structure," but vital, growing, productive, and changing, "like nature or the mind of man" (Wheeler 99). Thus, according to Kathleen Wheeler's "Coleridge and Modern Critical theory," "relations of things (relations of part to parts and to wholes, etc.) derive their integrity from within" (100).

<sup>32</sup> In this sense, according to Beer, Coleridge uses the term "understanding" to mean "the discursive and logical faculty in human beings in its higher form," "as 'discourse of reason,' whose work it is to bring out 'the necessary & universal truths in the infinite into distinct contemplation'" (*Aids to Reflection* 553-54).

<sup>33</sup> Lockridge maintains that although the concept of self-realization originated with Plato and Aristotle, it has been "sporadic . . . in Western philosophy" (265). "The term is rarely applied again before the Romantic period," Lockridge continues. "One can argue its applicability to the post-Kantian idealists (Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel), to the British Romantics, to the American Romantics Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman" (Lockridge 265).

<sup>34</sup> During years of intense collaborative thinking and writing, Wordsworth sought Coleridge's assistance and advice on his *Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, an autobiographical epic poem tracing Wordsworth's development as a poet (Holmes, *Darker Reflections* 76, 82). In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth ponders the depths of the soul:

Hard task to analyse a soul, in which,  
 Not only general habits and desires,  
 But each most obvious and particular thought,  
 Not in a mystical and idle sense,  
 But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd,  
 Hath no beginning. (232-37)

<sup>35</sup> “‘Finient,’ from the present active participle of the Latin ‘finio,’ to set limits”  
 (Lockridge 269).

<sup>36</sup> Ps. 139.14. “Fearfully and wonderfully made” refers to the “silent moments of  
 conception and birth” in the Beginning (Mays 491).

<sup>37</sup> 2 Cor 5.1. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we  
 have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” 2 Pet.  
 1.13, 14. “Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting  
 you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle.” The  
 tabernacle was “the portable sanctuary of the Israelites during the wilderness period.” For  
 the New Testament writers, this also meant “the body” (*The HarperCollins Bible  
 Dictionary* 1087).

<sup>38</sup> The Crewe manuscript of “Kubla Khan” in Coleridge’s own handwriting was  
 discovered in 1934. The manuscript has not been dated and, although it is not the original  
 version, it is believed to predate the text published in 1816 (*A Coleridge Companion*).

<sup>39</sup> *Daemon*: run-on-entries: “1587 GOLDING . . . [Plato] saith, when the good man  
 departeth this world . . . hee becommeth a Dææmon. . . . 1774 J. BRYANT *Mythol.* I. 52  
 Subordinate dææmons, which they supposed to be emanations and derivatives from their  
 chief Deity. 1846 GROTE *Greece* I. ii. (1862) I. 58 In Homer, there is scarcely any

distinction between gods and dæmons” (*OED Online*).

<sup>40</sup> As Beer notes, here Coleridge’s allusion to the afterlife avoids any discussion about the hereafter, such as heaven or hell (Introduction lxxxvi).

<sup>41</sup> In Coleridgean thinking, the terms “fancy,” “understanding,” and “rationality” are often interchangeable mental functions of the ego. Fancy deals mainly with the rearranging of words and concepts in verbal and written expression. Understanding implies reasoning based on sense perception. Rationality stresses the abstract reasoning of the human mind.

<sup>42</sup> *Co-adunating* comes from Latin *co-adunare*, “to join into one” (J. Wordsworth 34).

<sup>43</sup> As Barth explains, Coleridge emphasizes that many in his own day had lost faith in the Divine as well as in the transformative organic power of language. For Coleridge, Barth notes, “reason and imagination have been replaced, all too often, by the mechanical Understanding” of “temporal fact or history”—a problem “to which his conceptions of Reason and imagination are a response” (*Symbolic Imagination* 127). Kirschner adds that Coleridge saw the rationalism of the ego not only as limited but also as potentially dangerous. Coleridge believed that “rationalism and empiricism provided an inadequate vision of reality and that the secularized prospectivist vision embedded in these philosophical positions offered an impoverished depiction of human potential,” Kirshner maintains. Coleridge “became particularly disillusioned with the veneration of [rationalism] when the French Revolution (the brainchild of the Enlightenment) failed to fulfill what they had perceived to be its initial salvationist promise” (112).

<sup>44</sup> The poet-prophet, by rising to the level of the secondary imagination or the universal

soul, views past, present, and future of the human race as well as each individual, according to Coleridge (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 271-72). Blake, who composed his epic poems in the persona of what he called the voice of the bard, similarly proclaims in chapter 1 of *Jerusalem*, plate 15: "Such is my awful Vision. / . . . I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once / Before me" (5, 8).

<sup>45</sup> Gen. 3.21. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

<sup>46</sup> Subpersonalities are described as semiautonomous "'secondary personalities' living behind, or alternating with, the everyday personality" (Assagioli 11). They have also been described as "roles," similar to Jung's "personae," and "multiple personalities" (Assagioli 66-68).

<sup>47</sup> The Gnostic idea of "*gnosis*" overlaps with the Romantic idea of the indwelling God, although Plotinus and Coleridge took a dim view of what they saw as Gnostic superstition. The Gnostics are religious dualists who hold that salvation is attained by esoteric knowledge, or *gnosis*. According to Harold Bloom, "In one form or another, Gnosis has maintained itself for at least the two millennia of what we have learned to call the Common Era, shared first by Jews and Christians, and then by Muslims" (*Omens of Millennium 2*).

During the formative years of Christianity, each Gnostic sect had different doctrines and practices; however, they all pursued self-knowledge as knowledge of God, which they called "*gnosis*" (the Greek word for "knowledge"). For the Gnostics, achieving *gnosis* meant to know ultimate Reality. But this knowledge was obtained

through “insight,” or knowing oneself through intuition rather than through intellectual knowledge. Scholar Elaine Pagels asserts that the Gnostics believed that “the self and the Divine are identical.” Thus, “to know oneself at the deepest level is simultaneously to know God,” in other words, to achieve union with God (xx).

The immediate goal of *gnosis* is for each one to become a Christ in his or her own right. The Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* deals with this initiation into the mysteries of *gnosis*. According to scholar Marvin Meyer, the goal of the initiate, or “mature Gnostic, unlike the immature Christian,” is to become “so intimately joined to Christ that ‘this person is no longer Christian but a Christ’” (235). To be thus transformed, the initiate must “attain to the truth” (Meyer 235). Yet, according to Gnostic belief, not all human beings are spiritual or ready for *gnosis* and liberation. Initiation into the mysteries of *gnosis*, according to the *Gospel of Philip*, includes a series of five sacraments, or rites (Meyer 235).

About the fourth sacrament, Pagels writes, “Achieving *gnosis* involves coming to recognize the true source of divine power—namely, ‘the depth of all being.’ Whoever has come to know that source simultaneously comes to know himself and discovers his spiritual origin” (37). She continues, “Whoever comes to this *gnosis*—this insight—is ready to receive the secret sacrament called the redemption” (37). Pagels adds that after receiving direct contact with the Divine through this initiation, those who were becoming a Christ are “not likely to recognize the institutional structures of the church” “as bearing ultimate authority,” i.e., “its bishop, priest, creed, canon, or ritual” (134). In other words, initiates are likely to resist the moral laws of this world when they conflict with the

higher ones.

Like the Neoplatonic Romantics, the Gnostics also posit an original spiritual unity, which includes an androgynous nature of God and self, which came to be split into a plurality. The fifth sacrament into the initiation of *gnosis*, the bridal chamber, the highest sacrament, is the “true mystery” where a person “transcends the divisions that separate Adam from Eve, man from woman, and the divine from the human” (Meyer 235). According to the *Gospel of Philip*, the problems of humankind resulted from the differentiation of the sexes. Wesley W. Isenberg asserts:

When Eve was separated from Adam, the original androgynous unity was broken. The purpose of Christ’s coming is to reunite Adam and Eve. Just as husband and wife unite in the bridal chamber, so also the reunion effected by Christ takes place [in the sacrament of the] bridal chamber. (Introduction 140)

Pagels, however, has argued that the bridal-chamber image was meant to describe the union of the soul with the Spirit or Son of God. The *Gospel of Philip* sums up this mystery and the Gnostic quest for self-knowledge as the knowledge of God: “[The Lord] said, ‘I came to make [the things below] like the things [above, and the things] outside like those [inside. I came to unite] them in that place’” (150). The purpose of the *gnosis*, sent from the realms of divine light beyond the universe through the divine emanation Christ, is to enable Gnostic initiates to pass through the spheres of the material plane into the realms of light.

<sup>48</sup> Exod. 33.20. “And [the LORD] said [unto Moses], “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live [as man].”

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