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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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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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 him*self* or her*self* 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,[1] or what Jung would call "archetypal,"[2] 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[3] 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[4]) 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 eighteen-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 intellecion 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.[5] 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).[6] 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:

> [Emanual] 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 contingence," or what he calls "synchronicity"[7] (*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[8] ("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 "unfathonable 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[9] and the "shadow,"[10] 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
Nous	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.[11] 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*,[12] 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.[13]

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,[14] 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).

<u>Self as Man</u>

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"[15] 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,[16] 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."[17] 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 though 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 paradisal 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