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Coleridge's theory of art | A study of its source and effect

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COLEBIDGE'S THEORY OF ART:

A STUDY OF ITS SOURCE AND EFFECT.

BY Grace D. Baldwin

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COLERIDGE'S THEORY OF ART;

A STUDY OF ITS SOURCE AND EFFECT

I. The Source of Coleridge's Conception
II. The Effect of Coleridge's Conception
COLERIDGE'S THEORY OF ART: A STUDY OF ITS SOURCE AND EFFECT

PART ONE

The Source of Coleridge's Conception

The dominant characteristic of Coleridge's conception and treatment of poetry is intellectuality. This quality, implying as it does separate consideration of ideas as such, is indicated by Coleridge's statement that "Biographia Literaria" is "introductory to . . . . the application of the rules, deduced from philosophic principles to poetry and criticism."

(1.) He presupposes, to be exact, a "philosophic (and . . . artificial) consciousness" (2.) which he says "lies beneath or (as it were) behind the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings," (3.) and which "is exclusively the domain of pure philosophy." (4.) Here ideas are set beyond general experience, and by being given first attention, are made to take precedence over it. Ideas, are, in fact, according to Coleridge, not mere products of experience, but revelations of ultimate reality in the individual consciousness, for which the data of sense experience can furnish symbols.

Definitely based on this underlying consciousness which functions in pure philosophy only, Coleridge's conception and treatment of poetry parallel each other and carry out, in whatever aspect one considers them, a pattern involving hypothetical, and so false, cleavages.

Thoughts are considered as having hypothetically, according to Coleridge, an existence superior to and apart from general experience, to which they bring the meaning. The "dramatic truth" (5.) for instance,

(1.) Ch. I. p. 1, "B. L."  (3.) Ch. XII. p. 117, "B. L."
(2.) Ch. XII, p. 117, "B. L."  (4.) Ibid: Score mine
(5.) Ch. XIV. p. 145, "B. L."
is to be illustrated by, not found in, sense data. (5.) And even this
dramatic truth itself, already separated from experience, Coleridge says
must be explained philosophically before it can be appreciated. And
then this very appreciation is first "exclusively" philosophical and
for philosophers only, through whose agency appreciation is "ultimately"
made possible to the poets themselves. (7.) "A great poet" he says,
must be also (that is, separately) "a profound philosopher." (8.)
Coleridge himself attempts thus through philosophical means to make
appreciable Wordsworth's practice. And the very metaphor Coleridge uses
in stating his intention in so doing itself involves false cleavage.
He, Coleridge, would supply the trunk (the basis of ideas) to the tree
(poetry practice) of which Wordsworth had made "a masterly sketch of
the branches," as though Wordsworth could have sketched the one without
implying the other. (9.) So does this elaborate and hypothetical
special consideration of thoughts as such reveal its own futility and
absurdity.

This separation of thoughts from experience for the sake of ex-
plaining experience by them inevitably involves, as has been implied,
artificial superstructures of hypotheses that over-shadowing experience,
tend to be substituted for it. Thus, Coleridge, in order to explain
his own conception and Wordsworth's treatment of poetry, erects such a
superstructure, an intricate system of philosophical discriminations.
(10.) This system of theses, based not on experience but rather on an
idea of experience, or "primary intution" (11.) Coleridge builds
with precise logic, (12.) and from it, according to rule, "deduces"

[6.] Ibid.
[7.] Ch. IV. p. 43, "B. L."
[8.] Ch. XV. p.155, "B. L."
[9.] Ch. IV. p. 44, "B. L."
[10] Ch. IV. p. 44, Ch. XII. p.128
to 138, "B. L."
[11.] Ch. XII.p.122, "B. L."
[12]. Ch.XII. (13.) p.128
3.

(13.) abstract statements such as his definition of "the poet, in ideal perfection", (14.) itself a composite of ideas erected over, and offered instead of, actuality. Poetry itself, for Coleridge, though it is symbolic concretely, is yet such an artificial super-structure, a product "essentially ideal" and "generic" (15.), erected not on experience but on ideas, and tending to be a substitute for experience, an interpretation of it, (16;) something hypothetical and so false.

In order that poetry may be so "essentially ideal" (17.) the creative force itself must be subjected to intellectual domination. Coleridge's whole conception and treatment of poetry are, in fact, determined by just such domination. This he himself admits. Imagination, "the living power and prime agent of all human perception", (18.) "that synthetic and magical power", (19.) "...repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM", (20;) he definitely subordinates to the conscious will. "This power," he says, is "first put into action by the will and understanding and is only retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed control." (21;) Thus the realizations of the imagination are, for him not truly "synthetic" but preconceived, as its products also are. Always there is, for Coleridge, this seeking for, and preoccupation with the truth, philosophical, theological, moral or dramatic, as the case may be. And to this idea the poetic pattern is arbitrarily shaped, according to "ideal" and definitely settled poetic conventions, manipulation according to which is a conscious process. (22.) Thus poetry, for Coleridge,
presupposes fitting to a fixed metrical pattern, (23.) the use of special poetic diction, (24.) the broad and obvious composing, flat surfacing, and use of type data, of ideal painting in illustration of a fixed and absolute idea, (25.) the superimposing upon life of made patterns from which the subjective and accidental (26.) qualities have been removed.

(23.) Ch. XVIII. p. 177  
(24.) Ibid. p. 177  
(25.) XVII. p. 165  
(26.) Ibid. p. 165
Although Coleridge’s conception, stated in retrospect in "Biographia Literaria", presupposes a conscious product, his poetry, before this time, passes through several phases not completely intellectual, and only eventually reaches an entirely idea-controlled form. Yet this set ideal, once reached, gradually inhibits direct realization.

I. Early Unrealizing Period.

Coleridge’s early work (1787-1792) is almost entirely mechanical, determined as much by training as by any tendency of his own. And though what direct activity it does show is intellectual, this is not so much because creative realization is intellectually controlled as it is because the creative power is as yet practically unaroused. He himself says that such work, "like most school poetry, is a Putting of Thought into Verse;" (1.) which he justifies by saying that "such verses as strivings of mind, and struggles after the intense and vivid are a fair promise of better things." (1.) Such early intellectual emphasis can be traced directly to "....old Jemmy Bowyer", (2.) Coleridge's master at Christ's Hospital, who was, Coleridge says," an admirable educer no less than Educator of the Intellect" (2.) and who bade him give separate consideration to the form of his verse, in fact, to "leave out as many epithets as would turn the whole into eight-syllable lines, and then ask myself[Coleridge] if the exercise would not be greatly improved." (2.) Coleridge’s next remark shows how he does consider form thus separately. He says:'How often have I thought of the

(1.) 1825, note to "Dura Navis", given as footnote, p.2, E.H.C.
(2.) Note to "Dura Navis", p.3, E.H.C.
(2.) See. (2.) above
proposal since then, and how many thousand bloated and puffing lines have I read, that by this process, "thus entirely separately intellectual and as such arbitrary" would have tripped over the tongue excellently." (3.) He recalls, also, approvingly, his Master's arbitrary banishment of certain forms, "Apostrophes and 0 Thous" (3.) showing again separated consideration of form, really his only consideration since this early period, which being thus merely consideration, is not realization at all. His early work, in fact, shows itself to be thus merely formal and actually unrealized, such as might be written about assigned subjects. In the first of these verses, "Easter Holidays" (4.) youths beat the ground "with mirthful dance" (5.) while "Their moments all in transposts fly" (6.) and

"......little think their joyous hearts
of dire Misfortune's varied smarts" (7.) or of the moral that
"......he who Wisdom's paths shall keep
And Virtue............................
His hours away in bliss shall glide
Like Easter all the year." (8.)
The second of these early attempts deals with the supposed horrors of crossing the ocean, where lightning,

"In forked Terror and destructive state
Shall shew with double gloom the horrid scene" (10.)
and a wave "---against some wave-worn rock
Which long a terror to each Bark had stood
Shall dash thy mangled limbs with furious shock
And stain its craggy sides with human blood." (10.)

(3.) Note to "Dura Nesis", p.3
(4.) 1787, p. 1-2, E.H.C.
(5.) p.1. line 12
(6.) p.2. line 17
(7) p.2. lines 19-20
(8.) p.2, lines 25-26 and 35-36
(9.) 1787.
(10.) p.3, E.H.C.
(10.) See (10.) above
and where 

"thundering Cannons spread a sea of Gore." (10.)

These dangers are set against the "joys of home—Peace, Plenty and mutual Love—that gilds with brightest rays—"(11.) In an early sonnet (12.) "the Autumnal Moon" is, to Coleridge:

"Mild Splendour of the various-vested night!
Mother of wildly working visions!" (13.)

In an "Anthem for the Children of Christ's Hospital" (14.) Coleridge begins by addressing the

"Seraphs! around the Eternal's seat who throng
With tuneful ecstacies of praise;"(15.) and in his moralizing uses such expressions as "Wan Resignation struggling with despair" (16.) and "Cheerless want unpitied" (17.) "Julia" (18.) is a tale according to diagram of a supposed person who at one stroke "A Lover and a Lapdog lost." (18.) "Quae Nocent Docent" (19.) is a chance to point the moral, "But sage experience only comes with years." (20.) "The Nose" (21.) is rhetorical in order to poke fun."The Destruction of the Bastille" (22.) is at once rhetorical and simplified:

"But cease, ye pitying bosoms, cease to bleed!
Such scenes as these no more demand the tear humane;
With every patriot virtue in her train! -------
No fetter vile the mind shall know
And Eloquence shall fearless glow——" (23.) "Life" (24.) and "The Progress of Vice" (25.) deal with personified abstractions, for the sake of the moral. The "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" (26.)
is an unrealized idealization and address to the spirit of Chatterton to:

"Grant me, like thee the lyre to sound----
But ah, when rage the Waves of Woe
Grant me with firmer breast to oppose their hate
And soar beyond the storms with upright eye elate." (27.)

As would be expected there are, in this early period two abstract prayers to the Muse. (28.) "Anna and Harland" (29.) a type story like "Julia", is told for the ending:

"I love to sit upon her tomb's dark grass,
Then Memory backward rolls Time's shadowy tide" (29.)

Coleridge addresses the evening star as: "O meek attendant of Sol's setting blaze" (30.) and likens it to "the maid I love" (30.) He calls tears "Pledges sweet of pious woe." (31.) The "Monody on a Tea-Kettle" (32.) is a composition, like "The Nose" intentionally stilted, with a moral. "Genevieve" (33.) the last of the 1790 poems, still of the school boy type, ends with:

"I've seen your breast with pity heave,
And therefore I love I you, sweet Genevieve!" (34.)

In 1791-1792 pre-occupation with form is, as I have said, still noticeable. There is, in fact, an "Ode in the Manner of Anacreon," (35.) and also an arbitrary attempt to fit "A Mathematical Problem" to verse; (36.)

"On a given finite line
Which must no way incline;
To describe an equilateral
A, N, G, L, E." (36.)

Yet in these years preoccupation with form is giving way to preoccupation with idea, in such compositions as "Honour", (37.) "On Imitation," (38.)

(27.) p.15, closing lines (31."On a Lady Weeping", p.17-18, 1790
(28.) "To the Muse", 1789 (32.) 1790, p.18-19, E.H.C.
"An Invocation", 1780, p.15 (33.) " p.20. (34.) p.20, E.H.C.
(29.) 1790, p.16, E.H.C. (35.) 1792, p.33, Score mine
intellectual emphasis shows up still more in occasional verses suggested by happenings, such as his "Sonnet on Quitting School," (45.) and "Inside the Coach," (46.) in the latter of which he says,

"0 may no jolt's electric force
Our fancies from their steeds unhorse." (46.)

Unrealized rhetoric is gradually giving way to a product intellectual but yet experienced. "Devonshire Roads," while stilted, is yet humanly affected by the mud.

"May all the curses, which they grunt
In raging moan like goaded hog,
Alight upon thee, Damned Bog!" (47.)

It is this gradual awakening of creative realization that marks the end of early attempts and the beginning of a product more definitely Coleridge's own.

II. Period of Awakening Imagination and Intellectual Control of Such Imagination.

This second phase of Coleridge's poetry, marked by a waking imagination and a noticeable meditative tendency, thus intellectual, but entirely determinedly so, runs from about 1793 through 1796. Creative realization and conscious intellectuality, both active, show themselves in several different combinations, in all of which, of course, intellectuality is ultimately the determining force, though experience is often the inspiration.

Coleridge's earlier interest in form as such is continued indirectly and in

(38.) 1791, p.26, E.H.C. (43.) 1792, p.35, E.H.C.
(39.) 1791, p.28, E.H.C. (44.) 1792, pp.35-36, E.H.C.
(40.) 1791, pp.30-33, E.H.C. (45.) 1791, p.29, E.H.C.
(41.) 1792, p.33, E.H.C. (46.) 1791, p.27
(42.) 1792, p.34, E.H.C. (47.) 1791, p.28
translation, of which there are, all through his life, many and varied examples, especially in the early part of this second period (48.), and again later, as his directly creative activity lessens. Imitation, of which there are also many examples (48.), stresses particularly, of course, the idea element as such. Coleridge has a number of poems, also, not professedly imitations, that yet show outside influence, and attention to form, such as "The Rose," (49.) which begins:

"At late each flower that sweetest blows
I plucked, the Garden’s pride!
Within the petals of a Rose
A sleeping Love I spied, "(50.) and ends supposedly in the words of the Love, in the rose, now on "Sara’s breast".

"Some other love let Venus find—-
I’ll fix my empire here."(50)

Although here the capitals and the allusions suggest Coleridge’s early work, the handling is more clearcut and realized, in fact, and though intellectual, imaginatively so.

Another type of poem, in consciousness of form and pointing suggestive of this classically influenced type, yet not so preconceived as some of his poems (x.), is the short didactic poem resulting from an actual experience which suggests an idea, usually a moral idea, and in which the

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(48.) Translations and Imitations
1793 Translations and Imitations
E.H.C. edition
Imitated from Ossian, pp. 38-39
The Complaint of Hinathorna, p. 39
1794
Imitated from the Welsh, p.58
Casimir, Book II, Ode 3, pp.59-60
To Lesbia pp/60-61
The Death of the Starling, p.61
Moriens Superstiti pp.61-62
Moriens Superstites p.62
1795
Lines in the Manner of Spenser, pp.94-95
(x.) "On the prospect of Pantisocracy," 1974
experience is overshadowed and dulled by preoccupation with the idea it suggests, so that precise imagery gives place to vague general terms. "The Faded Flower" (51.) is such a poem, the conclusion of which has become generalized, in which the idea of the person

"Lost to Love and Truth, whose selfish joy
Tasted her vernal sweets, but tasted to destroy" (51.)

has obliterated the flower which suggested the idea.

Another type of short, more-or-less experienced poem frequent in this second period is that suggested by a person, but taking form as an idealization. Of this type are the "Sonnets on Eminent Characters," (52.) and the eulogies of friends. (53.) "To Earl Stanhope" suggests the many poems of this type. It begins, sincerely enough, but in general and simplified terms:

"Not, Stanhope, with the Patriot's doubtful name
I mock thy worth——Friend of the Human Race! (54.)

However, the poems that really set the work of this period apart from Coleridge's unrealized earlier work are those not pre-determined, or developed according to an idea, but in which whatever idea develops comes first accidentally out of the experience that itself is actually put into the poem. Such poems, to one so predominantly intellectual as Coleridge is, are of rare occurrence, but are yet sufficient to show that Coleridge does recognize actual experience, that it is not, to him, always seen through a veil of ideas as generalized, idealized, or simplified.

"Songs of the Pixies", (55.) a fanciful application of actual life imagery, yet an outgrowth of real experience, is the first of Coleridge's

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[51.] pp. 70-71, E.H.C. 1794
[52.] December 1794-Jan.1795
[53.] "To a Young Lady", p.66
    "To Miss Brunton", p.67
    "To the Rev. W.J. Hort", p.92
    "To the Author of Poems," pp.102-104
[54.] p. 90, E.H.C.
[55.] 1793, pp.40-44, E.H.C.

thirteen sonnets, pp. 79-90, E.H.C.
poems actually to present experience. But here "—-the blackbird strains his throat", (56.) fairies dance" To the time of distant-tinkling teams", (57.) and "Aye from the sultry heat------ to the cave retreat o'ercanopied by huge roots intertwin'd with wildest texture, blackened o'er with age," (58.) or sing:

"By lonely Otter's sleep-persuading stream;
Or where his wave with loud unquiet song
Dash'd o'er the rocky channel froths along;
Or where, his sliver waters smooth'd to rest
The tall tree's shadow sleeps upon his breast." (59)

The actual occasion of his gaining such imagery is itself, though somewhat vaguely, recorded in the poem, a festive gathering in the setting to which, thus fancifully, the fairies are added, and made to entertain the company, of which the (human) fairy queen, idealized, is yet presented. (60.) Coleridge's Sonnet to the River Otter" (61.) though an idea product, yet presents in retrospect the experience from which it comes, how he "skimm'd the smooth stone along [Otter's] breast, numbering its light leaps," (62.) the "crossing plank," (63.) the "marge with willows grey" (63.) and the "bedded sand that vein'd with various dyes Gleamed through [Otter's] bright transparence." (63.) Though "Lines on an Autumnal Evening," (64.) is an elaborate superstructure of ideas, dealing with personified "Imagination" (65.) than whom "No fairer Maid does Love's wide empire know," (65.) it is still based on an actual evening when there were

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(56.) p.40, line 7  
(57.) p.41, line 16  
(58.) p.41, lines 21-24  
(59.) p.42, lines 68-72  
(60.) p.44, lines 107-109  
(61.) 1793, p.48, E.H.C.  
(62.)  
(63.) p.48, lines 9-11  
(64.) 1792, pp.51-54  
(65.) p.49, line 1, first draft  
(66.) p.51, line 47
"purple clouds", (67.) "rich, amber-glowing floods of light," (68.) and on the lake "a silver lustre" (69.) slept, when "waterlilies ripple[d] the slow stream" (70.) "placidly smoothing through fertile fields its current meek." (71.)

In his "Lines to a beautiful Spring", (72.) in which the ideas suggested bring Coleridge, sentimentally ("with languid hand") (73.) to wreath the [spring's] mossy urn", (73.) the experience itself which suggests this false superstructure of ideas he brings into the poem, by noting the "milky waters cold and clear," (74.) and the "passing clouds impictured on [the stream's] breast" (74.) on which the children have "launch[ed] paper navies." (74.) In a little piece called "Perspiration", called into existence by the idea of "loath'd Aristocracy['s] career[ing]" (75.) by, the "distant track quick vibrates to the eye, and white and dazzling undulates with heat; where scorching to the unwary traveler's touch, The stone fence flings its narrow slip of shade." (76.) In "To a Young Ass", (77.) discussing the idea of oppression, Coleridge yet presents the young ass with "ragged coat," (78.) and "moveless head" (79.) hung "earthward", (79) beside a mother "chained to a log within a narrow spot, Where close-eaten grass is scarcely seen while sweet around her waves the tempting green." (80.) In "Lines Composed While Climbing the Left Ascent of Brockley Coomb" (81.) Coleridge repeats the experience itself of climbing, "with many a pause" (82.) "the Coomb's ascent" (82.) where "From the deep fussures of the naked rock the Yew-tree bursts" (83.) and "broad smooth stones jut out in mossy seat" (84.), and only at the end, [88.-11]
as the idea came to him on the top, does he apply the experience to his thoughts of Sara. (85.) In "Lines at Shurton Bars" (86.) in which Coleridge says he turns away from the actual scene to "paint the moment" (87.) he and Sara shall meet, he yet first presents this place, where "The sea-breeze moans Through yon refit house!" (88.) and "O'er rolling stones------The onward-swinging tides supply The silence of the sky with mimic thunders deep." (88.) "The Eolian Harp", a poem of reflection, yet based on experience and not pre-determined, is led away from experience to ideas only eventually, though it is then didactic. It first presents the actual experience which inclines him to reflection.

"My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on my arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our Cot, our cot o'ergrown
With white-flowered Jasmin, and the broad-leaved Myrtle
........................................
And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light
Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
Serenely brilliant ......................
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
Snatch'd from yon bean-field! And the world so hush'd!
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of silence........". (90.) Into this scene Coleridge brings the sound of the lute "by desultory breeze caress'd (91.) and later

"Broadlier swept, till the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise" (92.) in "soft
witchery of sound" (2.) that lures him away to separated

(85.) p.84, lines 16-17 (90.) p.100, lines 1-12
(86.) 1795, p.99, S.H.C. (91.) line 14
(88.) p. 99, lines 51-36 (92.) lines 16-20
(89.) 1795,pp.100-02,S.H.C.
his thoughts, and an unrelated applied conclusion, his idea of duty to God.
And soon Coleridge is to be thus turned, but permanently, away from experience, "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement," (93.)
which deals, in retrospect, with the scene of the above quotation, a farewell piece, marks also Coleridge's turning aside from facts to ideas,
which now begin to crowd out actuality, and except in a very few instances (though three of these are important) (94.) so to preoccupy him as to prevent notice of their source, thus bringing the second period, though gradually at first, to a close. The transition is evident in his lines:

"Here the bleak mount,
The bare, bleak mountain speckled thin with sheep;
Grey clouds, that shadowing spot the sunny fields;
And river, now with bushy rocks o'erbrowed,............
And seats, and lawns, the Abbey and the wood
And cots, and hamlets, and the faint city spire;
The Channel there, the Islands and white sails,
Dim coasts and cloud-like hills and shoreless Ocean
It seemed like Omnipresence! God, methought,
Had built him there a temple:..................

Now wish profaned my overwhelmed heart.
Blest hour! It was a luxury,.... to be!" (95.)
"Yet oft when after honourable toil........(96.)
My spirit shall revisit.........................(96.)
"Ahi had none greater! [abode] And that all had such!

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<th>(93.) 1795, pp.106-08, E.H.C.</th>
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<td>(95.) &quot;This Lime Tree Bower&quot; 1797</td>
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It might be.... but the time is not yet.

Speed it, O Father! Let thy kingdom come!" (97.) The very titles, in fact, of the last two poems of 1795, "Religious Musings", (98.) and "Monody on the Death of Chatterton", (99.) and the first poem of 1796, "The Destiny of Nations" (100.) show the same change.

"Religious Musings" (101.) a long and elaborate discussion of faith, has in it such abstract passages as:

"There is one Mind, one omnipresent Mind, \nOmnific. His most holy name is Love \nTruth of subliming import! with the which \nWho feeds and saturates his constant soul, \nHe from his small particular orbit flies, \nWith blest outstarting! From himself he flies, \nStands in the sun, and with no partial gaze \nViews all creation; and he loves it all, \nAnd blesses it, and calls it very good!
This is indeed to dwell with the Most High! (102.)

Although thus purely an intellectual outpouring, "Religious Musings" is still, as this passage shows, a natural and not a predetermined product. Such reflective poems, on a lesser scale, have, of course, occurred all through this period, (103.) yet not so conspicuously. Yet now, in his growing preoccupation with ideas, even as Coleridge turns from the spontaneous presentation of the experience which suggested these ideas, so does he turn from spontaneous presentation of the ideas themselves to a still more consciously intellectual and detached form.

(97.) lines 69-71
(98.) pp.109-125, E.H.C.
(99.) pp.125-131, E.H.C.
(100.) pp. 131-148, E. H. C.
(101/) pp. 109-125, E.H.C.
(102.) lines 105-114
(103.) "Pantisocracy", pp.68-69
"Sonnet at Birth of Son", pp.152-55, 1796
III. Transition Period. From Natural to Artificial Control.

Transition from a spontaneous intellectual trend to a conscious manipulation is difficult to ascribe to any particular time. However, the set form, though it appears rather suddenly, can, more or less, be accounted for, yet not chronologically.

The poems already cited as reproductive of actual experience, also as I have indicated, definitely subordinating this experience to ideas, show the impossibility, for Coleridge, of realization from sense facts alone. His two most mature and imaginative attempts so present actual experience as to make ideas clear, "Frost at Midnight", (101.) and "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni", unmistakably show this, for him, final inadequacy of even such intensely experienced actuality as he portrays, as a vehicle in itself for ideas, to him the ultimate, and so separate and greater, reality.

Nowhere has Coleridge been more imaginative than in the opening lines to "Frost at Midnight" (103.)

"The frost performs its secret ministry
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
Came loud..... and hark again loud as before.....

"..........at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
'Tis calm indeed! So calm that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings on of life
Inaudible as dreams! The thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not,
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters, there, the sole unquiet thing"
Yet this experience must be directly applied to thought before Coleridge can be satisfied.

"Methinks its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own mood interprets, everywhere
Echo or mirror seeking of itself
And makes a toy of Thought." (104.)

And then not satisfied with this imaginative meditation, Coleridge enlarges the circle of his philosophizing and goes back to his own school days, (105.) then, reminded of his child comes back, momentarily, but not thoroughly, and again is off:

"Dear Babe,
Whose gentle breathings,
Fill up the interspersed vacancies
And momentary pauses of the thought!
"...............It thrills my heart
............... to look at thee,
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
And in far other scenes!" (106.) And from here Coleridge is off on thoughts of his child's future and of his own past. (106.) and a direct application of idea to this case:

"So shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God

(104.) lines 17-23
(105.) lines 24-44
(106.) lines 45-52
Utters who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great Universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.
Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee..." (107.)

In the "Hymn before Sunrise" (108.) presenting a later, perhaps more vivid, and certainly more overwhelming actual experience, Coleridge is even more definitely conscious of the inadequacy of this experience itself for realization, as he sees it, of the implied ideas. Yet there can be no doubt of its vividness as far as seeing and feeling goes, though Coleridge sees it and feels it only to apply it to a separated idea.

Hast thou a charm to stay the morning star
In his steep course? So long he seems to pause
On thy bald awful head, O sovereign Blanc!
The Arve and Arveiron at they base
Have ceaselessly; but thou, most awful Form!
Risest from forth thy silent sea of pines,
How silently! Around thee and above
Deep is the air and dark, substantial, black,
An ebon mass: methinks thou piercest it
As with a wedge! But when I look again,
it is thine own calm home, thy crystal shrine,
Thy habitation from eternity!
O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee,

(107.) lines 59-66
(108.) pp.376-380, E.H.C. 1802
Till thou, stil present to the bodily sense,
Didst vanish from my thoughts: entranced in prayer
I worshipped the Invisible alone" (109.)

Yet at this point the experience itself is almost sufficient for Coleridge, might be, if he could but forget the idea, the something without.

"Yet, like some sweet beguiling melody,
So sweet, we know not we are listening to it,
Thou, the meanwhile was blending with my thought,
Yea, with my life and life's own secret joy:
Till the dilating soul, enrapt, transfused,
Into the mighty vision passing.....there,
As in her natural form, swelled vast to Heaven!" (110.)

Yet the experience is not so sufficient, and failing to be, is not in itself fully realized. It is the idea only that fills his mind, the question, already decided, as far as he is concerned:

"Who sank thy sunless pillars deep in Earth?
Who gave you your invulnerable life?.....
Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!
Who made you glorious [not as themselves, but] as the gates of Heaven

Beneath the keen full moon?..............(111.)

The question to which his own answer is "God!" (112.) he applies as though answered by the phenomena themselves, and then, further, as though there might be doubt, commands them to answer thus, to

"Utter forth God!" and fill the hills with praise! (113.) as though in themselves they could not fill the hills with praise. Yet, in

(109.) lines 1-16 (112.) line 58
(110.) lines 17-23 (113.) line 69
(111.) lines 36, 44, 53-55
his excitement at his idea, Coleridge is carried _way_, as in no other poem, to produce a faithful emotional pattern, which in _applying_ the experience, almost makes it live for itself, could he only forget, could we only forget, that these data are just in illustration of an idea.

"Thou, too, hoar Mount Blanc with thy skypointing peaks,
Oft from whose feet the avalanche, unheard,
Shoots downward, glittering through the pure serene
Into the depths of clouds that veil thy breast....
Thou too, again, stupendous Mount Blanc!
That as I raise my head..............

Solomnly seemest, like a _poury cloud,_
To rise before me----Rise, oh ever rise,
Rise like a cloud of incense [something detached from the earth!]

............... tell thou the silent sky,
And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun,

Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God!" (114.)

So does Coleridge state the insufficiency of actual experience, the impossibility of realizing _that_ experience, except as it illustrates a separate and applied idea. And so in his excitement over the idea does he overlook the arbitrariness, and so falseness, of such conscious application. The idea, as he thus ultimately sees it, being the reality, sense data must be subjected to it. In "France: An Ode," (115.) earlier than "Chamouni", Coleridge yet goes a step further in such application, by selecting and pre-arranging, rather than by finding, the data

(114.) lines 70-85
(115.) 1798, pp.243-247
(116.) lines 20-21
(117.) lines 102-105
to illustrate the idea, this time not of abstract God, but of abstract Liberty. (116.) He presents the cases which illustrate, as he sees it, the impossibility of liberty to organized groups, and calls upon "Everything that is or will be free" to "bear witness" for him how he has adored Liberty, (116.) thus admitting the prearranged form. He then brings the whole to a conclusion in his preconceived idea that therefore Liberty is only to be found by men individually, in solitude. (117.)

Thus does Coleridge, gradually, give up natural reflection, and take to considering ideas as separate and preconceived, to illustrate which, conscious composing of data must be carried on. and so does he reach his ideal conception of poetry.

(116.) lines 20-21          (117.) lines 102-105
IV. Coleridge's idea-determined ideal.

Ideas having become, by 1797, of such importance to Coleridge, as to make realization impossible to him, except through ideas, he assumes, in order that such realization may be possible, though he recognizes the physical impossibility of such a case, that ideas are independent of things, and have existence complete in themselves, and that such existence may actually be made tangible, in form of a hypothetical absolute superior to any actual form in that it is an ideal. This ideal, which would have "representative" (118.) or "generic" (119.) quality, Coleridge admits is a glorified average actually non-existent, supposedly reached by "omitting" (120.) whatever is "peculiar" (121.) or "accidental" (122.) from actuality. Yet Coleridge recognizes that such an absolute can only be made tangible by being clothed in sense data, and thus a second supposition becomes necessary. Presentation must be through simulating of individual forms, which, though subordinate to ideas, must, in order that presentation be convincing, seem to be in themselves complete and sufficient, that is, have "verisimilitude" (123.) or "semblance to truth" (124.) In other words, for presentation of his ideal, Coleridge posits a doubly hypothetical process in which: first, ideas must be assumed to be complete and sufficient in themselves, and second, simulated individual forms, by which these ideas are to be presented, must seem complete and sufficient. Thus does Coleridge propose, through a process doubly false, to present The Truth. The growing importance of ideas, which have always been, for him, separate from and superior to things, thus forces Coleridge on from drawing them out of or superimposing them upon things, a process at least still, for him, natural and unassumed, to the artificial reverse process of arranging the things to fit the idea, which is both unnatural and assumed.

(118.) p.165, "B.L."  (121.) p.170, "B.L."
(119.) p.279, "B.L."  (122.) p.165, "B.L."
(120.) p.170, "B.L."  (123.) p.165, "B.L."
(124.) p.145, "B.L."
Yet in carrying out such a process Coleridge is but attempting practically, in poetry, what he later, as I have already shown, posits hypothetically in a philosophical system; that is, assumed cleavage between things and thoughts, and subjection of things to thoughts, although recognizing that such a supposition is actually false, and merely an attempt to reach realization intellectually. Being himself dominantly intellectual, however, Coleridge can only appreciate what is by trying to explain it. In other words, he can not realize experience completely in itself, at all, but must substitute an ideal for it, in illustration of it, and can not see that in so doing he produces, not realization, but merely a false growth which overshadows and obliterates the reality it is attempting to make clear.

"The Destiny of Nations" (125.) is the first of Coleridge's poems to be consciously and merely illustrative, and still shows the rambling natural form (126.) and much of the reflective tendency of such poems as "Religious Musings", already discussed. (127.) Yet there is a definitely presented idea, at the very beginning, about which there is no doubt in his mind:

"Auspicious Reverence! Hush all meaner song,
Ere we the deep precluding strain have poured
To the Great Father, only Rightful King,
Eternal Father! King Omnipotent!
To the Will Absolute, the One, the Good!
The I AM, the Word, the Life, the Living God! (128.)
"Such symphony requires best instrument." (129.)

(125.) 1796, p.131-148, S.H.G. (126.) Ideas suggesting tangent ideas, final application (127.) Part II, poem last discussed
Coleridge further states that he deems "all that meets the bodily sense——symbolical" of God, (130.) and thus the next lines, though in form of reflection, are really pre-determined (131.) to show that "all evolve the process of eternal good." (132.) With this line the supposed reflection gives place to conscious illustration, and true to Coleridge's nature, novel and striking illustration, with which it is impossible that he can have firsthand knowledge. He goes into startling detail about the Laplander who has faith in his Lapland God, (133.) and discusses "those legends terrible——with which the polar ancient thrills his uncouth throng," (134.) and the "trances" (135.) of the "Greenland Wizard" (135.) "——wild phantasies! yet wise on the victorious goodness of high God teaching reliance, and medicinal hope——" (136.). Thus into his illustrative material Coleridge admits not only facts, and already distant ones at that, but legends of the supernatural as well, so long as they serve his purpose. His next step carries the process to actual manufacture of material appropriate to this purpose. He needs a person who will sense divine revelation, so he constructs Joan of Arc as he supposes her, and apparently real, possessed by "the indwelling angel guide——that oft——shapes out Man's course to the predoomed adventure," (137.) and then himself "shapes out" adventure for her. He has her first face the sorrows of a peasant family, puppets for the occasion, (138.) victims of the "inroad" (139.) of tyranny, and then "suffering to the height of what was suffered" (140.) has her fall under supernatural influence, of "a mighty hand——strong upon her" (141.) which urges her, through a storm, (130.) lines 18-19, and inference, to 26 (136.) lines 121-123. (137.) lines 186-189 (138.) lines 197-252 (139.) line 234 (140.) line 253 (141.) lines 261-262 (133.) lines 60-80 (134.) lines 90-91 (135.) line 98
composed for the occasion, (142.) to a hill where she feels" and inevitable presence near" (143.) which commands her in "unearthly tones" (144.) to see a vision, marshalled to illustrate the destined triumph of good over evil, and itself supernatural. (145.) The poem then ends as it begins, to the refrain of

"Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!

Nature's vast ever-acting Energy!" (146.)

Thus has Coleridge not only constructed illustration, but constructed it spectacularly, as though intimate experience was not only separate from ideas, but could not illustrate them, as though the near or the natural were not sufficient, but the distant and the supernatural had to be found. And so does Coleridge show the dulling effect of this separate consideration of ideas upon actual realization, and so does he forecast the artificial and heightened work to follow.

By the time Coleridge approaches "The Ancient Mariner",(147.) his concern is only to illustrate an idea, with whatever simulated facts are most effective, with no pretense that these facts be actual, or that they seem so. There must only be sufficient "verisimilitude" (148.) to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith," (149.) so as to interest" ....by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations supposing them real."

(142.) line 256
(143.) line 271
(144.) line 274
(145.) lines 272-450
(146.) lines 459-461
(147.) 1797, pp.186-209, B.R.C
(148.) p. 168, "B.L." (149.) p.145, "B.L."
In other words, the illustrations can be faked and impossible if only they create an illusion sufficient to carry the point of the involved idea. Coleridge, in his next words, admits how ideas have come, in his own life, to dominate things so much as to admit illusion as indistinguishable from actuality. He says: "and real in this sense they have been to every human being who from whatever source of delusion has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency." (151.)

Actuality has become dulled until it is on a par with hallucination, which is, to him, equally valuable for purposes of illustration. And so "The Ancient Mariner", as though to rouse senses too jaded to respond merely to the actual, presents illusions, as startling and heightened as possible, so as most unmistakably to carry its point. And this illusion is presented through admittedly conscious means, mechanically, in a pattern arbitrarily composed.

The supposed killing of the supposed albatross, together with consequences, being a sufficiently plausible cloak for the idea of the necessity for penitence after crime, Coleridge fits this illustration into the proper sea setting, and gives it the proper narrator, the Mariner. That the point may be obvious, the circumstances of the narrating are as contrasting with the story as possible, the occasion of a wedding with the listener a guest at the festivity. (152.) The Mariner is composed in character, with "long gray beard," (153.) "glittering eye", (153.) and "skinny hand." (154.) The telling of the tale involves all possible tricks that will add to its effect, such as stopping "one of three" guests, (155.) who listens like "a three years"
child;" (156.) repetition of words that will enhance the supernatural quality of the mariner's eye (157.); parallel and balanced structures in the story itself; such as: "The sun came up upon the left, Out of the sea came he," (158.) and later, "The sun now rose upon the right: Out of the sea came he;" (159.) heightened and gruesome effects, such as "All in a hot a copper sky, The bloody sun", (160.) ice that "cracked and growled, and roared and howled, like noises in a swoond," (161.) "slimy things" (162.) that "crawl[ed] with legs Upon a slimy sea," (162.) and "death-fires" (163.) that "danced at night; The water, that like a witch's oils Burnt green and blue, and white;" (164.) and actually supernatural agencies that operate supernaturally; such as the spectre ship bearing "Death" and the "Nightmare Life-in-Death" (165.), the "seraph-men" that give semblance of life to the corpses (166.), and the rumbling that sinks the ship. (167.) The actual arrangement of words, as I have implied, is a conscious one, a fitting to a selected pattern, with obvious and progressing tricks, such as repeating of refrains and words: "Below the kirk, below the hill, Below the lighthouse top", (168.) "The ice was here, the ice was there, The ice was all around," (169.) the double refrain of "Water, water everywhere," (170.) "Down dropt the breeze, The sails dropt down," (171.) "swiftly, swiftly, flew the ship" (172.) balanced with "Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze," (173.) and the return vision, reversed, of the harbor:

".......... is this indeed
The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? Is the the kirk?
Is this mine own countree? (173.)

(157.) "glittering" repeated, (165.) lines 185-196
line 13, "bright-eyed" line 20 (166.) lines 490-491
(158.) lines 25-26 (167.) lines 546-549
(159.) lines 83-84 (166.) lines 22-24
(160.) lines 111-112(Score mine) (169.) lines 59-60
(161.) lines 61-63 (170.) lines 119-122
(162.) lines 125-126 (171.) line 107
(163.) line 128 (172.) lines 460-462
(164.) lines 129-30 (173.) lines 464-467
So does Coleridge put into practice his theoretical tenets of "studied selection," (174.) "artificial arrangement," (175.) for "voluntarily" heightening emotions (176.) which are "balanced and organized into metre" (177.) "by a supervening act of the will and judgement consciously and for the foreseen purpose of pleasure." (178.) In other words, everything about a poem has become arbitrary and according to ideal plan, so that composition is merely the manipulating of trick processes in such a way as to create illusion for effect. The creative force, except as it functions in falsely stimulated ways, though here it is supernaturally active, is dead.

"The Dark Ladie" (179.) shows Coleridge's portrayal, not of a particular lady, but of a made type, supposedly "representative", but only in order to illustrate the idea of disappointed love. He puts her in a set scene; the most effective, (by a lonely brookside) to await a type lover, for whom she sends a type page, and whom, when he arrives, she addresses in the accepted manner of the accepted ideal situation.

"And in the eye of noon my love
    Shall lead me from my mother's door,
    Sweet boys and girls all clothed in white
    Stressing flowers before:
    But first the nodding minstrels go
    With music meet for lordly bower,
    The children next in snow-white vests,
    Strewing buds and flowers!"

(174.) P.150, "B.L.
(175.) p.150, "B.L.
(176.) p.177, "B.L.
(177.) p.177, "B.L.
(178.) p.177, "B.L.
(179.) 1798, pp. 293-295
And then my love and I shall pace, [woodenly]
My [properly] jet black hair in pearly braids,
Between our [properly] comely bachelors
And blushing bridal maids." (180.)

Plainly, "The Dark Ladie" is an attempt to realize Coleridge's doubly hypothetical ideal, and is as far removed from the actual, a substitute which, instead of stimulating to realization, turns one away from it, as an opiate would.

"Christabel," (181.) itself is an opium dream, projected as a whole, as Coleridge says, (182.) and so, though involving, yet not constructed in illustration of an idea, is rather the result of a subconscious process of falsely imaginative shaping to an idea, [the struggle of evil and innocence] presenting not persons but symbolic puppets, or absolutes, that yet, despite their ideal and arbitrary nature, reveal the very real imaginative power, diseased though it has become, of the mind that shaped them. This imaginative power, operating within the given shape, is evident, as is the conscious process itself, in the setting:

"The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek——
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky." (183.)

(180.) lines 49-60
(181.) 1797-1801, pp.213-236
(182.) Note to later editions, save 1834, quoted by E.H.C. p. 213
(183.) p.217, lines 43-52
The character portrayed is at once exotically imaginative and conventionally, woodenly, ideal:

"There she [Christabel] sees a damsel bright [Geraldine]
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue-vein'd feet unsandal'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems, entangled in her hair." (184.)

The supernatural, and symbolic quality, that makes of these characters mere diseased shadows of ideas, and as such, false products, comes out in such lines as:

"A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy.
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye
And with somewhat of malice and more of dread,
At Christabel she looked askance!" (185.)

And making "Christabel" still further removed from actuality, the actual putting down in words is, as Coleridge admits, the result of a conscious process, involving the counting of accents in the lines, though variation occurs, he says, "in correspondence with ... transition in the nature of the imagery or passion." (186.)

A still more direct product of Coleridge's subconsciousness, during this period of his ideal pattern, a poem which he himself says is of interest, if it is of interest, chiefly as a "psychological curiosity," (187.) is "Kubla Khan" (188.) Here the dulled state of his imagination

(184.) lines 58-65
(185.) lines 583-587, p.233
(186.) p.215, Footnote, E.H.C.
(187.) p.295, Prefatory note
(188.) 1797, p.295-96
is obvious. The inspiration itself and much of the imagery coming,
admittedly, from a book Coleridge was reading when he fell asleep, (189.),
the whole is merely a reshaping and heightening process, in which ap­
parently vivid presentation turns out to be rather a clouding for ef­
fect, such as can be gained by such combinations as "ancestral voices,"
(190.) "demon-lover," (191.) "sacred river," (192.) and "sunless sea,"
(193.) the latter imageless state in fact suggestive of that to which
Coleridge himself seems tending. The whole pattern is, in fact, blen­
ded according to sound in itself artificially soothing and hypnotic,
something false to and offered instead of, life.

Subsequent developments of Coleridge's poetry product further show
the effect, on himself, of his cleavage-substitute assumption. I have
mentioned the few notable exceptions, the aftermaths of what I have called
his second period. (194.) On the whole, however, Coleridge's poetry
becomes negligible after "Christabel". He has such poems as "Ode to
Georgiana," (195.) a stilted and idealized address to a stranger whom
he calls "Lady nurs'd in pomp and pleasure" (196.) for the sake of her
celebrating of William Tell's defiance. (195.) He has an abstact "Ode to
Tranquility:" (197.)

"Tranquillity! thou better name

Than all the family of Fame!

To thee I gave my early youth

And left the bark, and blest the steadfast shore,

Ere yet the tempest rose and scared me with its roar." (198.)

(189.) "Purchas's Pilgrimage", regarding Xamdu and Cullai Can,
note to p.296, E.H.C.
(190.) line 30
(191.) line 16, taken directly from Byron,
p.296, E.H.C.
(192.) line 5
(193.) line 5
(194.) See notes (101.) and (102.)
(195.) 1799, pp.335-338, E.H.C.
(196.) line 5
(197.) 1801, p.360, E.H.C.
(198.) lines 1-2, 6-8
He has "Dejection: An Ode," (199.) in which he says he had better have stayed mute than have spoken. (200.) He has "The Picture," (201.) of the same year, a poem in which there are many nature images, but listed consciously rather than imaginatively. He has abstract discussions like "What Is Life? " (202.) the title sufficiently indicative; "The Blossoming of the Solitary Date Tree," (203.) symbolic of an idea. And he has, subsequently, very occasional, short, abstract and prosy verses. He even accounts, at length, for the existence of such a prosy and heavy attempt as "The Wanderings of Cain," a prosy piece (204.) which in 1828 he attempted to arrange in verse, from memory, a sample of which he gives to print, containing such lines as:

"The moon was bright, the air was free,
And fruits and flowers together grew
On many a shrub and many a tree..." (205.)

Admitting the undoubted effect of his poor health, of the deflection of his interest to translation (206.) and his absorption with philosophy, which in itself is a tremendous piece of evidence in point, a decided inhibition in creative power becomes evident in Coleridge's poetry just subsequent to the development of his ideal pattern, and is never removed. Turning in upon Coleridge himself the effect it has been producing for others, which of course reacts first on him, this effect of Coleridge's ideal substitute for realization is destruction of the power to realize, finally amounting to annihilation of the creative power.

(199.) 1802, pp. 362-68, E.H.C.
(200.) line 8.
(201.) 1802, pp. 369-74, E.H.C.
(202.) 1805
(203.) 1805
(204.) 1797, p. 288-93 note to edition
(205.) p. 287
(206.) Following his trip to Germany, 1799