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# IMAGINATION IN COLERIDGE

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Click on a superscripted number to go to a footnote. Once in the Notes, click the asterisk at the end of the note to return to the point where you were in the text. **Bold numbers in square brackets** mark the *beginning* of a new page in the original printed edition of *Imagination in Coleridge* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

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## Extract 35 from *The Statesman's Manual* (December 1816)

This section contains two extracts from *The Statesman's Manual*, as follows:

- A (from the text, on *symbol* and *allegory*)
- B (from Appendix C, on *Reason, Religion, and the Understanding*)



### Extract 35-A (On *symbol* and *allegory*)

[150] And in nothing is Scriptural history more strongly contrasted with the histories of highest note in the present age than in its freedom from the hollowness of abstractions.<sup>1</sup> While the latter presents a shadow-fight of Things and Quantities, the former gives us the history of Men, and balances the important influence of individual Minds with the previous state of the national morals and manners, in which, as constituting a specific susceptibility, it presents to us the true cause both of the Influence itself, and of the Weal or Woe that were its Consequents. How should it be otherwise? The histories and political economy of the present and preceding century partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy,<sup>2</sup>

and are the *product* of an unenlivened generalizing Understanding.<sup>3</sup> In the Scriptures they are the living *educts*<sup>4</sup> of the Imagination, that reconciling and [151] mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*.<sup>5</sup> These are the Wheels which Ezekiel beheld, when the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he saw visions of God as he sate among the captives by the river Chebar. *Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, the wheels went, and thither was their spirit to go: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels also.*<sup>6</sup> The truths and the symbols that represent them move in conjunction and form the living chariot that bears up (for us) the throne of the Divine Humanity. Hence, by a derivative, indeed, but not a divided, influence, and though in a secondary yet in more than a metaphorical sense, the Sacred Book is worthily intitled the WORD of GOD. Hence too, its contents present to us the stream of time continuous as Life and a symbol of Eternity, inasmuch as the Past and the Future are virtually contained in the Present. According therefore to our relative position on its banks the Sacred History becomes prophetic, the Sacred Prophecies historical, while the power and substance of both inhere in its Laws, its Promises, and its Comminations.<sup>7</sup> In the Scriptures therefore both Facts and Persons must of necessity have a two-fold significance, a past and a future, a temporary and a perpetual, a particular and a universal application. They must be at once Portraits and Ideals.

Eheu! paupertina philosophia in paupertinam religionem ducit:<sup>8</sup> -- A hunger-bitten and idea-less philosophy naturally produces a starveling and comfortless religion. It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds SYMBOLS with ALLEGORIES.<sup>9</sup> Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principle being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand, a Symbol (*ho estin aei tautêgorikon*)<sup>10</sup> is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General.

Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself [152] as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative.<sup>11</sup> The other are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter, less beautiful but not less shadowy than the sloping orchard or hill-side pasture-field seen in the transparent lake below. Alas! for the flocks that are to be led forth to such pastures! *"It shall be even as when the hungry dreameth, and behold! he eateth; but he waketh and his soul is empty: or as when the thirsty dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh and is faint!"*<sup>12</sup>

(CC vi 28-31)

## Notes

[Click on asterisk (\*) at the end of a note to return to the point you left in Coleridge's text]

1. The "histories of highest note" were David Hume's *History of Great Britain* (1754-61) and Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88). \*
2. *I.e.* the empirical philosophy of Locke, Hume, Hartley, etc. \*
3. On Understanding, see Extract 35-B, n.1. \*
4. The image of streams issuing from a central fountain or spring would seem to be uppermost in STC's mind here. *OED*, which cites this passage from *The Statesman's Manual*, defines *educt* as "a result of inference or of development". In James Gillman's copy of *The Statesman's Manual*, STC altered "*educts*" to "*Produce*" and added the following note: "Or perhaps these *morphômata* [forms, figures] of the mechanic Understanding as distinguished from the '*poiêseis*' [makings] of the imaginative Reason might be named *Products* in antithesis to *Produce* -- or *Growths*". \*
5. Keppel-Jones (1967) is helpful here: "Reason, unlike the Understanding which deals with truths derived from the senses, is concerned with truths of a higher kind, that can be defined as truths above sense, and are named *ideas* . . . . In approaching these truths, Reason (unlike the Understanding which remains in contact with the concrete world through the medium of the senses) needs no intermediate organ, for it is itself their source . . . . [Imagination functions as the mediator between Reason and Understanding:] in its peculiar and magical operation, [Imagination] is able to use suitable contradictory images of sense, and produce a synthesis from them (that is, from the concrete world) that corresponds to an idea -- the conjunction, in fact, which is the exponent of the idea. In this way the Imagination is able to reconcile 'the idea, with the image' . . . . What the Imagination is doing, then, is to produce symbols . . . . Thus a synthesis produced from images of sense by the Imagination is a symbol and embodies an idea; but is also itself actually part of the truth of that idea. Through this process the Imagination presents the ideas of Reason in a manageable form to the [153] Understanding . . . [and] modifies images of the concrete world to embody ideas of Reason" (56-65). Cf. also Knights (1965).  
 For STC on *Idea*, see for example his letter of 10 November 1816 to James Gillman (*CL* iv 690) and Appendix E of *The Statesman's Manual* (*CC* vi 100-14). On *Reason* and *Understanding*, see Extract 35-B, n 1. On *Symbol*, see for example *CN* ii 2274 (quoted in Extract 25, n 1); *CN* iii 4253; *PL* 193-4; *CL* v 19, 324-7 and vi 611. \*
6. Ezekiel 1:20 (*variatim*). \*
7. *commination*: "a threatening of divine vengeance". \*
8. *Eheu! paupertina philosophia*, etc.: "Alas! an impoverished philosophy leads toward an impoverished religion". STC's own free translation follows the Latin sentence. \*
9. In a note to the ninth of the Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion in *Aids to Reflection*, STC writes: "Must not of necessity the FIRST MAN [Adam] be a SYMBOL of Mankind, in the fullest force of the word, Symbol, rightly defined -- that is, a sign included in the idea, which it represents; -- an actual *part* chosen to represent the *whole*, as a lip with a chin prominent is a symbol of a man; or a *lower* form or species used as the representative of a higher in the same *kind*: thus Magnetism is the Symbol of Vegetation, and of the vegetative and reproductive powers in animals; the Instinct of the ant-tribe, or the bee, is a symbol of the human understanding. And this definition of the word is of great practical importance, inasmuch as the symbolical is hereby distinguished *toto genere* [in every aspect] from the allegoric and metaphorical" (*AR* 173). Cf. also Extract 40-A; and *CN* iii 4183 and 4498. \*
10. *ho estin aei tautêgorikon*: "which is always tautegorical". Whalley (1974)

translates: "which is always self-declarative" (16); for another version, see *CC* vi 30, n 3. The word *tautegorical* is STC's coinage; *OED* uses as a definition STC's own explanation in *Aids to Reflection*: "The *base* of Symbols and symbolical expressions; the nature of which is always *tautegorical*, that is, expressing *the same* subject but with a *difference*, in contra-distinction from metaphors and similitudes, that are always *allegorical*, that is expressing a *different* subject but with a resemblance" (*AR* 136). \*

11. On STC's organicism -- the relation of parts to a whole -- see Extract 13-A, n 2, and Extract 28, n.2.

Whalley (1974), having quoted this description of a *symbol*, concludes: "Symbols, then, are neither distinguishable items nor conventional marks in a denotative system, but centres rather of finely disposed shaping energy that command a wider or narrower field of poetic activity. By partaking of the reality that they render intelligible they are patient of very detailed analogical exploration . . . and this is the delight and duty of critical inquiry. Yet they transcend the abstract parallelism of analogy because they are active in a field where the [154] centrifugal force of recognition is opposed by the centripetal activity of evocation or "association"; and this in itself ensures that interpretation will normally be peripheral to critical inquiry. It is better to ask of a symbolic event, not 'What does it mean?' but 'What is it doing?' We expect (if our poetic experience has any depth) that a symbol will not be single but manifold -- that its true simplicity will disclose an astonishing complexity. It is in symbolic process that the *data* of perception (if there are such things) are transformed into the *données* of poems" (16-17). \*

12. Isaiah 29:8 (*variatim*). \*

## Extract 35-B (On Reason, Religion, and the Understanding)

[154] Reason and Religion differ only as a two-fold application of the same power. But if we are obliged to distinguish, we must *ideally* separate. In this sense I affirm, that Reason is the knowledge of the laws of the WHOLE considered as ONE: and as such it is contradistinguished from the Understanding, which concerns itself exclusively with the quantities, qualities, and relations of *particulars* in time and space.<sup>1</sup> The UNDERSTANDING, therefore, is the science of phaenomena, and their subsumption under distinct kinds and sorts, (*genus* and *species*.) Its functions supply the rules and constitute the possibility of EXPERIENCE; but remain mere logical *forms*, except as far as *materials* are given by the senses or sensations. The REASON, on the other hand, is the science of the *universal*, having the ideas of ONENESS and ALLNESS as its two elements or primary factors. In the language of the old schools,

$$\text{Unity} + \text{Omnëity}^2 = \text{Totality},$$

The Reason first manifests itself in man by the *tendency* to the comprehension of all as