Living powers: Idea and Symbol in Coleridge[1]

Graham Pechey

GEOFFREY HILL IS FULLY AWARE OF THE PLATONIC TRADITION to which Coleridge adheres, expressed principally as a form of energy:

> Look! Crowning the rise, that bush,
> copper-gold, trembles like a bee swarm.
> COLERIDGE'S *living powers,* and other
> sacrednesses, whose asylum this was,
> did not ordain the sun; but still it serves,
> bringing on strongly now each flame-recognizance,
> hermeneutics of autumn, time's
> continuities tearing us apart.[2]

Coleridge may well have shifted his philosophical and political ground as he grew older: the man who in 1795 characterized the Holy Trinity as 'that mysterious cookery of the orthodox' was to be celebrated some seventy years later by John Henry Newman as a man who 'made trial of his age, and succeeded in interesting its genius in the cause of Catholic truth'.[3] Superficially it might seem that the young and engaged revolutionary and Hartleian materialist became a philosophical idealist removed from any investment in the dynamics of social life. What he held on to all through this realignment, though, was precisely the indissoluble bonding of truth and being: the force of thought sometimes in and ever beyond history; and two key terms in his vocabulary—*idea* and *symbol*—help us to understand this continuity.

Idea and symbol are bound up indissolubly for Coleridge in a single complex, or as he himself puts it: 'An IDEA, in the *highest* sense of the word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*'.[4] Coleridge's generic word for them is *powers*; often he will qualify them with the adjective *living*. Symbols are no more merely textually-figurative than ideas are merely mentally-cognitive; both are quite as much at home and active in the world as revolution is. 'All the *epoch-forming* Revolutions', Coleridge writes in 1817, 'have coincided with the rise and fall of metaphysical systems'…'principles of deepest insight and widest interest fly off like sparks from the glowing iron under the loud anvil'.[5] In short, only the dualism of body and spirit launched by Descartes blinds us to the standing of ideas as enlivened by social upheaval and yet greater, more encompassing and longer-lasting forces in *being* than any such finite event in historical *becoming*. We in our turn, though, have been blinded—prevented from that last insight by the construction over the last century or so of a more

---

[1] This article was delivered as a paper to the Coleridge Society in Jesus College, Cambridge, in the Lent Term of 2012. The invitation to speak came from my good friend Fr John Hughes, Dean of Chapel, who died so tragically young in a car accident at Petertide the following year. *Requiescat in pace.* [The same blessing we must also ask for Graham Pechey, who died soon after submitting this article, knowing he would not see its publication. (Ed.)]

[2] Hill, Geoffrey. *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012.* Ed. Kenneth Haynes, p.374, herafter 'Hill'.

[3] Newman, John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua.* London: J.M. Dent, 1912, p.105, hereafter 'Newman'.

[4] Shawcross J.C, ed. S.T. Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria.* Vols. I and II. OUP, 1907, p.100, hereafter 'Shawcross'.

[5] White, R.J., ed. S.T. Coleridge: *Lay Sermons. The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp.14-15, hereafter 'White'.

easily assimilable, purely literary-critical Coleridge, the Coleridge who famously 'desynonymized' (his own term) *fancy* and *imagination.*

It wasn't always so; and it isn't everywhere so even now. It was in the character of a philosopher, after all, that Coleridge signally influenced thinkers of the English counter-enlightenment in his latter years and in the first decades after his death, and it is as an original thinker that he is even today largely understood in continental Europe. Thus it is that we ignore those paronyms of the *fancy-imagination* couple by which *idea* is hierarchically elevated over *abstraction* and *symbol* correspondingly discriminated from and raised above *allegory*; and thus it is that we miss too the role (respectively) of *reason* and *imagination* as the faculties of the making of the powers specified by those 'higher' terms. The 'lower' terms in the relation are indispensably necessary; they are not negated, like the mutually exclusive terms of a binary opposition; and they are vicious only when either functionally substituted for their superiors or not beneficently 'irradiated' by them. In our blindness to all this we not only fail to see that liturgy and Scripture as well as (the more obvious) literature and the fine arts are the privileged places of the working of the symbol; we also fail to see how the symbol's writ runs across all of the intellectual disciplines and all dimensions of social praxis, and that both domains are vitiated precisely in so far as they ignore the symbol's efficacy and ubiquity. Fail to see this pre-eminence of the symbol and of the idea it opens to the heightened senses, and you fall by default into the 'mechanical' philosophy, European modernity's 'philosophy of death' (phrases by which that complex of rationalism and empiricism in epistemology, utilitarianism in ethics and deism in religion was comprehensively anathematized by Coleridge).

Let us begin with *symbol* and *allegory.* Coleridge writes:

> 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 honours usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds SYMBOLS with ALLEGORIES. 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 principal being more worthless than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol (which is always tautegorical) 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 which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative (*SM* 30).

The symbol is *taute*gorical—a word which has never caught on but which was borrowed into German by Friedrich von Schelling—in so far as it signifies not, as *alle*gory does, by means of that which is *other,* but by means of that which is

ontologically *the same*. Allegory is nothing more than abstraction compounded, perceptual abstraction standing for conceptual abstraction, both of which are 'unsubstantial', says Coleridge, using that term in a quite technical-metaphysical sense: neither has *substance*—that category which Descartes had dualized and in which Locke could not bring himself absolutely to believe. (Coleridge uses *allegory* and *metaphor* as virtual synonyms, elsewhere discriminating metaphor as 'a fragment of allegory'.) The symbol, by contrast, is a sort of transcendental synecdoche, a metonymy of the infinite: a part standing for the whole which is also *consubstantial*—'of the same substance', 'of one being' to quote the Creed—with that whole. As C.S. Lewis was later to put it: 'the allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to talk of that which is confessedly less real…the symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real'.[6] In the symbol, signifier and signified relate not as opacity to abstraction but as elements of the same translucent reality. For Coleridge, then, the symbol is not so much a figure as a veritable *form of life* in which the inner is made outer and the invisible becomes visible to the inner eye. Thanks to symbols, ideas of the *reason* are translated from the supersensuous into a mode of sense.

Reason brings us to another of the terminological couples. Like Kant, Coleridge 'desynonymizes' *reason* and *understanding*. The understanding 'concerns itself exclusively with quantities, qualities, and relations of *particulars* in time and space' and is 'the science of phenomena'. Reason is unconcerned with cause and effect, beyond subject and object—it is nothing less than 'the integral *spirit* of the regenerated man'—co-inherent (perichoretic) with the individual—and

> without being either the SENSE, the UNDERSTANDING or the IMAGINATION contains all three within itself, even as the mind contains its thoughts, and is present in and through them all; or as the expression pervades the different features of an intelligent countenance. Each individual must bear witness of it to his own mind, even as he describes life and light: and with silence of light it describes itself, and dwells in *us* only as far as we dwell in *it*. (*SM* 69-70)

Reason, then, doesn't admit of the plural; it is *one*, and it is not so much the faculty of the making of our ideas as the silent and lucent medium in which we truly live and to which our relation is not one of instrumental manipulation but rather a *witnessing*. Though contained *eminenter* in the reason, the imagination is discriminated from the other 'powers' of the self as 'the completing power which unites clearness with depth, the plenitude of the sense with the comprehensibility of the understanding' (*SM* 69).

Definitions are perhaps not as ready an entry into the mind of Coleridge as those passages of creative explication in which all of these categories are (explicitly or implicitly) present and in which we catch that mind in all its

[6] Lewis, C.S. *Allegory of Love*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, p.45, hereafter 'Lewis'.

brilliant singularity *thinking in symbols.* Here is one such passage:

> Let us consider what we do when we leap. We first resist the gravitating power by an act purely voluntary, and then by another act, voluntary in part, we yield to it in order to light on the spot, which we had previously proposed to ourselves. Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous. Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of a brook; and will have noticed, how the little animal *wins* its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it, in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION.) (Shawcross I 85-86)

The context is a complicated argument in which Coleridge is refuting the associationist philosophy of his former mentor Hartley, which reduces consciousness to a mere resultant of blind external causes—such that, Coleridge quips, the *Biographia Literaria* which he is engaged in writing 'may as truly be said to be written by St Paul's church, as by *me*…I myself…have nothing to do with it, but merely the causeless and *effectless* beholding of it when it is done' (Shawcross I 77). That this philosophy should carry conviction at all rests on a fundamental category mistake whereby 'the *conditions* of a thing' are conflated with 'its *causes* and *essence*'. He gives an example: 'The air I breathe is the *condition* of my life, not its cause' (Shawcross I 85). The 'laws of mind' cannot be reduced to a 'law of matter', as in that fortuitous contemporaneity of sensations on which the associationist theory of knowledge is based; a 'law of matter' can at most impose itself as a (necessary) limit upon the laws of mind, exactly as the law of gravitation does upon locomotion. Our exploitation of the force of gravity in leaping is no argument for its being a *cause* of leaping.

Coleridge's moves here merit close attention. First he proposes this process in which passivity and activity necessarily and beneficently alternate as an *analogy* for the act of the mind in writing or remembering. He then raises the stakes by passing from watching the mind to watching the world, and in adducing the water-insect's alternation of thwarting and yielding to the current as an 'emblem' for the act of the mind in all thinking as such he too sets in train his own alternation: a movement from inside to outside and back again which takes us out of the sphere of an arbitrary reaching after material

analogues for invisible processes and into the high sphere of the symbol. It could not be otherwise in a thinker who, in the same text, has declared that body and spirit are not 'heterogeneous', but rather (listen to the neo-scholastic) 'different modes, or degrees in perfection, of a common substratum' (Shawcross I 88)—for whom, in short, physics and metaphysics, swimming and thinking, ultimately shade into each other. The water-insect accordingly becomes what he elsewhere calls 'a symbol established in the truth of things' (White 72); and the imagination is reflexively exemplified and active in the very words that describe its working.

This example of the symbol at work in a prosaic context is important as enforcing the charge of the symbolic in all things, even the smallest and humblest. At its most epistemologically resonant the symbol is exemplified for Coleridge in the Bible, which he poses against modern thinking as 'a science of realities'. 'In the Scriptures they [history and political economy]' are

> the living *educts* of the Imagination; of that reconciling and 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*. (*SM* 29)

At its most dramatic and efficacious the symbol is exemplified in the Sacraments and especially in the Mass. The odd fact that Coleridge received communion as a first-year student at Cambridge in 1791 but then didn't receive again until Christmas Day 1827 should fool no one into thinking that the Eucharist was unimportant for him. In pronouncing it to be 'a Symbol, i.e.—a part, or particular instance selected as representative of the whole, of which whole however it is an actual, or real part' (*M* 1 862), he accepts the Article 28 teaching of the Real Presence in it of Christ and regularly denounces those who would 'volatilize [it] into a metaphor' for 'the exclusive purpose of recalling to our minds the historical fact of our Lord's crucifixion…just the same as when Protestants drink a glass of wine to the glorious memory of William III'.[7] If the Sacraments are symbols, and the Eucharist supremely so—though not indeed unproblematically, in the view of at least one recent commentator[8]—all symbols are sacramental in so far as they borrow some of the power of that supreme symbol and with it truly (as Coleridge himself puts it) 'find' those who participate in the symbol's activity. Coleridge's investment

[7] Coleridge, S.T. *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit; to which are added miscellaneous essays from 'The Friend'.* London: Cassell and Co Ltd, 1892, p.99, hereafter 'Coleridge'.

[8] Nicholas Halmi has astutely pointed out an anomaly in Coleridge's understanding of the Eucharist as a symbol, one which he seems never to have brought to consciousness, and which springs from the theological freight borne by the word *consubstantial* to describe its (synecdochic) relation to its referent. First, it 'dissolv[ed] the distinction between *generation ex Deo* and *creatio ex nihilo* on which Trinitarian orthodoxy was founded'. Secondly, this anti-Lutheran 'steadfastly disallowed the sacramental elements the consubstantiality he attributed to scriptural and natural symbols…Consubstantial symbols were evidently to be found everywhere *except* at the altar' (Halmi 355-356). Halmi's case would have had greater ramifications for me if this study had been concerned with the internal theoretical relations of the *symbol-allegory* couple, rather than—as its very title implies—exclusively with the relations of the latter with its *idea-abstraction* counterpart in history.

in the efficacy of the symbol is at once an aspect of his Christian faith in the Incarnation and the sustaining strength of his mission as a philosopher, which is nothing less than a project of *reversing the fortunes of the idea in history, and using the symbol as the agent of this restitution*.

We can come at this by looking at a remarkable footnote in the *Biographia Literaria* in which he traces the historical path of the *word* idea:

> …in its original sense as used by Pindar, Aristophanes and in the Gospel of Matthew, [the word] represented the visual abstraction of a distant object when we see the whole without distinguishing its parts. Plato adopted it as a technical term, and as the antithesis to *eidola*, or sensuous images; the transient and perishable emblems, or mental words, of ideas. The ideas themselves he considered as mysterious powers, living, seminal, formative and exempt from time. … Our English writers to the end of Charles 2nd's reign, or somewhat later, employed it either in the original sense, or platonically, or in a sense nearly corresponding to the use of the substantive *ideal,* always however opposing it more or less to image, whether of present or absent objects. … Des Cartes having introduced into his philosophy the fanciful hypothesis of *material idea,* or certain configurations of the brain, which were so many moulds to the influxes of the external world; Mr Locke adopted the term, but extended its signification to whatever is the immediate object of the mind's attention or consciousness. Mr Hume distinguishing those representations which are accompanied with a sense of a present object, from those reproduced by the mind itself, designated the former by impressions, and confined the word *idea* to the latter.
>
> (Shawcross I 69-70)

The trajectory of the idea has been, in short, from heaven to earth, within earth from world to mind, and altogether from active making to passive shadowing. Locke borrows Descartes' already mentalized *idea* in order to confer dignity upon what Hobbes had designated as mere 'apparitions' or 'seemings', the phantasmal effects of world upon mind, one order of 'matter in motion' upon another: empiricism, in short, raids the terminology of rationalism to counter materialism. Coleridge in this note takes the story up to Hume, for whom 'ideas' are only the feeble after-images of the lively 'impressions' of the senses. 'Hume, Hartley, and Condillac', he elsewhere declares, 'have exploded all *ideas,* but those of sensation' (White 102). A later comment, in *A Lay Sermon,* takes the story up to Kant:

> Whether Ideas are regulative only, according to Aristotle and Kant; or likewise CONSTITUTIVE, and one with the power and Life of nature, according to Plato and Plotinus…is the highest *problem* of Philosophy, and not part of its nomenclature. (White 114)

It is clear from the collocation of these two passages that Coleridge sees Kant as at least freeing the idea from its passivity in conceiving it as already anterior

to sense and as 'regulating' our experience. Transcendental philosophy opens the prospect of a return, under ineluctably modern conditions, to Plato's 'constitutive' ideas. Coleridge is a modern transcendentalist thinker whose gaze is turned always to a Platonist horizon of truly paradigmatic and causative ideas. That he sees the imagination and its symbols as the route back to this ancient status of the idea is profoundly ironic if we recall that for Plato himself, notoriously dismissive of art, such representations would be distracting and delusive copies of those mere 'copies' of the Ideas which make up the phenomenal world (Plotinus was to make good this anomaly in his mentor).

However that may be, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that modernity with its subjectivism and its disbelief in a Platonically objective order of the True and the Good and the Beautiful delivers us over to some merely second-best option. The philosopher Charles Taylor observes that 'the world's being good may now be seen as not entirely independent of our seeing it and showing it as good'; and he goes on:

> The goodness of the world is not something quite independent of God's seeing it as good. His seeing it as good, loving it, can be conceived not simply as a *response* to what it is, but as what *makes* it such…What we have…is the development of a human analogue to God's seeing things as good: a seeing which also helps effect what it sees….What is new [with the Romantics] is the modern sense of the place and power of the creative imagination. This is now an integral part of the goodness of things, and hence the transformation of our stance and thus our outlook helps to bring about the truth it reveals.[9]

This empowering of the Romantic imagination plays out, according to Taylor, both in theistic and atheistic versions; in Dostoevsky's specifically Christian version, *grace* is the rubric under which we can positively affirm a restitutionary project such as Coleridge's:

> We are closed to grace, because we close ourselves to the world in which it circulates; and we do that out of loathing for ourselves and for this world…loathing and self-loathing…fuel a projection of evil outward…where all evil is now seen to reside. This justifies terror, violence, and destruction against the world; indeed this seems to call for it. (Taylor 451)

Though Taylor doesn't allude to Coleridge at all, he might have been referring to the Ancient Mariner's killing of the albatross, the blight which follows upon it, and the blessing which later descends upon the Mariner when he acknowledges the beauty of the sea creatures which had before repelled him—by which Coleridge symbolically narrates both the modern disenchantment of the world and the hope of its overcoming. Or, again, 'Frost at Midnight', where the self-binding and the punctual simultaneity of frost works suddenly

[9] Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity.* CUP, 1989, p. 449, hereafter 'Taylor'.

and secretly, as if outside the order of cause-and-effect, and is not simply *like* grace (or the imagination) but rather *in the world* as grace is, one with it in the infinite consubstantiality of things. This symbolic vision is given to a father looking in love at his sleeping child and imagining for him a future in which nature will appear perennially saturated with grace.[10]

Out of the trauma of the Cartesian dichotomy of substance and the disanimation of the modern world, then, there is born the symbol and its promise of recovery. Those twentieth-century commentators who have lined up to tell us that Coleridge naturalizes the supernatural should be told that he does exactly the reverse; and that what his thinking portends is not the bloodless humanism of a Matthew Arnold for whom *God* is 'a literary term' but a marriage of the sort that Taylor sees in Dostoevsky, who 'brings together…a central idea of the Christian tradition, especially evident in the Gospel of John':

> that people are transformed through being loved by God, a love that they mediate to each other, on one hand, with the modern notion of a subject who can help to bring on transfiguration through the stance he takes to himself and the world, on the other. From this point of view, it doesn't matter that Dostoevsky saw himself as opposing much of the modern tradition—he once identified Descartes's cogito as the root of the modern evil. What he was opposing was the belief that humans affirm their dignity in separation from the world. (Taylor 452)

The Coleridgean symbol effectually brings about just such a mutual renewal of the central tradition of Christianity and modern subjectivity—as witness its importance to the language of the Catholic Revival in the Church of England and the poetry of *inscape* in Gerard Manley Hopkins, both of them living confutations of the humanist bias in Coleridge's latter-day interpreters (who pattern after Arnold). Before them, though, there is a figure of the first generation to follow Coleridge: namely, Thomas Carlyle, exact contemporary of John Keats, whose chapter on 'Symbols' in *Sartor Resartus* closely echoes Coleridge's terms:

> In the Symbol proper…there is ever…some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there. By Symbols, accordingly, is man guided and commanded, made happy, made wretched. He everywhere finds himself encompassed with Symbols…the Universe is but one vast Symbol of God…Not a Hut he builds but is the visible embodiment of a Thought; but bears visible record of invisible things; but is, in the transcendental sense, symbolical as well as real…Highest of all Symbols are those wherein the Artist or Poet has risen into Prophet,

[10] For a further elaboration of these points, see my articles 'Crossed lines: The vernacular metaphysics of the *Ancient Mariner*', *Christianity and Literature,* 59:1, 2009, and '"Frost at Midnight" and the poetry of periphrasis', *The Cambridge Quarterly,* 41:2, 2012.

> and all men can recognize a present God; and worship the same: I mean religious Symbols. (Carlyle 149)

In the generation following Carlyle, John Ruskin will make good a missing dimension in this version of Coleridge's signifying and sanctified universe: that is to say, the indelible mark of the *finitude* of the makers of symbols in the things they have made. Gothic architecture is a three-dimensional instance of the symbol inasmuch as in its structure and ornament inside and outside interpenetrate, and because it derives its 'majesty' from the very *imperfection* of those who erect and decorate it. Christianity confesses the imperfection of every soul:

> … in only bestowing dignity upon the acknowledgement of unworthiness. That admission of lost power and fallen nature…the Christian makes daily and hourly, contemplating the fact without fear, as tending, in the end, to God's greater glory…it is, perhaps, the principal admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture, that…out of fragments full of imperfection, and betraying that imperfection in every touch, [they] indulgently raise up a stately and unaccusable whole.[11]

Rising out of an earth that has been sanctified by the Incarnation, the Gothic building so transfigures the individual fallenness and brokenness of those who make it, so turns their failure into glory, as to be an organic symbol of our Redemption. This faith in the real *because* symbolic power of broken lives joined to free imaginations predisposes Ruskin to a liking for saints rather than (as in Carlyle) heroes: it explains his peculiar interest in what he calls the 'symbolical grotesque', and it is the means by which he modulates smoothly from aesthetic to social critique.

And so we come back at last to revolution. When Coleridge speaks of ideas as 'sparks from the glowing iron under the loud anvil', he is fusing into one image (like William Blake in 'The Tyger') a social revolution abroad and another in the economic system at home. To the classicist criticism which would diagnose this image as a case of catachresis or 'broken metaphor'—'Really now: shouldn't that anvil be a hammer?'—we might riposte that it is just such images that sometimes make the best symbols. (Ruskin does exactly this with Milton's 'blind mouths' in *Sesame and Lilies*—Wilmer 267). This one is, for us, especially revealing. Coleridge's ideas about idea and symbol had plainly been given urgency by mature reflection upon the French Revolution which had so excited him politically in his younger years. The artisanal image in that 'loud anvil' phrase points to the context of the Industrial Revolution in which his intellectual legatees were to live and write, Ruskin pre-eminently. All in their different ways 'redeem the time'. All make of the crisis in the old spiritual culture of England to which those two revolutions bore material witness an occasion for re-empowering the idea through the agency of the

[11] Wilmer, Clive, ed. *John Ruskin: Unto this Last and Other Writings.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997, p.83, hereafter, 'Wilmer'.

symbol, thereby so deepening their vision of a restitution as to make those upheavals seem not so much catastrophes as providential opportunities. Ruskin's investment in the redemptive power of the broken looks back to his two great poetic masters: to George Herbert's symbol of the preacher as a 'brittle crazie glasse' lit none the less by the light of the Divine; and to Dante, whose ability to condense the spiritual essence of sin as its own hellish punishment in action and gesture Ruskin replicates in his own grotesquely symbolic realizations of an England dominated by 'the God of getting on'. But Ruskin also looks forward—to the twentieth century, and to a modernist generation which would deny any continuity with Coleridge but which could not have cultivated a sensibility in which 'a heap of broken images' is held in taut suspension with 'the fire and the rose are one' without those large claims for the symbolic imagination made by that great English philosopher so long ago.

All was not lost, though: custodians of the continuity do indeed begin to emerge in the wake of high modernism. A modest critical intervention by a Leavisite in the 1950s connected the Coleridgean symbol with Erich Auerbach's doctrine of figural or typological interpretation in which events of equal historical substance—prototypically those of the Old and New Testaments—are related as adumbration and fulfilment: a mode of signification replete with 'background', infinitely deepening the relationship of human and divine, and differing absolutely from the externalities of pagan allegory (Knights 155-168). This can only give greater weight to symbolic purchase across a number of fields: notably narrative theory. In the poetry and painting of David Jones—and in path-breaking essays of his such as 'Art and Sacrament' (where Maritain meets Morris)—Coleridge's *con*substantiality of the symbol gets a strong charge of the experience of the practical 'maker' of effectual signs and takes on the nature of a neo-Thomist aesthetic of *trans*substantiation. In our own time it is in the formidable figure of Geoffrey Hill that the Arnoldian heresies are renounced, Ruskin championed, and a body of work fashioned in which the path from Coleridge's strong case for the symbolic imagination is redemptively retraced forwards. The upshot in his work has been a Coleridgean visionary philology given a peculiar Hillian twist—an exploration of the whole, often violent 'matter of Britain' in the depths of its powerfully ordaining *words.* Certainly nobody else in our time understands better the earthly labours entailed upon us by the symbol's demands and the rich rewards it can bestow:

> Fellow-labouring master—
> servant of *Fors Clavigera,* to us he appears
> some half-fabulous field-ditcher who prised
> up, from a stone-wedged hedge-root, the lost
> amazing crown. (Hill 285)