EMERGENT PATTERNS IN BRITISH ROMANTIC PAINTING AND POETRY:
AN INTERART STUDY

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Ms. NITOO DAS

Centre of Linguistics and English
School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067
1998

CENTRE OF LINGUISTICS & ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES
जवाहरलाल नेहरु विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110067 INDIA

21-07-98.

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled "**Emergent Patterns in British Romantic Painting and Poetry: An Interart Study**", submitted by **Ms. Nitoo Das**, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any other university.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

Prof. H.C. Narang
Chairperson

Prof. Kapil Kapoor
Supervisor

Gram : JAYENU Tel. : 5107676, 6167557/Ext. 2231 Telex : 031-73167 JNU IN Fax : 91-011-6165886

For Deuta.....
who taught me to love colours
and Ma .....
who taught me to love words

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After months of gruelling work, which involved not merely "intellectual" labour, but sheer physical stress and strain (braving the Delhi summer, commuting for hours together to reach out-of-the-way libraries ultimately to find nothing, photostating an ungodly number of pages, worrying about foot-notes and nightmares about the spell-checks on the computer which repeatedly showed "color" for "colour") I am ready with my first "original work".

Now is the time to thank the people who helped me through those months of self-discovery. Undoubtedly, the first person to name should be my supervisor, Dr. Kapil Kapoor, not merely to follow the dictum of an unwritten code of formality, but truly from my heart. For not only did he smilingly advice me through all my tantrums, complaints and even tears, but his insights regarding the problem of the representation of reality, which my dissertation is all about; made everything crystal clear. I will remain eternally grateful to him.

The staff and faculty of the Centre for Linguistics and English were always there to help me through all my travails. A special thanks goes to Rawatji and Ritaji who have been extremely sweet and helpful all these years that I have been in JNU.

I thank my room-mate Gulu, my class-mates, Shruti, and Jisha and my sister for always being there for me.

A special thanks to Sanjay whose presence in my life has made all the difference.

And ultimately, I thank my typist that irresponsible little imp, Harish Chand Upreti, who made me shiver and shake with worry and really fear for the safety of my dissertation. He has proved me wrong.

Am I happy about that!

Nitoo Das.

CONTENTS

Introduction:-

Any interart study, like the one I have in mind before I actually start my dissertation, would immediately give rise to abundant scepticism. Questions like the following could easily be raised from various quarters.

(I) Can periodized interart studies be investigated responsibly ?

(II) Can an artist`s oeuvre, which is necessarily individualistic, be studied with the emphasis on history?

(III) Can cogent conclusions be drawn from the study of such divergent forms of artistic expression where both concepts and methods differ so widely?

My attempt in this dissertation is to systematically answer these questions on the premise that in every historical period, the verbal and visual arts, as aesthetic assertions of the ascendant cultural designs of the day, are more than likely to have certain recurrent images and modes of expression in common.

But before I go into the actual justifications for the sort of interdisciplinary study that I wish to make, I think I ought to make it clear at the outset that I will be looking into the philosophical considerations behind the need to REPRESENT; because all Art is after all, a representation of Reality-a creation of images. The creative urge of the artist to make manifest his total understanding of an object, represent it in images, either verbal or visual, enlighten our (as receivers of the texts) own inner selves or touch our memories. Words and pictures are, ultimately, means by which we cognise the realities of different individual minds. Because in the final say, artistic manifestation is giving visible form to one`s experiential reality.

However, as I said before, one cannot ignore the societal pressures working on a creative mind. The contemporary trends of a certain era work and feed on each other and a sensitive artist cannot help but respond to such stimuli. For as Gertrude Stein said-

"The whole business of writing is the question of living in.... contemporariness. Each generation has to live in (it)... what I am trying to make you understand is that every contemporary writer has to find out what is the inner time-sense of his contemporaries. The writer, or painter... feels this thing more vibrantly, and he has a passionate need of putting it down. That is what creativeness does".[1]

Although I do not want to force any blanket formulations on a historical period, and infact will have to, of necessity, deal extensively on the many meanings of the word, "romantic", I will make a thorough and detailed study of both literary and art works before coming to any conclusion on the thematic and stylistic affinities that they may share. No other than Wordsworth himself had said in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads:-

" We are fond of tracing the resemblance between poetry and painting, and, accordingly, we call them sisters".[2]

The idea of painting and poetry as sister arts had long been in vogue. In the eighteenth century, paintings were conceived as "still pictures" and poems as "moving pictures" in the sense that they were mobile mental images. Obviously, the methods used are different for both media, but ultimately, as artistic creation, both are about transcribing one's thoughts and feelings, one's Reality onto the blank whiteness of the

---

1 Gertrude Stein, "How Writing is Written", in N.H.Pearson and W.R.Benet, The Oxford Anthology of American Literature, OUP, London, pp.1446-51.

2 Wordsworth Complete Poetical Works, (publs.) Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd., London, 1950, p. 701.

paper or the canvas. Infact Hegel, in his Lectures on Aesthetics (1835), now known as Philosophy of Fine Art divided art into three stages- (I) symbolic, (II) classic and (III) romantic. In the romantic, as in "modern music, painting, and (above all) poetry, spirit overflows and envelops matter in selfconscious fulness".[3]

In the eighteenth century, the notion of poetry as pictures (ut pictura poesis) gained in momentum. The French painter Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy in his De Arte Graphica had started his treatise thus-

"A poem is like a picture; so a picture ought to try to be like a poem... a picture is often called silent poetry; and poetry a speaking picture".[4]

A notable work in this direction which attempted to theorize, not on the resemblances ,but on the differences between poetry and painting, was the German thinker, G.E. Lessing's Laokoon (1766). His basic contention was that poetry worked in the medium of time, while painting worked in the medium of space. A medium of time can directly represent actions and events, but cannot show perfect objects or bodies. While contrarily, a medium of space can represent objects or bodies, but cannot show the actions of these bodies. But this was a superficial understanding of both the arts; an external, pictorial analogy; and J.G. Herder, the next major figure in German critical theory, was dissatisfied with the distinction. In his opinion, the physical arts (like painting, or sculpture) worked through a particular sense. Painting worked by the sense of sight. For him, poetry was a higher medium of expression because it worked without the help of an external sense organ, but directly through the soul.

---

3 Hegel, The Philosophy of Fine Art, vol. I, trans. F.P.B. Osmaston, London 1920, p.5.

4 trans. by Dryden. (1695).

The movement for an assimilation of the arts spread throughout Europe and, towards the beginning of the nineteenth century, also appropriated music into its fold. The English Romantic poets, repeatedly used the symbol of the lyre or the Aeolian harp as a symbol for artistic creation. A.W.Schlegel had written about the trend:-

"We should once more try to bring the arts closer together and seek for transitions from one to the other. Statues perhaps may quicken into pictures, pictures become poems, poems music, and (who knows?) in like manner stately church music may once more rise heavenward as a Cathedral".[5] *

A look into the cultural heredity of the artists and the significance of the received images will allow me to understand how traditional modes were reinterpreted to fit in with the new socio-political frame work. I will start work with the conviction that historicity is a weighty factor in artistic creation. Not as an old- fashioned category, but as a code shared by the best minds of the day, in all its complexities and contradictions which then become a condition of representation.

Although the work "Romantic" has almost lost its primary meaning because of the multiplicity of its connotations, I will attempt to find certain cohesive motifs. Chief among them being the repudiation of the strict rules of art in vogue during the eighteenth century for individualistic and imaginative creativity.

---

5 A.W.Schlegel, "Die Gemahlde", Athenaeum II (Berlin, 1799) Quoted in Irving Babbitt, The New Laokoon, Boston, 1910, pp. 124-5.

* For the historcial perspective on painting and poetry in this section I am grateful for the two chapters, "Addison and Lessing: Poetry as Pictures" (pp.252-282) and "German Ideas" (pp.363-383) in Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History. Oxford and IBH Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1984. Quote nos, 1,3,4,5,7,9 have been taken from these chapters.

My first chapter, will try to look at how the meaning of the word "Imagination" was revolutionised during the Romantic epoch. Coleridge in Chapter xiii of the Biographia Literaria had written:

"The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate... it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead".[6]

Blake's Imagination as "infinite and eternal" is the forerunner to Coleridge's "Secondary Imagination" and infact both can be seen as reacting against the Hartleyan school of passive perception which said that the mind was a "lazy looker-on on an external world".

This chapter will also analyse how imagination coloured the understanding of objects and transformed their material reality; how the paintings of Blake and Fuseli allowed full rein to the imaginative faculty. Turner's paintings will be seen as an endeavour to transcend reality and become landscapes of the mind and show how memories and experiences become the touchstones for Romantic creation.

My second chapter will look at the world of nature. Pope in his "Essay on Man" had written:-

---

6 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (Ch. Xiii) ed. J. Shawcross, OUP, London, 1973, pp 189-190

"First follow nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard which is still the same.
Unerring NATURE, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang`d and universal light".[7]

Nature in the eighteenth century had been a superior reality ,an unchanging and unchangeable universal order. I will check how this conception of nature was jettisoned during the Romantic period and how the mere prettiness of nature was no longer the right model for its representation. Wordsworth had written a poem titled- "Elegaic Stanzas suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont"- I quote some lines from it to prove how painting and poetry become almost symbiotic and also give an idea about the sort of nature that was deemed representable.

"This Work of thine I blame not, but commend;
This sea in anger, and that dismal shore.
Oh`tis a passionate work!-yet wise and well;
Well chosen in the spirit that is here;
That Hulk which labours in the deadly swell,
This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear!
And this huge castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The light`ning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves".[8]

---

7 Alexander Pope's Collected Poems, "Essay on Criticism", ed. Bonamy Dobree, Everyman's Library, London, p.60. (1969)

8 (publs.) Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd., London, 1950, p.456.

I will also see how the idea of the sublime had influenced the artists of the period.[9] and how nature also came to mean a real situation and a "real language".

My third chapter will look at the Romantic artist as an individual very much aware of his own sense of flux and mutation. I will look deeply into the cloud imagery of this period. The poet's obsessions are well known (Wordsworth's use of it as a symbol of his lonely wanderings, Shelley's identification with its powers of regeneration). In painting too, clouds became the subject of serious study-starting with Gainsborough, then on to Constable and Turner. They became believable natural phenomena, dark and pregnant with rain. The placement of the clouds in such a way as to block out the heavens (in a painting like Gainsborough's "Conrad Wood") stops any attempt of the viewer to look beyond the rural scene. I will prove how the enclosing of, or isolation of the human and natural helps to show the terrestrial as a self-sufficient presence. The third chapter will ultimately look at death, the logical consequence of change.

My fourth chapter entitled, "The Number of the Beast is 666" after a painting by Blake, will open with the problematics of reality; it will be about presences and absences. Horace had started his "Ars Poetica" thus-

"If in a picture you should see

---

9 Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like; these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we readily call these objects, sublime because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature." - Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement (1790) trans. J.H.Bernard, (2nd ed.), London, 1931, p.125.

A handsome woman with a fish`s tail,
Or limbs of beasts of the most diff`rent kinds
Cover`d with feathers of all sorts of birds,
Would you not laugh, and think the painter mad?1[10]

History had indeed called Blake mad. But his painting is no laughing matter. I will use it to see the changes in the idea of the Christian God and the restructuring of classical myths. Although I will not make any definite efforts to talk about religion or religious movements during this period, I will see the new aesthetic as creeping towards a certain secularization. The feeling of a superior power will however be shown in the recurring leit-motif of the rainbow in both painting and poetry and how it will come to symbolise the colours of poetry and the poetry of colours.

---

10 Quoted in Canonical Texts of English Literary Criticism, ed. K.Kapoor and R.Kapoor, Academic Foundation, New Delhi. p.106. 1995.

CHAPTER-I

"Life is a vision shadowy of truth..."

-Coleridge, "Religious Musings."

The first and most obvious problem that confronted me as I began my dissertation, was the arbitrariness of nomenclature. No sooner did I start my research that the problematics of definition presented itself. What after all, did I, or everybody else for that matter, mean by the term "Romantic"? Where did the "Romantic" in painting or poetry reside? Meticulous readings only clarified the realisation that the word "romantic" had generously been used by various literary critics and historians to signify something that is "not-classical." It was tempting to think with Arthur O. Lovejoy that "the word `romantic' has come to mean so many things that by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign." [1]He continues in the same essay :

"One of the few things certain about Romanticism is that the name of it offers one of the most complicated, fascinating and instructive of all problems in semantics. It is in short, a part of the task of the historian of ideas, when he applies himself to the study of the thing or things called Romanticism, to render it if possible psychologically intelligible how such manifold and discrepant phenomena have all come to receive one name." [2]

But we cannot even imagine abolishing the term altogether either. As Mario Praz writes in his Introduction to The Romantic Agony.

"The epithet `romantic' and the antithetical terms `classic' and `romantic' are approximate labels which have long been in use. The philosopher solemnly refuses to allow them, exorcising them with unerring logic, but they creep quietly in again and again, always obtruding themselves, elusive, tiresome, indispensable, the grammarian

---

1 Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms", from PMLA, xxxix, 1924, quoted in Romanticism :Points of View, ed. R.G. Gleckner & G.E.Enscoe, Prentice Hall, Inc. Eaglewood, New Jersey, 1964, p.45.

2 Ibid. P.46.

attempts to give them their proper status, their rank and fixed definition, but in spite of all his laborious efforts he discovers that he had been treating shadows as though they were solid substance."[3]

So even though we may sometimes baulk like Lovejoy at the seeming clumsiness of defining "Romanticism", the inevitability, and maybe even the indispensability of the term "creeps" upon us time and again. There must be a reason for its omnipresence.

In the nineteenth century itself, eminent German thinkers were deeply involved in defining the differences between "classicism" and "romanticism". A.W.Schlegel in his first lecture on Dramatic Art and Literature (1808) had talked against the elitism of the neo-classical.

"The groundwork of human nature is no doubt everywhere the same; but in all our investigations, we may observe that throughout the whole range of nature, there is no elementary power so simple but that is capable of dividing and diverging into opposite directions. The whole play of vital motion hinges on harmony and contrast. Why, then, should not this phenomenon recur on a grander scale in the history of man? In this idea we have perhaps discovered the true key to the ancient and modern history of poetry and the fine arts."

Those who followed this idea gave "to the peculiar spirit of `modern' art, as contrasted with the antique' or `classical,' the name of `romantic'."[4]

---

3 Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson, Oxford Paperbacks, London & New York, 1970, p.1.

4 A.W.Schlegel, A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans. John Black & A.J.W.Morrison, London 1846, P.21. quoted in Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism : A Short History, Oxford & IBH India, 1984, p.367.

Goethe himself while speaking against the French Romantics had said :

"I call the classic `healthy', the romantic `sickly', ...Most modern productions are romantic, not because they are new but because they are weak, morbid and sickly; and the antique is classic, not because it is old, but because it is strong, fresh, joyous and healthy." [5]

But he follows it up by another qualifying statement about himself :

"The idea of the distinction between classical and romantic poetry, which is now spread over the whole world, and occasions so many quarrels and divisions, came originally from Schiller and myself. I laid down the maxim of objective treatment in poetry, and would allow no other, but Schiller, who worked quite in the subjective way, deemed his own fashion the right one, and to defend himself against me, wrote the treatise upon Naive and Sentimental Poetry. He proved to me that I myself against my will, was romantic..."[6]

Historically speaking, this was the starting point of the long process of definition. And as is quite obvious, the "romantic' was seen as being invested with certain qualities. But what were these qualities and how were they to be recognised as "Romantic"?

René Wellek, while refuting Lovejoy's critique of the term, states that period terms are not "arbitrary linguistic labels" nor "metaphysical entities," but names for "systematic norms which dominate literature at a specific time in the historical process.' He defends his position thus :

---

5 Goethe, Conversations, April 2, 1829 trans. John Oxenford, quoted in Wimsatt & Brooks, p.368.

6 Ibid. p. 369.

"If we examine the characteristics of the actual literature which called itself or was called "romantic",... we find... the same conceptions of poetry and of the workings and nature of poetic imagination, the same conception of nature and its relation to man, and basically the same poetic style, with a use of imagery, symbolism and myth which is clearly distinct from that of eighteenth century Neo-classicism. This conclusion might be strengthened or modified by attention to other frequently discussed elements: subjectivism, medievalism, folklore etc. But the following three criteria should be particularly convincing, since each is central for one aspect of the practice of literature: imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style."[7]

For the purposes of this chapter, I shall take up the first criterion- "imagination for the view of poetry" and engage its usefulness for the visual arts as well. It also becomes absolutely necessary to understand the meaning of the word "Imagination" when applied to the Romantic mode in poetry and painting. If we look at the time frame immediately preceding this period, we can see that-.

"In the first half of the eighteenth century life was conducted, on the whole, within a framework which was accepted as fixed and final. Fixities and definites were the order of the day : in society, the appointed hierarchy; in religion, the establishment, in Nature, the admirable order with its Chain of Being and its gravitational nexus which was mirrored in humanity by `self love and social;' in art, the rules and the proprieties."[8]

It was against such a tyrannical system that we find Blake voicing his violent and spontaneous protest. Science, according to him was a cruel and evil power which

---

7 Rene Wellek, "The Concept of `Romanticism' in Literary History," from Comparative Literature, I, 1949, quoted in Romanticism: Points of View, p. 201.

8 Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies, Chatto and Windus, London, p.24.

destroys the primordial unity that only imagination can restore. Imagination for him was to move away from the fetters imposed by comtemporary society. In "Jerusalem" he says:

> "I must create a System or be enslaved by another Man's.
> I will not Reason and Compare : my business is to create."[9]

And create he does. For the purposes of my dissertation, Blake offers a unique opportunity to study the similiarities and contrasts in the same creative artist. Here it would seem we may find ideal conditions undisturbed by the differences in a painter of a poet which normally hinders such an investisation.

So what does Blake mean when he talks about the Imagination? To him the "world of imagination is the world of eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the vegetated body. The world of Imagaination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal."[10]

One can say quite confidently that this is the same Hartleyan school of passive perception that Coleridge reacts against which had said that the mind was a lazy looker on an external world. This presuposes a vegetative imagination, infact no imagination at all but a fixed, uncreative mind.

In A Descriptive Catalogue, Blake wrote :

"A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing: they are organised and minutely articulated beyond all that the

---

9 Blake Complete Writing, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p.629.

10 Ibid. p.605. ("A Vision of the Lost Judgement").

mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all...."[11]

So, imagination is something that transforms ordinary nature into something that the creative poet or painter envisions within his own mind. The mind is not passive and does not accept what is seen as the ultimate real. As Coleridge said :

"To emancipate the mind from the despotism of the eye is the first step towards the emancipation from the influences and intrusions of the senses, sensations, and passions generally."[12]

I believe that Coleridge here wants to legitimise the primacy of the cognitive faculties while imaginatively reconstructing reality. Imagination after all, works to change the "brazen" world of nature and make it "golden" as Sidney had expressed in his Apologie so long ago. In fact in a letter to Poole, Coleridge talks of the subjugation of "the doctrine of association as taught by Hartley," and continues that "any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system."[13]

What then is true? Imaginative truth is the wish
"for something loftier, more adorned
Than is the common aspect, daily garb
Of human life".[14]

---

11 Ibid. p.576. (A Desciptive Catalogue).

12 Coleridge on Logic and Learning, quoted in The Philosophical Lectures, ed. Kathleen Coburn, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950, p.49.

13 Coleridge, Letter to Poole, March 1801, quoted in Nineteenth Century Studies, p.14.

14 The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd. London. 1950, P.498.

Here then occurs the problem of transcribing the mental image into a verbal or visual one. Plato had talked about image-making (all Art or representations of reality being a creating of images) as a mimetic art far removed from Truth (Republic, x). So can an image depict the full and complete reality of an object? He replies in the negative and says that if it expressed the entire reality all the time, it would no longer be an image. He continues, "The imitator knows nothing about the thing he imitates... imitation is a form of play not to be taken seriously". [15]

An image can be called an image only when "something is added or subtracted". Plato divided all images into "likenesses" and "semblances" and concluded that these were all "corruptions of the mind ."(Republic.x) In the Sophist, Plato gives the example of the untruth used by Phidias, the sculptor, while creating enormous statues. He makes the upper part of the body larger so as to make it seem real.

"So artists, leaving the truth to take care of itself, do in fact put into images they make, not the real proportions, but those that will appear beautiful."

"This semblance of fantasia that the artist creates is a class that baffles... This "appearing" or "seeming" and the saying of something which yet is not true... Falsehoods have a real existence." [16]

Aristotle's refutation of Plato and his reinterpretation of "mimesis" to mean representing reality as it ought to be was the thread that was picked up by the Western literary tradition. So imagination was not "falsehood", nor a distortion of reality, but an ideal, a superior image or likeness of nature. Aristotle, while talking about history and poetry says: the historian "describes the thing that has been, and the (poet) a kind of

---

15 Plato, (Republic) : The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Hamilton and Cairn, Pantheon Books, New York, 1964, p.827.

16 Ibid., pp.979.

thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophical and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singluars."[17]

Continuing in the same vein, Wordsworth writes in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads."

'Aristotle has said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so. Its object is truth, not individual and local, but general and operative... Truth which is its testimony."[18]

The world of imagination that the artist creates, be it verbal or visual, may be at a remove from actual perceptible, quantifiable reality: but this itself does not make it a "falsehood". Beacuse nature as it is, is essentially cold, drab and lifeless unless it is coloured by the powers of the active, imaginative mind.

As Blake wrote: "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green Thing that stands in the way."[19]

In Modern Painters, Ruskin had said that-

"There is in every word set down by the imaginative mind an awful undercurrent of meaning, and evidence and shadow upon it of the deep places out of which it has come. It is often obscure, often half-told; for he who wrote it, in his clear seeing of the things beneath, may have been impatient of detailed interpretation, for if we choose to dwell upon it and trace it, it will lead us always securely back to that

---

17 Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Ingram Bywater, Preface by Gilbert Murray,Oxford Clarendon Press. 1988, p.43.

18 The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, publ. Ward, Lock and Co. 1950, p. 702.

19 Blake, Letter to Dr.John Trusler : Keynes, p.793.

metropolis of the soul's dominion from which we may follow out all the ways and tracks to its farthest coasts."[20]

The psyche of the individual artist came to be of supreme importance during the Romantic period. The artist was a seer, someone who could comprehend the mysteries of life. It was the work of the artist to unravel the unknown in the known; to show to the world the invisible order beyond the visible.

Throughout his life, Blake searched for a symbolic expresion of his mystical philosophy. And inspite of his unconventional manner, he a was a thoroughly "religious" man; although his religion was an intensely personal one. The Prometheus myth which is so important to Romanticism can be equated to some extent with "Blake's Satan, a spirit of evil it is true, but one whole greatest attibrute in energy, an essential component in the human psyche, and one from which stems revolution."[21]

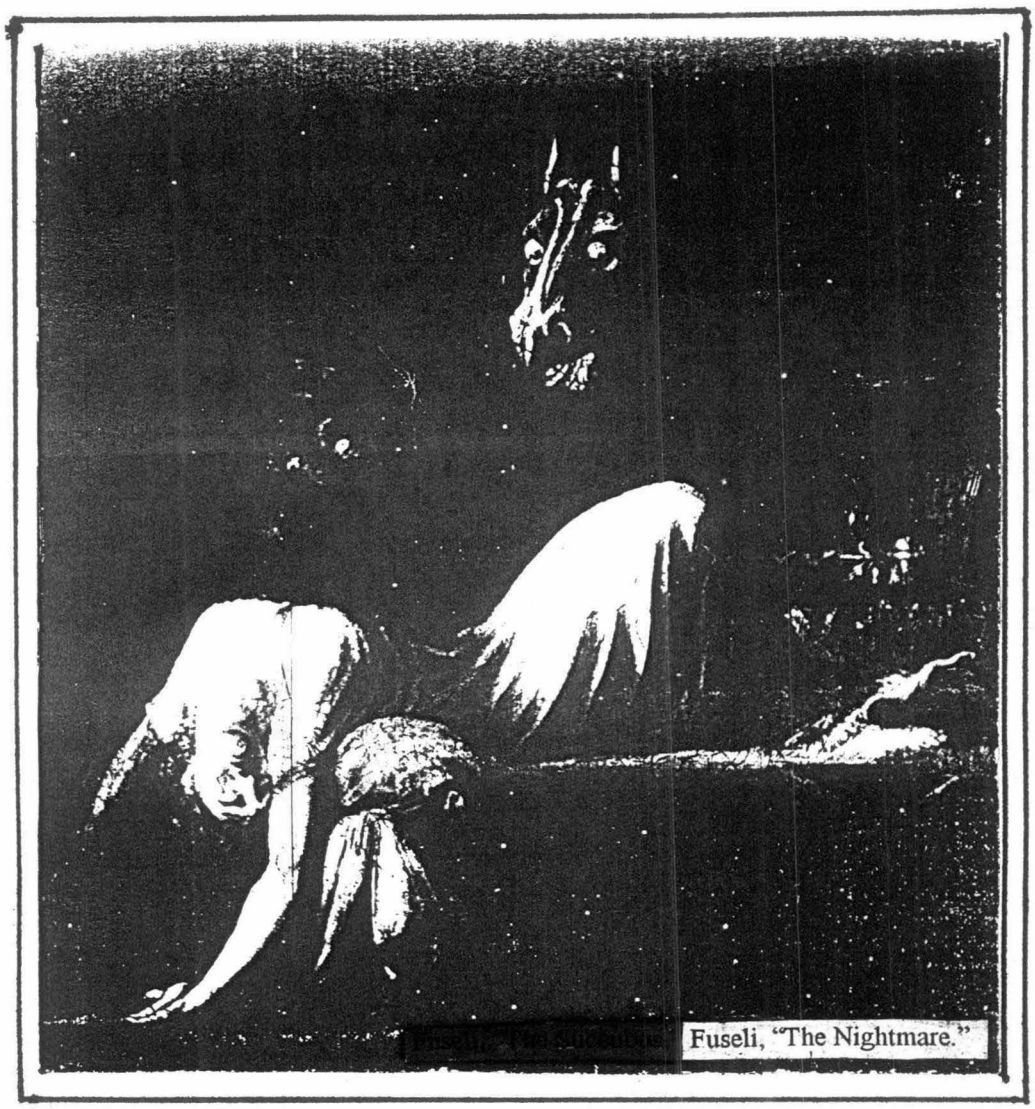
But the streak of irreverence towards religion which runs throughout Romanticism cannot be found distinctly in Blake. Infact in his paintings, we see an almost gothic preoccuption with it. He could never had said like Swinburne did of "the Supreme evil, God".[22] Blake's is a subtler interpretation, René Wellek says, in the same essay quoted earlier that, although the Romantic poets were against the mechanical world of the eighteenth century, Wordsworth admires and accepts Newton's understanding of the universe. Blake stands violently apart from this. He says, "May god us keep/from single Vision and Newton's Sleep!" And he does not agree with the Romantic deification of nature. Commenting on Wordworth's

---

20 Ruskin, Modern Painters. Vol.III, Ch. V, quoted in T.E.Hulme's "Romanticism and Classicism" from Speculation's, 2nd ed. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.1936. P.120.

21 Raymond Lister, British Romantic Art, Bell Books, London, 1973, P.13.

22 Swinburne Complete Works (eds.) Sir E.Gosse and T.J.Wise. OUP, London, 1927, p.47.



Fuseli, "The Nightmare."

"Excursion" he says, "you shall not bring me to believe such fitting and fitted." To Blake, the Fall of Man and the creation of Nature were simultaneous events with synonymous consequences. In the golden age of the future, nature and man will be restored to their former glory. [23]

The Gothic Spirit which found expression in literature, archietecture and painting had a profound connection with Romanticism. Gothic novels like The Monk by M.G.Lewis, The Mysteries of Udolpho by Mrs. Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus, were widely read and discussed.

The material from gothic literature much affected painting and the works of John Henry Fuseli are full of such detailed horrors. Paintings like "the Nightmare," "The Succubus" and even superficially innocent ones like, the "Nursery of Shakespeare" have an air of uncanny earieness about them. Realistically speaking, he may be cirticised for "falsehoods" in depicting nature. But the truth of the inner self, the imagination, was more important for the Romantics.

While talking of such matters, it is worthwhile to keep Walter Pater in mind. He had said :

"It is the addition of strangeness that constitutes the romantic character in art....it is the addition of curiosity to the desire of beauty that constitutes the Romantic temper.... the essential elements, then of the Romantic spirit are curisoity and the love of beauty." [24]

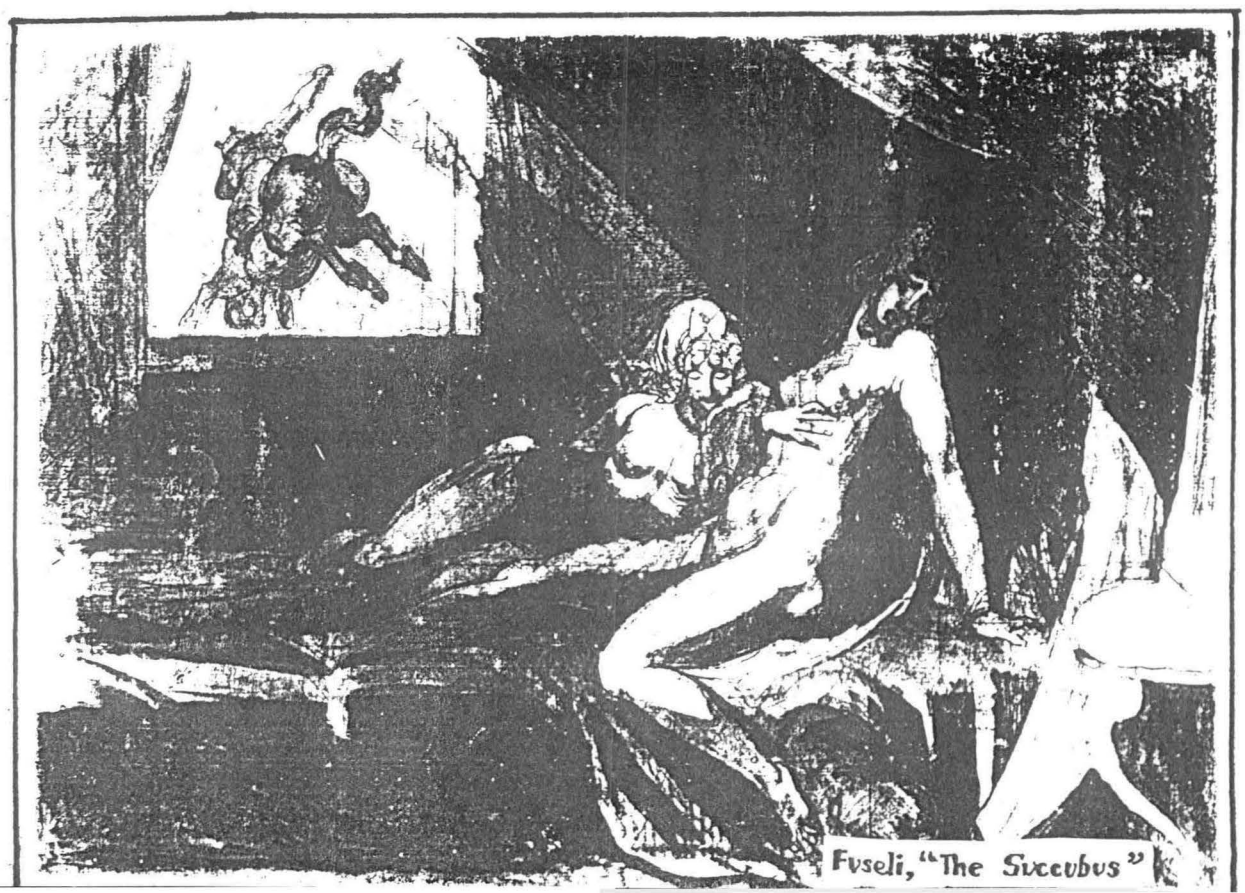
There are no barriers that the Romantic artist cannot transcend. For the poet, Shelley has written in his A Defence of Poetry.

---

23 The ideas and quotations in this paragraph were taken from Rene Wellek's, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History".

24 Walter Pater, "Postscript" from Appreciations, quoted in Points of View,P.3.

Fuseli, "Nursery of Shakespeare."



Fuseli, "The Succubus"

"(they) are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion... A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one."[25]

Shelley spoke for the poet but the Romantic view of the painter is not much different. They tried to delve into the deepest recesses of the human mind and see everything not as disparate but as one.

As Blake said, "Every minute particular is Holy"[26] and again in a poem we see the same view expressed.

> "To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in a hour."[27] ("Auguries of Innocence")

In the concentration and detail of thought than can seen in his line engravings we are reminded of the following line from his "Vision of the Last Judgement."

"General knowledge is Remote Knowledge; it is in particulars that Wisdom consists and Happiness too."[28]

---

25 Shelley, Defence of Poetry, from Romanticism: An Anthology, (ed.) Duncan Wu, Blackwell Anthologies, 1994, p.960.

26 Blake, "Jerusalem", Keynes, p.708.

27 Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," Keynes, p.431.

28 Ibid., p.611.

John Constable had understood this and although he had often been criticised for painting the same subjects again and again, he knew that the experience underlying one painting was totally at variance from another. As he said himself:

"The world is wide; no two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of the world; and the genuine productions of art, like those of nature, are all distinct from each other."[29]

It has been recorded that while Blake was once looking through one of Constable's sketch books he said of a drawing of trees:

"Why this is not drawing, but inspiration."[30]

To Constable, trees were not just "green things" which stood in the way. Every object of nature was valuable when it got imbued by the imagination of the Romantic artist. It was the only method through which the truth of nature could be understood. Every "particular" is given the utmost significance so that they become part of a unifying whole. As Wordsworth writes in "The Prelude" Book III.

"To every natural form, rock, friut or flower
Even the coarse stones that cover the highway
I gave a moral life."[31]

It was necessary for the Romantic artist to see everything not as disparate and discrete, but as one. Constable criticises the French art students thus:

---

29 Carlos Peacock, John Constable, the Man and his Work, John Baker Publishers Ltd., London, 1971, p.43.

30 Ibid. P.43.

31 Poetical Works. P.481.

"They make painful studies of individual articles- leaves, rocks, stones, trees, etc. Singly- so that they look cut out without belonging to the whole-and they neglect the "look of nature altogether, under its various changes."[32]

The objection is not about the studies themselves but that they do not gel or coalesce into a unified whole, they remain disparate, divided.

I had earlier talked about the criticisms levelled against Constable for painting the same subject repeatedly, the most frequent being the East Anglian landscape. But he drew what he knew best. The experiences and memories of his childhood moulded his style and choice of subjects. He himself said.

"Painting is with me but another word for feeling, and I associate my `careless boyhood' with all that lies on the banks of the Stour; those scenes made me a painter, and I am grateful; that is, I had often thought of pictures of them before I ever touched a pencil."[33]

During the Romantic period, memories of childhood came to acquire profound importance. In almost Freudian terms we see the adult artist's subconscious creating and recreating the imprints or impressions that had been made on the mind of the young child.

In Hannah More's book Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education published in 1799, she had insisted that children were of "a corrupt nature and evil dispositions".[34] Sunday school teachers during this period were asked to "tame the

---

32 Carlos Peacock p.47.

33 Constable- Letter to John Fisher, 23 Oct. 1821, quoted in Romanticism: an Anthology, p. 635

34 Quoted in Changing Perspectives in Literature & the Visual Arts. By Murray Roston, Princeton University Press, 1984, p.390.

ferocity of (the childrens') unsubdued passions- to repress the excessive rudeness of their manners- to chasten the disgusting and demoralizing obscenity of their language- to subdue the stubborn rebellion of their wills."[35]

Almost simultaneously, however, Blake and Wordsworth's poetry links the child not with evil, but the divine. In the "Prelude", Book xi, Wordsworth writies:

"That from thyself it is that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Come back upon me from the dawn almost
Of life: the hiding places of my power
Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
May scarcely see at all; and I would give
While yet we may, as far as words can give.
A substance and a life to what I feel
I would enshrine the spirit of the past
For future restoration."[36] (331-342).

The "spirit of the past" is to be imaginatively restored in words as well as colours. It is the same past that Constable seems to evoke in his paintings. His emotional experiences in childhood made him love "every stile and stump, every lane in the village, so deep rooted (were) early impressions."[37]

But childhood was not always something happy and optimistic, fears and terrors were of equal significance. In "Ode to Intimations of Immortality" Wordsworth makes this clear:

---

35 Ibid., p.390.

36 Poetical Works of Wordsworth, p.544.

37 Quoted in Roston, Changing Perspectives, p. 391.

"Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise,
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing suprised-
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may.[38]
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet master-light of all our seeing.... (143-156)

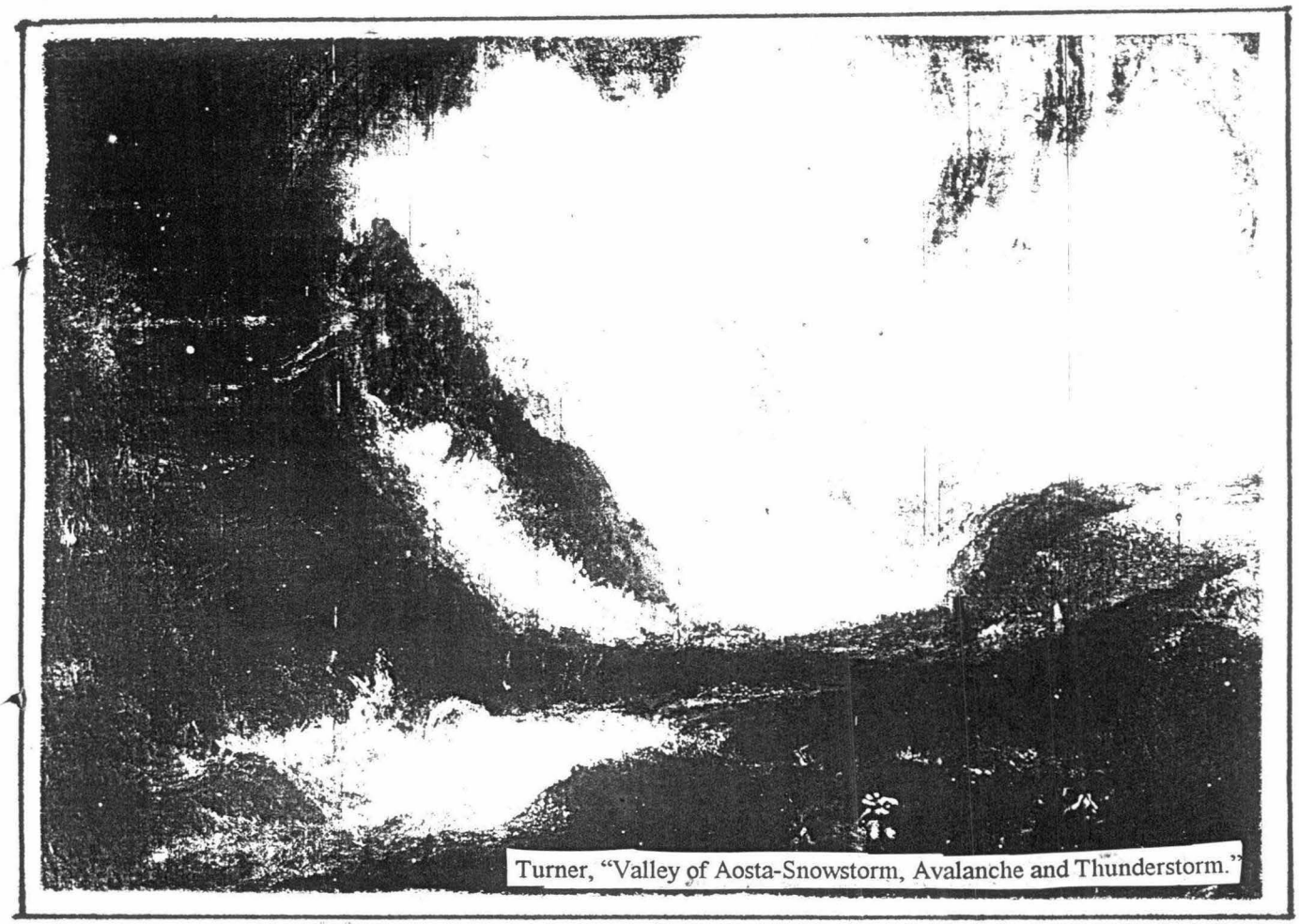
Early trumatic experiences in an artist's life are imaginatively reconstructed and invested with the gleam of a mental image. Byron, in Canto three of "Child Harold" talks of the same process.

"He who, grown aged in this world of woe...
so that no wonder waits him...
he can tell
Why thought seeks refuge in lone caves, yet rife.
With airy images, and shapes which dwell
Still unimpaired, though old, in the soul's haunted cell."[39] (stanza 5)

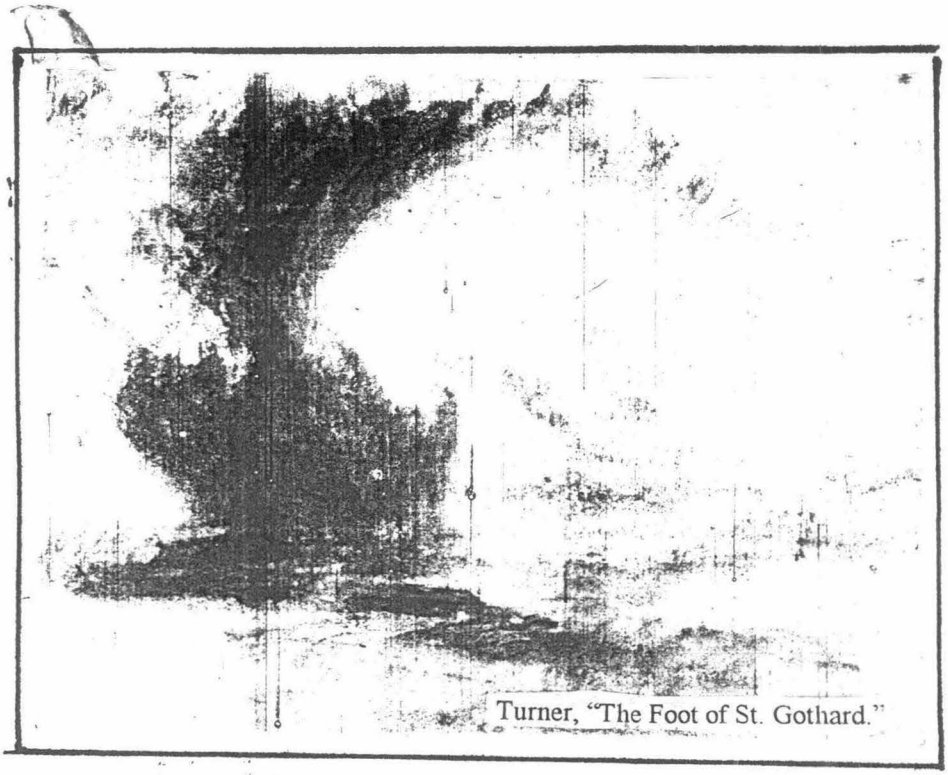
The present of the aging artist can be transcended by searching in the "lone caves" and the "haunted cell" of memory. As Ruskin said in the passage quoted earlier- In every thing created by the "imaginative mind" there is "an awful undercurrent of meaning, and evidence and shadow upon it of the deep places out of which it has

38 Poetical Works, p.465.

39 The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p.210.



Turner, "Valley of Aosta-Snowstorm, Avalanche and Thunderstorm."



Turner, "The Foot of St. Gothard."

come." These "deep places" are the crucibles of memory, the impressions of experiences which illuminate an artist's imagination.

J.M.W. Turner's paintings like the "Valley of Aosta-Snowstorm, Avalanche and Thunderstorm" and "The Foot of St. Gothard" do not look like actual places but like numinous mindscapes-like representations of those "shadowy recollections" of life. The swirling violence of the "Valley of Aosta" seems to be a manifestation of the unconscious, colours of the inner self. The hazy mistiness and the sudden dark reds and browns over the whiteness of tumbling snow reminds one of what Coleridge had said in the 13th Chapter of the Biographia Literaria.

"What I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while everywhere shadows were deepened into substances."[40]

It is the artistic representation of nature which rekindles the dead earth. Coleridge, when he had talked about Wordsworth in the Biographia Literaria, had said in admiration.

"It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world, around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre-had dried up the sparkle and the dewdrops."[41]

The artist's vision may be, in Plato's terms, "false", removed from reality, but it is this attempt alone, the attempt to transcribe the purity of the mental image into

---

40 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Ch.xiii, ed. By J. Shawcross, London, Oxford University Press, 1973. p.187.

41 Ibid. p.53.

words or colours which makes artistic creation worthwhile. Therefore, Wordsworth in the final lines of the "Prelude", can write with supreme assurance about the imaginative capability of the human mind: "The mind of man," he writes, can itself become-

> "A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
> On which he dwells..."[42] (xii,446-448).

---

42 Poetical Works., p.562.

CHAPTER - II

"Light...dews...breezes...bloom...and...freshness."

-John Constable

The picturesque was a popular mode of painting and poetry which started from the beginning of the eighteenth century and continued for the next hundred years or so. The term itself was derived from the Italian word, "pittoresco" which meant, "in the style of painters". It was about the depiction of nature in all its dulcet perfection. Discordance was to be subtracted from the final artistic creation.

It was more or less a purely English phenomenon and it caused quite a few poets and painters to make tours in the English country side. It also led to the publication of such works as Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1756) and William Gilpin's Tours The Wye(1782), The Lakes (1789) and The Highlands (1800).

Gilpin's theories of the picturesque depended mostly upon his own preference and his childhood memories of a Cumbrian landscape.He was all for remodelling nature according to what he felt was right. In his Wye Tour he wrote:

"Nature is always great in design, but unequal in composition. She is an admirable colourist , and can harmonize her *tints* with infinite variety and inimitable beauty, but is seldom so correct in composition as to produce an harmonious whole. Either the foreground, or the background, is disproportioned; or some awkward line runs across the piece, or a tree is ill placed; or something or other is not exactly as it should be."[1] The artist had complete freedom in rearranging the landscape so that the final outcome was picturesque and pleasing to the eye.

---

1 William Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales & C. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty made in the Summer of Year, 1770, London 1782, Quoted in:William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism; Jonathan Wordsworth, Michael C. Jaye, & Robert Woof. Rutgers University Press,New Brunswick and London, 1987, p.88.

"Trees he may generally plant ," Gilpin wrote in the Lakes Tour," or remove, at pleasure. If a withered stump suit the form of his landscape better than the spreading oak which he finds in nature, he may make the exchange... He may pull up a piece of awkward paling; he may throw down a cottage; he may even turn the course of a road, or a river, a few yards on this side or that."[2]

Burke's theory of the sublime was,however, more "Romantic" than that of Gilpin. While Gilpin generally talked of external effects, Burke looked at the internal. According to him, nature which aroused fear or awe was conducive to the sublime in Art. In his The Sublime and the Beautiful he wrote:

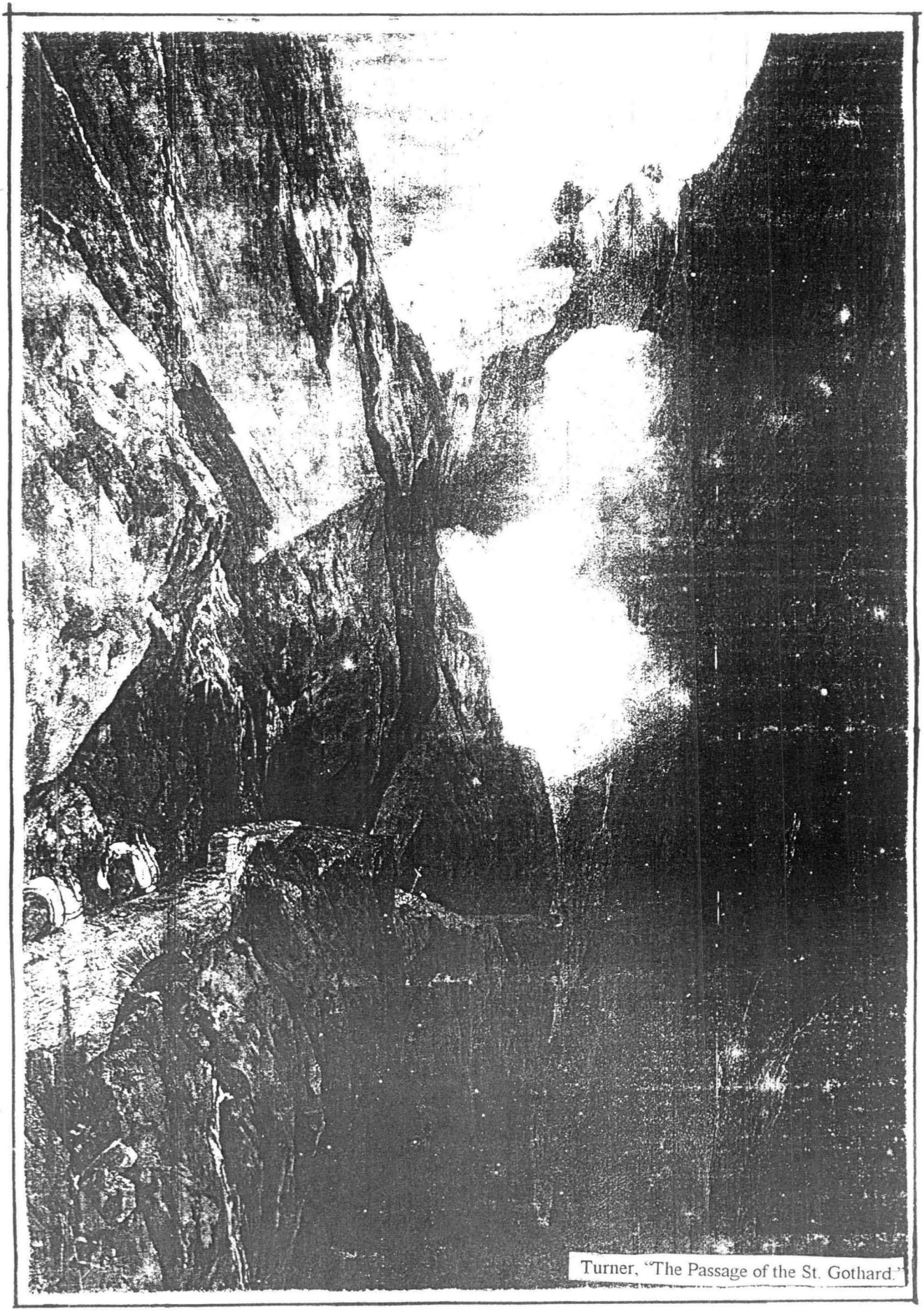
"No passion so effectually robs the mind of its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous... indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime."[3]

Infact Gilpin definition of sublimity was not very different from Burke's. Writing,as he did, almost twenty years after Burke, he was no doubt influenced like many others of his time by the novel ideas incorporated in The Sublime and the Beautiful. In the Lakes Tour he writes:

---

2 Ibid, p.88.

3 Edmund Burke, A Philosophical enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1756). Quoted in British Romantic Art, Raymond Lister, Bell Books, London, 1973, pp.35, 36.



Turner, "The Passage of the St. Gothard."

"No tame country however beautiful, can distend the mind like this awful and majestic scenery. The wild sallies of untutored genius often strike the imagination more than the most correct effusions of cultivated parts."[4]

The merely picturesque gradually gave way to the Romantic. In a footnote to the poem " Descriptive Sketches" (1793) Wordsworth had written.

"I had once given to these sketches the title of "Picturesque", but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting, would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impassive imaginations."[5]

The Alps required a vocabulary of the Burkean sublime. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (1816) incorporates a sense of the infinite.

"Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,

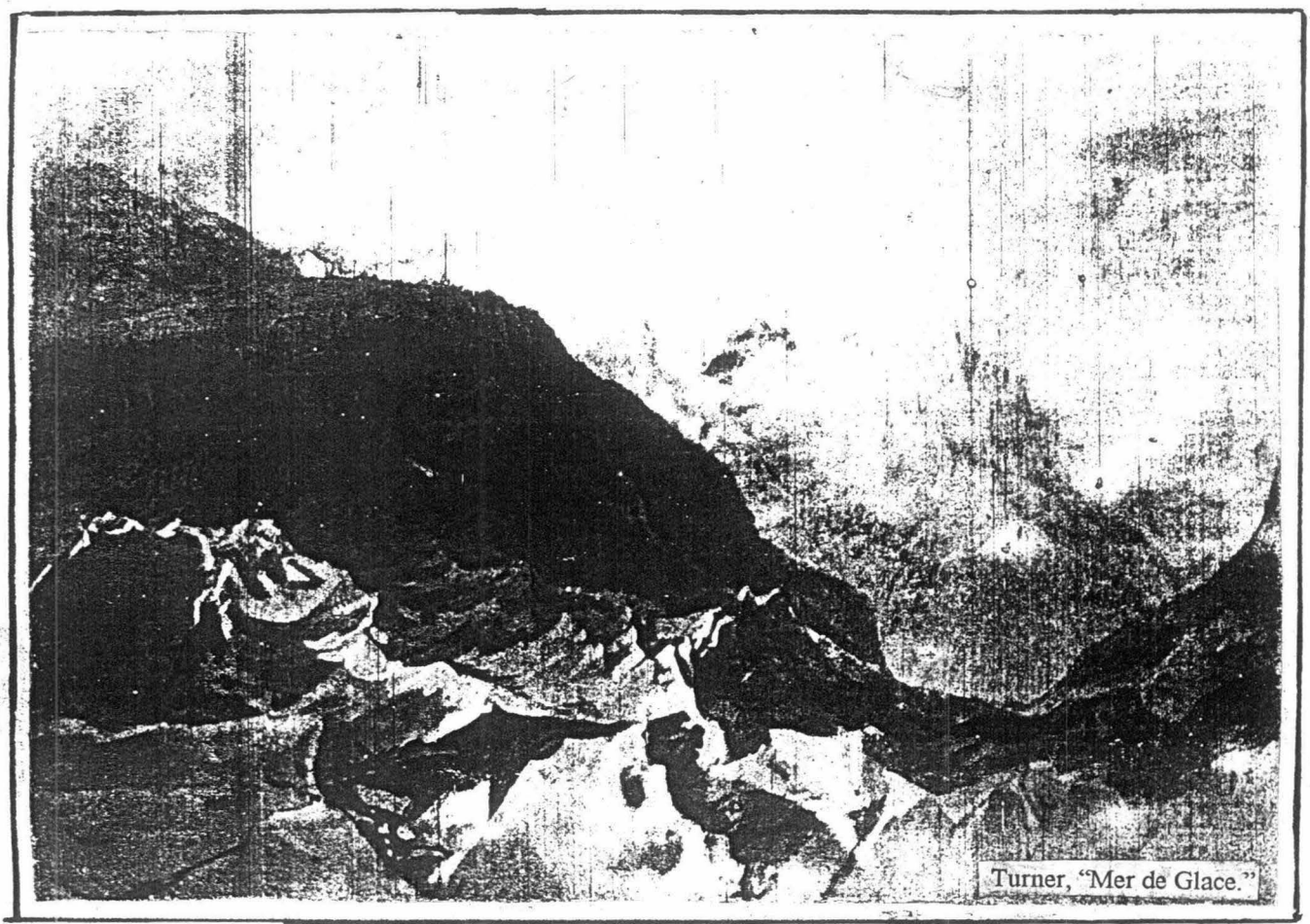
Mont Blanc appears, still, snowy, and serene" (60-61)

Later he asks a question to the same mountain -

---

4 William Wordsworth & the Age of English Romanticism, pp.89, 90.

5 The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, publs.. Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd, 1950, p.8.



Turner, "Mer de Glace."

"And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind 's imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy?"[6](142-144)

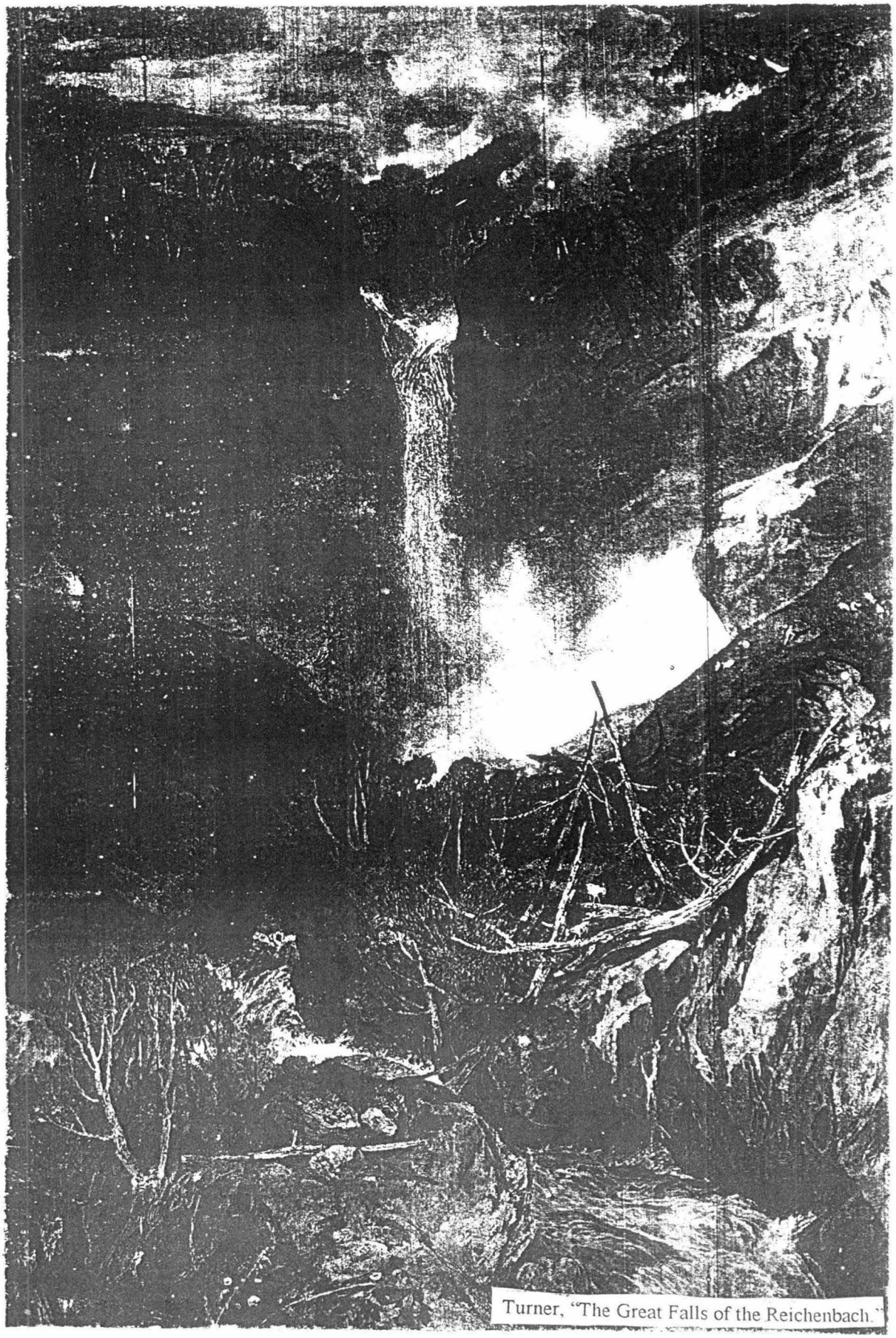
Mountains came to be associated with the unreachable and the infinite. Their serene remoteness, their sheer massiveness and the underlying sense of fear and danger tinged all representations of mountains with sublime grandeur. Earlier,Mrs. Ann Radcliffe had written in The Mysteries of Udolpho about the Pyrenees:

"...the road had constantly ascended, conducting the travellers into the higher regions of the air, where immense glaciers exhibited their frozen horrors, and eternal snow whitened the summits of the mountains. They... looked over dark forests of fir, and precipices where human foot had never wandered, into the glen so deep, that the thunder of the torrent , which was seen to foam along the bottom, was scarcely heard to murmur. Over these crags rose others of stupendous height, and fantastic shape, some shooting into cones, others impending far over their base, in huge masses of granite, along whose broken ridges was often lodged a weight of snow, that trembling even to the vibration of sound, threatened to bear destruction in its course to the vale. Around, on every side, far as the eye could penetrate, were seen only forms of grandeur-the long perspective of mountain tops, tinged with ethereal blue, or white with snow; vallies of ice, and forests of gloomy fir... They had no words to express the sublime emotions they felt.[7]

---

6 Complete Poems of Shelley, G. Matthews & K. Everest vol.I, Longman, London & NY, p.532.

7 Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho quoted in British Romantic Art, pp.36, 37.



Turner, "The Great Falls of the Reichenbach."

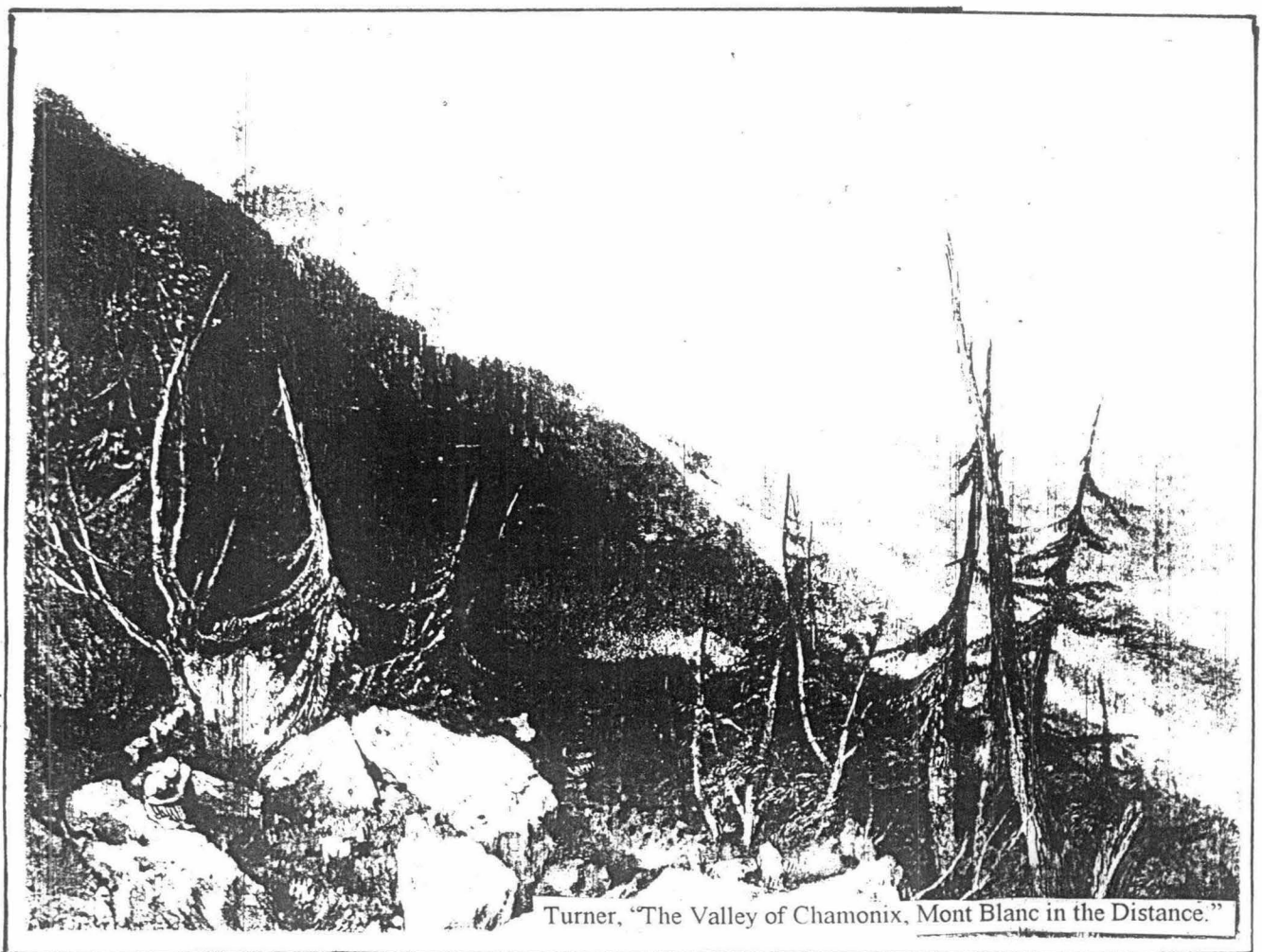
The silence when confronted with a "sense of God" is also seen in the reverberating silences of Turner's paintings on the same subject. Paintings like "The Passage of the St. Gothard","The Great falls of the Reichenbach", "Mer de Glace" and The Valley of Chamonix" also inspire a sense of awe. It seems as if the artist is worshipping "The Invisible alone". The sheer vastness and the immensity of the mountains make them magnificent . And this magnificence arises not from prettiness or sweet perfection but from the ruggedness, the cragginess and the irregularity*. Comparable to this movement in the visual arts where nature was deemed to be the original source of inspiration, was the movement in poetry initiated by Wordsworth.

Constable had written in his English Landscape Scenery (1833) "In art, as in literature, there are two modes by which men endeavour to attain the same end, and seek distinction. In the one, the artist, intent only on the study of departed excellence, or on what others have accomplished becomes an imitator of their works, or he selects and combines their various beauties; in the other he seeks perfection as its PRIVITIVE SOURCE, NATURE.[8]

---

* While referring to his introduction to Wordsworth's poetry, J.S.Mill had written in his Autobiography A Crisis in My Mental History, "In this power of rural beauty over me, there was a foundation laid for taking pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry - the more so, as his scenery lies chiefly among mountains, which . . were my ideal of natural beauty."

8 John Constable, Various Subjects of Landscape, Characteristic of English scenery, Principally Intended to mark the Phenomena of the Chiaroscuro of Nature; London, 1833 Quoted in Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism, p.115.



Turner, "The Valley of Chamonix, Mont Blanc in the Distance."

In the same manner , Wordsworth looked towards nature to give him all the trappings of his poetry. He tried to bring in the very "language of men" and shunned inane or archaic diction . In the 1800 and 1802 editions of the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads[9] he puts down clearly his views about culling directly from nature . He was glad of the fact that he had written little of what is usually called "poetic diction." He wanted to depict the "reality" of the language that men used in his poetry. Wordsworth clearly states his intention of "choosing incidents and situations from real life" and to delineate them in "a selection of langauge really used by men." A few paragraphs later it becomes a matter of "what is really important to men" and the shunning of poetic diction "to bring my language near to the language of men."

In the 1850 text it is categorically repeated that he would use "a selection of the language really spoken by men," " That which is uttered by men in real life ." All men are seen, as sharing the same human knowledge and the same emotions and sensations. People from a more humble station in life or those still strongly connected to the rural were deduced to speak a language essentially poetic "... because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived, and because from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple unadorned expression. Accordingly, such langauage, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than which is frequently substituted for it by poets." (1802)

So Wordsworth, like Constable said, did not study and imitate "departed excellence" in poetry but tried to find a new idiom for himself. He went to the "primitive source" of nature and used what he found there to the best of his advantage. But acceptance for his type of

---

[9] The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, pp.697-729.

writing was slow in coming. In the year 1800, Wordsworth wrote a letter to the critic John Wilson when he and his circle of friends expressed deep distaste for "The Idiot Boy".

"Please whom? or what? I answer human nature as it has been and ever will be. But , where are we to find the best measure of this ? I answer from within by stripping our own hearts maked, and by looking out of ourselves towards men who lead the simplest lives according to nature, men who have never known false refinements".

"It is not enough for me as a Poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men do sympathise with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men may sympathise with, and such as there is a reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathise with."[10]

In Wordsworth's "Michael" we see one such man . A man who has lived one of the "simplest lives" possible. His language too is Biblical in its simplicity and depth. The following passage occurs when Luke, Micheal's son, is about to leave for the city. But Michael makes him lay a stone as a sign of his future return.

"This was a work for us; and now, my Son,
It is a work for me, But, lay one stone---
Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.
Nay, Boy, be of Good hope, --- we both may live
To see a better day. At eighty four
I still am strong and hale;- do thou thy part;
I will do mine.--- I will begin again
With many tasks that were resigned to thee:
Up to the heights, and in among the storms,

---

10 Quoted in Literary Critism, a Short History, Wimsatt & Brooks, Oxford & IBH, New Delhi, 1984, p. 347.

Will I without thee go again, and do
All works which I was wont to do alone,
Before I knew thy face--- Heaven bless thee, Boy!
Thy heart these two weeks has been beating fast
With many hopes; it should be so - yes - yes.
I knew that thou couldst never have a wish
To leave me, Luke: thou hadst been bound to me
Only by links of love : when thou art gone,
What will be left to us! But, I forget
My purposes..."[11] (385-403)

Here we see an almost continuous and obsessive use of monosyllables which is permeated with its own rhythm. We hear the simple, relentless, monosyllabic rhythm of Michael's talk. He, who is an epitome of the humble man who had always lived among" the beautiful and permanent forms of nature".

In the visual arts too, the language changed drastically. The pomp and frills of painting under Royal Patronage gave way to a new individualism. The subjects of paintings also changed. This change was primarily due to the establishment of the Royal Academy in 1768. The painter started to have access to a broader spectrum of the public and the possible buyer. He was also freed from the dictates of conforming to rules while making a commissioned painting. Constable had declared quite vehemently:

---

11 The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, p.108.

"Whatever may be thought of my art; it is my own; and I would rather possess a freehold, though but a cottage, than live in a palace belonging to another."[12]

This search for individuality ironically amalgamates all the Romantic artists within its fold. The "I" of the artist's imagination became the crux of all creation. It is interesting to note that the autobiography as a genre of literature gained precedence during his period. de Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater, J.S. Mill's Autobiography, Wordsworth's "Prelude" and Coleridge's Biographia Literaria are among the most famous. The significant feature is that these works talk more about the intellectual and spiritual development of the artist rather than directly talking merely about episodic events. It was essential to understand the "growth" of the artist's mind as well as the various contributory factors which went into refining his emotional life. As Herbert Read says in his essay, " Surrealism and the Romantic Principle"

"The contradictions of the personality are resolved in the work of art: this is one of that first principles of romanticism ...(indeed) the personality without contradictions is incapable of creating a work of art.It renews vision, it renews language , but most essentially it renews life itself by enlarging the sensibility , the wonder of the possible forms of being.[13]

The hurried brush strokes that Alexander Cozens painted to represent a mental landscape before ultimately creating the final actual one, shows the need to break free from the shackles which tied down the imagination. The rapid strokes seem to be a mental impression

---

12 C.R. Leslie, Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, London, 1949, p.298, quoted in Changing Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts, Murray Roston, Princeton University Press, p.341.

13 Herbert Read, Introduction to Surrealism by Andre Breton and others, "Surrealism and the Romantic Principle," London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1936, p.8.

Stages of a Cozens "blot".

rather than a physical one. It was the style of the day to sketch in the open air to try and catch the ever changing forms and colours of nature. The preliminary sketches are oftentimes the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" while the later, more sober versions painted in the studio became "emotions recollected in tranquillity." Indeed some of Constable's final versions still retain the immediacy of the first sketches. His "Study of Sky and Trees" falls into this category. When he says, "I may yet makes some impression with my light, my dews, my breezes, my bloom and my freshness, "the emphasis,[14] on the personal "my" not only makes a strong claim for individuality, but also actually echoes Wordsworth's new theories of language in poetry. He had said of his oil sketch, "The Lock":-

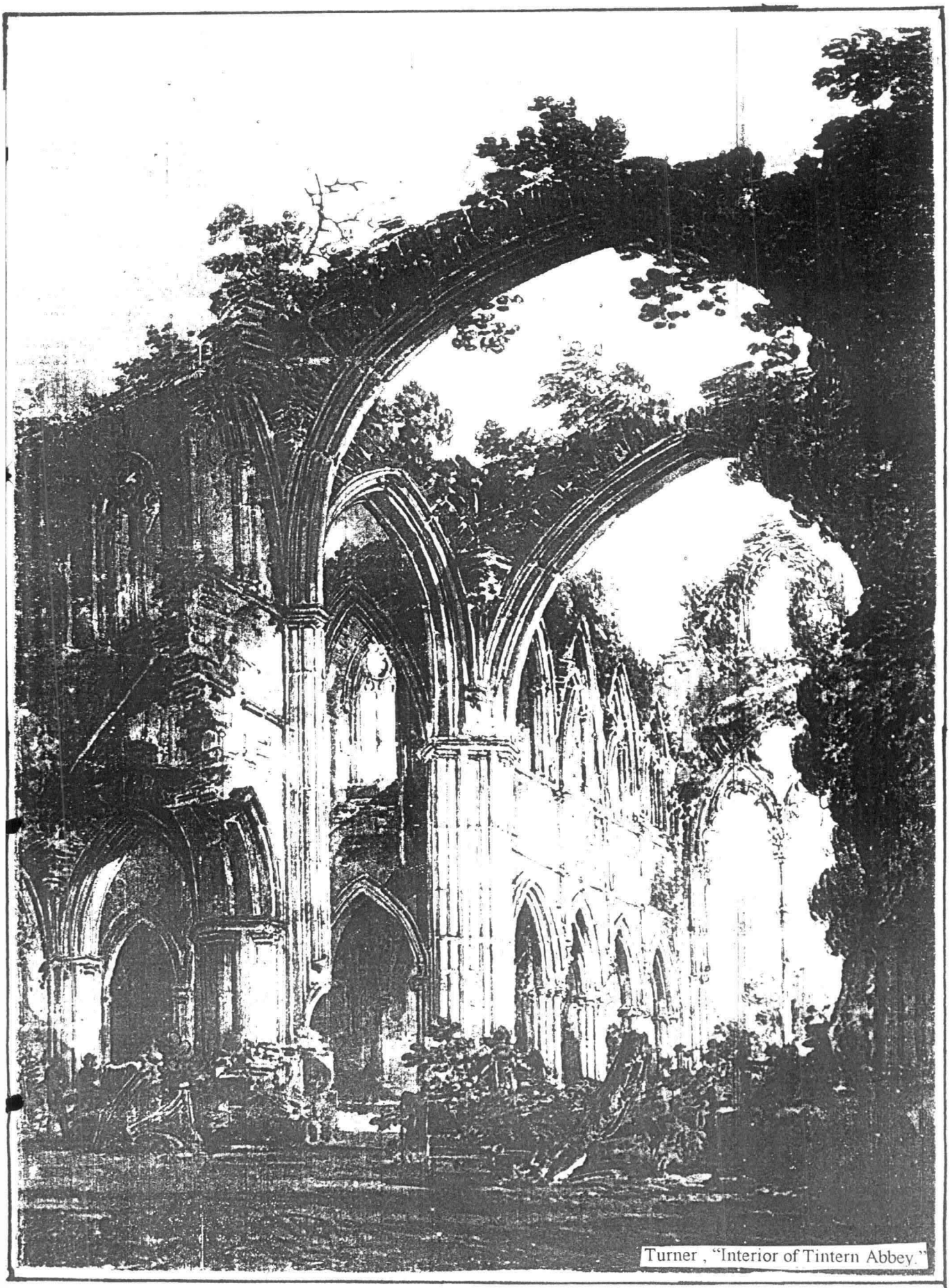
> "My picture is liked at the Academy. Indeed it forms a decided feature, and its light cannot be put out because it is the light of Nature--- the mother of all that is valuable in poetry, painting or anything else where an appeal to the soul is required. The language of the heart is the only one that is universal... my execution annoys most of them the (critics), and all the scholastic ones. Perhaps the sacrifices I make for `lightness' and `brightness' (are) too much, but these things are the essence of landscape."[15]

The Romantic artist was deeply concerned with light and colour. The first book of Sir Isaac Newton's Optics was widely discussed and debated upon. Coleridge was one of the most profoundly disturbed by the connotations of Newtonian optics - especially the manner in which he had ignored the role of darkness in the production of colour. Goethe's work Zur Farbenlehre (1810) was one of the most important works during this time and it stressed the role of darkness with that of light in the visible presence of colour. It is quite possible that Coleridge

---

14 Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism, p.128.

15 Ibid, pp. 189, 190.



Turner , "Interior of Tintern Abbey."

was familiar with Goethe's work. In one of Coleridge's notes written around 1820, he voices his concerns.

"The distinction, however, between Black and Dark , if we employ one to express the contrary of, and the other the opposite to, White, is of great value. Among the numerous Sophisms and equivoques of the Newtonian Prism, the confusion of two senses in one term, Shadow, has not been the least fruitful of bastard notions- the first sense, the privation of light, the other, the relative diminution of the same by (partial interception). In the latter, the shadow is `something'--- a (+)seeing, in the former a nothing, a (-)negative seeing. Now the Prism casts a Shadow in the latter sense, as a dense and semi- opake Whole; but it likewise casts 1. Color by its total `energy', as qualifying (not intercepting) Light, i.e. the Prism generates `white` within itself and 2. it casts `Colors' generated within itself by the polarizing energies of its parts acting on the white."[16]

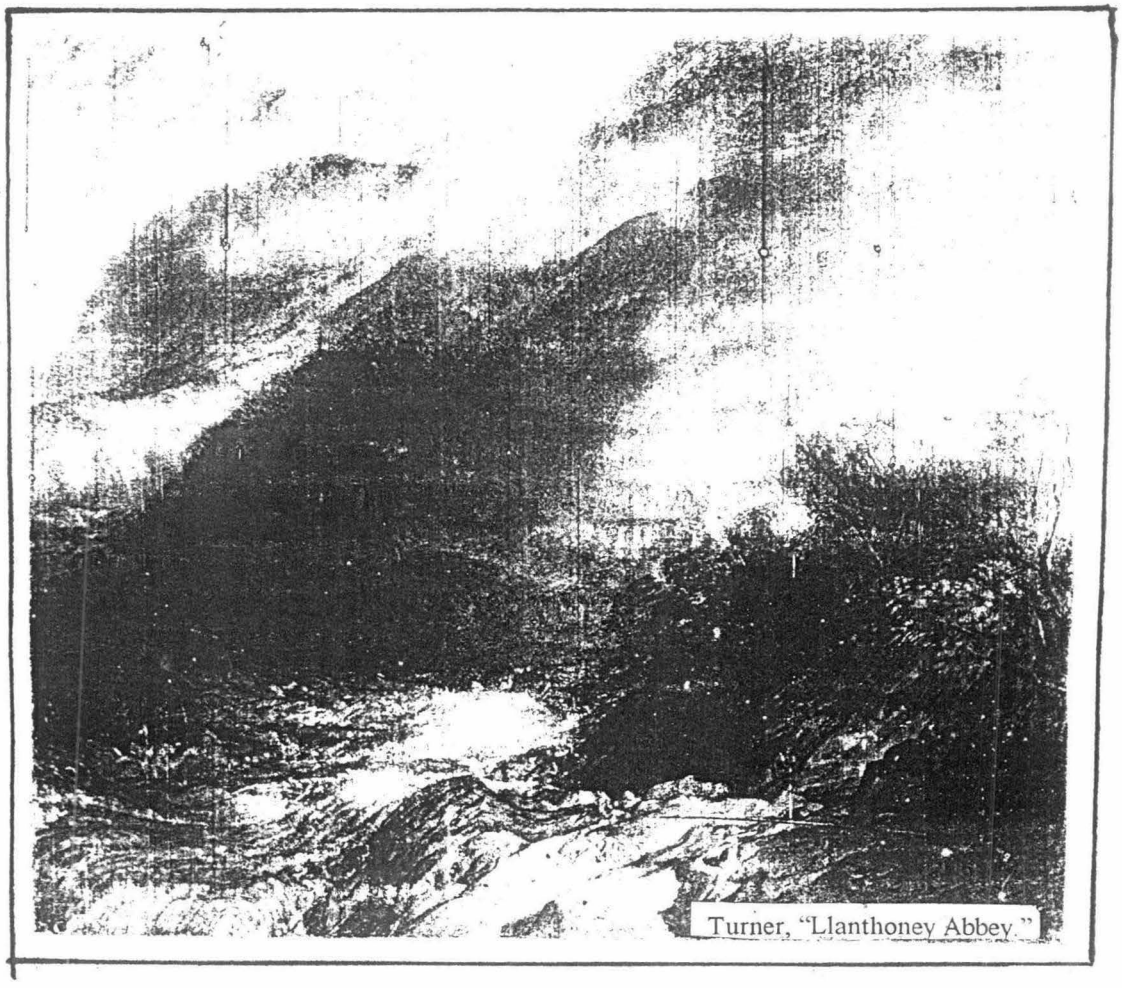
The knowledge of shadow was indispensable if we were to have knowledge of substance - the physical world of light and colour. As Coleridge says in this passage from, the poem "the Destiny of Nations" with overpowering Platonic echoes---

"all that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
For infant minds; and we in this low world
Placed with our backs to bright Reality,
That we may learn with young unwounded ken.
The substance from its shadow"[17] (18-23)

---

[16] Coleridge, notebook 21, Quoted in Poetry Realised in Nature : Coleridge and Early 19th Century Science, Trevor H. Levere, Cambridge University Press, p.151.

[17] Poems of S.T. Coleridge, ed. E.H. Coleridge, London, OUP, 1957, p.131.



Turner, "Llanthoney Abbey."

The changes that took place in the movement from the merely picturesque to the Romantic are most readily apparent in the works of a painter of Turner's calibre. For example, when we look at a painting of the nineteen year old Turner's Tintern Abbey, we see that it is an exact copy of the architectureal patterns and arches. The solidness of the structure and the straightness of the lines are of utmost importance. Forty years later he painted the Llanthoney Abbey washed by rain. Here the Abbey itself is a dim white shadow in the background. What is given precedence is Turner's understanding of nature. The rain is almost exhausted and the tentative sunlight seems to glide across the canvas. This painting is closer in mood and execution to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" with its

"sense sublime
of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man...
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things," [18] (96-103)

The "mind of man" is the power by which the life-giving force of nature can be envisioned. It is the mind which endows an ordinary landscape with uncanny significance. Wordsworth had himself claimed an affinity with Rembrandt and his use of chiaroscuro-light and shade- in his paintings. Hazlitt comments on this in The Spirit of the Age.

---

[18] The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, p. 167.

"In the way in which the artist (Rembrandt) works something out of nothing, and transforms the stump of a tree, a common figure, into an ideal object by the gorgeous light and shade thrown upon it, he (Wordsworth) perceives an analogy to his own mode of investing the minute details of Nature with an atmosphere of sentiment."[19]

Coleridge says much the same thing in his Biographia Literaria. In chapter XV he writes that images become poetic "when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit."[20]

He cites an example---

"Behold yon row of pines, that shorn and bow'd
Bend from the sea-blast, seen at twilight eve"

In these lines, he says, "There is nothing objectionable, but also nothing to raise them much above the level of a "book of topography" or a "descriptive tour." But the same image can be raised to a "semblance of poetry" by being altered in the following manner---

"Yon row of bleak and visionary pines,
By twilight glimpse discerned, mark! how they flee
From the fierce sea - blast, all their tresses wild
Streaming before them."[21]

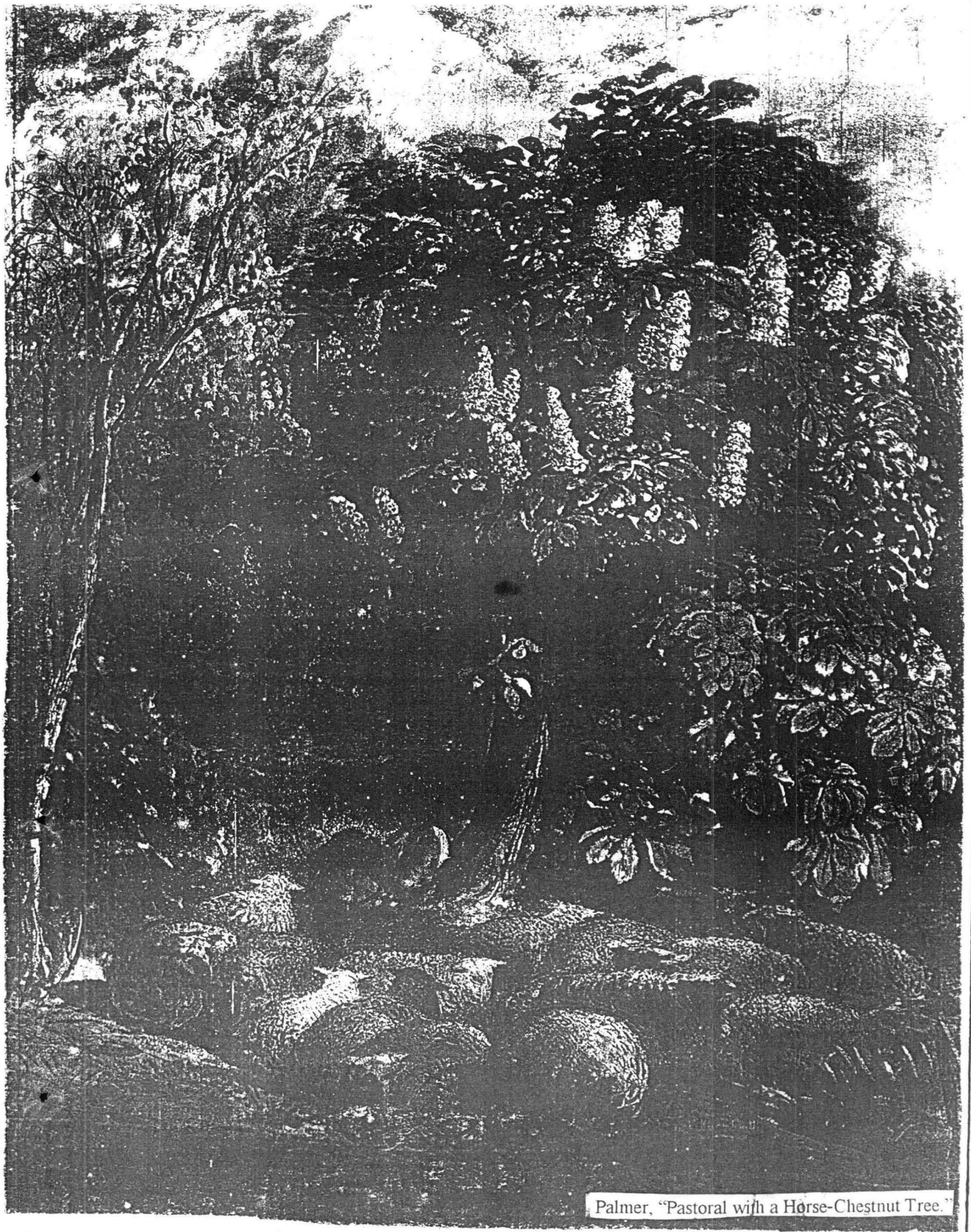
The actual scene was not as important as the delineation of the image's impact on the poet or painter's mind. The artist's responsibility was not to record given truths but to be as Kurt Badt said, "roused by every change of nature in every moment, that allows no languor

---

19 Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, edited by Ernest Rhys, Everyman's Library, 1928, p.259.

20 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chap. XV

21 Ibid, Chapter II



Palmer, "Pastoral with a Horse-Chestnut Tree."

even in her effects which she places before him and demands more peremptorily every moment his admiration and investigation, to store in his mind with every change of time and place".[22]

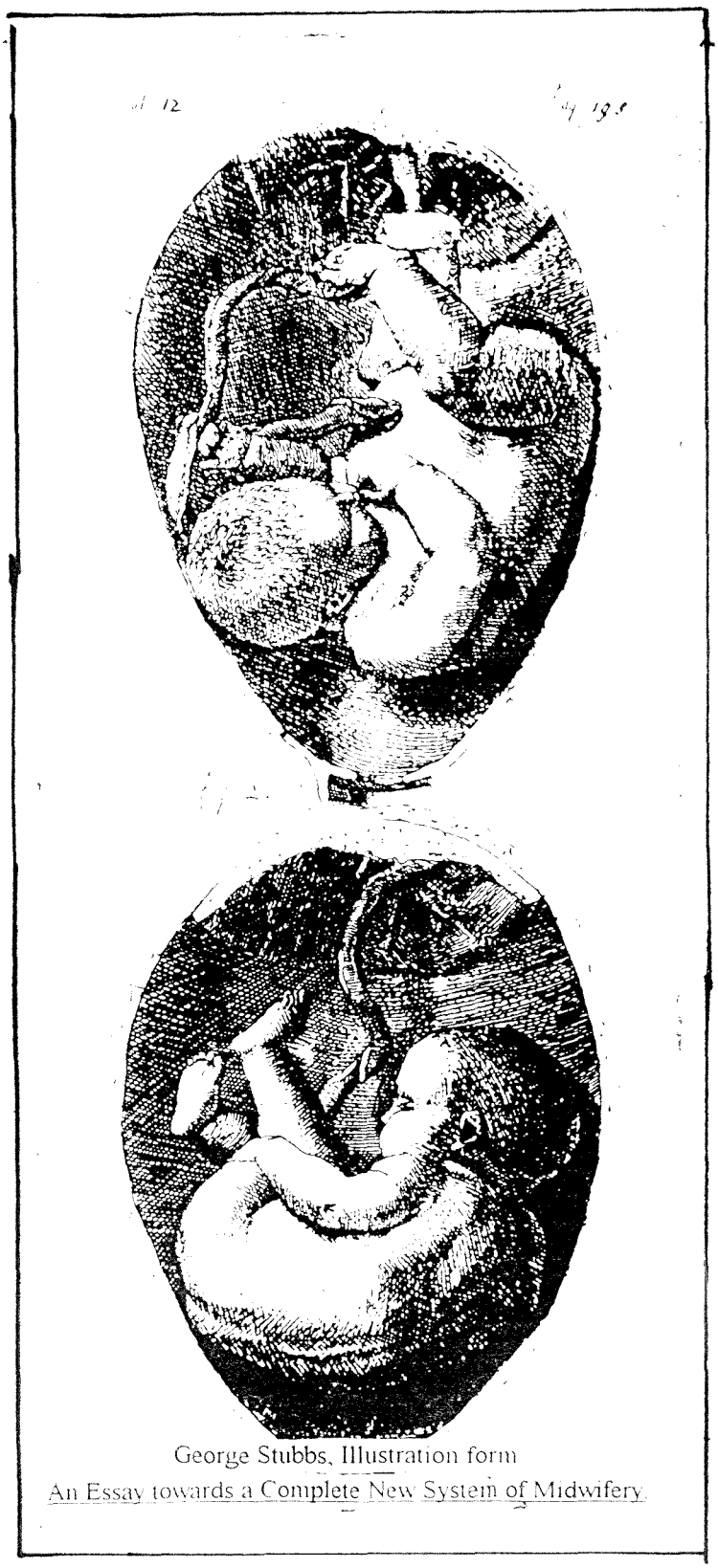
In a way, nature almost needed deification. Its value for the Romantic artist was such that each "minute particular was Holy." The sparkle of every dew drop, the delicate colour of every flower, the greenness of every rain washed tree was to be meticulously depicted.

Samuel Palmer's paintings show the same quality of imaginary vision, capturing glimmers of light everywhere. In one of his sketchbooks was found a poem, evocative in its capacity for colour and detail---

"And now the trembling light
Glimmers behind the little hills, and corn,
Lingring as loth to part: yet part thou must
And though than open day for pleasing more
(Ere yet the fields, and pearled cups of flowers
Twinkle in the parting light;)
Thee night shall hide, sweet visionary gleam
That softly lookest through the rising dew:
Till all like silver bright;
The Faithful Witness, pure, & white,
Shall look o'er yonder grassy hill,
At this village, safe, and still.
All is safe, and all is still
Save what noise the watch-dog makes
Or the shrill cock the silence breaks
--- Now and then---
And now and then---
Hark! - once again,

---

22 Kurt Badt, John Constable's Clouds,, trans. S. Godman, London, 1950. p.18.



George Stubbs, Illustration form
An Essay towards a Complete New System of Midwifery

The wether's bell
To us doth tell
Some little stirring in the fold.
Methinks the lingring, dying ray
or twilight time, doth seem more fair,
And light the soul up more than day,
When wide-spread, sultry sunshines are.[23]

His paintings like "Pastoral with a Horse-Chestnut Tree" or "The Valley Thick with Corn" show a haunting, imaginary, ideal landscape. The gold light of his leaves or sheaves of corn seem, to be a "sweet visionary gleam" rather than an actual "reportage" of nature. The smallest things glow with the light of the artist's imagination. Like Wordsworth's poetry, he too goes to the farmer and his field, or the shepherd and his flock for the subject matter of his paintings.

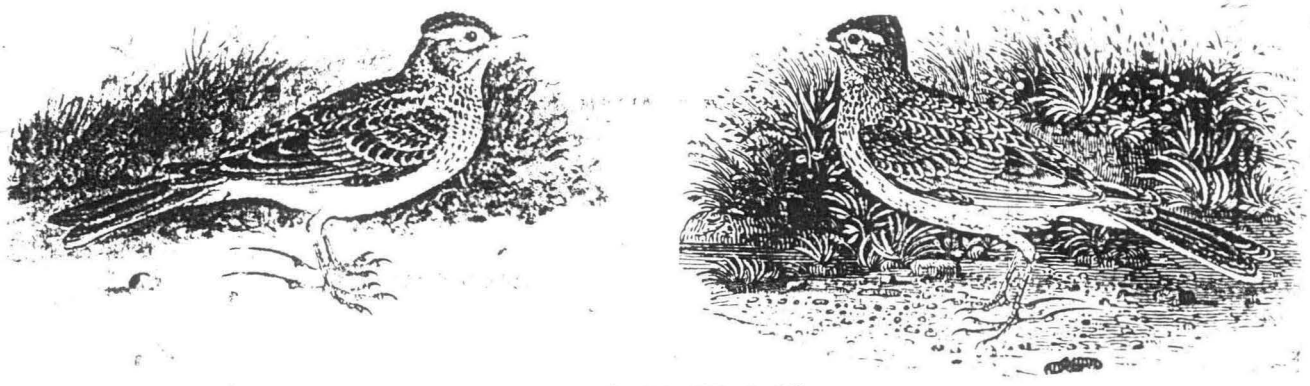
Poets like Pope in the eighteenth century were not very particular about the natural world that they displayed in their poetry. In a discussion of this aspect of Pope's poetry, Frederick A. Pottle gives the example of a passage from the Second Dialogue of the "Epilogue to the Satires"

"Ye tinsel Insects! Whom a Court maintains,
That count your Beauties only by your Stains,
Spin all your Cobwebs o'er the Eye of Day!
The Muse's wing shall brush you all away" (220-23)

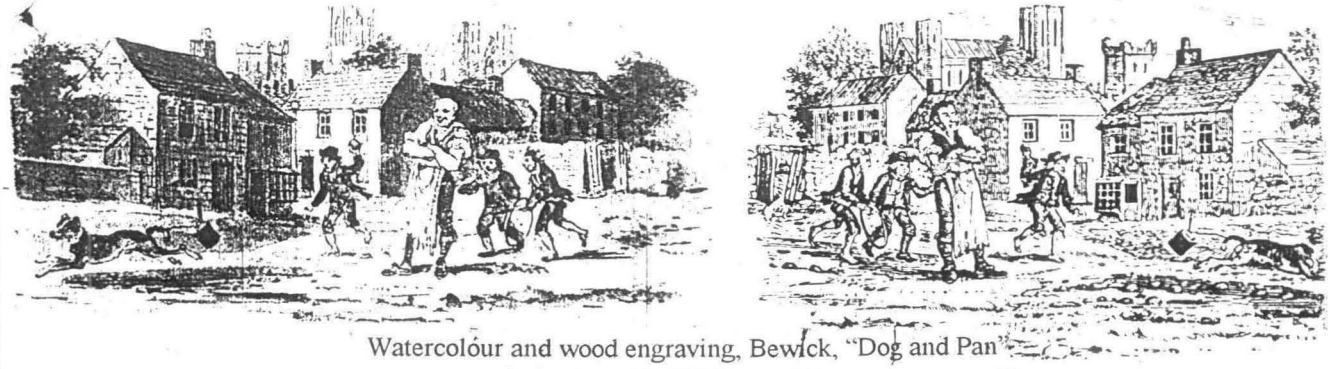
Pottle says that these lines make him think of three kinds of insects- beetles, butterflies/moths and spiders. He adds - "the trouble... is that Pope's insects spin cobwebs which no butterfly or moth can do. I think we shall do Pope no injustice if we conclude that his

---

[23] British Romantic Art, p. 150.



Thomas Bewick, "Skylark".



Watercolour and wood engraving, Bewick, "Dog and Pan".

Philip Henry Gosse,
"Arctica Caja or Tiger Moth".

insects have the combined characteristics of beetles, moths and spiders, and hence do not belong to any order known to naturalists.."[24]

We can compare this with Coleridge's fine example of a water -insect while talking about the workings of the mind.

"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 the 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 art of thinking."[25]

All creatures of the natural world were deemed holy. The Ancient Mariner receives redemption only when he has enough love in his heart to bless the water-snakes. Painters too like Thomas Bewick (in his Quadrupeds, 1790 and British Birds, 1797), Philip Henry Gosse and George Stubbs put in their own poetry into their works about the natural world. Bewick's "tale-pieces" were famous for the stories that they recounted in one single, sharp frame. His wood-cuts like "Dog and Pan" tell a lively, everyday story of the country side; we also do not miss Bewick's disapproval of the scene.

The "light" of nature to which I had been constantly, referring in this chapter was symbolically used as a universal image by the Romantic artist to mean spiritual illumination, prophetic vision, active imagination or a poetic ideal. And darkness, the polar opposite of light,

---

[24] Frederick A. Pottle, "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth," in William Wordsworth Centenary Studies ed. G.T. Dunklin, Princeton University Press, 1951, pp. 35-36.

[25] Biographia Literaria, Chapter 7.

Gosse, "Chrysaora Cyclonata,"
from A Naturalist's Rambles on the Devonshire Coast.

was associated with chaos, barrenness and, repeatedly, with the urban. The city-dweller was frequently portrayed as a man alienated from his fellow-beings and those forms of nature which may bring him to a communion with the entire universe. As Shelley says in his poem, "The Invitation."

"Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood, and the downs---
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
Its music, lest it should not find
An echo in another's mind,
While the touch of Nature's art
Harmonizes heart to heart."[26] (21-28)

The multiple meanings inherent in the works of the romantic poets and painters can however be, in a way, seen as a movement towards truth according to nature. The old myths were reworked to fit in with the romantic conception of the universe. The "light" of nature permeated everything, be it in the choice of subjects, the language used or the type of individuals portrayed. Compared to the eighteenth century predilection for "fixities and definites", Romanticism can indeed be seen as an age of "light... dews... breezes... bloom and... freshness".

---

26 Palgrave's Golden Treasury, Selected and Arranged by Palgrave's with a new fifth book by John Press, OUP, 1957, p.269.

CHAPTER-III

"We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon."

-Shelley, "Mutability."

In the last chapter, we saw how "light" was used to connote various facets of the Romantic artist's set of images; "light" as the light of understandable and knowable reality, of nature which was tangible, which could be transcribed on to the blank whiteness of the poet's paper or the painter's canvas; light that was the power of goodness over evil, of the individual over the collective. And ultimately, light which even if not captured perfectly, could atleast glimmer like a vision in an artist's oeuvre. The later paintings of Constable has patches of white paint dotted apparently haphazardly on to the finished work. This "snow" created an impression of the leaves or the water catching the ever changing sparks of light. In this chapter, we shall look at darkness and shadow, the polar opposites of light - The world that could not be seen, understood or known; the world also of motion and dynamism where each living moment was as ephemeral as a wisp of cloud. The later part of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century had seen grand developments in mathematics and science. Newton had proved that natural phenomena were ruled by universal laws, which could be demonstrated experimentally; whereas the "truths" derived from literature, visions or revelations were not only incapable of being mathematically proved, but were often contradictory. John Locke, in his Essay Concering Human Understanding, had said that all things should be tested by the evidence of our senses. All "Revelation" must be judge by Reason so that one is not misled by "Fancy" (disorganized mental activity) into the dangers of "Enthusiasm" (uncritical belief in either religion or politics). Finally, he said that bardic inspiration or prophetic vision only happens to people who are mentally ill.

Between Locke and Newton, the educated classes of the eighteenth century had an image of god as a great Architect or Watchmaker who had put together a mathematically perfect world. This also had an analogy in which the universe was seen as a well-greased, perfectly working machine, usually a watch. The cosmos was conceived as a static mechanism where each part of the machine did its pre-ordained duties. The values to be inculcated were- perfection changelessness, uniformity and

rationalism. The philosophical shift that occurred during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was that this conception changed to one of organic organism. "Growth" became the new metaphor- As Morse Peckham wrote in his seminal essay,

"The new metaphor is not a machine; it is an organism. It is a tree, for example.... the new thought is organicism. Now the first quality of an organism is that it is not something made, it is something being made or growing. We have a philosophy of becoming, not a philosophy of being. Furthermore, the relation of its component parts is not that of the parts of a machine which have been made separately,... but the relation of leaves to stem to trunk to root to earth... The existence of each part is made possible only by the existence of every other part. Relationships, not entities, are the object of contemplation and stud Moreover, an organism has the quality of life. It does not develop additively, it grows organically. The universe is alive. It is not something made a perfect machine; it grows.... change is not man's punishment, it is his opportunity. Anything that continues to grow, or change qualitatively, is not perfect, can never perhaps be perfect. Perfection ceases to be a positive value."[1]

The philosophy of "becoming" not of "being" sees the universe as ceaselessly moving in continuous flux. The Romantic artist engaged in the flux of the cycle of life and restlessly constructed new symbols, new myths, which according to his own new theory of flux and mutability, yielded to newer symbols, newer myths. If we go back to René Wellek's three criteria of Romantic creation, we see that the third was- "symbol and myth for poetic style." Before we go further, it is necessary to look into what exactly is meant by a Romantic symbol. Because as Ernest Bernbaum said.

---

1 Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," PMLA, LXVI (1951), In Romanticism, Points Of View, P.216.

"Romanticism is a faith, or system of belief, expressible only through a symbolical and emotional art."[2]

David Hartley in his Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duties, and Expectations, published in 1749 had indirectly defined the word `symbol' in the following manner :

"When a variety of ideas are associated together, the visible idea, being more glaring and district than the rest, performs the office of symbol to all the rest, suggests them and connects them together. In this it sowewhat resembles the first letter of a word".[3]

Hartley's meaning of `symbol' is something which gathers a number of ideas in a rigid combination and represents them like an initial letter- almost like a mathematical sign for a particular formula. Its artistic equivalent can be said to be an allegory like Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress" where there is a one to one relationship between the symbol and the thing described. Coleridge is, however, very careful in distinguishing between an allegory in the above sense and symbol. He writes "a symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general, above all by the translucence of the eternal in and through the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of that unity of which it is the representative".[4]

---

2 Ernest Bernbaum, "The Romantic Movement" from Guide Through the Romantic Movement, 1949, In Romanticism, Points of View. p.95.

3 David Hartley, Observations on Man, His Frame, his Duties and his Expectations, 1749, vol.1, p.78. quoted in Coleridge and Wordsworth, the Poetry of Growth, Stephen Prickett, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.14.

4 The Statesman's Manual, "Works," ed. Shedd, New York, 1853, p. 437. Quoted in Prickett, p.15.

A symbol, then, according to Coleridge, only reveals a glimpse of the whole, but this glimpse shares the nature of what is shown or revealed. So "The Ancient Mariner" is not an allegory but a symbolical representation of spiritual death and regeneration. What is important about a symbol is that if alters the way we conceive reality. Paul Tillich in Theology of Culture writes :

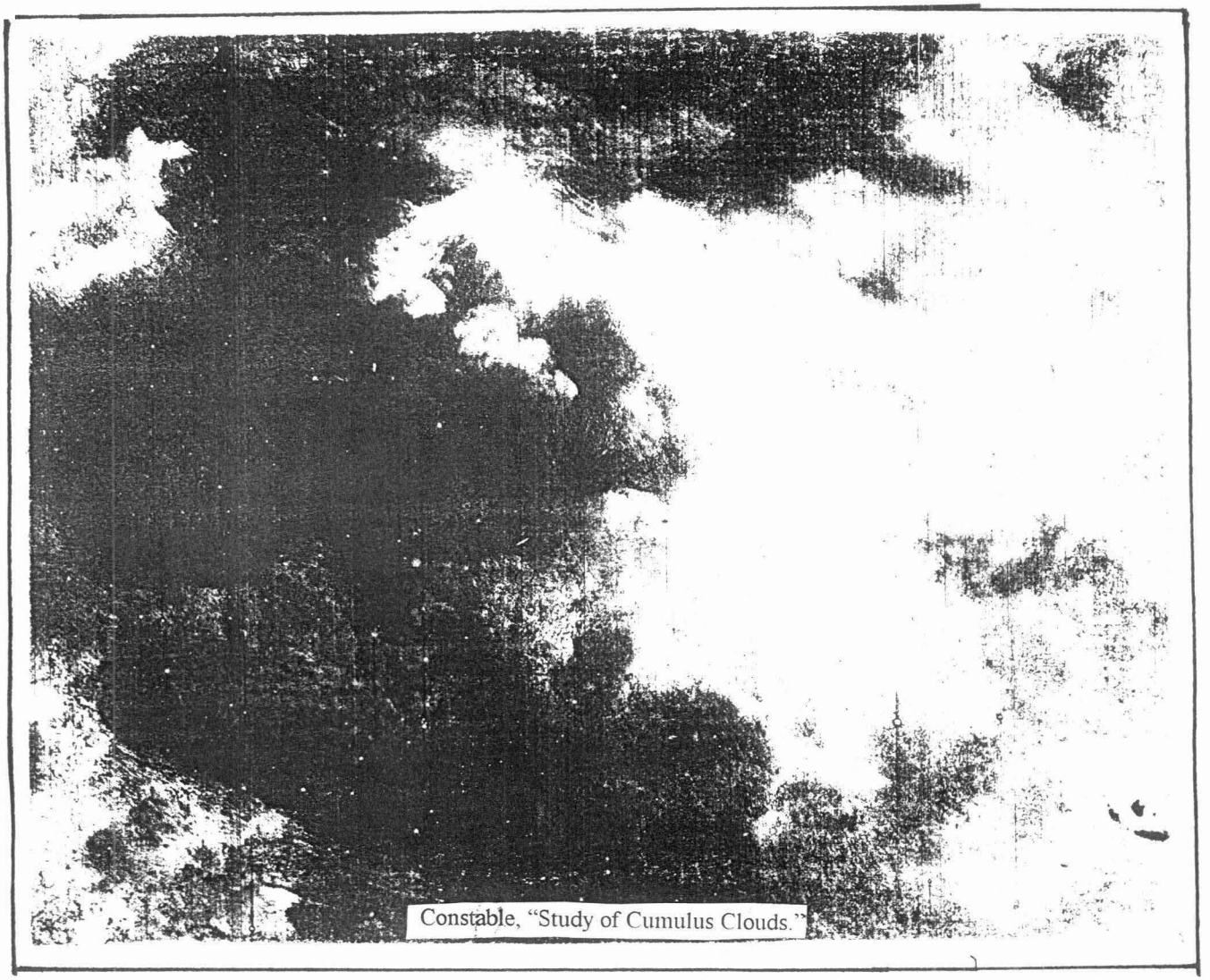
"Every symbol opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate.... But in order to do this, something else must be opened up - namely levels of the soul, levels of our interior reality. And they must correspond to the levels in exterior reality which are opened up by a symbol. So every symbol is two edged. It opens up reality and it opens up the soul".[5]

With the new apparatus which the nineteenth century thinker and artist had- that of the cosmos that was no longer static, nor hierarchically ordered, a revolution was achieved in what was deemed necessary to be represented. All restrictions were broken down and new subjects were sought- to display in their vastness, the new freedom of expression. This vastness was however, not represented by the immensity of the divine heavens, like in Claude Lorrain's paintings, but terrestrially- through deserts, mountains or oceans. The celestial became a bit too distant for the artist's concerns. And the perspective was either level with the ground or at a certain middle-point-looking either upwards to a canopied sky, or downwards. As Wordsworth describes in the final book of the Prelude-

"I looked about, and lo,
The moon stood naked in the heavens at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
all over this still ocean, and beyond,

---

5 Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture, Oxford, New York, 1959, p.7.



Constable, "Study of Cumulus Clouds."

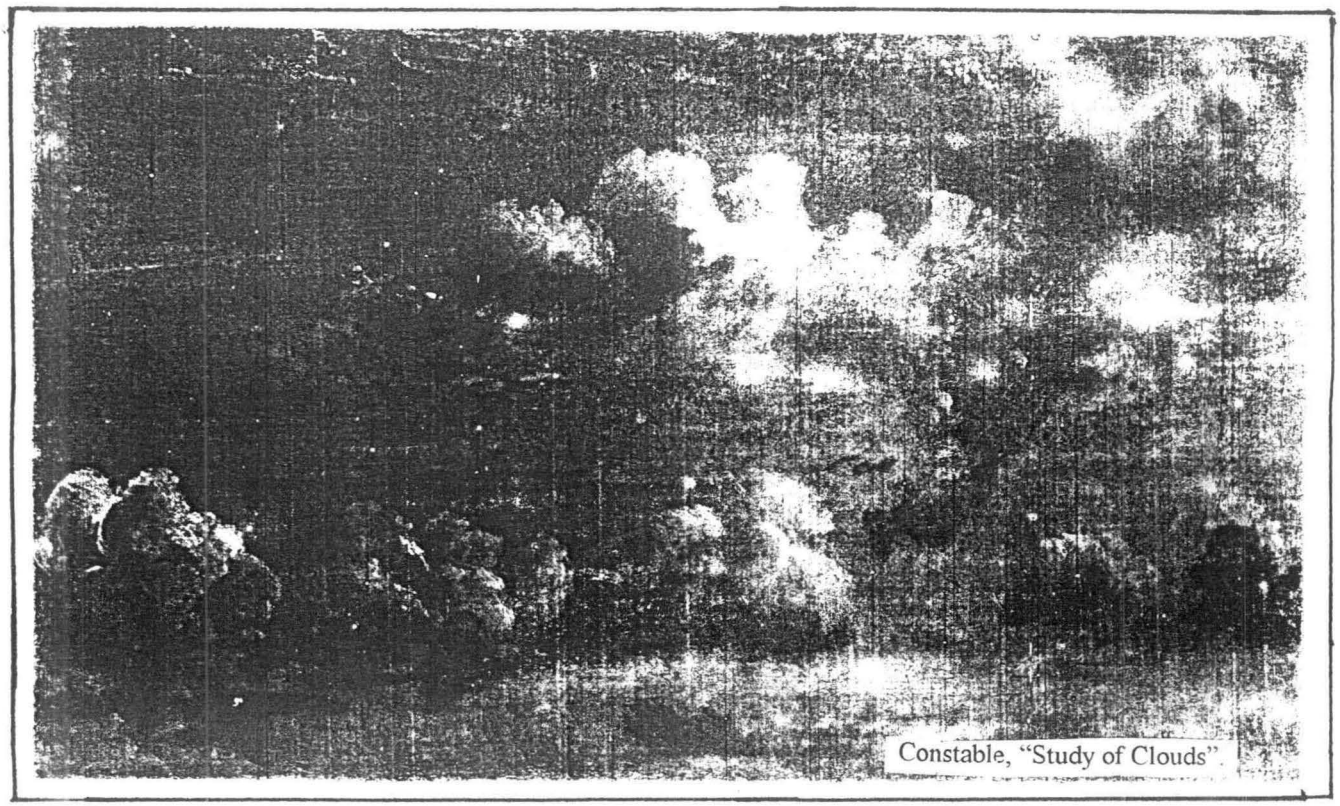
far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea- the real sea- that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty.
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach."[6] (xiii, 40-51)

The "meek and silent" is deceptive because all around him seems to be a feeling of suppressed movement and activity. The "dusky backs" of cloud are "upheaved" and the vapours have 'shot themselves" into tongues and promontories. Nature had changed the mountainous landscape into an ocean of moving cloud. Such significant shifts (as have been described above) in the philosophical understanding of the universe were bound to show up in the symbols used by the artists of the day. Consequently, the use of the imagery of clouds by the poets and the painters has received considerable attention in recent studies. Kurt Badt's path-breaking work, John Constable's Clouds (1950) examined in meticulous detail Constable's deep interest in cloud formations. During the years 1821-22, Constable's interest was generated by the findings of the English chemist, Luke Howard.

Howard's first work on the subject (1803), in which he distinguished and analysed the various cloud formations were said to have influenced Goethe and to have formed the basis of the his nature poetry. But Cons table came into contact with Howard's work only after the publication of his book. The Climate of London (1818-20). After that Constable devoted two years in diligent study of cloud structures and added them on to his canvasses. But even before Howard, Constable had been struck by the study of variable cloud formations in Alexander Cozens' A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Composition of Landscape (1785). Cozens had printed a quotation from The Winter's Tale on the title page of his first edition which is quite evocative -

---

6 Complete Poetical Works, (publs.) Ward, Lock and Co. Ltd., London, 1950, p.553.



Constable, "Study of Clouds".

"This is an art

Which does mend nature-Change it rather, but

The art itself is nature." (IV, iv. 95-97)

It was indeed natural art that Constable was aiming for. His "Study of Clouds" and "Study of Cumulus Clouds," both part of a single series, sometimes reminds one of Shelleyan intensity -

"Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean...." [7]
("Ode to the West Wind." 15-17)

- and sometimes of Keatsian peace :

"While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
and touch the stubble plains with rosy hue..."[8]
("To Autumn". 25-26)

The clouds seem to be symbol of the mental process- thoughts which wait, converge, vanish and reappear. As Wordsworth wrote in the starting-point of his famous "Daffodils"

"I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high over vales and hills,
when all at once I saw a crowd.
A host of golden daffodils." (1-4) [9]

---

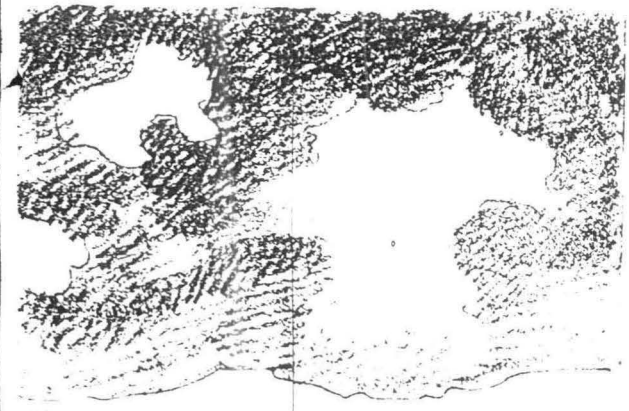
7 Shelley and Keats, Complete Poetical Works. Random House, New York, 1950, p.616.

8 Ibid. P.194.

9 (publs.) Ward, Lock, and Co. Ltd., p. 152.

8. Half Cloudy with Storm. the light of the Sun Shining Through — and the Clouds Darker than the Storm. Black and ragged at the Top than the bottom, the Trees very much in the Storm and Rain, and Rain in the Clouds.

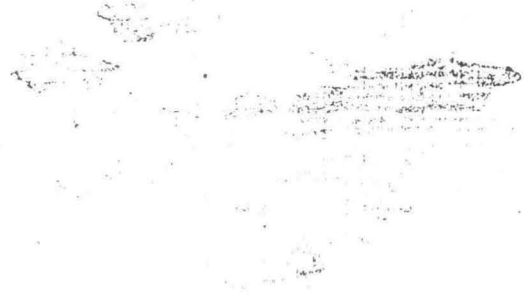
9. The same as the last. but [illegible] at the Top than the bottom.



10. All cloudy. except one large Opening with others smaller. the clouds Darker in some Places than the plain Part. Darker at the Top than the bottom

11. The same as the last. but Darker at the bottom than the top.

12. All Cloudy. except one large Opening with others smaller the clouds lighter than the plain part and Darker at the Top than the bottom.



13. The same as the last. but Darker

John Constable, "Sky studies after Alexander Cozens"

Recent thinking has however, attributed the quality of inconstancy and impermanence of the clouds to the Romantic spirit. As Raymond Lister declares :

"...the clouds themselves provided a symbol of transience and unattainability. They were a floating mass of changing shapes, in which the Romantic could see his own transient but aspiring spirit buffeted, shaped and sometimes left floating in peace, but always changing at the whim of exterior forces. By studying, therefore, the rules by which clouds are shaped and dispersed, it was hoped that a reflection, and perhaps also some explanations of the mysteries of the human spirit could be found." [10]

The whimsical quality of life was captured by the symbol of the clouds. Kurt Badt used the following lines from Shelley as the epigraph to his John Constable's clouds and they do justice to the artists' sense of mutability.

" We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;

How restlessly they speed and gleam and quiver,

Streaking the darkness radiantly! yet soon

Night closes round, and they are lost for ever[11]

("Mutability")

The change in the type of skies painted, infact, took place much earlier in painting than in poetry. Gainsborough had already in his country-scenes, started drawing low, over-hung clouds. His professional career did not give him the satisfaction he craved. He had written in a letter to William Jackson-

---

10 Raymond Lister, British Romantic Art, p.170.

11 Complete Poctical Works, Random House, p. 562.

"I'm sick of Portraits and...hate...being confined in Harness to follow the track, whilst others ride in the waggon, under cover, stretching their legs in the straw at ease, and gazing at Green Trees and Blue skies." [12]

His paintings like "Conrad Wood" (1748) which later came to be known as "Gainsborough's Forest" were among the first paintings to be done in this manner. His later works [like "the Cottage Door" (1780)] show rural scenes happily ensconced within nature. The trees on either side and the clouds behind, artistically close out the heavens. The clear skies of Claude Lorrain gave way to an enclosed setting of human intimacy and love.

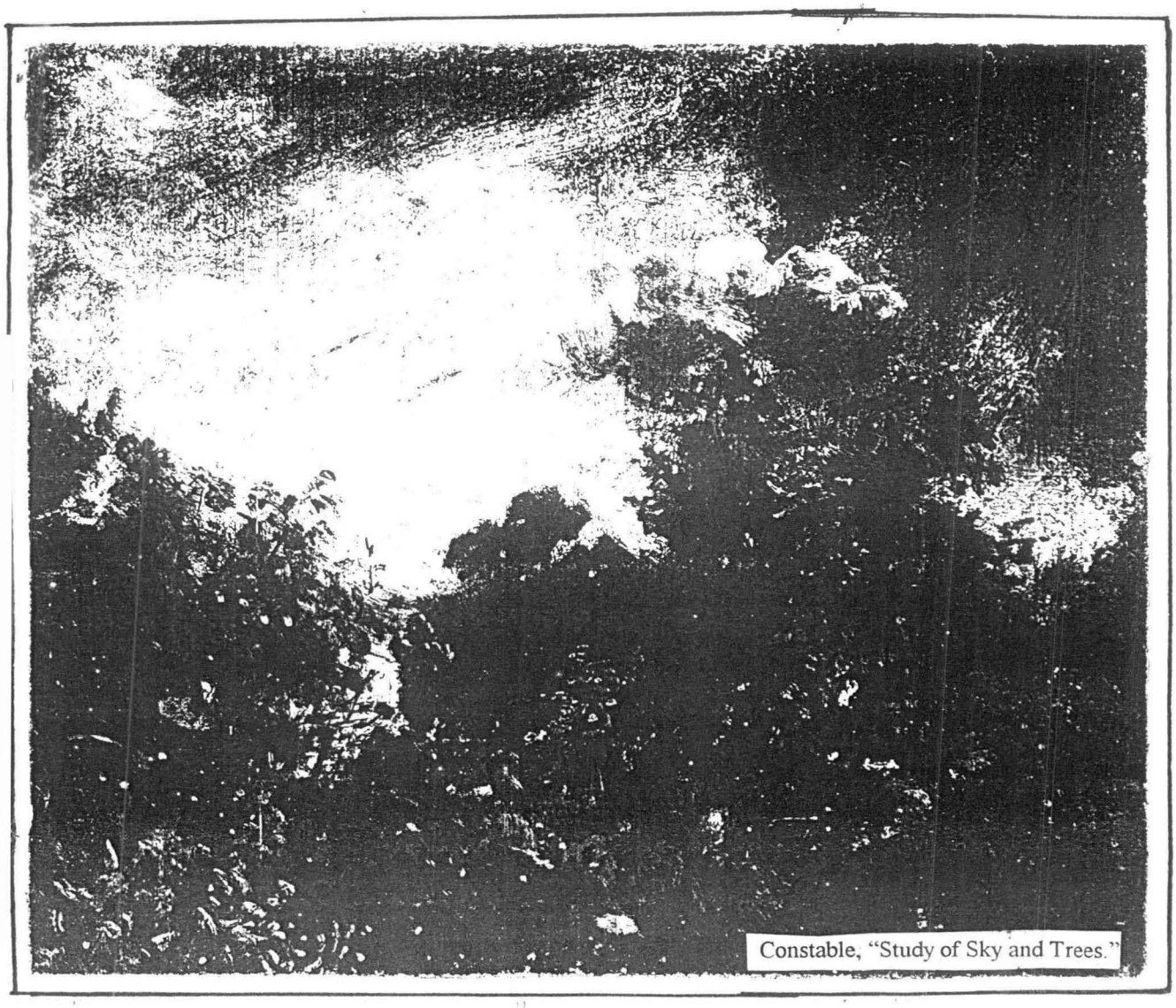
The Romantic artist viewed the sky as a closed dome. The heavens had become remote from his worries. The traditional connection that had been made between God and the sky was ignored. The human or natural scene became the centre of interest. The eye of the spectator did not stray upwards because more often than not, the clouds blocked out the view. A contemplation of the divine was not allowed. As Murray Roston writes :

"...The Romantic was to create a view point more appropriate to his own changed needs.:. by positioning himself upon earth, level with his subject, he reveals in both painting and poetry his sympathy with a shared human condition, Gainsborough views the rustics as though from a nearby path concealed from their view, as a passing traveller, unseen yet participating in the scene; Keats stands within the darkling forest, brooding amid the increase hanging upon the bough; Wordsworth wanders through the forest experiencing a kinship with all the different forms of nature." [13]

---

12 Letter to William Jackson, 4th June, 1768, in Letters of Thomas Gainsborough, ed. Mary Woodall, London, 1963, p.115. Quoted in Roston, Changing Perspectives. p. 345

13 Ibid., p.348.



Constable, "Study of Sky and Trees."

The introduction of low, heavy clouds over scenes of the English, countryside was indeed quite revolutionary, because the Elysium was no longer the place towards which to lead the gaze. The clouds were of paramount significance because not only did they depict the transience of the moment but they also captured the spectator's gaze and kept it focused on to the centre of the canvas; and put forth the individual experience of the subject painted as well as that of the painter. Constable painted clouds not just because their changeability challenged his genius but because he loved them. They formed part of his internal experience. In a letter to Mr and Mrs Gisborne in 1818, he had written:-

"I take great delight in watching the changes of atmosphere here, and the growth of the thundershowers with which the noon is often overshadowed, and which break and fade away towards evening into flocks of delicate clouds."[14]

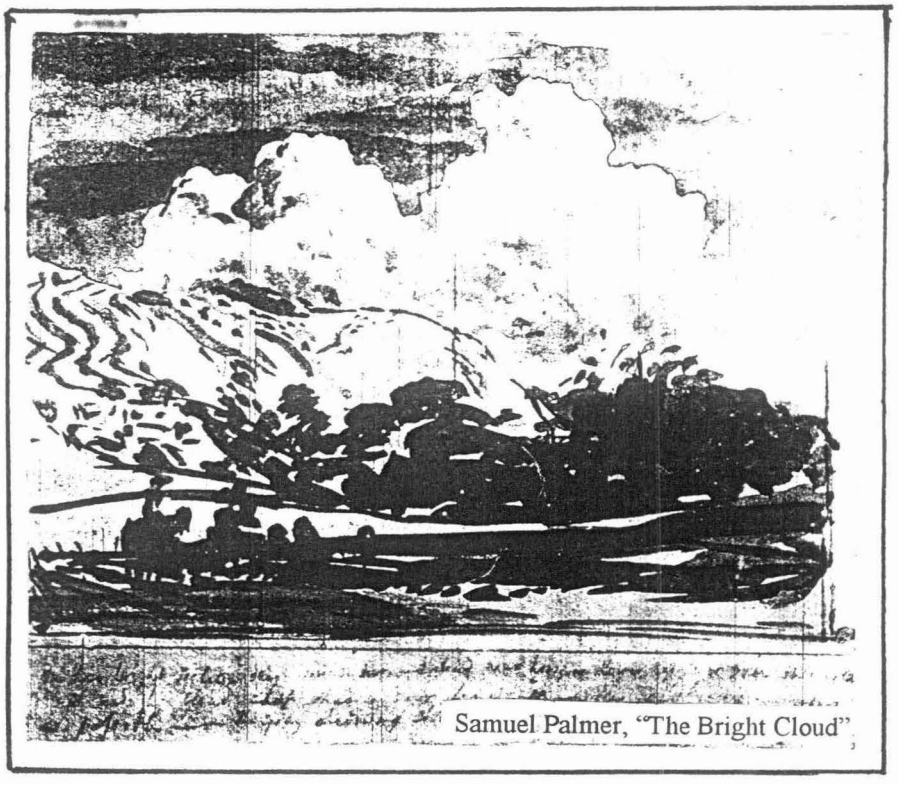
Ruskin had noticed the profound `cloudiness' in the paintings of his times and had hinted at a secularization of nature. He was of the opinion that this characteristic pointed towards a "... total absence of faith in the presence of any deity therein. Whereas the mediaeval never painted a cloud, but with the purpose of placing an angel in it; and a Greek never entered a wood without expecting to meet a god in it; we should think the appearance of an angel in a cloud wholly unnatural, and should be seriously surprised by meeting a god anywhere." [15]

The Romantic primacy accorded to the individual made the poet and painter eagerly don the garb of the Creator. The scenes painted by Constable or described by Wordsworth were endowed with a sense of holiness, not directly associated with the divine Deity. It was a mystic experience which not only imaginatively recreated what was seen, but also recreated the mind of the artist.

---

14 Ibid., p.344.

15 Ruskin, Modern Painters, 3:16, Quoted in Roston, p. 352.



Samuel Palmer, "The Bright Cloud"

Samuel Palmer's "The Bright Cloud", which depicts a full mass of voluptuous cloud, seems like most of Palmer's works, a visionary scene. But it was a real experience for him. The beauty of the changing shapes and colours were inscribed in his own hand beneath the water-colour. The quick strokes seem as if they are hurriedly trying to catch a moment in time in the form of the billowing cloud. He had written along the bottom -

"On these bright Italian days middle dist., white cloud near horizon lower edges or base obscure / effect made by cloud cast shadow over landscape- the rest as sunny / as possible- the gray shadows of cloud almost as cold as azure." [16]

Obscurity and "gray shadows" are as important to the Romantic artist as light and brightness because they form part of the wholeness of life. An attempt to gain knowledge of all facets of natural phenomena was imperative. And Palmer hits the nail on the head in a letter written quite late in the century, but still relevant to the Romantic ideal- that of the imagination.

"...The real charm of art seems to me not to consist in what can be best clothed in words, or made a matter of research or discovery Its technical means are conversant with several branches of science; and it demands lifelong investigation of phenomena; but I do not think that the *result* is a science, through Constable very truly said that every picture was a scientific experiment. The result I take to be not interpretation, but representation- its first appeal not to the judgement but the imagination." [17]

A predilection for detail can be seen in the nineteenth century artist. Ontological "truths" were sought to be explained, understood. Hopkins wrote under one of his sketches of sea waves -

---

16 William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism, p.221.

17 Palmer, in a letter to L.R.Valpy, 1875. Quoted in John Constable, the Man and his Work, p.56.

"Note the curves of the returning wave overlap, the angular space between is smooth but covered with a network of foam, The advancing wave, already broken, and now only a mass of foam, upon the point of encountering the reflux of the former."

But knowledge was not always so readily acquired. What the senses discerned was not always what actually *was*. The "foaminess" of reality and the flux of eternal motion fascinated the Romantic artist, but exactitude in representation was a distant dream. Since symbols, as Paul Tillich says, open up levels of reality (exterior as well as interior) the clouds, as I have been trying to prove in this chapter, bring us closer to the image of the artist as situated within a new dynamic, organic universe where everything was changeable, mutable. It also takes us closer to that time when "Night closes round" the artist's epistemological understanding of the earth and the *unknowable* rears up, as it were, to confront him. This also happened more often than not with vast bodies of water in the Romantic artist's oeuvre. Seas and oceans gained unforeseen precedence during this time, not only because of the artist's interest in spatial vastness, but also as another symbol of the evanescent, ever-changing moment. They became symbols of infinity and of danger. Danger because they could not be controlled. The individualism of the Romantic had already alienated him from the ordered hierarchy of society. It is as if he had been tossed into the stormy sea to fight his battles alone. He becomes the steamer in Turner's "Steamer in a Snow-storm."

Moreover, the epistemological shift from the clear, observable reality of the eighteenth century Empiricists to the inferred essence of the Romantics is clearly seen in both the verbal and visual media. The border lines of paintings as well as poems became indeterminate, hazy, smudged. Nothing was really concrete and knowable- a hoary shroud of mystery cloaked everything. Coleridge needs to be requoted here:

'What I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while everywhere shadows were deepened into substances."

(Biographia Literaria, xiii)

This same feeling of "Unknowability' is seen in Coleridge's "Rime" of the Ancient Mariner," the scenes described do not answer to either reason or logic, the two catch-words of the eighteenth century.

"The souls did from their bodies fly-
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow."[18] (220-223).

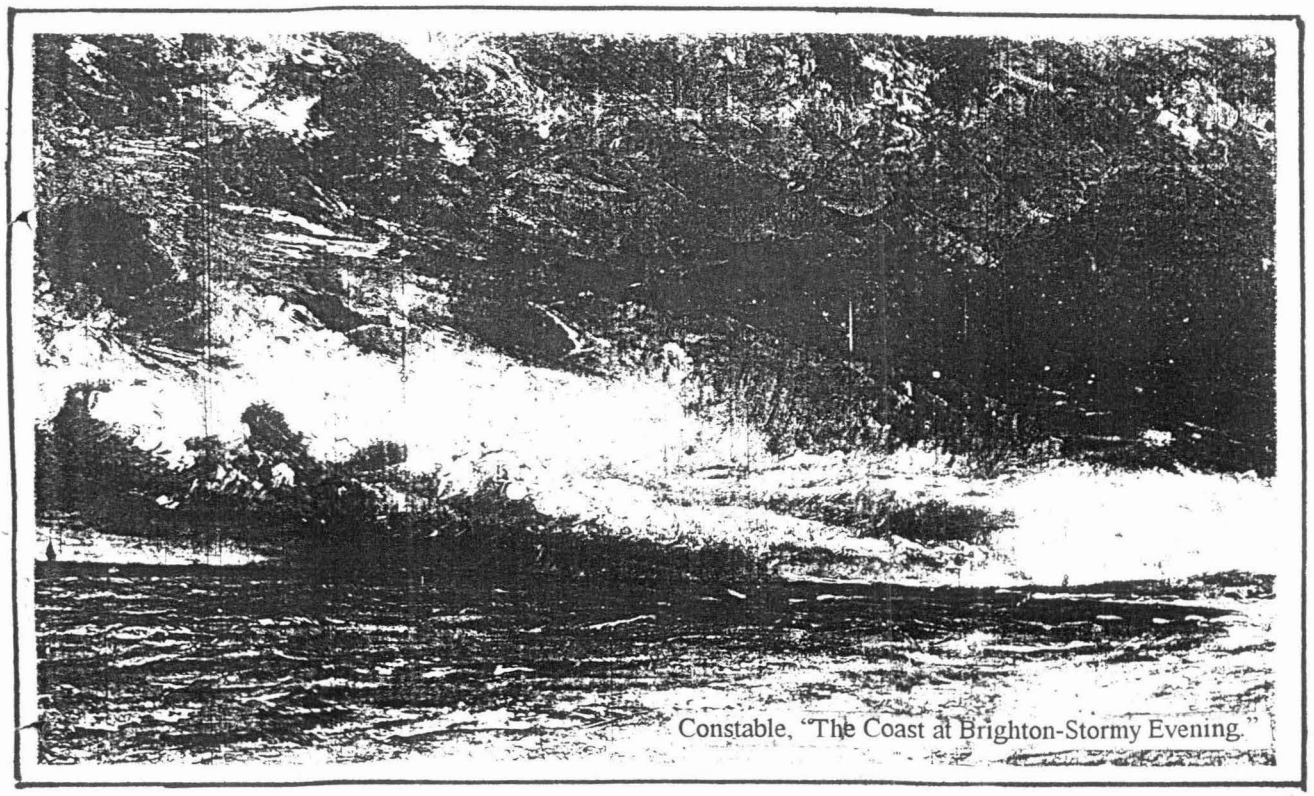
The above lines quoted arbitrarily from the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner," just go to show that the demarcating lines between reality and illusion had become terribly unclear. A gossamer thin thread divided the one from the other.

The violence of Coleridge's "tyrannous and strong" "storm-blast" can be effectively compared to Turner's "Steamer in a Snow-storm". The frightening haziness of Coleridge's shadows, mists and snows can become a counterpart to Turner's unclear, misty brush strokes which so terrifyingly engulf the tiny steamer, nondescript and vulnerable against the power of the raging, charged, threatening sea.

Stephen Spender in his Preface to A Choice of English Romantic Poetry writes "The solitude of real nature is alien, immeasurable, inhuman; the Romantic solitude is a vision of nature which reflects the solitude of the poet. The Romantic finds every where in nature his own image. This has the effect of spiritualizing nature while at the same time it makes his mind appear to have a kinship with landscapes, moons and vast

---

18 Coleridge Collected Poetical Works, (ed.) E.H. Coleridge, OUP, 1969, p.196.



Constable, "The Coast at Brighton-Stormy Evening."

waters. The Romantic attitude... makes the natural scene which is outside the poet appear as a quality of the mind." [19]

Even Constable had paid his respects to the sea by seeing in it a fit subject for his paintings. In a letter to Maria Bicknell, who later became his wife, he had written:-

"I was always delighted with the melancholy grandeur of a sea-shore."

His paintings of the coast catch the onrush of waves, the breaking of water into foam and the subtlety of the changing colours. Carlos Peacock writes in admiration in his John Constable, the Man and his work.

"...Constable's sea pictures are in many ways the freest and most impressionistic things he ever did. In its every changing form and colour the sea presented the supreme challenge, demanding from the painter the greatest technical skill: in comparison with its evanescent effects the painting of landscape was an almost simple matter."[20]

Although he had painted tranquil seas as well, Constable's stormy seas, like Turner's are more attractive to the eye and more representative of the Romantic artist's isolation, catching as they do the dark anger of the clouds and the primal force of the sea. Paintings like 'Coast Scene with Breaking Cloud" or " The Coast at Brighton : A Stormy Evening" recapture a fast-fading moment- a moment as infinitesimal as the time it takes for sand to trickle through the fingers.

In his later pencil sketches of the sea, Constable seems to break free from all constraints of drawing, of learned technical skill. To quote Peacock again-

---

19 Stephen Spender. "The Interior World of the Romantics," 1947, in Points of View, p.183.

20 John Constable the Man and his Work, p.57.

Constable, "Coast Scene with Breaking Cloud".

"...he (Constable) imparts a comparable suggestion of light and movement by a curiously free, almost straggling, line which seems sometimes to float over the surface of the paper like blown thread. Yet behind it all there is always a sense of absolute control and that quality of individuality that is manifest in every touch."[21]

In a study of romantic painting which moved towards a line that was smudged, fuzzy-edged, "straggly," it is interesting to note as Murray Roston points out, that Blake, the most individualistic of all artists had insisted, on a clear, boundary line for all objects painted. The poet who had said, "No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings,"[22] also made the following apparently contradictory statement about his paintings-

"...The more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art."[23]

Roston takes great pains to convince us that Blake here was not talking about the body as being restricted by the dark boundary line of Reason-but of the Energy emanating from the body. He quotes Blake himself to prove his point-

"Energy is the only life and is from the Body, and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of energy".[24]

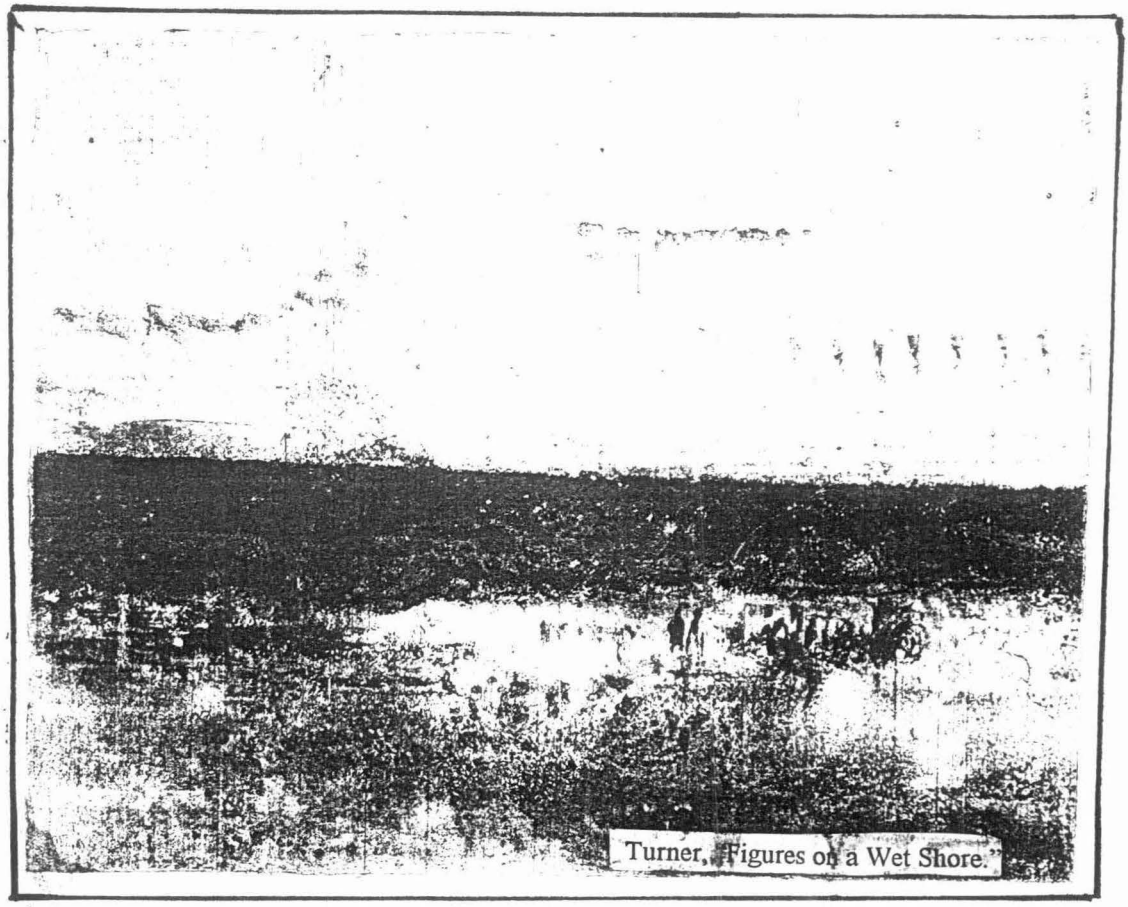
---

21 Ibid., p.63.

22 Blake, ("The Marriage of Heaven and Hell") (ed.) Keynes, p. 151.

23 Quoted in Roston, Changing Perspectives, p.292.

24 Ibid., p.293.



Turner, "Figures on a Wet Shore."

Roston ultimately concludes that Blake's figures are-

"...imaginative creations, never to be confused with mortal bodies of flesh and blood. Their muscles are....quite inaccurate anatomically in their exaggerated, scale-like effect and whether that innacuracy arose from the artist's lack of physiological training or from a conscious rejection of realism (since volume and weight belonged in Blake's view to the despised Newtonian or empirical conception of the universe), the result is suggestive of spiritual energy rather than physical prowess.... What the wiry, bounding line offered Blake, therefore, was not

Urizenic constriction but a valued distancing from reality, the transformation of the specific and tangible into an artefact of the symbolic and eternal."[25]

We can take this explanation at face-value and add that from the clear-cut lines of Blake's paintings enveloping anatomically unreal human figures, most of them drawn in moments of restless motion, energetically striving to move beyond time, space and indeed, the limits of the border, it is a historically straight movement of progress to Turner's "Figures on a Wet Sea-Shore" where slight dabs of dark blue paint symbolically represent the "figures".

In this chapter, we had all the while been talking about Time, for what is change and growth after all but the effects of time on man and nature. The Romantic artist, in his situation of existential loneliness, when confronted with sense of nature's and his own changeability, looked towards a certain rootedness to give meaning to his self. He sought the immutable backdrop of Art, of created arefacts to give an awareness of something that may yet live on and not change. Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn," the eulogy to a state of being without change-ultimately without being susceptible to death and destruction, falls into this category. Constable's watercolour,

---

25 Ibid., p.294.

"Stonehenge" with its double rainbow, was the last exhibit of his life-time and on the mount he had written-

"The mysterious monument of Stonehenge, standing remote on a bare and boundless heath, as much unconnected with events of past ages as it is with the uses of the present, carries you back beyond, all historical records into the obscurity of a totally unknown period." [26]

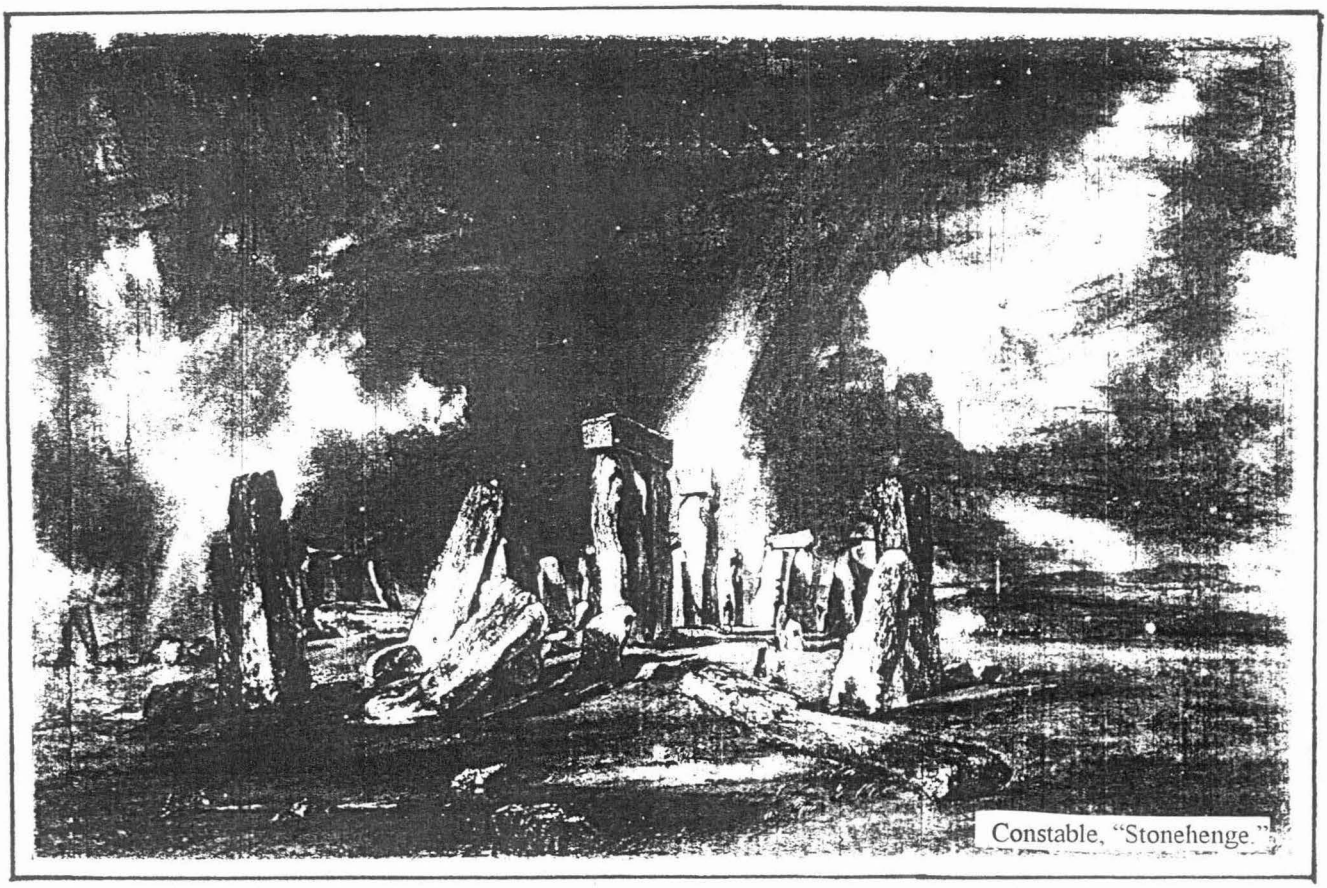
It stands untouched by history just as the ruins of Ozymandias' statue stand in the desert sand. Ozymandias' remains after his death had long ago become one with the elements; but the scuptor who had carved the "frown/and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command" still lived on in what he had created. The fear that the artist may not live to create immortal, indestructible, permanent works of art, be it in poetry or painting, is seen in the following poem by Keats which I shall quote in full -

"When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charact`ry
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the fairy power
Of unreflecting love-then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone , and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink."[27]

---

26 Quoted in Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism, p.130.

27 Complete Poetical Works, p.237.



Constable, "Stonehenge."

("The Terror of Death".)

The darkness of death is the ultimate truth, for change carries within itself the seed of all destruction. Shelley's symbol for himself and his clan-that of the cloud, seems truest when applied to the final curtain of life. For howsoever the Romantic artist may "restlessly" create and "speed and gleam and quiver" for an instant, they were always aware that soon night would close around them and they would be "lost forever" in the mists of time. Only what they had created would live on.

CHAPTER-4

"The Number of the Beast is 666".

- Blake. Water-colour.

Blake, "The Number of the Beast is 666."

The water-colour with which I have chosen to entitle my fourth and final chapter, may be a little misleading--- for my intention, here is neither to make any direct Biblical allusions, nor to talk expressly about Christianity. I chose this particular Blake water-colour for the powerful vibrancy of its colours and the awe-inspiring double vision of the Beast; with its innumerable heads, horns, tail and the strange thorn-like projections on the left arm of the Beast which has its back towards us. The significance of this water-colour is-- the questions on Reality that it begs. Does the Beast exist in reality or only in Blake's imagination? Is Blake making use of received images, merely making a pictorial representation of the Christian Beast as it has been commonly interpreted (horns, tails et al). E. H. Gombrich in a paper on "Imagery and Art in the Romantic Period" writes thus-

"The original genius who 'paints what he sees' and creates new forms but of nothing is a Romantic myth. Even the greatest artist - and he more than the others-needs an idiom to work in . Only tradition such as he finds it, can provide him with the raw material of imagery which he need to represent an event or a 'fragment of nature.'"[1]

So it would seem that Blake here is using an "idiom" from "tradition" for the" raw material of (his) imagery." But it would be useful at this juncture to remember that all art is about experiential reality- or as Auerbach puts it, it is about the "representation of reality". There are two corollaries to this : firstly, Art imitates what is there.' i.e. what exists in reality; and secondly, it imitates 'what is not

---

1 E.G. Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse, Phaidon, 1965, quoted in Stephen Prickett, Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Poetry of Growth, Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.153.

there.' i.e. what exists in reality; and secondly, it imitates 'what is not there'. For the first distinction, "mimetic" is the word that has been traditionally used, and for the second type of artistic creation, imitation of what is not present in reality, may be called the " meontic" mode. What Blake had drawn, may have been derived from the traditional image of the Christian Devil, but it also stands as an example of the "meontic" mode - representing in Art something that is 'not there'. The difference between 'what is there' and 'what is not there' can be shown simplistically by quoting Keats' remark in a letter while comparing himself to Lord Byron:

"You speak of Lord Byron and me-There is this great difference between us. He describes what he sees- I describe what I imagine."[2]

Blake had had various problems with Wordsworth's deep association, or as he saw it, his dependence upon nature; nature being in his terms equivalent to Reality. On Henry Crabb Robinson's copy of Wordsworth's Poems (1815), Blake had made annotations in his own hand. On the title-page to the "Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood," Blake had written-

"I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man, rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually & then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration."[3]

---

2 Keats, letters, The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, Vol. II ed. H.E.Rollins. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1958, p. 200.

3 Blake Complete Writings, ed. By Geoffrey Keynes, London, OUP, 1969, p.782.

Blake opposed the assumption that the imaginative faculty depended upon the material reality of nature. To him, "One Power alone makes a Poet-- Imagination the Divine Vision."[4] (P vii). To Wordsworth's title for section XV, "INFLUENCE OF NATURAL OBJECTS in calling forth and strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and early Youth," Blake replies-

"Natural objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & Obliterate Imagination in Me Wordsworth must know that what he writes Valuable is not to be found in Nature."[5]

Baudelaire, writing in 1859, had said-

"I find it worthless and tedious to represent that which is, because nothing of that which is satisfies me. Nature is ugly, and I prefer the monsters of my fantasy to matter-of-fact... triviality."[6]

He cannot assign to Art "the sterile function of imitating nature."[7] And Blake had put it quite succintly himself-

---

4 Ibid, p.782.

5 Ibid, p.783.

6 Baudelaire, Oeuvres Completes, ed. Claude Pichois, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, Paris, Gallimard, 1975-76, Vol. II, p.627. quoted in T. McFarland, Romanticism and the forms of Ruin, Princetion Univ. Press, New Jersey, 1981, p.385.

7 Baudelaire, p.100, quoted in Mc Farland, Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, p.385.

"Why are Copiers of Nature Incorrect while Copiers of Imagination Are Correct this is manifest toall."[8]

Edward Young had said much the same thing even earlier in his Conjectures, 1759-

"... so boundless are the bold excursions of the human mind, that in the vast void beyond real existence, it can call forth shadowy beings, and unknown worlds, as numerous, and bright , and, perhaps as lasting , as the stars ; such quite-original beauties, we may call Paradisaical."[9]

Coming back to Blake's water-colour, "Paradisaical" is not perhaps the correct adjective to describe something so obviously bestial, but it is close to the heavens in so far as the mind in the act of creating, especially in the meontic style, something that is truly the child of the imagination, comes nearest to the Divine.

It is necessary to understand what the Beast, as a symbol, stood for in Blake's scheme of things. If we repeat Coleridge's definition of `symbol' as something which "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" *then his understanding that the symbol is a part that enunciates the whole points the way towards the realisation that meontic art is emotionally more

---

8 Blake, ed. Keynes, p. 567.

9 Edward Young, Conjectures on Original Composition, 1759, quoted in Mc Farland Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, p. 418.

* See the previous chapter.

intense than purely mimetic art. Because as Plato says in his Laws, any part always strives to reconstitute itself into wholeness.

"Thine own being, foolish man, is a fragment, and so, far all its littleness, its striving is ever directed toward the whole... to win bliss for the life of the life of the whole; the life of the whole is not made for thee, but thou for it. For every physician and every craftsman does all his work for the sake of some whole, and he produces a part for the sake of a whole"[10]

If Blake's Beast is symbolically, a part of the whole, it then strives to become part of the wholeness of received history. For Blake, the limitations of orthodox Christianity were political and theological evil. Evil which was institutionalised and authoritarian. (We shall see later, that in his writings Blake's idea of Energy, as against Reason, came from the Beast of Christianity, Satan.)

His political vision is powerful when he says " Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion."[11] In his poem "London," we hear the clanging of the "mind forg'd manacles"-

I wander thro' every charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,

---

10 Plato, Laws (903 CD) The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Hamilton and Cairn, Pantheon Books, New York, 1964. P.1459.

11 Blake, ed. Keynes. p. 151.

Blake, "The Good and Evil Angels, from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." The "good" angel represents repression, the "bad" angel, energy.

In every voice, in every ban,
The mind - forg'd manacles I hear.
How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls;
And the hapless soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.
But most thro' mid night streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse."[12]

In the first breath of optimism that spread through the intellectual circles of Europe after the French Revolution, Blake had written in " The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790), "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite."[13] He saw the New Order of the world as breaking free from the despotism of the senses and Lockean empiricism. In "The Book of Thel" he writes

'Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
'Or the Glist'ning Eye to the poison of a smile ?....
'Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
'Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in ?
'Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror,trembling, & affright?"[14]

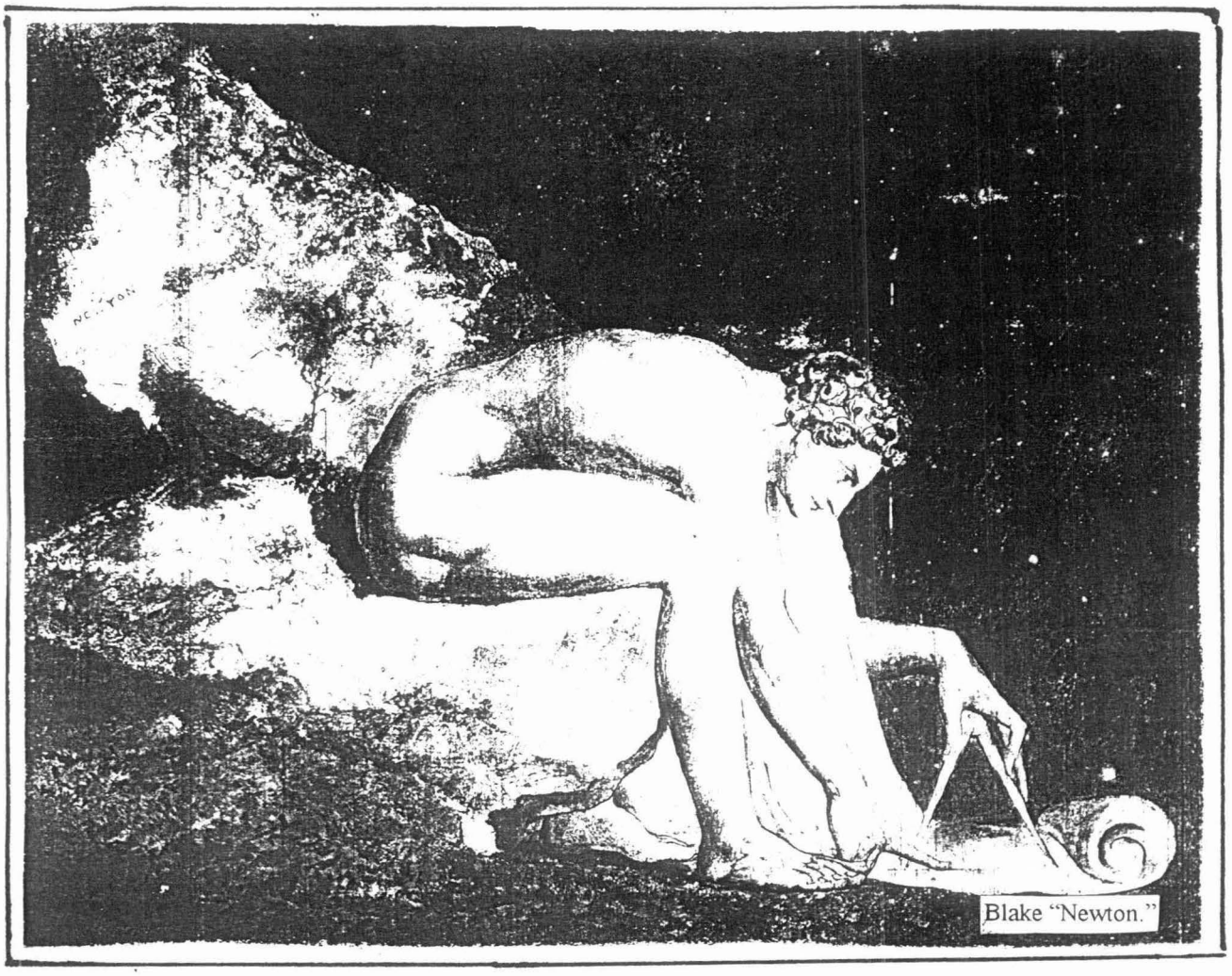
The higher and better way of experiencing life was not through the senses, but through the mind. In "The Marriage," Heaven and Hell do not actually marry, but are turned upside down in a reversal of concepts. Satan, the Beast, is Energy (which in Blake's book stands for

---

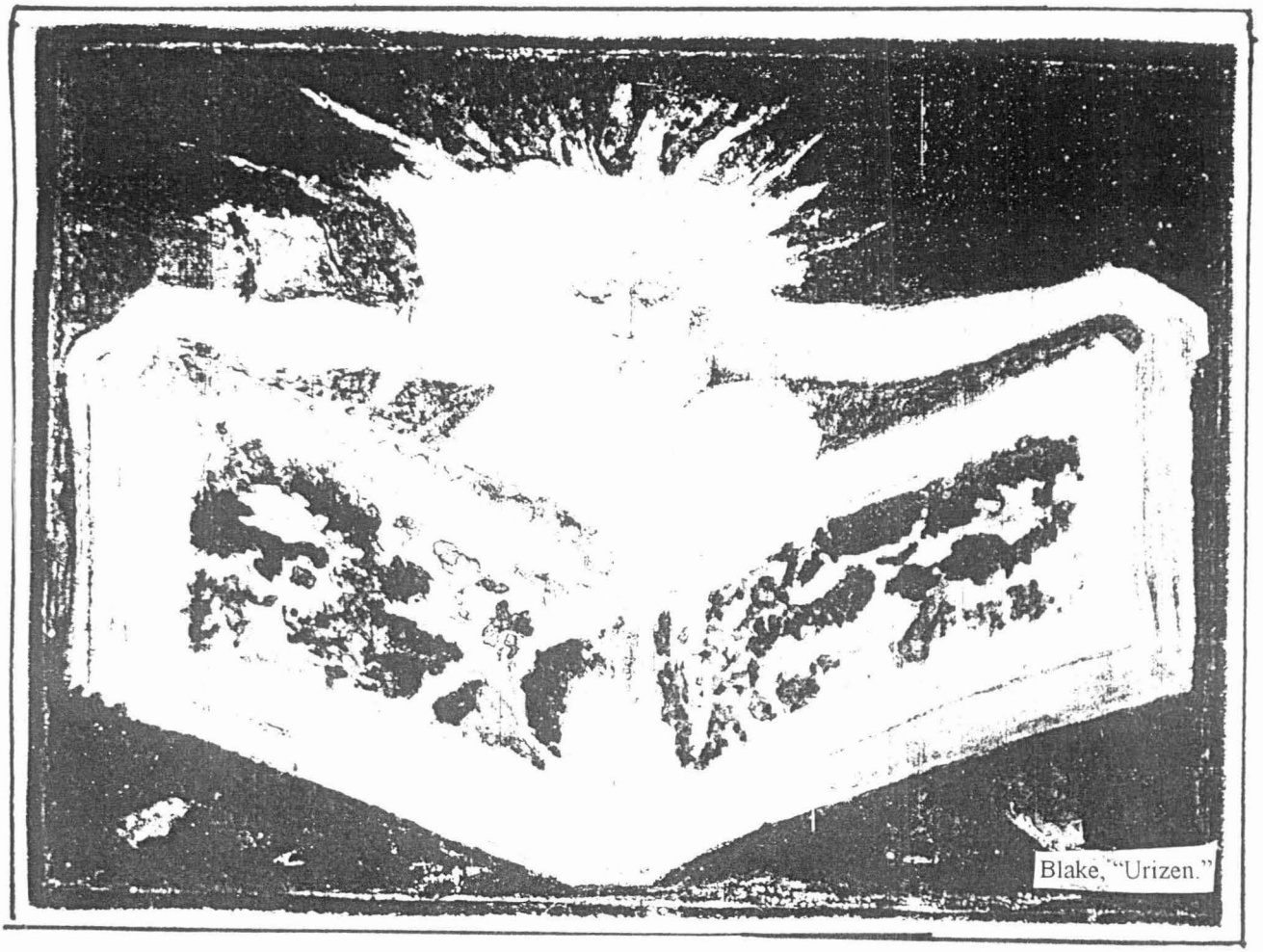
12 Ibid., p. 216.

13 Ibid., p. 154.

14 Ibid., p. 130.



Blake "Newton."



Blake, "Urizen."

political revolution, sexual drives, imagination, spiritual birth and liberty) whereas God becomes the "Great Forbidder." In "The Book of Urizen," the knowledge that God had deliberately created evil, without attempting to forestall the Fall, becomes a new myth. The creation and the Fall gets united. In this stage of Blake's career, he sees the forces of Repression as victorious - Blake connects Urizen with orthodox Christianity and with its tyrannical, constrictive God who declares:

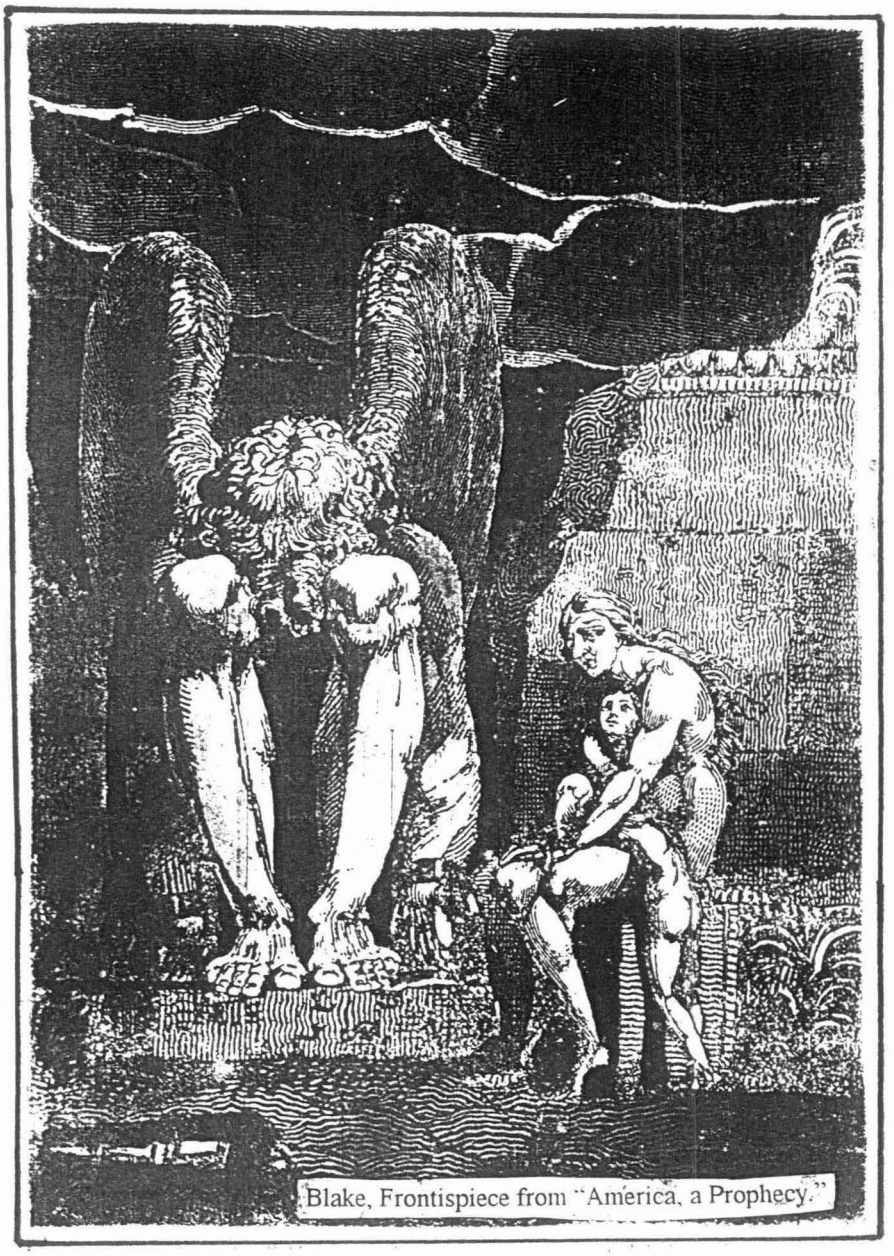
> "Lo ! I unfold my darkness : and an
> This rock, place with strong hand the Book
> Of eternal lrass, written in may solitude."[15]

Urizen (actually a pun an "your reason") is seen in Blake's painting of the same name, as looking down on the book of his creation, which Blake called "The Bible of Hell ." In another painting, Newton intently checks the precision of a drawn figure with a geometrical instrument. The compass and the divider symbolises his capacity to measure the physical, material world, which simultaneously blinds him to the infinite possibilities of the imagination.

The search for and creation of new, alternative myths to make intelligible the new understanding of the universe, was an universal Romantic concern. As René Wellek said, "All the great romantic poets are mythopoeic, are symbolists whose practice must be understood in terms of their attempt to give a total mythic interpretation of the world

---

15 Ibid., p. 224.



Blake, Frontispiece from "America, a Prophecy."

to which the poet holds the key."[16] And Blake was among the first to create a new mythology. Wellek continues -

"Blake's mythology in neither classical nor Christian, though it incorporates many Biblical and Miltonic elements. It draws vaguely on some Celtic (Druidical) mythology...., But essentially it is an original ....creation which tries to give both a cosmogony and an apocalypse: a philosophy of history, a psychology and.... a vision of politics and morals."[17]

Blake in A Descriptive Catalogue had written about his own works "The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him more perfect and more minutely organised than any thing seen by his mortal eye."[18]

A vision such as this made Blake create an engraving like "America, a Prophecy" (1793) in which the winged spirit of revolution, Orc, sits chained and bowed. The Prophecy may be linked to the following lines spoken by Orc-

"Let the inchained soul, shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never, seen a smile in thirty weary years,

---

16 René Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History", quoted in Points of View, p. 206.

17 Ibid., p. 206.

18 Blake, ed. Keynes, pp.576-577.

Rise and look out; his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open And let his wife and children return from the oppressor's scourge."[19]

Raymond Lister interprets the engraving in the following manner-

"...the engraving does combine the Romantic concepts of the chained and naked hero (the main figure), pathetic humanity (the woman and children), revolt (the breached wall, the broken weapons), and fate (the threatening clouds louring above the scene)."[20]

Even if we have doubts about the sweeping generalisation of the above interpretation we cannot doubt that Blake refashioned old Myths for his own purposes. In the same manner, Shelley searched for an old myth and redefined it to create an apocalyptic verse drama. In the Preface to "Prometheus Unbound". Shelley gives a brief description of the story as it had been written by Aeschylus and then proceeds to give us his reasons for changing it the way he did:

"Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus; an ambition which, if my preference to this mode of treating the subject had incited me to cherish, the recollection of the high comparison such an

---

19 Ibid., p. 198.

20 Raymond Lister, British Romantic Art, p.84.

attempt would challenge might well abate. But, in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary. The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan."[21]

Prometheus lies chained, like Orc, to a rock, suffering perennial torture on behalf of humankind. He cries-

"No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure.
I ask the earth, have not the mountains felt?
I ask yon Heaven, the all-beholding sun,
Has it not seen? The sea, in storm or calm,
Heaven's ever-changing shadow, spread below,
Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?
Ah me! Alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!"[22]

Hercules releases him with the help of destined forces (Demogorgon) and brings about an end to Jupiter's repressive Power: Demogorgon speaks the final lies-

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite ,
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night.
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;

---

21 The Complete Poetical Works of Keats and Shelley. pp.225-226.

22 Ibid., p. 229.

To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent.
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory."[23]

Since we have been talking about myths and the various reinterpretations of classical myths that the Romantic poets engaged in, to accomodate the new understanding of the universe, it would be worthwhile to see how myth has been defined. The Encyclopaedia Britannica writes thus:

"Myth is a collective term used for one kind of symbolic communication and specifically indicates one basic form of religious symbolism, as distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (such as temples and icons).... As with all religious symbolization, there is no attempt to prove that these unusual, transcendent, or divine events are "possible" or otherwise to justify them. For this reson, every myth presents itself as authoritative and always as an account of facts, no matter how completely different they may be from the ordinary world. The original Greek term for myth ("mythos") denotes "word" in the sense of a decisive, final pronouncement. It differs from "logos", the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated."[24]

But the problem arises because the Romantic poet did see "mythos" as " logos"., the validity of which could be questioned and

---

23 Ibid., p. 293.

24 The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 24, E.B.Inc., 15th edition, p.710.

reconstructed to further the poets' own argument. When Shelley could with impunity change received myths to incorporate his own political leanings, or when Blake could, while still retaining the iconographical features in his paintings of the Devil, powerfully change the concepts

concerning "good" and "evil" and the Christian cosmogony, we realise that a revolution of ideas is discerible in all Romantic creation. Shelley writes in the same Preface from which I had quoted earlier-

"We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion... The great writers of our own age, we have reason the suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring, or is about to be restored."[25]

When the Britannica talks about "Basic modes of approach" for myths, after the Rationalistic, it describes the Romantic and ends the short paragraph with the following interesting sentence-

"Also Romantic is the long-lingering explanation of myth as an expression of man's experience of nature."[26]

---

25 Shelley, Preface to "Prometheus Unbound", p.227.

26 The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, p. 713.

* "The Romantic poets identified the creative with the ethical imagination.... In this study we consider the relationship of each poet's belief to his poetry and find... that the

*Recent criticism has tried to reconnect the Romantic poets to Christion tradition. But it is evident even after a cursory reading of their

works that at least five of the major poets- Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Keats; questioned the validity of the Christian doctrine of Sin and Guilt, either privately or publicly ; and found it necessary to search for and create new, alternate fates in which to place themselves in the social or natural world . And even when they did use Christian images or beliefs in their writings, the divine revelation did not happen on a one - to-one basis between the Creator and the suppliant worshipper, but through the medium of nature. Nature is no longer merely the bearer of a Christian message to make manifest God's power as in Herbert's poetry. Herbert could write into the poem entitled "The Flower," a Christian moral, an edifying tale of his own life. Poetic inspiration could be killed by a God only too happy about meting out punishment. Herbert ends, pleasantly surprised that God had forgiven him, at least for the present. I quote below the last three stanzas to make my points clearer-

" But while I grow in a straight line,
Still upwards bent, as it heav'n were mine own,
Thy anger comes, and I decline:
What frost to that? What pole in not the zone,
Where all things burn,
Where thou dost turn,
And the least frown of thine is shown ?

---

poets stood closer to orthodox Christianity than they realized or than we have since." English Romanticism, the Grounds of Belief, John Clubbe and Ernest J. Lovell. Macmillan Press, London, 1983. p.2.

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write:
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing : O my onely light,
It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night
These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
To make us see we are but flowers that glide:
Which when we once can finde and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us, where to bide.
who would be more
swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride."[27]

Herbert had written this in the seventeenth century and much had happened in the intervening two centuries. But even Wordsworth had to frequently change passages in the "Prelude" to counter charges of unorthodoxy and heresy, specially with regard to his leanings towards pantheism. For example, the phrase- "God and Nature's single sovereignty"[28] (9:237)" appears in a different form in the 1850 version as

" Presences of God's mysterious power
Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty"[29]

He would often pause over giving an actual name or identification to the source of his inspiration.

---

27 The Metaphysical Poets, ed. Helen Gardner, Penguin Classics, London, 1972, pp. 137-138.

28 "The Prelude" (1805 version) E.de Selincourt, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p.xxxvi.

29 Ibid., p.xxxvi.

"The sense of God, or whatso'er is dim
or vast in its own being, above all,
One function of such mind had Nature there
Exhibited by putting forth, and that
With circumstance most awful and sublime".[30]

The Divine could be perceived only through objects in which goodness resided. As Wordsworth says in "The Excursion".

"An *active* Principle :- however removed
From sense and observation, it subsists
In all things, in all natures ; in the stars
Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds
In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks.
The moving waters, and the invisible air.
Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
Beyond itself, communicating good...'[31]

One such symbol for the existence of some higher, divine power was the rainbow . Certain ideological convictions forestalled the Romantics from directly naming God as the source of poetic inspriation. But the rainbow readily lent itself to religious exegesis. Words such as `glory' or `halo' abound in Romantic poetry as synonyms for it. In fact the rainbow also takes us back to the beginning of this chapter where we had discussed Art as (i)representing things "that are there" and (ii) things "that are not there". A problem of reality crops up while talking about the rainbow. Addison in Spectator no: 413, writing on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," shows the influence of Newtonian science and Lockean epistemology.

---

30 (ed.) E.de. Selincourt,. p.231.

31 publs. Ward, Lock and Co., p.667.

"Things would make but a poor Appearance to the Eye, if we saw them only in thir proper Figures and Motions ; And what Reason can we assign for thir exciting in us many of those Ideas which are different from any thing that exists in the Objects themselves, (for such are Light and Colours) were it not to add Supernumerary Ornaments to the Universe, and make it more agreeable to the Imagination ?... What a rough and unsightly Sketch of Nature should we be entertained with, did all her Colouring disappear, and the several Distinctions of Light and Shade vanish."[32]

This was in 1712. The date of this piece is important because it was written just eight years after Newton's Opticks, in which he had published his findings on light and colour after his experiments with prisms. The relationship between man and nature shown in the act of the perception of the rainbow is very interesting. The rainbow exists neither "out there" in the sky nor "in" the mind of the beholder. It only exists on the one hand, when there are specific atmospheric conditions of nature and light and on the other, in the lens and retina of the observer. That is to say, the rainbow exists only when there is a sympathetic relationship between the observer and the natural world . Hopkins in 1864, had conclusively stated the problem-

"It was a hard thing to undo this knot.

---

32 Quoted in Wimsatt and Brooks, p.259. Addison here refers to the eight chapter of the second book of Locke's Essay.

The rainbow shines, but only in the thought
Of him that looks. Yet not in that alone,
For who makes rainbows by invention?
And many standing round a waterfall
See one bow each, yet not the same to all
But each a hand's breadth further than the next.
The sun on falling waters writes the text
Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.
It was a hard thing to undo this knot."[33]

But this was not so during the eighteenth century, because in between had come the Romantic epoch which had problematised questions on perception and conception. Thomson in his "Seasons," writing nearly a hundred and forty years before Hopkins, with his understanding of Newtonion optics, wrote in intellectual joy, contrasting himself to the "swain" who tries to catch the rainbow.

"Meantine, refracted from yon eastern cloud,
Bestriding earth, the grand ethereal bow
Shoots up immense ; and every hue unfolds,
In fair proportion running from the red
To where the violet fades into the sky.
Here awful Newton, the dissolving clouds
Form, fronting on the sun, thy showery prism;
And to the sage - instructed eye unfold
The various twine of light, by thee disclosed
From the white mingling maze. Not so the swain.
He wondering views the bright enchantment bend
Delightful, o'er the radiant fields, and runs
To catch the falling glory ; but amazed
Beholds the amusive arch before him fly,
Then vanish quite away."[34] (Spring," 203-17)

---

[33] Quoted in Prickett, Coleridge and Wordsworth, the Poetry of Growth, p.9.

Although Wordsworth had paid his tributes to Newton in the "Prelude,"* his appreciation of the rainbow was because of his understanding of nature, not physics. It formed a part of his private religion, his "natural piety." In the following lines, written on the night before he started his "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," we find a microcosm of Wordsworthian thought.

"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky ;
So was it when my life began ;
So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old
Or let me die !
The child is father of the man :
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety."[35]

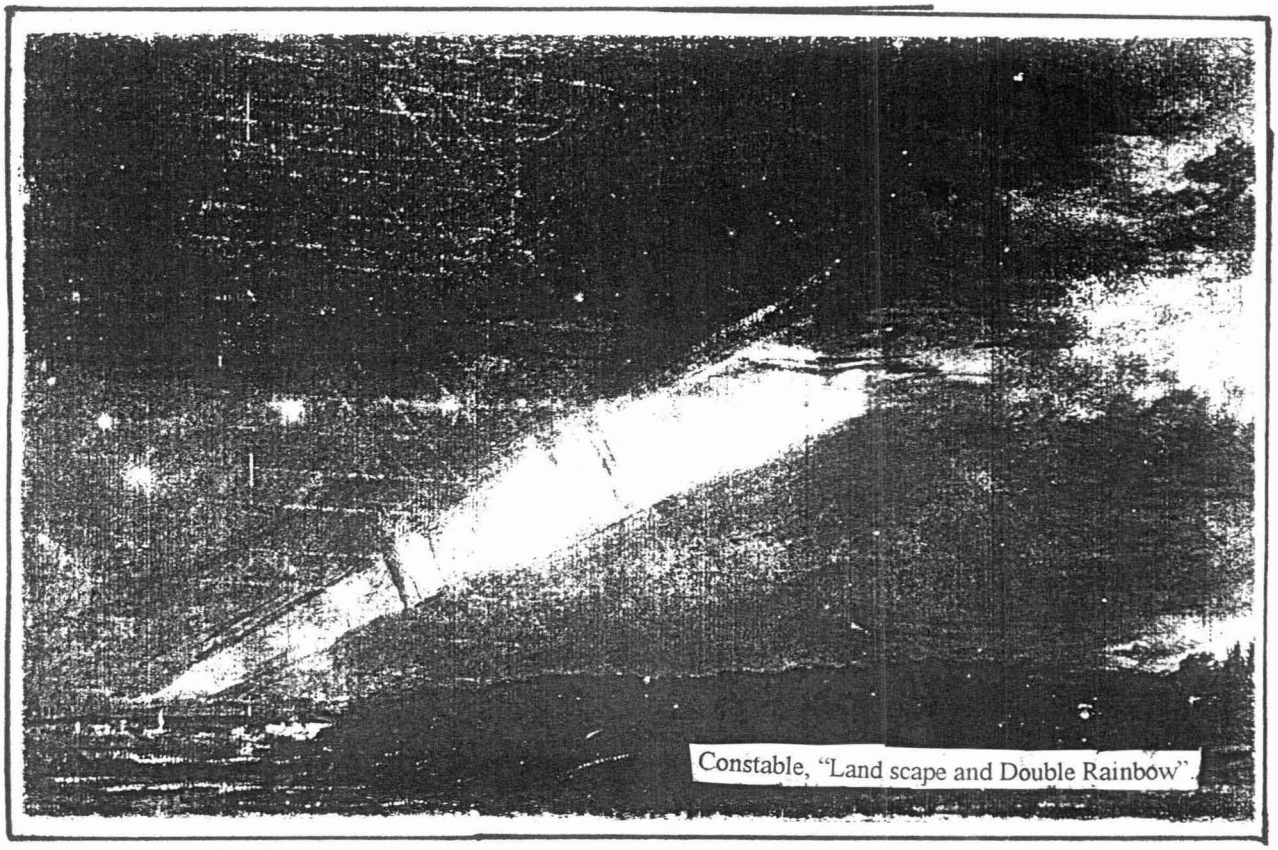
It is eye-opening to note that these lines were copied out by none other than Constable towards the end of his life. But he had always been fascinated by the subject. In his " Landscape and Double Rainbow," the bow seems to shoot out from a ink-blue sky dominating the entire landscape of trees on the left and at the centre and a tiny windmill in the right hand corner.

---

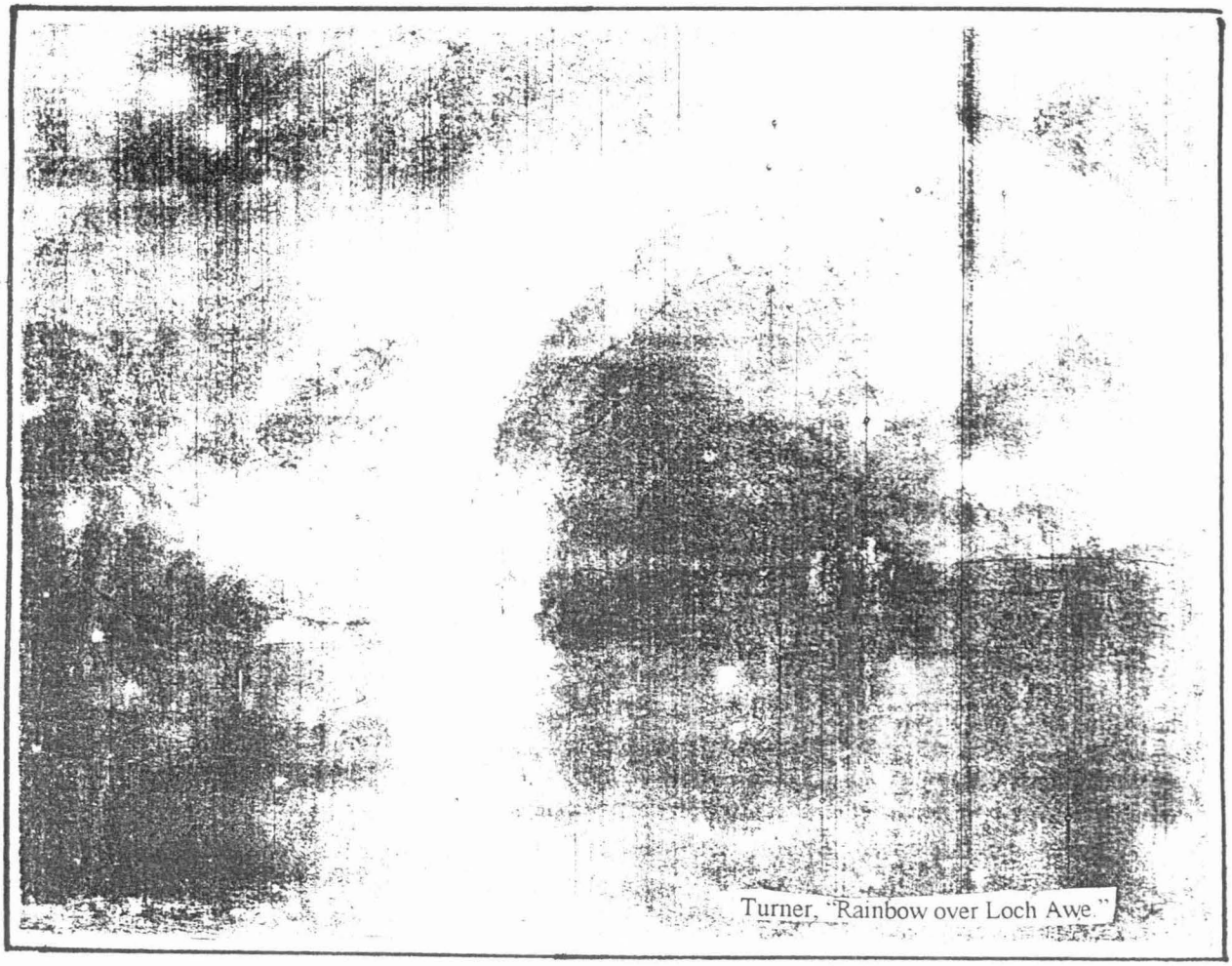
34 Ibid., p.6.

* "Newton with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind forever,
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone." (Book III, ls. 60-3).

35 publs. Ward, Lock & Co, p.65.



Constable, "Land scape and Double Rainbow".



Turner, "Rainbow over Loch Awe."

Wordsworth wrote in his note to " The Thorn," "that it (poetry) is the history or science of feelings."[36] The poets of the future, he writes in the 1802 Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads,"

" Will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science...[37]

Carrying sensation (feeling) into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the chemist , the botanist, or minerologist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any on which it can be employed..."

But this cannot happen until science becomes

"...Material to us as enjoying and suffering beings." Until science is "ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood."[38]

Newton seems to stand in the way of such a realisation, Coleridge in a letter to Poole (23rdMarch 1801) writes that Newton is a "mere materialist."[39] And Keats in Benjamin Haydon's "Immortal Dinner" of 1817 had proposed a toast, "Confusion to the memory of Newton" in the presence of Lamb, Haydon and Wordsworth. When Wordsworth had asked for an explanation, Keats had replied-

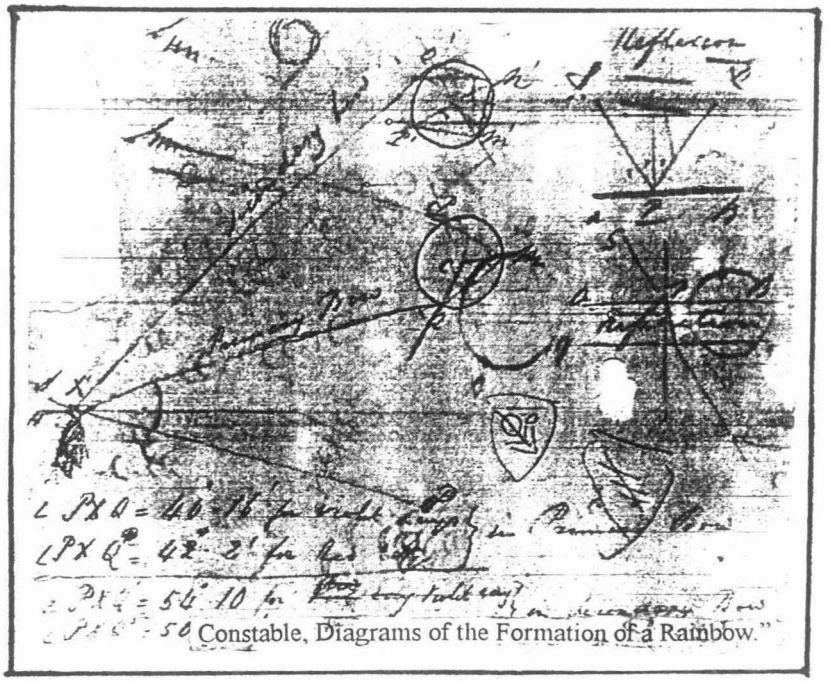
---

36 Ibid., p.160.

37 Ibid., p.703.

38 Ibid., p.703.

39 Collected Letters of S.T. Coleridge, (ed.) by E.L.Griggs, Oxford Clarendon Press, London, Vol. II, p.338. In the same letter, he writes: "I believe that the souls of 500 Sir Isaac Newtons would go to the making of a Shakespeare or a Milton".



Constable, Diagrams of the Formation of a Rainbow."

"Because he destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism."[40]

He makes it clearer in "Lamia"

" There was an awful rainbow once in heaven :
We know her woof, her texture- she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things."[41] (231-233)

Constable in 1833, at the age of fifty - seven, started drawing the rainbow as a scientific phenonenon; drawing prisms and calculating angles. He gives Newton his due; makes optical diagrams, lists the colours of the spectrum and notes that there are "3 primary" and "7 prismatic" colours. And ultimately, in a true Romantic vein, seemingly confronted with the infinitude of nature as against scientific measurement, wrote almost in surprised revelation,

"There is no limit to the number of prismic colours."[42]

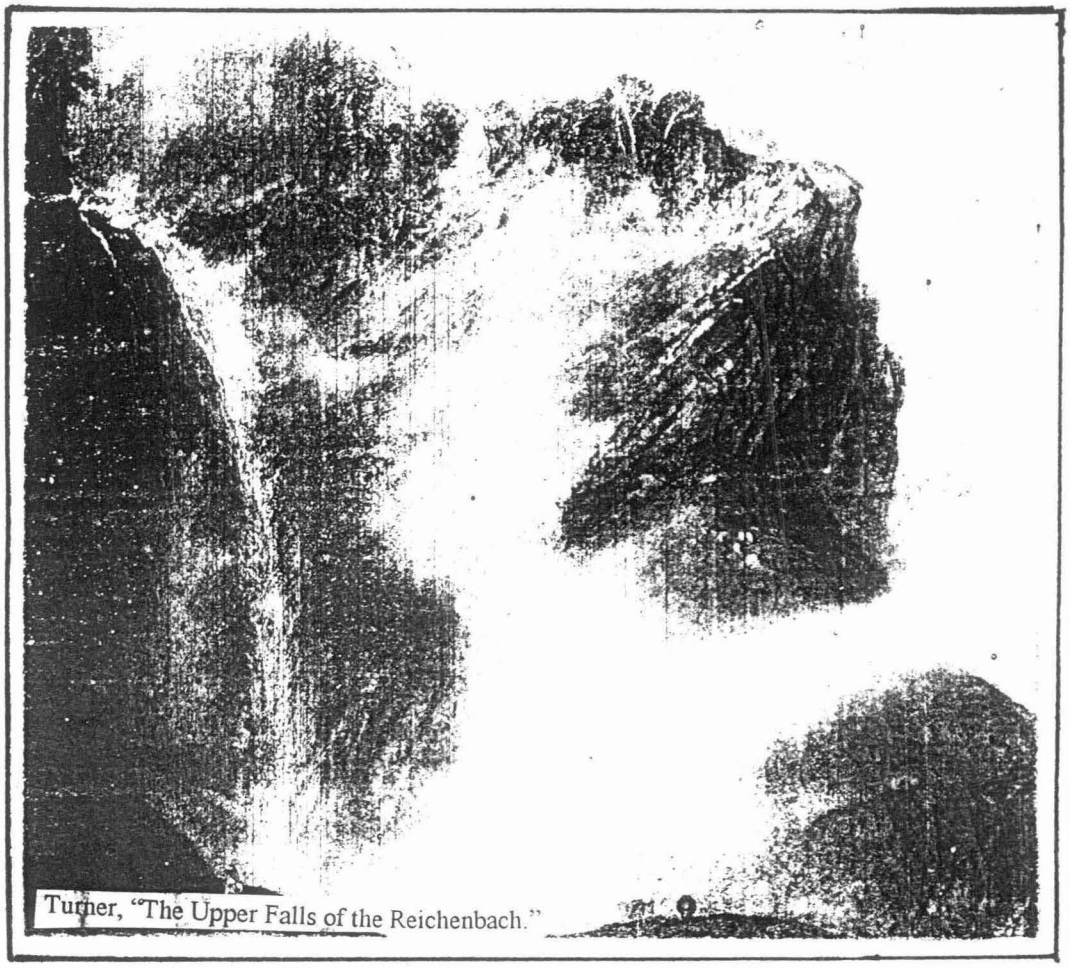
Constable's rainbows in paintings like "London from Hampstead with a Double Rainbow" or "Sky Study with a Rainbow" " are colourful arcs of light and colour against dark backgrounds. Compared to the calm and sober rainbows of Turner, painted with light against light ("Rainbow over Loch Awe," " The Upper Falls of the Reichenbach" or "Rainbow : Osterspey and Feltzen on the Rhine") they are shocking in

---

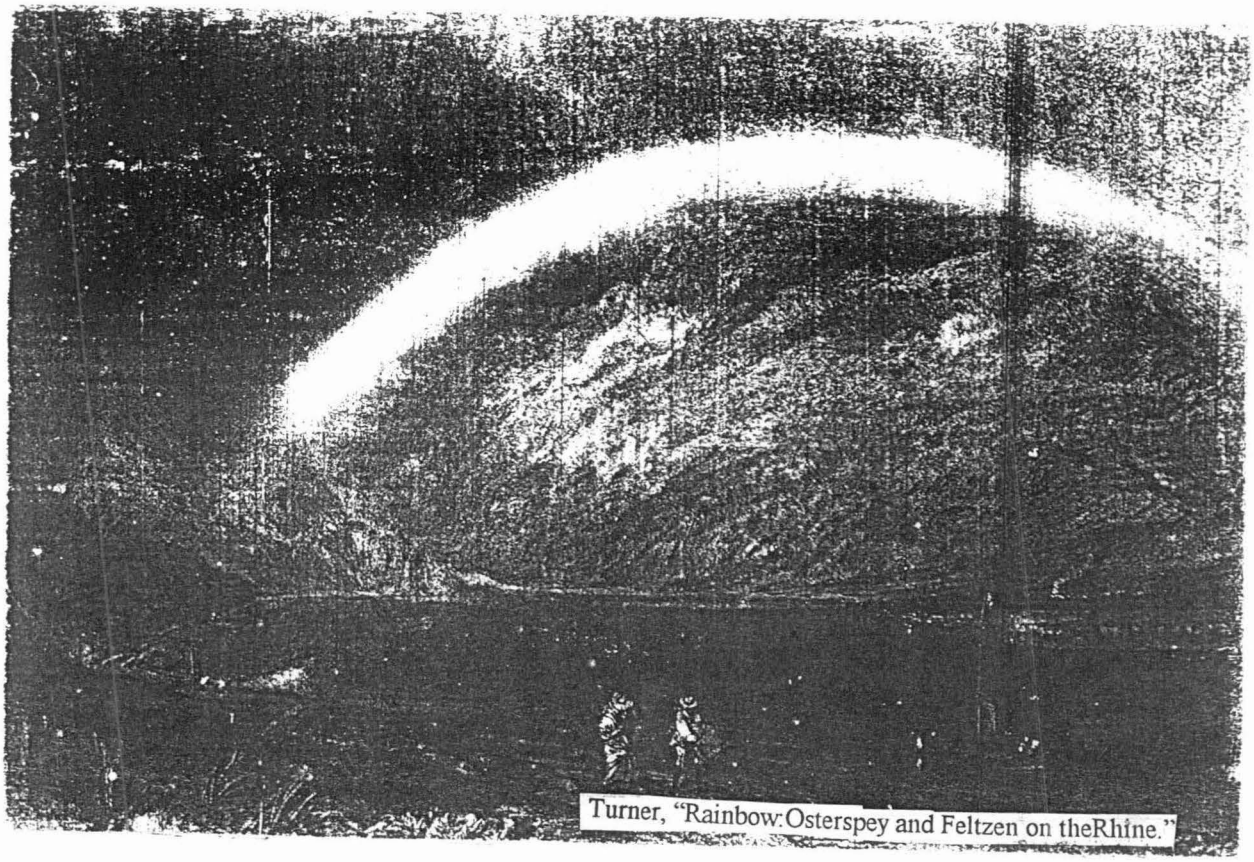
40 The Autobiography of Benjamin Haydon, (ed.) Elwin. Mcdonald, 1950. pp. 316-317. Quoted in William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism, pp.64- 65.

41 The Complete Poetical Works of Keats and Shelley, p.155.

42 Constable, Diagrams on the Formation of a Rainbow, Quoted in William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism. p.68.



Turner, "The Upper Falls of the Reichenbach."



Turner, "Rainbow: Osterspey and Feltzen on the Rhine."

their child-like intensity. They almost seen to have been painted for Wordsworth's lines in the "Prelude"-

"Upon the edge of autumn, firece with storm:
The wind blew down the vale of Coniston
Compressed as in a tunnel; from the lake
Bodies of foam took flight, and everything
Was wrought into commotion, high and low-
A roaring wind, mist, and bewildered showers,
Ten thousand thousand waves, mountains and crags,
And darkness, and the sun's tumultuous light.
Green leaves were rent in handfuls from the trees...
The horse and rider staggered in the blast...
Meanwhile, by what strange chance I cannot tell,
What combrination of the wind and clouds,
A large unmutilated rainbow stood
Immovable in heaven."[43]

As a miracle of nature, the rainbow in the the heaven stood for the beauty and poetry of a benevolent ("sense of") "God." A God who did not punish, repress, or kill inspiration, but whose bow became an ideal symbol for a covenant with nature. The Romantic artist's closeness to it shows. how the past and the future can be coalesced in the emotional permanence of a moment . This is why the following lines become a kind of prayer, a prayer of the Romantic artist so that he does not lose his vision, his inspiration, his imagination-

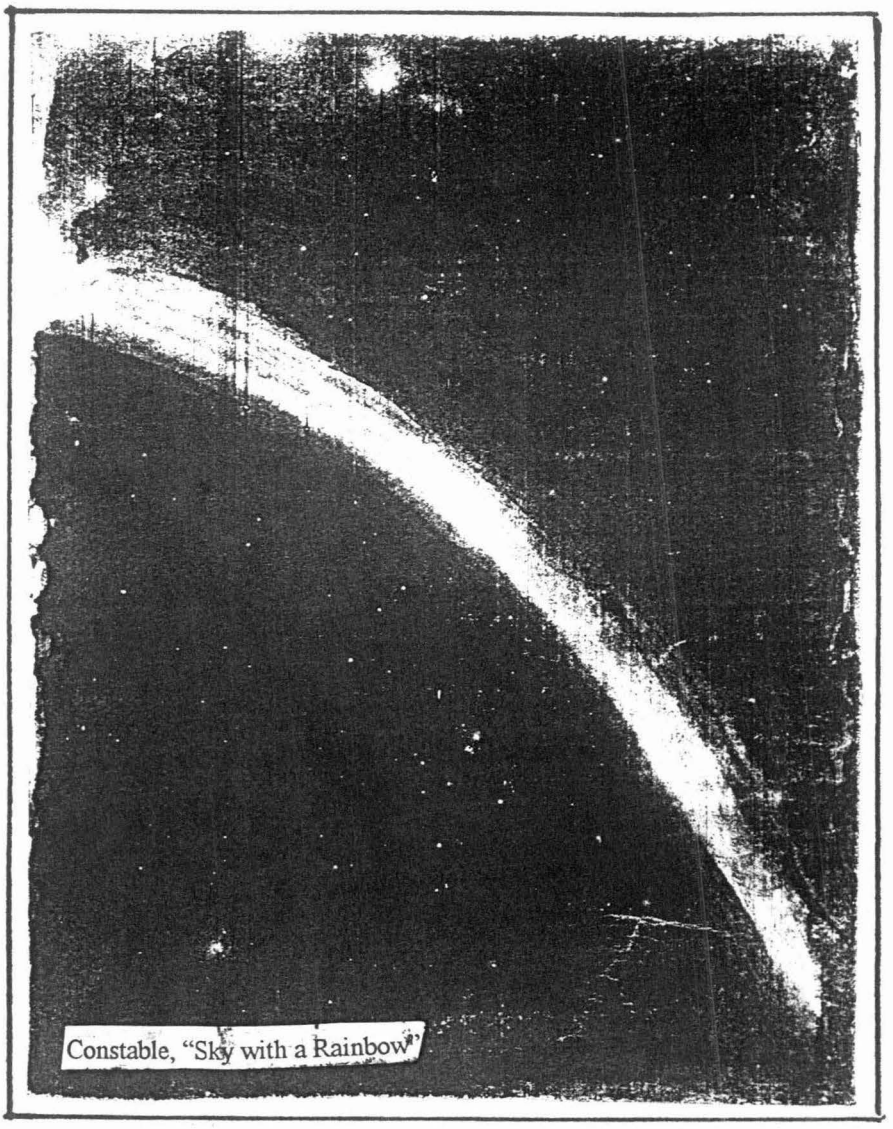
" So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,

---

43 Ibid. p. 72.

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die !"



Constable, "Sky with a Rainbow"

CONCLUSION :-

In Plato's Phaedrus , Socrates says,

"You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before it as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you the same thing forever."

In my dissertation, my endeavour was to make both paintings and poetry talk; to tell me their secrets. I do not know how successful I have been in my efforts, but I do know that, I have, in a way, penetrated their silence, have been able to know their realities.

In this century, thinkers and practitioners of both painting and poetry have almost self-consciously brought the two together. Movements like Impressionism, Surrealism, Expressionism, etc., deliberately brought the two media together so it is a fairly simple matter to find philosophical similarities underlying the products of these movements.

But it was not such a simple matter in the nineteenth century, because there were no real trends clubbing the two together. The similarities between the two media that I have found in this interart study have been generally, because of the impact of the socio-political scene and particularly, because the conditions of representation in all ages remain the same. The need to know the total reality of an object and represent it in images, as I had said in my introduction, remains the basic foundation of all art; specially media like painting and poetry.

Criticisms can be levelled against the sort of work that I have done, chief among them could be that my analysis has been a superficial one, dependent upon the external effects of the images on the receiver's (namely my own) consciousness. But I think, the historical and philosophical bases of the images have not been ignored in my dissertation. The revolutionary ideal of the imagination, the new organic conception of nature, the radical novelty of the ideas associated with the symbols and the fervent questioning of old myths and religious beliefs, have all been meticulously looked into in my dissertation. The images had talked intelligently, the colours were alive, the words were full with the urge to reveal their secrets.

I hope I was alert enough sensitive enough to see and hear them.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Badt, Kurt. (trans.) Godman, S. John Constable's Clouds. Oxford University Press. London. 1930.

(trans.) Bywater, Ingram. Aristotle's Poetics. Oxford Clarendon Press. London. 1988.

Clubbe, John and Lovell, Ernest J. English Romanticism : the Grounds of Belief. Macmillan Press. London. 1983.

(ed.) Coburn, Kathleen. The Philosophical Lectures. Coleridge on Logic and Learning. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. 1950.

(ed.) Coleridge, Hartley. Coleridge : Collected Poetical Works. Oxford University Press. London. 1969.

(ed.) Dobree, Bonamy. Alexander Pope's Collected Poems. Everyman's Library. London.1969.

(ed.) Gardner, Helen. The Metaphysical Poets. Penguin Classics. London. 1972.

(eds.) Gleckner, Robert F. and Enscoe, Gerald E. Romanticism, Points of View. Prentice Hall Inc. New Jersey, 1964.

(ed.) Gosse, Sir, E.and Wise, T.J. Swinburne's Complete Works. Oxford University Press. London. 1951.

(ed.) Griggs, E.L.Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Vol. 2. Oxford Clarendon Press. London.

(eds.) Hamilton and Cairn, The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Pantheon Books, New York. 1964.

(eds.) Kapoor, Kapil and Kapoor, Ranga. Canonical Texts of English Literary Criticism with Selections from Classical Poeticians. Academic Foundation. New Delhi. 1995.

(ed.) Keynes, Sir Geoffrey. Blake: Complete Writings. Oxford University Press. London. 1969.

Levere, Trevor H. Poetry Realised in Nature: Coleridge and Early Nineteenth Century Science. Cambridge University Press. London. 1957.

Lister, Raymond. British Romantic Art. Bell and Sons. London. 1973.

(ed.) Matthews, G. And Everest, K. Complete Poems of Shelley, Vol. 1 Longman. London and New York. 1967.

Mc. Farland. T. Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin. Princeton University Press. New Jersey. 1981.(ed.) Palgrave. Palgrave's Golden Treasury. with a new fifth book by John Press. Oxford University Press. London. 1957.

Peacock, Carlos. John Constable : The Man and his Work. John Baker Publishers. London. 1966.

Praz, Mario. (trans.) Davidson, Angus. The Romantic Agony. Oxford University Press. London. 1970.

Pottle, Frederick A. "The Eye and the object in the Poetry of Wordsworth". (ed.) Dunklin, William G.T. Wordsworth Centenary Studies . Princeton University Press. New Jersey. 1951.

Prickett, Stephen. Coleridge and Wordsworth : The Poetry of Growth. Cambridge University Press. London. 1970.

Read, Herbert. Introduction to Surrealism by Andre Breton and Others. "Surrealism and the Romantic Principle." Faber and Faber Ltd. London. 1936.

(ed.) Rhys, Ernest. Hazlitt, William. The Spirit of theAge Everyman's Library. London. 1928.

Rollins, H.E. The Letters of John Keats (1814-1821). Vol. II. Harward University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1958.

Roston, Murray. Changing Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts (1650-1820) .Princeton University Press. New Jersey. 1984.

Selincourt, Ernest de. The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind. Oxford University Press. London. 1960.

(ed.) Shawcross, J. Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. Oxford University Press. London. 1975.

The Complete Poetical Works of Keats and Shelley. Random House. New York. 1950.

The Poetical Works of Lord Byron. Oxford University Press. London. 1959.

The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth. Ward, Lock and Company Ltd. London. 1950.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. Vol. 24, E.B.Incorporated. 15th Edition.

Tillich, Paul. Theology of Culture. Oxford. New York. 1959.

Willey, Basil. Nineteenth Century Studies. Chatto and Windus.London. 1966.

Wimsatt and Brooks. Literary Criticism : A Short History. Oxford and IBH Publishing Company. New Delhi 1984.

Wordsworth, Jonathan; Jaye, Michael C; Woof, Robert. William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick and London. 1987.

(ed.) Wu, Duncan: Romanticism: An Anthology. Blackwell Anthologies. New York. 1994.