

COLERIDGE AND JUDAISM

by CHANA HEILBRUN

The history of Jewish-Christian scholarly intercourse is a long and fascinating one, reaching back to the very roots of Western culture and continuing, with varied degrees of intensity and openness, through the Middle Ages and into modern times. At no time, even during those periods when Jews were vanished from the areas of the Church's dominion, were Christian theologians totally indifferent to Jewish scholarship. Paradoxically, during the period of the Crusades, at the very same time that massive anti-Jewish persecutions and pogroms were taking place, some of the most seminal and influential Christian exegetes, such as Nicholas de Lyra and Hugh of St. Victor, turned to Rabbinic scholars both past and contemporary to learn from their methods of exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹

Interestingly, it has only been quite recently, with the growth of interest in ecumenism and in the origins of theological frames of reference, that research has focused specifically on the contributions of a long and impressive line of Christian Hebraists, for the most part also philo-semites, who introduced Rabbinic source

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1. Excellent studies in this area are: Raphael Loewe, "Jewish Scholarship in England," in V.D. Lipman, ed., *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History* (Cambridge, 1961); Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh, 1963).

material and modes of thought into the general Christian theological tradition. Concurrently, we witness in contemporary literary criticism a growing interest in writers, particularly English ones, whose works manifest clearly discernible Hebraic themes and motifs, either distilled from their general heritage or acquired by specialized study.² Some of the most brilliant, if controversial, figures in the "daring school"³ of modern literary theory, such as Harold Bloom⁴ and Susan Handelman,⁵ have postulated fascinating correlations between methods of literary analysis and Rabbīnic concepts.

But despite this proliferation of works devoted to crystallizing the specifically Hebraic strain within both the Christian and Western literary heritages, a particularly fertile and productive period has thus far received scant attention. The *zeitgeist* of the 19th century gave birth to a new and dynamic approach to the Judaic tradition as a distinct historical phenomenon with its own integrity, as well as being an inseparable part of the inherited culture. The quality of perception, shaped by the traumatic transition from a theological world-view to a secular one and by the transformation of religious symbolism into imaginative myth-making, that exploded in such fecund artistic productivity, also extended to a novel interest in Jews as a people. Judaism was recognized as a historical presence and continuum, essentially different yet inextricably linked to the very foundations of the theology which was then being re-examined and reshaped on all levels. To the great literary minds of the day – most notably Samuel Coleridge (1772-1834) and George Eliot – the Jewish presence bore a fascination because it was somehow connected to the intellectual turbulence of the time, and perhaps held a few answers thereto. It is not at all coincidental, I think, that Coleridge, who agonized most deeply over this turbulence, also exhibits the most deeply rooted ambivalence toward both Jews and the Hebraic elements that fascinated him.

Another major factor that obviously propelled this interest was the gradual breaking down of barriers between Jews and the rest of society as a result of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation. Until 1871, Jews could not read at Oxford or Cambridge, although Hebrew and Talmud were major subjects taught there by Christian Hebraists, who often employed Jewish scholars as tutors or assistants. Solomon Schiller-Szinessey was the first Jewish Reader of Talmud at Cambridge in the 19th century, while Hyman Hurwitz, who received the appointment with the assistance of Coleridge, became the first Professor of Hebrew at University College. Among the well-known publications that greatly influenced the general attitude towards Jews in the nineteenth century was Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (available in English in 1781), which left a profound impact upon both Coleridge and Eliot.

2. Directly pertinent to this question are: Harold Fisch, *Jerusalem and Albion: The Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth Century Literature* (New York, 1964) and Aharon Lichtenstein, *Henry More: the Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

3. Coleridge's epithet for Herder's school of Bible criticism.

4. Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York, 1975).

5. Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: the Emergence of Rabbinic Tradition in*

Mirabeau's 1787 essay on Moses Mendelssohn, Abbe Gregoire's impassioned pleas on behalf of the emancipation of the Jews in the same year, and Mendelssohn's exchange of letters with the Swiss theologian Lavater in 1825 were also widely disseminated.

It is no wonder that the Jew became an object of interest, even of fascination, during a period when the figure of the outcast, the satanic hero, the rebel on all levels, fired the imagination. Throughout Western history, the Jew had been scourged for his embodiment of these same concepts; now, these very attributes aroused curiosity and even sympathy. It must be added, however, that this more positive attitude was not always one of disinterested acceptance. For example, the benevolent "Jews' Society," founded by Shaftsbury and McCaul for the betterment of the socio-economic status of the Jews, was still clearly aimed at conversion.

II

Coleridge's prose writings contain numerous references to Jews and Judaism. Interestingly, most of his explicit remarks on this subject occur in his later writings, after the period of his greatest poetry, when he was turning towards a more conservative outlook and suffered a progressive decline in both his physical and creative powers. Nevertheless, the most complex elements of Rabbinic influences appear in certain earlier poems, which preceded his more explicit comments. It may be that his acquaintance with Hurwitz, after Coleridge moved to Highgate around 1810, spurred him to comment more directly on matters of which he had known far earlier. Possibly also, as his theological position became more sharply crystallized, he may have felt compelled to come to grips with certain elements in his development, including Hebraism.

Much of his correspondence with Hurwitz deals with the publication of two of his poems which Coleridge had translated from the Hebrew: *Kinat Yeshurun*, on the death of the young Princess Charlotte, and an elegy on the death of George III in 1820.⁶ Other sections of these letters refer to the three tales contributed by Coleridge to Hurwitz' *Hebrew Tales*, and to the three midrashim published by Coleridge in *The Friend*. Two of the letters offer some deeper insights: Coleridge is vehement in his castigation of religious persecution, but somewhat ambivalent about conversion brought about through acts of benevolence and intellectual persuasion. He also reveals his acquaintance with portions of the Mishnah and with midrashic commentaries on Psalms, with *Sefer Yezirah* (a basic early Kabbalistic

6. Coleridge as Hebrew translator is the subject of an article by Harold Fisch in the *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, October 20, 1972.

work), and with the writings of Maimonides.⁷ He argues passionately on behalf of the recognition of the Jewish origins of Christianity and the immutable bond between them. Later, in *Table Talk*, we find greater ambivalence. In one 1830 entry, he remarked, "...the religion of the Jews is indeed a light, but it is as the light of the glow-worm, which illuminates nothing but itself."^{7a} He also recounts two humorous anecdotes of how he was "flooded by a Jew," which clearly indicate the complex dialectic of attraction and repulsion in his own attitude.

However, in order to understand the subtlety of the Hebraic motifs which lie submerged in his poetry, one needs to examine a larger sphere of influence. Elinor Shaffer⁸ places much emphasis on the German school of Biblical criticism, which fostered research into the origins of texts, linguistic analysis and historical validation. Although Coleridge repudiated this methodology *per se* as sterile and mechanical, it left an indelible stamp on his consciousness by establishing the original Semitic nature of Scripture and the Jewish milieu of the birth of Christianity, as well as by raising powerful questions about the historical Jesus. The interrelationship between text and history — that is, the view of history as an ongoing process of the revelation of text — is an essentially Hebraic view that became fundamental to Coleridge's thinking. He saw history as a mythological milieu enabling the events of a particular society to take place; what is miracle to one society may be a natural occurrence to another. Jean-Pierre Mileur, in his discussion of *The Statesman's Manual*, emphasizes Coleridge's assertion that "The misery of our age is that it recognizes no medium between the literal and the metaphorical." He concludes that to Coleridge "Literary tradition begins with the Bible, with a text to be interpreted... post-Biblical history is not a movement away from origins. Rather it is our collective effort, generation by generation, to expand ourselves to the full creation marked out for us by the Bible."^{8a}

These concepts allude to three crucial issues concerning the historical contrast between Hebraic and traditional Christian thought. The first is the inseverable connection among different levels of interpretation, between "letter" and "spirit," between the flesh and the soul of the text. The second is the reflection of that dialectic in the historical process of ongoing interpretation. The third deals with creation, a constant if ambivalent preoccupation of Coleridge.

7. See in particular *Collected Letters*, ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford, 1971), v. 5: Letter 1219 (4 January 1820), pp. 1-9, and Letter 1226 (10 March 1820), pp. 19-22, addressed to Hyman Hurwitz.

7a. *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: John Murray, n.d.), p. 93.

8. Elinor Shaffer, *Kubla Khan and the Fall of Jerusalem: the Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770-1880* (Cambridge, 1975).

8a. Jean-Pierre Mileur, *Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 92-95.

The Church's oral tradition differed from the Hebraic in that nothing could be added after Christ, who is the total fulfilment, the Logos, the Word, the creative principle of the world become flesh. Scripture was spiritualized through figure and typology; it belonged to the supra-human." This fostered a view of reality as dichotomous: i.e., the sham world of the senses vs. the real world of immutable spirit. Thus, literal meaning is not only insufficient, but misleading. In Hebraism, by contrast, the literal and the symbolic, the physical and the spiritual, are inseparable. Shaffer posits that Herder and Eichhorn, the German philosophers who promulgated the semitic approach to Scripture, were the main exegetical influences on Coleridge. Actually, Herder and Eichhorn continued in the spirit of Bishop Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry on the Hebrews*^{8b} and in fact, as I noted earlier, this tradition goes back even further. Beginning in his Cambridge days, there was imbedded in Coleridge's intellectual development the influence of the Christian Hebraists who, as astute students of rabbinics, challenged the dichotomies between "letter" and "spirit." Foremost among these were Hugh of St. Victor, who accepted the Jewish commentaries almost *in toto*, and the famous Nicholas de Lyra. The Cambridge Bible reveals a clear path from Rashi (the paragon of Jewish exegetes) to Lyra, who constantly refers to Rashi by name in his own commentary, *Postillae*, accepting nearly all of his exegeses. Lyra likewise made use of other Jewish sources: the Targumim, the Talmud, the Midrashic literature, etc. Other links in this chain are Lightfoot, Selden and Nicholas Trivet.⁹ It is therefore clear that Coleridge had a substantial portion of the Hebraic tradition at his disposal long before he set out for Germany; it is evident from his many references to Hebrew and his plays on Hebrew words that he took a particular interest in this subject.

III

It is strange that the two works of Coleridge in which we most clearly detect the presence of Hebrew motifs were left incomplete; these were, however, seminal to the other poems. One was the long, ambitious epic, *The Fall of Jerusalem*, in which the theme of universality was the major element. Coleridge wrote to Southey that he once contemplated writing a long poem about Abraham's oak, to which people of all religions would gather every summer in "general confluence doing honour thereto,"¹⁰ to symbolize this concept. The tree of Abraham's is the subject of many

8b. Robert Lowth, Bishop of London, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* (London, 1787).

9. [On Christian Hebraism generally, see: "Hebraists, Christian," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* VIII: 10-71 (including a comprehensive listing of names); Hailperin (above, n. 1); B. Smalley, *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1952). On Christian Kabbalah, see: F. Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la renaissance* (1964); H. Wirszubski, *Sheloshah Peraqim be-toldot ha-Qabbalah ha-Nozrit* (Jerusalem, 1975); Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, Bernard D. Cooperman, ed., (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 209-211; "The Christian Kabbalah," in Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), 196-201 – Ed.]

10. Quoted in Shaffer, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

midrashim concerning the theme of universal hospitality; the term *eshel*¹¹ is seen as a popular acronym for that concept.

Coleridge's main source for *The Fall of Jerusalem* was Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*. He was fascinated by the figure of Josephus as a man caught between cultures and as an example of universalism. He emphasizes the role of Jerusalem and the Temple as the focal point for all nations and religions. In Coleridge's epic there would be no hero, so as not to sacrifice its symbolic import to partisan interests – a view which, according to Shafer, was influenced by Coleridge's reading of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, in which Judaism, Christianity and Islam are presented by means of the parable of the three interlocking rings. As none of the three can prove its truth through reason or through uncontested historical evidence, none has the right to impose itself on the other: so Nathan (supposedly modeled upon the real Moses Mendelssohn) argues.

In Coleridge's *The Fall of Jerusalem*, the life and death of Jesus were to have been present, albeit behind the events. The geography of Jerusalem would serve as an art of memory, but its symbolic presence would be most palpable as an *absence*. This approaches the Hebraic concept of figurative Divine self-revelation, a dynamic creative process that can only be grasped through corresponding dynamic creative interpretation.

This point brings us to the crux of the revolutionary leap in the 19th century from the theological interpretation of myth to its secular subjectivizing and internalizing as the creative act of myth-making. The dialectics of *Pardes*,¹² the textual palimpsest or mirror, are in effect the dialectics of psychic consciousness, both individually and collectively. The point of correlation between the psychic and the textual becomes the point of myth-making. More than anything, as a poet Coleridge wished to write a "sacred text" which would totally achieve that correlation. In order to achieve this, he had to delve into the secrets of creation; hence, his searchings into the secondary imagination characterized by *Will* and by the establishment of the "*I am*", wherein the self is fully individuated. Cosmic creation, self-creation and the creation of texts are interrelated by a common symbology. For Coleridge, this path is awesome and fraught with danger. J.B. Beer states it succinctly:

Coleridge's main conflict hinges on the dilemma about the nature of man implicit in the romantic dilemma: is man stained by eternal guilt, a spiritual disease, or truly in the image of the Creator?... The poet in him seemed not only in the image of God but invested with divine power.¹³

11. A terebinth, in Hebrew. According to Rabbinic tradition, the letters in the acronym stand for the granting of "food, drink, shelter" to wayfarers.

12. Literally, "paradise" or "orchard." Used in the medieval Rabbinic tradition as an acronym for the four levels of Biblical hermeneutics: *peshat* (literal), *remez* (allegorical), *derash* (homiletical), *sod* (esoteric).

Yet the concept of personal and collective sin is inescapable, as original sin and the relationship of sin to creativity are constant themes in Coleridge.

This dilemma serves to pinpoint certain significant misconceptions about Hebraism current throughout the 19th century. Although 17th century Puritanism gave rise to many Christian Hebraists, it was in effect a repudiation of the essential world-view of Hebraism, which crystallized around the key dichotomies between Pauline and Calvinist Christianity, on the one hand, and Hebraism, on the other. The central questions were: is the gap between man and God unbridgable except through grace and an incarnate mediator? Must the "old Adam" be rooted out by separating the fallen world of matter from the world of spirit? Is the lost Shekhinah, to which Coleridge so often refers, unreachable through man's efforts?

In Hebraism, the emphasis is on birth and creation, on the active sanctification of the natural, rather than on rebirth and redemption. Man is not only capable of communing with the divine, but his task is to participate in the process of creation. The Edenic ideal is not a return to a state of innocence, but rather the achievement of full knowledge, an integration of all levels of the text. Divine and human creativity are thus linked through the medium of the text.¹⁴

The symbols in Coleridge dealing with creation, imagination, the fall, exile and guilt are permeated with a paradoxical and unresolved ambiguity. A master-key to these conflicts can be found in "The Wandering of Cain," also an abandoned project for a grand epic conceived around the same time – probably slightly preceding – that he wrote *Christabel*, *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*. In one guise or another, always surrounded by the same pattern of images, the Cain motif is central to all these poems. A question surrounds Cain's original guilt: Why was his offering not accepted? Was he already the "victim" of some arbitrary curse or persecution? Several explanations appear in the commentaries to the Genesis story, but one *midrash* particularly illuminates Coleridge's constant linking of Cain and the serpent. David Max Eichhorn¹⁵ discusses the strange and provocative midrash which tells of the union between the archetypal serpent, *Nahash ha-Kadmon*, and Eve, producing Cain as their offspring. Whether Coleridge had knowledge of that particular version is unprovable either way, but we do have evidence of his acquaintance with the complex symbology of the serpent and its role in original sin

13. J.B. Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary* (New York, 1959), p. 29.

14. This is probably one of the bases for the unique emphasis upon study as a central religious activity in Jewish law, to which Coleridge refers in a passage of the *Notebooks* (Folio N f 95): "The Jewish Rabbis (according to the Talmud) anathematized a village having 30 homes which did not maintain a school. It has struck me as curious that there are no allusions to children's schools in the Gospels or even to the instruction of children in any way."

15. David Max Eichhorn, *Cain: Son of the Serpent, a Midrash* (New York, 1957), 36, referring to *Zohar* I: 54a; BT Shabbat 145; Yebamot 103; 'Avodah Zarah 22.

in Rabbinic literature. In Jacob Boehme's rendition,¹⁶ Cain sets out to kill the serpent with his mother's blessing (an interesting Oedipal twist), but instead succeeds only in killing his brother Abel.

A Rabbinic commentary, also found in Maimonides whom Coleridge had read,^{16a} suggests a fascinating explanation for the serpent's role in the fall. The question is asked: if Adam and Eve sinned, how could they be rewarded with *knowledge*? Knowledge, in Hebraic thought, is not "forbidden"; it is the highest good, the reward of all efforts. The explanation lies in the qualification of that knowledge: it is the "knowledge of good and evil," which is a descent from total perception of truth to a fragmentation and division, a dualism within the self, whereby moralism and convention replace the clarity of a once-unified wholeness of outer and inner vision. The essences of *din* (judgment), a restrictive principle, and *hesed* (lovingkindness), an expansive principle, are separated from one another; the "trees of life" and the "tree of [knowledge of] good and evil," heretofore of one root, are severed. This same split lies at the very core of the Romantic rift between imagination and "morality." Phrased in Kabbalistic terms, one aspect of the text, the written Torah, is divided from the other aspect, the oral Torah. This dualism is prefigured, again in Kabbalistic symbology, by the "breaking of the vessels" during the process of Divine creation.

The body of Coleridge's poetry can be read on one level as a struggle with this theme. The serpent is, paradoxically, both the symbol of separation and the instrument for restoration. This dualism is found in many Eastern myths, such as the image of the serpent as a perfect circle or the emblem of snakes proceeding from the sun with rings all about them. When the pattern is broken, the sun becomes wrathfully hot and the serpent loathsome, stinging its own head. Coleridge saw this paradox imbedded in the Hebrew word *saraph*, which refers both to the serpent and one of the higher order of angels: "... and thus Rabbi Berachai observes, 'This is the mystery of our Holy language, that the serpent is called seraph as an angel is called seraph.'"¹⁷

IV

In the Hebrew exegetical tradition, the inner core of Scripture, the integration of all the levels of the text and of reality, is the Kabbalistic level, that of the revealed secret — *sod*. According to the acronym *Pardes*, this suggests the achievement of the "Edenic ideal," the highest level of knowledge accessible to man. It seems to me that a Kabbalistic reading of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, that poem which leads from cosmic creation to poetic creation, is not only plausible but extremely illuminating.

16. Beer, 193.

16a. *Guide of the Perplexed* I:2.

17. *Ibid.*, 127

As mentioned earlier, Coleridge commented on his familiarity with *Sefer Yezirah* — the Kabbalistic *Book of Creation*. His other known sources were Henry More's *Defense of the Threefold Cabbala* and *Conjectura Cabbalistica*. He was certainly familiar as well with Pico della Mirandola's translation of a Kabbalistic commentary on the Pentateuch, but his chief source was probably Jacob Boehme, the 17th century German mystic.

Elinor Shaffer sees *Kubla Khan* as an outgrowth and culmination of *The Fall of Jerusalem*. In the dissolution of time and space, in the superimposition of myth upon myth, Coleridge achieved the effect of convergence and universality for which he had aimed in that grand, aborted epic. This argument becomes even more cogent when we take into consideration not only the diverse cultural myths, but their common source in the archetypal symbolism of cosmic creation.

In the prefatory note to the poem, Coleridge quotes the lines that he had been reading in Purchas' *Pilgrimage*^{17a} just before he fell asleep. The inexact quote adds the word "commanded" (the original read "built") which, in the poem, becomes, "did... decree." Also, the sixteen miles of "plaine ground" there turn into *ten* miles of fertile ground which, in the poem, become "twice five miles of fertile ground."

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Is there an echo here of the first verse of Genesis? It is possible that the cadence of the phrase, together with the image of a palace, the numerical encompassings of meadows, springs, streams, beasts, etc., triggered in Coleridge's half-awake imagination an association with the act of creation in its Kabbalistic symbology.

According to one Kabbalistic reading, the phrase *bereshit* is to be read, not as "in the beginning" in the sense of time, but "with or through the power of *reshit*" — i.e., the initial creative principle which, in one view, is Will. The essential quality of the fully individuated "I Am", expressed in the highest of the ten emanations or *sephirot*, the Crown (*Keter*), is Will or complete authority. As Coleridge said of Scripture, "where author and authority are one."¹⁸ It is thus an act of decree — an active Will — which is in constant operation in the cosmos.

"...pleasure-dome decree." Again, in a Kabbalistic version, the first so-called sensation or movement of the *Ein Sof*, the Infinite, was one of "pleasure" which caused the first emanation.

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man

17a. Samuel Purchas, *Purchase His Pilgrimage, or, Relations of the world and the religions observed in all ages and places discovered from the creation to the present*. (London, 1613).

18. Jean-Pierre Mileur, *Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence* (Berkeley, 1982),

We have here a complex merging of palace, river Alph and cavern, alluding to the various dialectics of the process of Creation. According to the Kabbalah, *aleph*, the initial letter of the Hebrew alphabet (also associated with the word *aluf*, prince or noble), the masculine principle, combined with *beth* – *bayit*, house, the female principle – as the first act of Creation. This association is not at all far-fetched, if we recall Coleridge's numerous references in *Table-Talk* to the sacred letters of Creation. In one anecdote recorded by Carlyon,¹⁹ Coleridge was observed walking back and forth repeating the letters *aleph* – *Bet*; *AB* – *BA*; *BA* – *AB* forward and backward in an attempt to meditate upon the inscrutable nature of the deity and the "lost Shechinah." (According to the *Zohar*, all creation came about through the letters of the alphabet; thus, our apprehension of reality is essentially linguistic and figurative, as some semanticists are fond of emphasizing. The letters *yod* and *heh*, again the male and female principles, combine to form the name of God.)

The path from Alph (*aleph*) to the "river" is a clear one: the diagrammatic representations of Creation involve linear and circular shapes. A brief excerpt from Gershom Scholem's rendition of one Kabbalistic description brings the images together:

And since it is a central point it expands into a circle in the third *Sefirah*, or it builds around itself a "palace" which is the third *Sefirah*. When this point is represented as a source welling up from the depths of nothingness, the third *Sefirah* becomes the river that flows out from the source and divides into different streams following the structure of emanation until all its tributaries flow into "the great sea" of the last *Sefirah*.²⁰

The "twice five miles" (changed from the original sixteen in Purchas) recalls the ten Sefirot, representing the stages of creative emanations.

The initial calm of creation by *fiat* in the first part of Coleridge's poem now changes to tumultuous, frenetic energy:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thrasher's flail:
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
Is flung up momentarily the sacred river.

19. Beer, 210.

20. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), 109.

In Kabbalistic symbology, the willed line of creation, represented at times as a river and at times as a shaft of light, was too powerful for the vessels as it drove through and filled the Sephirot. Some of them cracked and broke, sending shards and fragments into the abyss, the space of creation. Just what this complex, evocative image means in Kabbalah is one of its deepest mysteries; it seems to suggest the first, primordial upheaval or "catastrophe" within the process of creation which prefigures all occurrences of disunion and destruction.

And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

What is this "war" but the one I have been alluding to all along as central to the Romantics: the war between imagination and ethics, between expansive love and restrictive judgment — in other words, "original sin." Thus, the "sunny pleasure dome" has "caves of ice."

In the third part, the tone of the poem again changes. There is a marked, long pause moving silently over aeons of time and measureless vistas of space to the personalized, subjective vision of the poet-creator himself.

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.

J.B. Beer interprets the Damsel "as an image of a psychological state, the recovery of Wisdom and the lost Shechinah."²¹ Mount Abora, we are told, is a reminiscence of Milton's "Mount Amara" associated with the paradise of "Abassin kings." "Amara" is also quite close in sound to "Mount Amoria" (i.e., Moriah, or *Har ha-Moriyah*) where, in Scripture, God revealed Himself to Abraham. In Rabbinic writings, the Shekhinah is frequently represented as a voice and/or a maiden.

Were the poet to revive her symphony and song within himself — it is stated as a yearning, as a wish — then he would find within himself the power to reenact, to approximate, that archetypal creative process:

I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice! ...
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

21. Beer, op. cit., 270.

Having overcome the fear, the association of sin and rebellion with creativity, having found the Divine within himself, he can now enter Eden, Paradise – that is, *Pardes*, all the levels of the sacred text. Once there, he can achieve his heart's desire to create a myth, to write a "sacred text."

Perhaps the journey into paradise – and into Hebraic fields – left Coleridge a "slightly damaged archangel" before he turned to his later conservative stance. However, it is impossible to ascertain whether his absorption of Hebraic, specifically Rabbinic, elements was a conscious one or, more likely, the result of a certain turn of mind, a temperamental leaning, at a crucial point in his creative development.

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