AN ASSESSMENT OF AKENSIDE'S ROLE AS A PRECURSOR OF ROMANTICISM: A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF MARK AKENSIDE (1721-1770)

ELDON STANLEY KING

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by

Eldon Stanley King, B.A. (Ed.); B.A.

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ABSTRACT

The traditional manner of assessing Akenside's role as a precursor of Romanticism has been to select certain isolated passages from The Pleasures of Imagination which may be seen to anticipate the work of the great Romantic poets, rather than to treat the poem as a unified argument. Owing to this kind of disregard for the unity of Akenside's poem, its full significance as an eighteenth-century exercise in poetics is often missed. Furthermore, Akenside's considerable contribution to the development of the English ode has been virtually neglected by the critics. A complete and accurate assessment of Akenside's place in the history of English literature can be made only by considering his lyric poetry in relation to the theory of aesthetics found in The Pleasures of Imagination.

In his poem Akenside presents a theory which may be seen as an important apology for poetic fancy and enthusiasm. Applying his own deistic beliefs to Shaftesbury's theory that beauty, truth, and goodness are identical, Akenside claims that beauty in the physical realm is an outward expression of divine Beauty. He also asserts that imagination is mysteriously receptive of the divine semblance which exists in the natural world. Highly imaginative individuals are therefore justified in their enthusiasm for beauty, since whatever imagination perceives as beautiful will also be

morally beneficial. In its justification of the poet's love of beauty and its complete faith in imagination's ability to detect truth on a symbolic level, the theory of aesthetics in The Pleasures of Imagination is Romantic in its outlook.

Akenside's lyric poetry represents his attempt to write the kind of verse which is prescribed by his Pleasures of Imagination. Many of his odes may be seen to reflect Akenside's struggle to attain a truly lyrical poetic style. The inability to find renewed lyric inspiration is a theme which recurs often in Akenside's odes. Much of Akenside's lyric verse may be seen to reflect those concerns which affected him as a man, but more significantly it represents the dilemma which all lyrists experienced in an age unfavourable to lyric poetry. From this point of view, Akenside played a significant role in the development of the English ode.

The great admiration which Wordsworth and Coleridge had for The Pleasures of Imagination is an indication of the innovative nature of the theory which the work embodies. Wordsworth may be seen to be indebted to Akenside for a great deal of the moral philosophy in The Excursion, as well as for much of his theory regarding the mystical significance of the natural sublime found in The Prelude. While the critics generally consider Akenside's influence on Coleridge's early poetry to be considerable, they have failed to see any significant connection between the earlier poet's speculation on imagination and fancy and Coleridge's celebrated theory. In The Pleasures of Imagination, however, it is possible

to find many ideas which are central to Coleridge's mature theory of imagination and fancy. Akenside's discourse on the nature and function of imagination is undoubtedly a close forerunner of the Romantic concept of the imaginative faculty.

Akenside's contribution to the development of the English Romantic movement is greater than the critics have traditionally acknowledged. While the sensual appeal of Akenside's poetry may leave much to be desired, his poetic doctrine was a significant early reaction against neo-Classical literary convention. The theory of aesthetics in The Pleasures of Imagination had special significance in an age when all kinds of "enthusiasm" were anathema. And Akenside's odes, taken in their proper context, may be seen to represent his dissatisfaction with the poetic creed of his age. The fundamental influence which Akenside had upon the theories and practice of Wordsworth and Coleridge attests to his importance as a precursor of Romanticism.

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INTRODUCTION

While Akenside's affinity with the great Romantic poets is generally recognized by the critics, the full extent of his role as a precursor of Romanticism remains somewhat controversial. Many writers have selected elements in Akenside's poetry which they see as pre-Romantic. Others, however, like A.O. Aldridge, have warned against any attempt to represent Akenside as "groping in the dark . . . for the Wordsworthian concept of imagination."[1] Literary historians find that it is difficult to classify Akenside under one or the other convenient labels of "neo-Classicist" or "pre-Romantic." For while his high regard for the writers of antiquity indicates Akenside's classicism, much of the sentiment and many ideas in his poetry may be seen as slightly out of harmony with the literary doctrine and, indeed, the general attitude of the neo-Classical Age. Myra Reynolds sees many passages in Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination as anticipating Wordsworth; thus she concludes that in Akenside's poem "we find a poetical creed which so far as the thought is concerned, might come from The Excursion or The Prelude."[2] Discussing Reynolds' views on Akenside, C.A.

[1] A.O. Aldridge, "Akenside and Imagination," Studies in Philology, XLII (January, 1945), 792.

[2] Myra Reynolds, The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry: Between Pope and Wordsworth (1909; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 127.

Moore asserts that "the effect of nature on the plastic mind of the child is the only anticipation of nineteenth-century romanticists in which he was exceptional."[3] Another critic asserts that "much in the thought, or in chance phrase, in the verse of Wordsworth and of Coleridge, shows [Akenside's] influence."[4] Many such studies of eighteenth-century influence on the Romantic poets make occasional references to Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination. While such works point to many passages in Akenside's poem which may be seen as foreshadowing the work of the Romantics, they tend to neglect the unity of the work. As a result, the full impact of Akenside's theory of aesthetics on eighteenth-century thought is often missed. Another way in which the criticism regarding Akenside's contribution to Romanticism is inadequate is that it has all but neglected his importance as an eighteenth-century lyrist. An examination of the poetics in The Pleasures of Imagination, along with a consideration of Akenside's lyric verse as a significant example of eighteenth-century experimentation with the ode form, may demonstrate that his role as a precursor of Romanticism is greater than that traditionally acknowledged by the critics.

In retrospect Akenside's earliest published poems may be seen as foreshadowing an innovative and independent poetic career. He

[3]Cecil Albert Moore, Backgrounds of English Literature 1700-1760 (1953; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 100.

[4]Margaret Sherwood, Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 85.

made his literary debut at the age of sixteen, when he published in The Gentleman's Magazine for April, 1737 a poem entitled "The Virtuoso, in Imitation of Spenser's Style and Stanza."[5] By virtue of this poem Akenside has been credited by Edmund Gosse with having revived the Spenserian stanza.[6] "The Virtuoso" and several other of his earliest compositions are significant in this regard because they reflect the influence of Spenser and Milton on the young Akenside at a time when the order of the day was to imitate the classical writers of Greece and Rome. As a consequence, Akenside's early poetry portends greater accomplishments, and this augury of his future achievement was fulfilled in The Pleasures of Imagination.

The Pleasures of Imagination was published in 1744, when Akenside was just twenty-three years old; and from all accounts Akenside's didactic poem was received with great acclaim. The fact that The Pleasures of Imagination was followed by a number of similar poems, including Thomas Warton's The Pleasures of Melancholy, attests to the influence which Akenside's poem had on other writers in the eighteenth century. R.D. Havens states that "aside from the Essay on Man and Night Thoughts the greatest and most

[5]See Alexander Dyce's "Life of Akenside," The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside (Aldine ed.; London, 1834), p. ii. (Hereafter referred to as Poetical Works. All references to Akenside's poetry are from this edition.)

[6]Edmund Gosse, A History of Eighteenth-Century Literature (1660-1780) (1889; rpt. New York: MacMillan, 1896), p. 311.

admired philosophical poem of the century was Mark Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination."[7] Many reasons may be given for the instant success which Akenside's poem brought him. The Pleasures of Imagination takes as its major premise the essential principle of the deistic religion which was so much in vogue at the time. Akenside's poem is also a copious source of ethical, theological, aesthetic, psychological, and philosophical views, so that it had a wide appeal. But probably the main reason for the great popularity of The Pleasures of Imagination is indicated by H.A. Beers when he states that the poem's "doctrine . . . . was in harmony with the fresh impulse which was coming into English poetry."[8]

The first fifty lines of The Pleasures of Imagination may convince the reader of its enthusiastic and reactionary spirit. The invocation, for instance, is an outright rejection of the neo-Classical mistrust of the faculty of imagination. To lead his long train of inspirational powers Akenside summons

> Indulgent Fancy! from the fruitful banks
> Of Avon, whence thy rosy fingers cull
> Fresh flowers and dews to sprinkle on the turf
> Where Shakespeare lies. . . .
>
> (I, 10-13)

Akenside repudiates "dull obedience and the curb of rules" (I, 34-5), arguing that "Nature's kindling breath/ Must fire the chosen

[7] Raymond D. Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (1922; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 386.

[8] Henry A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century (1898; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 140.

genius" (I, 37-8). He maintains that natural ability is especially necessary in treating a subject such as the one he has chosen. For Akenside declares that he intends to explore "Through secret paths erewhile untrod by man, / The fair poetic region" (I, 49-50) of man's mind. The subject of The Pleasures of Imagination, therefore, is the human mind, a theme which Akenside regards as "still unsung" (I, 32) poetically. In Akenside's view nature is also a "fair poetic region," and he invokes the "Genii,"

> . . . who conduct
> The wandering footsteps of the youthful bard,
> New to your springs and shades; who touch his ear
> With finer sounds; who heighten to his eye
> The bloom of Nature, and before him turn
> The gayest, happiest attitudes of things.
> (I, 25-30)

In extending this invitation to the inspirational forces of nature Akenside is declaring himself to be a "nature-enthusiast." This is significant, for in keeping with the deists' creed, nature is the main authority to which Akenside appeals in the central argument of his poem.

Although nature may be seen to play an important role in The Pleasures of Imagination, the major concern of Akenside's poem is not to describe the landscape. Those critics who condemn Akenside for his lack of detailed description are ignoring the major part of his plan.[9] For The Pleasures of Imagination is primarily

[9] Henry Tuckerman makes the observation that Akenside's "descriptions are vague, and partake more of thoughtful reverie than minute observation." See "Mark Akenside," Southern Literary Messenger, XIV (1848), 408.

intended to be an exercise in poetics. In its subject and purpose Akenside's poem is more closely related to Pope's Essay on Criticism than it is to The Seasons, to which The Pleasures of Imagination is often compared. In his poem Akenside attempts to resolve a number of important aesthetic questions of the time. He is very much concerned with the way in which man perceives his world. And, as the title of the poem indicates, The Pleasures of Imagination is a poetical investigation into the psychology of the mental faculties. As he treats these significant issues, Akenside comes under the influence of the ancient Greek and Roman poets and philosophers, as well as contemporary writers such as Joseph Addison. But probably the most significant influence on Akenside's argument in The Pleasures of Imagination may be traced to the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury.[10] Shaftesbury's theory that man's moral sense is a natural endowment is the basic assumption in Akenside's argument. His particular interpretation of Shaftesbury's idea that good is identical to beauty often approaches mysticism. As a result, the theory of aesthetics elaborated in The Pleasures of Imagination may be seen as "a half-way house to the realm of romantic poetry."[11]

Akenside's abandonment of didactic poetry after the considerable success that The Pleasures of Imagination brought him marked

[10] Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, 5th ed. (London, 1727).

[11] Sherwood, p. 85.

a significant stage in his poetic development. Although he was revising his Pleasures of Imagination until his death, all of Akenside's fresh poetic endeavours after 1744 were in lyric verse. The first edition of his Odes on Several Subjects was published in 1745, a collection which, according to Alexander Dyce, represents "the most valuable accession which the lyric poetry of England had received since Dryden's time."[12] Akenside's preoccupation with the ode form represents his irresistible urge to treat subjects which could not be treated with propriety in the so-called "serious" poetry in his age. He was attempting to find a more subjective and imaginative poetic style than a poem such as The Pleasures of Imagination afforded him. For Akenside, as for many other eighteenth-century poets, the ode served as a convenient form, enabling him to circumvent restricting conventions. G.N. Shuster notes that during the neo-Classical period "poets would hamstring themselves with 'rules' and thus use the ode as a kind of device to raise themselves by their own bootstraps."[13] A study of Akenside's lyric verse reveals that the ode form served such a function for him. Many of his odes treat subjects that do not comply with the rules of neo-Classical decorum. Throughout Akenside's lyric verse it is possible to detect a note of personal anguish. While some of his odes reflect his disappointment regarding friendship and

[12] Poetical Works, p. xxxi.

[13] George N. Shuster, The English Ode from Milton to Keats (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 145.

love, others reveal his preoccupation with his own poetic difficulties. Akenside's lyric verse, therefore, aside from being very personally revealing, may also be seen as a useful commentary on the poetic dilemma which all lyrists in the Age of Reason experienced. In his extensive experimentation with the ode form Akenside makes a considerable contribution to the development of the English ode. Attempting to develop a more lyrical poetic style, Akenside is once again looking forward to Romanticism.

The ultimate test of Akenside's significance as a precursor of Romanticism is the degree to which his work influenced the great Romantic poets. Akenside's anticipation of parts of the poetic theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge has been recognized by many critics. In fact, William Haller claims that in The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside presents "in crude form that theory of poetic function later elaborated by Coleridge and Wordsworth."[14] Wordsworth and Coleridge both viewed The Pleasures of Imagination as a systematic and authoritative philosophical poem. At any rate, there is ample evidence to be found throughout the poetry and prose of these Romantic poets to support the view that they were both admirers of Akenside's work. Wordsworth's theory in The Prelude regarding the natural sublime may be seen to owe a great deal to Akenside. Likewise, much of the moral philosophy in The Excursion may be traced to The Pleasures of Imagination. Coleridge's debt

[14] William Haller, The Early Life of Robert Southey 1774-1803 (1917; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966), p. 108.

to Akenside may also be seen to be more extensive than the occasional borrowing of an idea. For in The Pleasures of Imagination may be found the very seeds of Coleridge's theory of imagination and fancy. The high esteem in which Wordsworth and Coleridge held Akenside's poem is significant; for it is an indication of the innovative nature of the theory of aesthetics which it embodies.

Like many of his contemporaries Akenside was dissatisfied with a poetic creed which was intent on keeping poetry devoid of emotion, and imagination under strict control. "Restraint" was undoubtedly the shibboleth of the neo-Classical poetic creed; and Akenside found himself opposed to many of the more restricting conventions of his day. Although he was a classicist by education, his love of the early English poets brought him to the realization that imagination is the supreme poetic faculty. Attempting to neutralize the neo-Classical mistrust of the faculty of imagination, Akenside placed himself in conflict with the literary doctrine of his age. The theory of aesthetics in The Pleasures of Imagination calls for more imaginative and emotional English poetry. And in his odes Akenside attempts to lead the way to a more lyrical poetic style. From this point of view, Akenside made a considerable contribution to the movement in English poetry known as Romanticism.

CHAPTER I

THE PLEASURES OF IMAGINATION: TOWARD A ROMANTIC THEORY OF AESTHETICS

Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination challenged many cherished literary conventions of his age. Although most of the issues which Akenside treats in his poem had been examined by philosopher-aestheticians before him, he manages to give new meaning to time-worn ideas. This is mainly the result of the deistic spirit which pervades the entire argument of his poem. Taking as his basic premise the deistic principle of "benevolence," Akenside attempts to demonstrate to austere adherents of the neo-Classical poetic doctrine that enthusiasm for beauty is part of a divine plan. Another major concern of Akenside's poem is to answer the charge that the faculty known as imagination is a capricious and dangerous one. Making the bold assertion that imagination, not reason as the rationalists claim, is the supreme mental power in man's search for truth, Akenside gives this faculty of mind divine affiliation. He argues that imagination determines taste, since it is the mental faculty which forms man's habits and even his moral conscience. In The Pleasures of Imagination, therefore, taste is represented as an innate ability, the seeds of which are given to each individual. This claim is significant, for it foreshadows the concept of taste as a product of individual endowments. The particular slant which

Akenside gives his treatment of such important issues results in a timely and significant theory of aesthetics.

A. An apology for poetic enthusiasm

The argument in The Pleasures of Imagination that nature is the outward expression of divine Beauty may be seen as an important apology for poetic enthusiasm in the eighteenth century. Arguing that beauty in nature has moral as well as aesthetic value, Akenside makes the significant claim that man's search for aesthetic gratification invariably leads him to truth. This is so because man is endowed with a special faculty, imagination, which enables him to detect the divine semblance in the natural world. Akenside maintains that, since the imaginative faculty is from the divine, whatever this power of mind perceives as beautiful will also be useful and good. Poets are especially justified in their enthusiasm for beauty, for being blessed with extraordinary imaginations, they are less likely than other men to err in their aesthetic judgment. By virtue of imagination man is able to glean spiritual refreshment from the beautiful and sublime aspects of nature. This idea that God reveals His goodness and wisdom to man through nature, is a deistic belief. Nature in The Pleasures of Imagination, however, is not only the worldly proof of the existence of a wise and benevolent providence, but also an irrefutable authority which sanctions enthusiasm in life, as well as in art.

Although all men are given access to the beauty which exists

in nature, providence decrees that each individual will perceive the world according to his own interests and aptitudes. Thus some men are "taught the fabric of the sphere," (I, 86) while others are equipped with the necessary skills to find "What healing virtue swells the tender veins / Of herbs and flowers" (I, 92-94). There are yet a few men whom nature,

> . . . wrought, and tempered with a purer flame.
> To these the Sire Omnipotent unfolds
> The world's harmonious volume, there to read
> The transcript of Himself.
>
> (I, 98-101)

These fortunate individuals who possess a more refined imagination than ordinary men are poets and painters. The "finer organs" of their minds have been made keenly receptive of those qualities in nature which "the painter's hand,/ The poet's tongue, confesses--the sublime,/ The wonderful, the fair" (I, 144-46). Here Akenside is echoing Joseph Addison, who argues that all objects which excite the imagination belong to one or the other of the three classes of greatness, novelty, and beauty.[1] Akenside then sets out to investigate the mysterious attraction which the three Addisonian orders hold for the faculty of imagination.

Akenside's discourse on the natural sublime is mainly in the tradition of Longinus. Citing the ancient rhetorician as his authority,[2] Akenside asserts that man's interest in the vast and

[1] Spectator, No. 412 (June 23, 1713).

[2] Poetical Works, p. 66 (n. to l. 152).

infinite is proof of his soul's immortality (I, 151-74). Akenside sees man's fascination with the awe-inspiring natural spectacles as an indication of the soul's noble aspirations. The material which constituted the natural sublime in the eighteenth century consisted of dreadful precipices, roaring torrents, and majestic cliffs, all of which produced in the spectator a kind of "delightful Horrour."[3] This very quality may be seen in Akenside's account of the soul's quest for the sublime experience:

> The high-born soul
> Disdains to rest her heaven-aspiring wing
> Beneath its native quarry. Tired of earth
> And this diurnal scene, she springs aloft
> Through fields of air; pursues the flying storm;
> Rides on the vollied lightning through the heavens;
> Or, yoked with whirlwinds and the northern blast,
> Sweeps the long tract of day.
>
> (I, 183-90)

Like many other eighteenth-century aestheticians, Akenside believes that through his perception of those scenes in nature which "evoke in sensitive minds some degree of the awe they feel for God Himself,"[4] man actually comes in contact with the divine. Through his imagination man is afforded occasional glimpses of his "high reward,-- / The applauding smile of Heaven" (I, 165-66). In the deistic belief that God reveals Himself through nature, may be seen

[3] Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 207.

[4] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 282.

the beginnings of the mystical significance which nature held for the great Romantic poets. Although Akenside adds little that is new to the eighteenth-century concept of the natural sublime, his assertion that it is the faculty of imagination which enables man to detect the divine in nature is noteworthy. Seen in this light, imagination is an important mental power, for it is the soul's only link with the infinite. Hence the great attraction which the majestic spectacles in nature hold for imaginative individuals.

Akenside's discussion of the novel or wonderful in nature reflects his faith in the deistic principle of "benevolence." While the sublime in nature is intended to foster man's spiritual development, the scenes of wonder enhance his intellectual growth. Man is capable of attaining a "perfection half divine" (I, 225); and to aid him in achieving his high potential, providence endows each individual with,

> ...this desire
> Of objects new and strange, to urge us on
> With unremitted labour to pursue
> Those sacred stores that wait the ripening soul,
> In Truth's exhaustless bosom.
>
> (I, 240-44)

In this account of the reason for man's fascination with the new, or strange, imagination becomes the key to his discovery of truth through intellect. For it is the imaginative faculty which gives man his insatiable curiosity for new experiences. Hence the youth "Breaks from his weeping mother's anxious arms,/ In foreign climes to rove" (I, 246-47), and the sage "Hangs o'er the sickly taper" (I, 249). Akenside maintains that it is by divine decree that man

is an imaginative being. In this part of his argument Akenside demonstrates his belief that imagination, being a God-given faculty, should be allowed free play, since this power is vital to the intellectual and spiritual development of the individual.

As Akenside celebrates the three "illustrious orders" in his poem, beauty is seen to play a very significant role in his theory. While Akenside argues that all three orders are of divine origin, he hails beauty as the "Brightest progeny of Heaven" (I, 280). Akenside makes the bold assertion that beauty has intrinsic value, a claim which is in opposition to the general attitude of his age. The theory of aesthetics in The Pleasures of Imagination is therefore headed toward Romanticism, which, according to F.P. Chambers, is based on a "philosophy of beauty."[5] Before such a philosophy could gain any amount of respect, however, the fear in the neo-Classical Age that enthusiasm for beauty may be detrimental to the poet's search for truth, would have to be dispelled.

The deistic principle of "benevolence" assures Akenside that whatever providence makes attractive in nature is also useful and good. "Does Beauty ever deign to dwell where health / And active use are strangers?" (I, 350-51), demands Akenside. In reply to this rhetorical question Akenside argues that,

> The generous glebe
> Whose bosom smiles with verdure, the clear tract

[5] Frank P. Chambers, The History of Taste: An Account of the Revolutions of Art Criticism and Theory in Europe (1932; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971), p. 163.

Of streams delicious to the thirsty soul,
The bloom of nectared fruitage ripe to sense,
And every charm of animated things,
Are only pledges of a state sincere. . .
(I, 364-69)

The benevolent Creator of the deists' creed has provided for man's spiritual, as well as for his physical needs. Beauty in nature, therefore, has not only recreational value, but also spiritual worth. By stamping man's world with beauty's "illustrious image," providence facilitates his choice between good and evil:

Thus was Beauty sent from heaven,
The lovely ministress of Truth and Good
In this dark world; for Truth and Good are one,
And Beauty dwells in them and they in her,
With like participation.
(I, 372-76)

The claim made by Akenside in these lines gives his theory special import. For if beauty in the physical realm is mysteriously connected with truth, then enthusiasm for beauty has the sanction of divine decree. Because of its adherence to this doctrine of beauty, truth, and goodness, Akenside's theory of aesthetics takes on mystical significance.

Although the doctrine of the "sacred triad," as it is referred to by F.P. Chambers,[6] is not original in Akenside, his Pleasures of Imagination was instrumental in popularizing the theory in the eighteenth century.[7] Akenside cites the ancients along with

[6] Ibid., p. 179.

[7] Myra Reynolds asserts that Akenside was "the first . . . to emphasize the doctrine of the identity of truth and beauty." p. 127.

Shaftesbury as his authorities for the idea in his poem.[8] In The Pleasures of Imagination, however, the doctrine of the sacred triad takes on a significance that it did not hold for Shaftesbury, who presents the idea as follows:

> what is good is beautiful, harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable, is True; and what is at once both beautiful and true, is, of consequence, agreeable and Good.[9]

The doctrine of beauty, truth, and goodness as it appears in these lines is merely the neo-Classical view that beauty is characterized by harmony and proportion. It holds none of the mysticism which is inherent in the theory as it is represented in The Pleasures of Imagination. Akenside bases his faith in the validity of the doctrine of the sacred triad on the deistic belief that "it was a benevolent design in nature to annex so delightful a sensation to those objects which are best and most perfect in themselves."[10] This assertion that beauty in the natural world heralds goodness, gives a whole new meaning to the neo-Classical dictum "follow nature." For if beauty is always the outward expression of virtue and truth, then man is justified in his desire for aesthetic gratification. Akenside issues a licence for the poetic indulgence in the beautiful image for its own sake. Beauty, Akenside believes,

[8] Poetical Works, pp. 68-9 (n. to l. 374).

[9] Shaftesbury, III, 382-3.

[10] Poetical Works, p. 69.

has always been a vital part of the poetic art:

> Thee Beauty, thee,
> The regal dome, and thy enlivening ray
> The mossy roofs adore: thou better sun!
> For ever beamest on the enchanted heart
> Love, and harmonious wonder, and delight
> Poetic.
> (I, 275-80)

These lines reveal Akenside's own partiality for the sensual image in poetry. Akenside believes that a true and divinely sanctioned taste is one which recognizes the real value of beauty in man's world, since the wise and benevolent Creator "made us to behold and love / What he beholds and loves" (III, 626-27).

A major concern of The Pleasures of Imagination is to remove the fear that the poet's love of beauty is detrimental to his search for truth. According to the deists' creed, it is not the design of providence that man's life should be devoid of pleasure. Akenside's intention, therefore, is to dispel the philosophy of gloom which advocates such an ascetic existence:

> Could my ambitious hand entwine a wreath
> Of Plato's olive with the Mantuan bay,
> Then should my powerful voice at once dispel
> Those monkish horrors: then, in light divine,
> Disclose the Elysian prospect, where the steps
> Of those whom Nature charms, through blooming
> walks,
> Through fragrant mountains, and poetic streams,
> Amid the train of sages, heroes, bards,
> Led by their winged Genius and the choir
> Of laurelled science and harmonious art,
> Proceed exulting to the eternal shrine,
> Where Truth, enthroned with her celestial twins,
> The undivided partners of her sway,
> With good and beauty reigns.
> (I, 404-17)

This passage is significant because it is a statement of Akenside's poetic task. The preceding lines are a typical manifestation of Akenside's attempt throughout The Pleasures of Imagination to reconcile his own "enthusiasm" with his classical heritage. The concern in the age for objectivity and respectability resulted in a literary doctrine which had no place for imagination or emotion. According to H.A. Beers, the literature of the period is characterized by "its coldness of feeling, the tameness of its imagination, and its narrow and imperfect sense of beauty."[11] Akenside is averse to a poetic creed which is intent on oppressing fancy and keeping poetry devoid of feeling. His impatience with this kind of austerity in the literary doctrine of his age may be detected in the following lines:

> On my strain,
> Perhaps even now, some cold, fastidious judge
> Casts a disdainful eye; and calls my toil,
> And calls the love and beauty which I sing,
> The dream of folly.
> (III, 443-47)

Akenside's castigation of this more severe neo-Classical critic is an indication of his disapproval of the narrow literary doctrine of his age. Also in these lines one may detect the poet's concern that his theory of aesthetics will be received with contempt. For Akenside's attempt to justify sensuality in poetry is a grave breach of decorum in the Age of Reason. Akenside is not suggesting, however, that poets should pursue beauty at the expense of truth;

[11] Beers, p. 43.

rather, he is attempting to demonstrate that a genuine taste is one which recognizes that beauty and truth are identical. For he warns that if you attempt to find beauty without also making truth your goal, "Beauty withers in your void embrace" (I, 384). While Akenside's theory of aesthetics calls for more fanciful poetry, it also reflects the belief that "a civilization which . . . distorts or ignores what is true will probably also place a false value on what is beautiful."[12] A cultivated taste is the only assurance that poets will not be misled in their search for beauty. It is with a view to demonstrating the distinctive characteristics of a true taste that Akenside introduces the allegory which constitutes two-thirds of the second Book of his poem. On its most obvious level of meaning this allegory is concerned with justifying the existence of evil in the "best of all possible worlds" of the optimists. It may also be read, however, as a symbolic account of the growth of a genuine poetic taste.[13]

The allegory of Harmodius is a restatement of Akenside's faith in the validity of the doctrine of beauty, truth, and goodness. The hero of the allegory, man in his "primeval seat" (II,

[12] John Francis Norton, "A Critical Edition of 'The Pleasures of Imagination' (1744) by Mark Akenside" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 36.

[13] Cornelius A. Silber argues that "if the hero of the allegory becomes finally an imaginative man, then the entire allegory asks to be read as an account of the education particularly of the poet." See "Akenside's 'The Pleasures of Imagination': Text and Meaning" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1972), p. 178.

366), is first seen as manifesting a false taste when he neglects the goddess Virtue, giving all his attention to Euphrosyne, the goddess of pleasure (II, 458-64). With the advent of the "fiend abhorred" (II, 485) into his world, however, the hero comes to recognize the true worth of virtue. The hero has learned that the pursuit of beauty without the aid of virtue is in violation of divine law. He therefore beseeches the sublime goddess:

> Oh! be thou forever near,
> That I may listen to thy sacred voice,
> And guide, by thy decrees, my constant feet.
> (II, 618-20)

The hero of the allegory recognizes his mistake in separating the goddess of virtue from "the fair Euphrosyne." Akenside considers this lesson to be a vital one for poets, since the pursuit of truth is the primary concern of their art. But the deists' creed provides grounds for his belief that the love of beauty is intended by benevolent providence to enhance man's search for truth. Thus we are instructed by the "Genius of human kind" in the allegory:

> . . . behold the ways
> Of Heaven's eternal destiny to man,
> For ever just, benevolent, and wise:
> That Virtue's awful steps, howe'er pursued
> By vexing fortune and intrusive pain,
> Should never be divided from her chaste,
> Her fair attendant, Pleasure.
> (II, 670-76)

A taste which neglects beauty is as false as one which fails to recognize truth as its guiding star. Man's aesthetic sense is God-given and unless this power is corrupted by a perverted aim, it can be trusted to guide him in his quest for truth. In his attempt

to create the beautiful image, therefore, the poet acts in full accordance with a divine scheme.

Akenside's classical education had instilled in him the idea that the poet's first obligation is the pursuit of truth. But his love of the early English poets led Akenside to the realization that imagination is the life-force of all poetry. Finding himself in an age which regarded all kinds of enthusiasm as anathema,[14] Akenside felt the need to reconcile his more "romantic" poetic tendencies with his neo-Classical education. In his Pleasures of Imagination Akenside provides grounds for the poetic indulgence in beauty without the fear that it is in conflict with the moral responsibility of poetry. Akenside's theory of aesthetics may be seen as an apology for enthusiasm and fancy in poetry because it professes complete faith in the ability of man's aesthetic faculty to detect truth on a symbolic level.

B. Imagination exonerated, and taste seen as an innate ability

Proceeding on the premise that "imagination directs almost all the passions, and mixes with almost every circumstance of action,"[15] Akenside argues that this faculty is supreme. This view

[14] William Lyon Phelps warns that the life-view of the Age of Reason "with its absence of spontaneous enthusiasm and religious imagination, must never be forgotten in the study of contemporary literature." See The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Literature (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1893), p. 8.

[15] Poetical Works, p. 74.

is in strong opposition to the neo-Classical attitude toward imagination. Philosophers in the Age of Reason viewed imagination as a promiscuous faculty, which could "lead the poet away from the pursuit of nature into the improbable and unnatural."[16] While Akenside agrees with the belief that fancy has a great influence on moral decisions and actions, he shares none of the apprehension of the neo-Classical philosophers regarding the danger of the faculty. The rationalists proposed that the only solution was to keep imagination at all times under the strict control of reason. In Akenside's view, however, such a proposal is senseless, since he believes man's reason or judgment to be actually shaped by his imagination.

Nowhere in The Pleasures of Imagination does Akenside express the belief that fancy should be restrained by reason. In literary matters, as A.O. Aldridge observes, Akenside issues absolutely no warning against fancy.[17] In fact, there is the assumption in Akenside's poem that reason, the supreme faculty of the rationalists, is actually subservient to imagination. Reason, argues Akenside, is entirely helpless when,

> From the enchanting cup
> Which Fancy holds to all, the unwary thirst
> Of youth oft swallows a Circaean draught,
> That sheds a baleful tincture o'er the eye

[16] Donald F. Bond, "Distrust of the Imagination in English Neo-Classicism," Philological Quarterly, XIV (January, 1935), 65.

[17] Aldridge, "Akenside and Imagination," p. 780.

> Of Reason, till no longer he discerns,
> And only guides to err.
> (III, 46-51)

The idea expressed in these lines, that the faculty of reason is capable of erring, is heretical in the Age of Reason. But Akenside believes that an individual's judgment is only as good as the education and culture which nurture it. To ensure that man's moral development is not thwarted by false representations of his fancy, there is clearly only one solution in Akenside's view. When fancy is trained to perceive in things "The features which they wore / In nature; there Opinion will be true, / And Action right" (III, 18-23). While Akenside believes that imagination does rule man's habits and decisions, he does not believe that the faculty should be repressed. As a God-given power of mind, imagination, if properly cultivated, can enhance man's spiritual growth. We have seen that a true taste for Akenside is one which recognizes the connection between beauty and truth; and a true taste is unmistakable proof of a finely cultivated imagination. According to the main principles of deism, man is lacking in nothing necessary for his physical and spiritual growth. Imagination is the faculty which controls man's moral decisions as well as his aesthetic judgment. But in order that man may have "free will" regarding his moral development, providence decrees that he be responsible for the early shaping of his own faculties, so that they may serve him properly.

Akenside does not insist upon the antithesis of imagination

and reason; rather he sees both as indispensable powers, each serving in its own respective capacity. Contrary to contemporary views regarding the psychology of the mental faculties, Akenside argues that reason has its limits. He regards the faculty very highly in its own realm, but he sees imagination as being capable of detecting truth where the faculty of reason is ineffectual. Reason, Akenside argues, is assigned by "Creative Wisdom" to such tasks as "Discerning justice from unequal deeds, / And temperance from folly" (I, 542-3). Reason, therefore, is a useful faculty in the normal affairs of every day living. But the wise and benevolent providence is conscious of man's need for guidance in the spiritual realm also, so that,

> . . .beyond
> This energy of Truth, whose dictates bind
> Assenting reason, the benignant Sire,
> To deck the honoured paths of just and good,
> Has added bright Imagination's rays:
> Where Virtue, rising from the awful depth
> Of Truth's mysterious bosom, doth forsake
> The unadorned condition of her birth;
> And, dressed by Fancy in ten thousand hues,
> Assumes a various feature, to attract,
> With charms responsive to each gazer's eye,
> The hearts of men.
> (I, 543-54)

Experiences which have a positive moral value may present themselves in many forms--another example of the wisdom of providence Akenside believes. For the man who is reluctant to embrace truth for its own sake is invariably led to appreciate its value by virtue of his imagination. The mystical significance which Akenside gives imagination in the preceding passage anticipates the Romantic

concept of the faculty. The great Romantic poets believed "that the true knowledge of the spiritual world was granted to . . . the faculty of imagination."[18] Likewise for Akenside, imagination is conversant with truth on a spiritual level. In The Pleasures of Imagination the imaginative faculty is not merely a power which enables the poet to dress his poetic judgment in lively imagery; rather it is, as it was for the Romantic poets, a special type of insight.[19] It is in this spirit throughout his poem that Akenside exalts the faculty of imagination to divine heights. This revolutionary concept of imagination raises an important question for Akenside when he comes to examine its role during artistic creation.

Akenside demonstrates that he is dissatisfied with the view that imagination depends upon the laws of association in order to create. The poet's tendency "to behold in lifeless things, / The inexpressive semblance of himself" (III, 284-5) leads Akenside to ponder:

> Whence is this effect,
> This kindred power of such discordant things?
> Or flows their semblance from that mystic tone
> To which the new-born mind's harmonious powers
> At first were strung? Or rather from the links
> Which artful custom twines around her frame?
> (III, 306-11)

While it is true that Akenside does not claim creative ability for imagination in these lines, it is significant that he poses this

[18] Chambers, p. 169.

[19] See C.M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (1949; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 7.

question at all, since the concept of imagination in the century was dominated by the theory of association.[20] The associationists of the Lockian tradition maintained that imagination is merely a form of memory which recalls previously connected images. The question is never clearly resolved in The Pleasures of Imagination, but there is evidence to indicate that Akenside does not accept the views of the associationists. At times he seems to be in agreement with parts of the associationists' theory, while at others he clearly decides in favour of the creating theory. Akenside states that when images are "By chance combined" (III, 313), certain ideas are given "an eternal tie, / And sympathy unbroken" (III, 317-18). He is here echoing John Locke's account of the way in which habits are formed.[21] A few lines further on, however, Akenside's argument may be seen as an advancement of the creating theory of imagination:

> . . . if ancient fame the truth unfold,
> Two faithful needles, from the informing touch
> Of the same parent stone, together drew
> Its mystic virtue, and at first conspired,
> With fatal impulse quivering to the pole:
> Then, tho' disjoined by kingdoms, tho' the main
> Rolled its broad surge betwixt, and different stars
> Beheld their wakeful motions, yet preserved
> The former friendship, and remembered still
> The alliance of their birth. . . .
>
> (III, 325-34)

[20] Ibid., p. 2.

[21] John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1894), I, 529-30.

This view that imagination is mysteriously equipped to make connections between ideas which apparently have no relation to each other is more in keeping with Akenside's concept of the power than the views of the associationists. According to Akenside's theory, it is inconceivable that the mental faculty which shapes man's moral judgment would be left at the mercy of the chance association of ideas. In much of his argument Akenside demonstrates that he has decided on "What to reject which Locke hath taught."[22]

From Akenside's point of view there is no substitute for natural ability. Early in The Pleasures of Imagination he asserts that "from Heaven descends / The flame of genius to the human breast" (I, 56-7). Throughout his poem Akenside continues to demonstrate the belief that if innate talent is lacking, no amount of education can make a poet. In this view he comes once more under the influence of Shaftesbury and his disciple, Francis Hutcheson, who asserts that,

> Education never makes us apprehend any Qualitys in Objects, which we have not naturally Senses capable of perceiving. . . . And the same way, a Man naturally void of Taste could by no Education receive the Ideas of Taste. . . .[23]

The mind, according to these aestheticians, is possessed of certain inborn powers which enable man to discern beauty from deformity

[22]See Akenside's Ode "To Caleb Hardinge, M.D."

[23]Francis Hutcheson, An Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue (1726; rpt. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1971), p. 91.

and truth from deception. The eighteenth-century view that the essential guiding faculties of the mind are innate is a forerunner of the concept of taste as a product of individual talents. Taste in The Pleasures of Imagination is represented as a natural propensity. Akenside maintains that the same inborn power which guides man in his moral decisions also determines his aesthetic judgment:

> What then is taste, but these internal powers
> Active, and strong, and feelingly alive
> To each fine impulse? a discerning sense
> Of decent and sublime, with quick disgust
> From things deformed, or disarranged, or gross
> In species?
>
> (III, 515-20)

Taste as seen here is a God-given tendency which serves to direct man's choices in all aspects of his existence. Akenside believes, however, that natural talents have to be cultivated and refined. For "Without fair culture's kind parental aid" (III, 538), the mental powers remain embryonic and crude. While Akenside does not see taste as truly spontaneous, he does argue that the seeds of taste must be present at birth. For if one is not naturally blessed with the proper talents, neither "gems, nor stores of gold, / Nor purple state, nor culture" (III, 520-1), can bestow the gift of taste. A true taste may be the peasant's blessing as well as the nobleman's. As proof of this assertion Akenside refers to the "swain" who

> . . . loiters to behold
> The sunshine gleaming, as thro' amber clouds,
> O'er all the western sky: full soon, I ween,

His rude expression and untutored airs,
Beyond the power of language, will unfold
The form of beauty, smiling at his heart.
(III, 529-34)

Manifest in these lines is Akenside's firm belief in the idea of natural goodness. The respect for the common man as it is seen here is a symptom of the changing concept of taste in the century. Akenside is clearly opposed to the neo-Classical assumption that taste can be defined by a set of rules or a literary theory which refuses to acknowledge man's innate talents. The concept of taste as a natural gift was, according to E.N. Hooker, "another factor which made for the downfall of reason and rules in literary criticism."[24] This part of Akenside's argument, therefore, anticipates the Romantic trust in individual standards for beauty.

While most eighteenth-century literary theorists attempted to arrive at a standard for art criticism, Akenside maintains that individuality of taste is actually in accordance with the plan of divine providence. This kind of respect for individuality in The Pleasures of Imagination is inherent in the popular religious views of the time.[25] Throughout his poem Akenside argues that it is the

[24] Edward N. Hooker, "The Discussion of Taste, from 1750 to 1770, and the New Trends in Literary Criticism," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 586.

[25] Arthur O. Lovejoy argues that "the general transition from universalism to . . . diversitarianism . . . was promoted--by no means solely, but perhaps chiefly--by the emphasis and reiteration given to the principle of plenitude in the arguments of the eighteenth-century defenders of optimism." See "Optimism and Romanticism," PMLA, XLII (December, 1927), 945.

design of providence that each man respond differently to the beauty in nature, since "so various are the tastes of men" (III, 567). He makes the observation that "Some men . . . are more delighted with the vast and magnificent, others on the contrary with the elegant and gentle aspects of nature."[26] This difference in taste reflects the particular natural endowments of men's minds:

> Hence, when lightning fires
> The arch of heaven, and thunders rock the ground;
> When furious whirlwinds rend the howling air,
> And ocean, groaning from the lowest bed,
> Heaves his tempestuous billows to the sky;
> Amid the mighty uproar, while below
> The nations tremble, Shakespeare looks abroad,
> From some high cliff, superior, and enjoys
> The elemental war. But Waller longs,
> All on the margin of some flowery stream,
> To spread his careless limbs amid the cool
> Of plantain shades. . . .
> (III, 550-61)

In Akenside's view Shakespeare is a manifestation of a sublime poetic genius, a mind attracted to those majestic natural spectacles in which it sees a reflection of itself. Waller, on the other hand, represents a more sober taste, drawn to the calmer scenes in nature. Akenside believes that this difference in men's tastes is necessary. By endorsing both Shakespeare's fascination with the sublime and Waller's more restrained response to nature, Akenside is attempting to reconcile opposing aesthetic values. His aim, therefore, is to demonstrate that taste, far from being a standard imposed by a literary doctrine, is an inborn power which gives

[26] Poetical Works, p. 75 (n. to l. 22).

each individual access to the beauty which exists in the natural world.

In the "Design" Akenside declares that his intention in The Pleasures of Imagination is to "unite the moral excellencies of life . . . with the mere external objects of good taste."[27] His argument, therefore, is that taste not only guides man in his search for beauty, but also controls his moral judgment. For Akenside beauty and truth are identical in a very real sense, since man's love of the former will lead him to discover the latter. Akenside believes that a fine imagination is tantamount to a true taste. And since imagination is the faculty which shapes the more noble side of man's nature, the gift of taste is another example of the wisdom and goodness of providence. In making this connection between man's aesthetic experience and his spiritual development, Akenside presents a considerable argument for the reinstatement of imagination to what he considers to be its rightful place in English poetry. Thus, in its high regard for the faculty of imagination and its representation of taste as a natural ability, the theory of aesthetics in The Pleasures of Imagination looks forward to Romanticism.

[27] Poetical Works, p. 4.

CHAPTER II

THE ODES: TOWARD ROMANTIC LYRIC EXPRESSION

The full significance of Akenside's extensive handling of the ode form early in the eighteenth century has not been recognized. His odes are often dismissed as uninteresting imitations of his classical models that have little literary or historical value. One critic, for example, feels that the goal of "correctness" which Akenside set for himself in the "Advertisement" to the 1745 edition of his Odes, is the only one he managed to achieve.[1] Another writer charges that as an eighteenth-century lyrist, "Akenside is interesting chiefly for his stanza forms."[2] Such dismissals are typical of the kind of treatment Akenside's lyric poetry usually receives. And yet, his collection of Odes on Several Subjects was published before either Gray or Collins had done much of any significance with the ode form. From this point of view, Akenside was, as E. Gosse claims, "an innovator . . . at this moment of crisis in the evolution of English poetry."[3]

In turning from didactic poetry to the ode Akenside may be

[1] Havens, p. 449.

[2] Shuster, p. 145.

[3] Edmund Gosse, "Mark Akenside, Poet and Physician," The Living Age, CCXI (December 25, 1921), 789.

seen as striving toward a more lyrical poetic style. At the time, the ode was invested with the authority of classical antiquity, and yet, as the "most amiable species of poetry,"[4] it afforded poets a freedom of expression that would not have been possible in the more popular poetic forms of the day. Akenside clearly uses the ode with this idea in mind. In his odes Akenside is not attempting merely to imitate his classical models; rather, like Gray, Collins, and other writers who used the ode extensively early in the century, he is trying to adapt a classical form to the lyrical mood which had begun to manifest itself in English poetry by this time.

Attempting to write poetry which is the product of his own feelings, Akenside finds himself in the same predicament as other lyrists in the age. This dilemma may be seen by examining the poetic task which Akenside sets for himself, as announced in the Ode "To Caleb Hardinge, M.D." Petitioning the aid of his friend, Hardinge, Akenside declares his acceptance of his literary responsibility:

> Oh! versed in all the human frame,
> Lead thou where'er my labour lies,
> And English fancy's eager flame
> To Grecian purity chastise:
> While hand in hand at Wisdom's shrine,
> Beauty with truth I strive to join,
> And grave assent with glad applause;

[4]"Advertisement" to the 1745 edition of Odes on Several Subjects.

To paint the story of the soul,
And Plato's visions to control
By Verulamian laws. (V.)

Here Akenside reiterates the wish, already expressed in The Pleasures of Imagination, to find a proper balance in poetry between enthusiasm and respectability, and between Platonic vision and scientific rationalism. The problem represented by the preceding lines accounts for the emotional restraint in Akenside's lyric poetry which has led Edmund Gosse to see him as "a sort of frozen Keats."[5] There is an obvious inconsistency in many of Akenside's odes, caused by his desire to attain uninhibited expression on the one hand, and to remain loyal to his more classical literary values on the other. Akenside's odes may be seen to reflect his difficulty with lyric expression, a symptom of the lack of inspiration for this kind of verse during the Age of Reason. Although Akenside's odes display a wide diversity of tone and theme, these poems leave the predominant impression that he was preoccupied with his own poetic art. This concern is most clearly seen in the handful of odes dealing specifically with the theme of lost inspiration; but throughout his lyric verse there are many hints of Akenside's dissatisfaction regarding his lyric expression.

Partly because of the stigma which was attached to wild flights of poetic fancy and partly because of his own temperament, Akenside saw himself as a follower of Horace rather than of Pindar.

[5]Gosse, A History, p. 312.

In his Ode I: "Preface," therefore, Akenside compares his lyric endeavours to the labour of the bee:

> Like thee, in lowly, sylvan scenes,
> On river banks and flowery greens
> My Muse delighted plays;
> Nor through the desert of the air,
> Though swans or eagles triumph there,
> With fond ambition strays.
> (v.)

Despite this declaration by Akenside that he does not aspire to Pindaric lyric expression, many of his odes are exemplary of the kind of emotion and daring characteristic of the odes of Pindar. Akenside's desire to write lyric poetry that is as imaginative and daring as the odes of Pindar may be detected in many of his odes. In an ode "To the Right Honourable Francis, Earl of Huntingdon" Akenside pays tribute to Pindar:

> O Pindar, oft shalt thou be hailed of me:
> Not that Apollo fed thee from his shrine;
> Not that thy lips drank sweetness from the bee;
> Nor yet that, studious of thy notes divine,
> Pan danced their measure with the sylvan throng:
> But that thy song
> Was proud to unfold
> What thy base rulers trembled to behold;
> Amid corrupted Thebes was proud to tell
> The deeds of Athens and the Persian shame:
> Hence on thy head their impious vengeance fell.
> (II. 3.)

It is significant that in these lines Pindar is "hailed" not for the wildness and passion of his verse, but because he was a champion of liberty's cause. It is apparent throughout Akenside's odes that he was a great admirer of Pindar's "notes divine;" and yet, he is reluctant to acknowledge the imaginative quality of the

ancient poet's verse, very likely a reflection of the attitude of his age toward Pindaric "wildness."

Although Akenside employs the Pindaric ode extensively, his most innovative work may be seen in his use of the more personal lyric. It is not surprising that in his Pindaric odes Akenside at times approaches poetic "madness," because at the time "imitators of Pindar felt free . . . to write in a much wilder fashion."[6] Akenside, however, often abandons the Pindaric form with its noble themes and turns to the more intense lyric of the Lesbian tradition for the treatment of his private concerns. These odes dealing with Akenside's own doubts and anxieties are a manifestation of his search for lyric inspiration. His strong urge to write poetry reflecting his own moods is another aspect of Akenside's affinity with the great Romantic poets. Akenside's personal odes betray a difficulty in his writing that does not arise in his use of the Pindaric form. The pattern of the Pindaric ode was well-defined in the century, and poets knew exactly how much licence they could take with it. The use of the "lesser" ode in the way Akenside employs it, however, was a more uncertain endeavour.

The Ode "On Lyric Poetry," in which Akenside pays tribute to his classical models, betrays the difficulty which he experiences in writing the personal odes. In his Ode "On Lyric Poetry" Akenside invokes the aid of the lyrists of the Lesbian tradition to

[6] James Sutherland, A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 146.

provide inspiration for his treatment of the more humble themes suited to the "lesser" ode. Thus, he invokes the "Teian chord" when "friendship" and "lettered mirth" demands his lyre (iv. 2). And Sappho herself is to provide the inspiration for his plaintive love-songs (iv. 2). In treating the kind of exalted themes for which the Pindaric ode was usually employed, however, Akenside declares that he needs no help from the classics:

> But when from envy and from death to claim
> A hero bleeding for his native land;
> When to throw incense on the vestal flame
> Of Liberty, my genius gives command,
> Nor Theban voice nor Lesbian lyre
> From thee, O Muse, do I require;
> While my presaging mind,
> Conscious of powers she never knew,
> Astonished, grasps at things beyond her view,
> Nor by another's fate submits to be confined.
> (iv. 3.)

While this declaration by Akenside of his intention to be a sometime follower of Pindaric daring in an age unfavourable to lyric poetry is significant, it is of even more significance in suggesting that inspiration is readily available in the age for the treatment of noble themes using the Pindaric ode. Poets in the century who attempt to find a more intimate lyric style, however, find it more difficult to proceed.

Akenside's personal odes may be seen as an attempt to attain more truly lyrical expression. Many of his odes serve a kind of therapeutic function for Akenside, for from all accounts he was too reserved to share his personal problems even with his closest friends. The odes of advice, for example, in their concern with

the poet's own doubts and failures become more than mere instances of poetic moralizing. In fact, these odes may not have been addressed to real friends of the poet at all. The more one reads these odes of advice, the stronger one's impression becomes that they are tools which enable Akenside to treat subjects of a very subjective nature. For example, in an ode entitled "Against Suspicion," Akenside betrays his anxiety regarding his friendship with Jeremiah Dyson. The ode is quite fanciful, as we may see by the opening stanza in which Akenside portrays suspicion as a Gothic horror figure:

> Oh! fly; 'tis dire Suspicion's mien;
> And, meditating plagues unseen,
> The sorceress hither bends:
> Behold! her touch in gall imbrued:
> Behold! her garment drops with blood
> Of lovers and of friends. (I.)

The highly imaginative treatment of the subject is an attempt by Akenside to attain unrestrained lyric expression. But there is a note of anxiety in the poem, which is its most fundamental concern. This becomes apparent as Akenside invokes the powers which he believes can protect his friendship from suspicion's corrupting influence:

> If, far from Dyson and from me,
> Suspicion took, by thy decree,
> Her everlasting flight;
> If, firm on virtue's ample base,
> Thy parent hand has deigned to raise
> Our friendship's honoured height.
> (X.)

Although the poet's friendship with Dyson remained strong throughout

his lifetime, Akenside has good reason for the anxiety expressed in these lines. It seems that he experienced frequent disappointment in many of his friendships. The Ode "Against Suspicion," therefore, strikes a very private note, as do many of the odes of advice.

The odes of advice on love also reflect Akenside's own personal doubt. I.A. Williams asserts that Akenside's odes reveal "a mind thrilled with intellectual passion, but often afraid of human emotions. . . ."[7] This assessment certainly applies to the odes of advice on matters of the heart. The Ode "To the Cuckoo," for example, is almost cynical in its message, undoubtedly one which reflects the poet's own experiences with love. The cuckoo is hailed as the sage of the groves who reminds the unsuspecting youth of love's darker side. The young lover, however, is always blinded by love's charms. In "To the Cuckoo" the poet relates that as a youth he, too, was reluctant to heed the "homely tale" of the cuckoo:

> I said, "While Philomela's song
> Proclaims the passion of the grove,
> It ill-beseems a cuckoo's tongue
> Her charming language to reprove"--
> Alas, how much a lover's ear
> Hates all the sober truth to hear,
> The sober truth of love!
> (III.)

The apprehensiveness regarding love which may be detected in this

[7] Iola A. Williams, Seven XVIIIth Century Bibliographies (London: Dulau & Company, Ltd., 1924), p. 83.

stanza is a recurring theme in Akenside's odes. For example, in an ode entitled "The Complaint" Akenside renounces all affiliation with the god of love, only to confess in a later stanza that he still recognizes the merit of love. Indeed, in the odes of advice on love there is the hint that Akenside protests too much. Thus, the Ode "On Love, to a Friend" warns the youth of ambition that love begets "unmanly fears" and "sloth," and then concludes with the poet's confession:

> While thus I preach the Stoic strain,
> Unless I shun Olympia's view,
> An hour unsays it all again.
> O friend! when Love directs her eyes
> To pierce where every passion lies,
> Where is the firm, the cautious, or the wise?
> (X.)

These lines leave one with the impression that in the odes of advice Akenside is trying to convince himself, rather than his friends, that man can deny his emotional nature its indulgences. Try as he may, however, Akenside seems unable to embrace the view that man is governed entirely by cold reason. This life-view, as already witnessed in The Pleasures of Imagination, causes Akenside to spurn the kind of austerity in his age which was intent on suppressing the imaginative qualities in man's nature.

The emotional "Ode at Study" reveals a conflict within Akenside which is reflected in much of his poetry. In the opening stanza we may see Akenside's perennial struggle as a man of letters:

> Whither did my fancy stray?
> By what magic drawn away
> Have I left my studious theme?

From this philosophic page,
From the problems of the sage,
Wandering through a pleasing dream?
(I.)

These lines represent the poet who on the one hand is striving to break away from the restraint which was fashionable in the neo-Classical Age, and on the other is concerned with the respectability which is characteristic of most of the literature in the period. For all his attempts to suppress his emotions, however, Akenside is forced to concede that "Nature bids a softer power / Claim some minutes for his own." (II.) The tendency in Akenside to forsake the more solemn subjects for fancy's pleasurable themes is indicative of his need to write truly emotional poetry. And he has only to examine his own feelings to be assured that the emotions will not be denied:

Though the day have smoothly gone,
Or to lettered leisure known,
Or in social duty spent;
Yet at eve my lonely breast
Seeks in vain for perfect rest:
Languishes for true content.
(V.)

In their revelation of the poet's loneliness and yearning, these lines represent a significant advancement in subjective lyric expression. The treatment of his own personal doubts and anxieties in the odes may be seen as a reflection of Akenside's attempt to attain a more truly lyrical poetic style. In this regard Akenside's odes of advice are significant eighteenth-century lyric poems. Akenside's personal lyrics also exerted influence on his contemporaries. Following Akenside's earlier example, Gray and Collins used

the lesser ode to work out their own private and literary problems.

The search for inspiration led many eighteenth-century lyrists to turn instinctively to the earlier English poets. Manifest in many of Akenside's odes, for example, is the desire to write in a style which is represented by poets such as Spenser and Milton. This ambition is reflected in Akenside's early imitations of Spenser, and in later poems like the "Hymn to Cheerfulness," which is an imitation of Milton's companion poems.[8] And a poem entitled "The Remonstrance of Shakespeare" is a bold charge by Akenside that his age has turned away from the true English poetic tradition. The ode is supposedly spoken by Shakespeare to an audience at the Theatre Royal. The English are taken to task for patronizing a company of French comedians. Akenside's great respect for the English poet is reflected as Shakespeare defends his own irregular art:

> What, though the footsteps of my devious Muse
> The measured walks of Grecian art refuse?
> Or, though the frankness of my hardy style,
> Mock the nice touches of the critic's file?
> Yet, what my age and climate held to view,
> Impartial I surveyed, and fearless drew.
> (11. 13-18.)

These lines reveal Akenside's attitude toward the enslavement to "correctness" which was characteristic of so much of the poetry in his age. The poem is also a statement of the poet's dissatisfaction regarding the French influence on English letters. As a conse-

[8]See Havens, p. 449.

quence, Akenside expresses his distaste for the "barren, trivial, unharmonious phrase" of the French language. As H.T. Houpt claims, Akenside "was alarmed at the prospect of English society's being corrupted by French example."[9] What really inspires Akenside's castigation of the French influence in "The Remonstrance of Shakespeare," however, is his belief that the early English poets are the real source from which renewed lyric inspiration might come.

Akenside sees Milton as the supreme example of visionary poetic genius. In his Ode "To the Right Honourable Francis, Earl of Huntingdon," Akenside places Milton in the company of Pindar. The central argument of the ode is that "great poetical talents, and high sentiments of liberty, do reciprocally produce and assist each other."[10] Akenside sees both Pindar and Milton as proof of this connection. In his ode Akenside portrays Milton as the definitive English poet of the sublime:

> . . . while each western clime
> Presents her tuneful sons to Time,
> So mark thou Milton's name;
> And add, "Thus differs from the throng
> The spirit which informed thy awful song,
> Which bade thy potent voice protect thy country's
> fame."
>
> (III. 2.)

In pointing out Milton's high example to English poets in the eighteenth century, Akenside is also rexpressing his own aspiration

[9] Charles Theodore Houpt, Mark Akenside: A Biographical and Critical Study (1944; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), p. 122.

[10] Poetical Works, pp. 245-6.

to experience Miltonic vision. The same ambition may be seen reflected in Akenside's Ode "To Sleep," as the poet invokes Morpheus' aid in his hope of attaining "Such honourable visions . . . . / As soothed great Milton's injured age" (VI.). The tone of the Ode "To Sleep," however, is not an optimistic one, a reflection of Akenside's realization that he is not a visionary, and that his age has in fact destroyed the visionary poetic spirit.

The best example of Akenside's conviction that Milton might provide inspiration for his lyric expression may be seen in the Ode "To the Muse." This ode reflects Akenside's dejection at finding his imagination hampered in his early attempts at lyric verse. The opening stanza of the ode is highly emotional, as the poet expresses his mental anguish in his address to the muse:

> Queen of my songs, harmonious maid,
> Ah, why hast thou withdrawn thy aid?
> Ah, why forsaken thus my breast,
> With inauspicious damps oppressed?
> Where is the dread prophetic heat,
> With which my bosom wont to beat?
> Where all the bright mysterious dreams
> Of haunted groves and tuneful streams,
> That wooed my genius to divinest themes?

Terms like "dread prophetic heat" and "bright mysterious dreams" in these lines, indicate that Akenside believes true poetic inspiration to be prophetic and visionary. He realizes, therefore, that neo-Classical poetry is a poor source of inspiration for the kind of lyric expression he hopes to develop. Not even the classical poets can supply the desired inspiration. Neither the "festal board," nor "young Olympia's form," symbols for the influence of

Anacreon and Sappho respectively, can rekindle the poet's quenched poetic flame. Only Milton's "celestial strain" wins back the muse's favour for Akenside at this time:

> O powerful strain! O sacred soul!
> His numbers every sense control:
> And now again my bosom burns;
> The Muse, the Muse herself returns.
> Such on the banks of Tyne confessed,
> I hailed the fair immortal guest,
> When first she sealed me for her own,
> Made all her blissful treasures known,
> And bade me swear to follow Her alone.
> (III.)

The Ode "To the Muse," therefore, is not only significant for its declaration of Akenside's desire to experience visionary inspiration, but also for its emotional treatment of the theme of lost poetic energy. Indeed, it may be seen in this ode that for Akenside the pain of a frigid imagination is the sharpest of all pangs.

Because Akenside sees the creative impulse as a spontaneous and transient entity, the return of his poetic powers after an unproductive period is always an occasion for celebration in his odes. For example, the Ode "On Recovering from a Fit of Sickness; in the country" is an interesting comment on the way Akenside receives his poetic inspiration. This ode, an epithalamium to Jeremiah Dyson and his bride, is an example of the "half pastoral . . . half-studious" qualities which G.N. Shuster sees in Akenside's lyric verse.[11] The ode is addressed to the "verdant scenes" of

[11] Shuster, p. 202.

Goulder's Hill, the home of Dyson. Akenside was a frequent guest at Goulder's Hill, and on this particular occasion he is there convalescing after an illness:

> How gladly 'mid the dews of dawn,
> By weary lungs thy healing gale,
> The balmy west or the fresh north, inhale!
> How gladly, while my musing footsteps rove
> Round the cool orchard or the sunny lawn,
> Awaked I stop, and look to find
> What shrub perfumes the pleasant wind,
> Or what wild songster charms the Dryads of the grove!
> (II.)

In these lines Akenside's sensitivity to the charms of nature is reflected. And as the ode progresses, we may see that communion with nature is a necessary condition for Akenside's poetic inspiration. Thus, as Akenside enjoys the healthful and pleasing natural surroundings at Goulder's Hill, he is visited by the goddess of health, who is accompanied by the "heavenly Muse; unseen for many a day" (IV.) The best lines in the ode are those in which the return of the muse is celebrated:

> In that soft pomp, the tuneful maid
> Shone like the golden star of love.
> I saw her hand in careless measures move;
> I heard sweet preludes dancing on her lyre,
> While my whole frame the sacred sound obeyed.
> New sunshine o'er my fancy springs,
> New colours clothe external things,
> And the last glooms of pain and sickly plaint retire.
> (V.)

The theme of returning poetic energy often raises the emotional quality of Akenside's odes to an ecstatic pitch, as may be witnessed in the preceding lines. This ode is very significant because it

represents poetic inspiration as truly spontaneous. Also in the ode nature is portrayed as the perpetual source of revitalized poetic energy. As a result, Akenside often uses nature in his odes as a symbol for uninhibited lyric expression.

Akenside's nature lyrics are as much about his difficulty with lyric expression as they are about nature. In these odes nature is seen as a powerful influence, but Akenside, because of his own mental state, is at times unreceptive of nature's inspirational charms. The Ode "To the Honourable Charles Townshend; from the Country," reflects a problem which is often the burden of Akenside's nature lyrics:

> Oft I looked forth, and oft admired;
> Till with the studious volume tired
> I sought the open day;
> And sure, I cried, the rural gods
> Expect me in their green abodes,
> And chide my tardy lay.
>
> But ah! in vain my restless feet
> Traced every silent shady seat
> Which knew their forms of old:
> Nor Naiad by her fountain laid,
> Nor Wood-nymph tripping through her glade,
> Did now their rites unfold.
>
> (III-IV.)

The inability to summon up an enthusiastic response to nature, seen in these lines, is for Akenside tantamount to a loss of creative energy. In the Ode "To Townshend" it is "grief of love" which prevents the poet from enjoying communion with nature, for "The eyes of care can never view" (VI.) the rural gods. His nature odes represent a kind of poetic liberation for Akenside, but at the same time hint at his dissatisfaction regarding his lyric expression. From these

odes one gets the impression that Akenside believes his own temperament to be unsuited for lyric poetry. The difficulty apparent in these odes, however, is not peculiar to Akenside in the eighteenth century. It is rather a symptom of the poetic sterility of the Age of Reason, and is shared by all poets in the period who aspire to attain a more truly lyrical style. Akenside's nature odes, therefore, are significant not only because they reflect the poet's preoccupation with his own poetic problems, but also because they are meaningful comments on the lack of lyric inspiration in the age.

Akenside's celebrated Ode "To the Evening Star" may be read as a symbolic account of the poet's struggle to attain the kind of uninhibited lyric style to which he aspired. This poem is a remarkable eighteenth-century forerunner of such Romantic lyrics as Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," to which it has been compared in its situation and mood.[12] The comparison, however, may be extended to include symbolic meaning as well. For example, both odes are about lyric expression in that their central motif is the poet's inability, because of worldly cares, to sing like Keats's nightingale in "full-throated ease."

"To the Evening Star" opens with an invocation to Hesper, in which the reader becomes aware of the poet's sad plight:

[12]See Arthur Pollard, "Keats and Akenside: A Borrowing in the 'Ode to a Nightingale,'" Modern Language Review, LI (1956), 75-77.

Alas, but now I paid my tear
On fair Olympia's virgin tomb:
And lo, from thence in quest I roam
Of Philomela's bower.
(IV.)

The poet is seeking the nightingale's bower because he believes that "music's healing charm / May soothe afflicted love" (V.). When Olympia shared the poet's evening walks, the nightingale's "enchanting Muse" was a constant companion. But the Nightingale's song, a symbol for care-free lyric expression, has no place in the gloomy presence of the grief-stricken poet. Thus the bird leaves the "solemn shade" (VII). The central concern of the ode, therefore, is the poet's inability to transcend the cares of his heart so that he may share the nightingale's bliss.

As the poet wanders through the evening shades in the ode "To the Evening Star," he becomes a symbol for the poetic dilemma of his age. He longs to attain the unencumbered strains of the nightingale's song, but is unable to do so. With the aid of Hesper's guiding light, however, the poet is finally successful in locating the bird's cheerful retreat:

But hark; I hear her liquid tone.
Now, Hesper, guide my feet
Down the red marl with moss o'ergrown,
Through yon wild thicket next the plain,
Whose hawthorns choke the winding lane,
Which leads to her retreat.
(VIII.)

Encumbrances such as the "wild thicket" and the "winding lane" overgrown with hawthorns may be seen as symbolic of the poet's difficulty in writing lyric verse. And when the poet finally

attains the nightingale's bower, he sees a symbolic "green space" where, in total communion with nature, he can once again enjoy the bird's blissful song:

> Hark, how through many a melting note
> She now prolongs her lays:
> How sweetly down the void they float!
> The breeze their magic path attends;
> The stars shine out the forest bends;
> The wakeful heifers gaze.
>
> (X.)

The nightingale's "melting note" works like an anodyne which soothes the poet's troubled mind. In this mental state he can once again enjoy the ecstatic strains of the bird's song. The ode, therefore, is a symbolic statement of the poet's desire to experience a truly uninhibited lyric style, as well as an acknowledgement of his inability to do so. Akenside's Ode "To the Evening Star" has been seen as a symbolic attempt to find a "developmental pattern" for poetry at this time in its history.[13] And this type of reading of the ode is certainly supported by the theory of aesthetics which Akenside puts forward in The Pleasures of Imagination. At any rate, in the way that Akenside uses nature as the background for his symbolic excursion into his own consciousness, the Ode "To the Evening Star" is a significant ancestor of the Romantic nature-lyric.

"To the Evening Star" marks the culmination of Akenside's

[13] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Reflections on the Evening Star: Akenside to Coleridge," in New Perspectives on Coleridge and Wordsworth, ed. G.H. Hartman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 87.

development as a lyrist. None of his other odes reflect the glimmer of promise for unencumbered lyric verse that may be detected in "To the Evening Star." And yet, this ode seems at the same time to suggest Akenside's realization that the kind of poetic style to which he aspires is beyond his ability. For example, in the Ode "To the Evening Star" ideal lyric expression, represented by the nightingale's song, is experienced only vicariously by the poet. Akenside never managed to overcome his difficulties with lyric poetry. At any rate, the edition of his odes which was published in 1760 is short by five of the "twice-twenty" he had intended to write.[14]

Akenside's greatest contribution to the development of the English lyric may be seen in his use of the short, intimate ode as a means of resolving his own personal and literary concerns. For in this regard, he is moving away from the concept of imitation toward the ideal of individual expression. Akenside's influence on eighteenth-century lyrists may be seen in the wide use of the "lesser" ode by poets such as Gray and Collins. Indeed, the "romance-six" stanza which Akenside adapted to the Horatian ode was used extensively in the century, and was to become a favourite of Wordsworth.[15] Akenside's influence, however, may be seen to go

[14]See Houpt, p. 157.

[15]See Oswald Doughty, English Lyric in the Age of Reason (New York: Russell & Russell, 1922), p. 113. Cf. George Saintsbury, Historical Manual of English Prosody (1914; rpt. London: MacMillan and Co., 1926), p. 198.

beyond that exerted by his stanza forms. For in his striving to acquire a more lyrical poetic style, he demonstrated to his age the course of development English poetry was to follow at this time in its history.

CHAPTER III

AKENSIDE'S INFLUENCE ON WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

As young poets attempting to articulate what were often shadowy notions into a systematic literary theory, Wordsworth and Coleridge found Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination to be a valuable work. For they discovered that Akenside had treated many issues which were at the heart of their own poetic creed. Wordsworth may be seen to have benefited greatly from Akenside's speculation concerning imagination's role in human perception. It is, therefore, little wonder that The Pleasures of Imagination has been seen by A.F. Potts as an important model for The Prelude.[1] Of considerable interest to Wordsworth also were Akenside's views on ethics and moral philosophy, indicated by the innumerable echoes of Akenside in The Excursion.[2] For Coleridge, who wrote that "metaphysics and psychology have long been my hobby-horse,"[3] The Pleasures of Imagination was a fascinating poem. Coleridge saw

[1]Abbie Findlay Potts, Wordsworth's Prelude: A Study of Its Literary Form (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), pp. 244-78.

[2]See Judson S. Lyon, The Excursion: A Study (1950; rpt. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1970), pp. 32-3.

[3]S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (London; Oxford University Press, 1907), I, 62.

The Pleasures of Imagination as a manifestation of just the right balance in a philosophical poem between what he calls "head and fancy."[4] Akenside's style was not the only reason, however, for Coleridge's interest in The Pleasures of Imagination. As noted in an earlier chapter, Akenside's theory of imagination is a close forerunner of the Romantic concept of this mental faculty. And Coleridge may be seen to owe a great deal to Akenside's theory regarding imagination's role in human perception and artistic creation. At any rate, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that The Pleasures of Imagination had a fundamental influence on the poetic theories of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

A. Wordsworth

Many central ideas in The Prelude and The Excursion originate with the deistic philosophy which underlies the theory of aesthetics in The Pleasures of Imagination. The theory elaborated in The Prelude concerning the natural sublime as divine revelation may be seen to owe a great deal to the deistic concept of nature as represented in Akenside's poem. We have seen that Akenside sees nature as the worldly manifestation of divine harmony, and Wordsworth also maintains that, in contact with nature, man may attain spiritual perfection. The idea that the vast and majestic spectacles which constitute the natural sublime may become an apocalyptic experience

[4] Collected Letters of S.T. Coleridge, ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956), I, 197.

for imaginative human beings appears often in The Prelude. Such deistic concepts found throughout Wordsworth's poetry may be seen to some extent as a manifestation of Akenside's influence.[5] The essential principles of deism may have been available to Wordsworth in the philosophical and theological treatises of the eighteenth century, but as A.F. Potts argues, he would have found The Pleasures of Imagination "more assimilable" than these.[6] At any rate, the innumerable echoes of Akenside found throughout Wordsworth's poetry tend to substantiate this view. Furthermore, the many parts of Akenside's argument adopted by Wordsworth and reworked in The Prelude and The Excursion indicate his great respect for the earlier poet's work.

A collation of The Pleasures of Imagination and The Excursion will reveal that they have many subjects in common. In the "Prospectus" to The Excursion[7] Wordsworth states that he intends to sing,

> Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love and Hope,
> And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
> Of blessed consolation in distress.
> (ll. 14-16)

[5]William Haller maintains that the Romantic "nature-poets" are indebted to Akenside for their concept of nature as a divine manifestation. See The Early Life of Robert Southey, pp. 107-8. Cf. C.A. Moore, p. 89.

[6]Potts, p. 247.

[7]The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. E. De Selincourt and H. Harbishire (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949), V. 3. (All subsequent references to The Excursion are from this edition.)

In the revised Pleasures of Imagination Akenside invokes "Truth" as the "heavenly auspice" of his own "perilous excursion" (II, 43-44). As I have shown, "Grandeur" and "Beauty" are two of the Addisonian orders to which Akenside devotes Book I of his poem. The theme which Wordsworth denotes as "blessed consolations in distress" is an issue which Akenside treats in his allegory of Harmodius. The justification of evil in the "best of all possible worlds" of the optimists, a major concern of eighteenth-century theodocies,[8] is an issue which no didactic poem in the century can ignore.

There is a remarkable similarity between Akenside's and Wordsworth's approach to the issue concerning the place of evil in the world. To treat this question Akenside introduces the Sage, Harmodius, who is led through his own personal tragedy to question the ways of Providence. In the revised version of The Pleasures of Imagination, however, the allegory of Harmodius is replaced by the tale of Solon, the "last and wisest" (III, 31) of the fathers of ancient Greece. The Solitary of Wordsworth's Excursion may be seen as a combination of Harmodius and Solon in the early and revised versions, respectively, of Akenside's poem. Like Harmodius, the Solitary flouts the divine scheme of the world because of a tragic incident in his life. Also, the Solitary's exile from society is, like Solon's, self-imposed. Wordsworth's examination

[8]Lovejoy, pp. 921-45.

of evil in the form of the Solitary's tragedy, therefore, may be seen as similar to Akenside's in his allegory of Harmodius and tale of Solon, and the verbal echoes are usually available to indicate Wordsworth's debt. Beginning his tale of Solon, Akenside asks,

> What tongue then may explain the
> various fate
> Which reigns o'er earth? or who to
> mortal eyes
> Illustrate this perplexing labyrinth
> Of joy and woe, through which the feet of man
> Are doomed to wander?
> (III, 1-5)

This very sentiment is expressed by Wordsworth's Solitary as he ponders,

> Through what perplexing labyrinths, abrupt
> Precipitations, and untoward straits,
> The earth-born wanderer hath passed; and quickly,
> That respite o'er, like traverses and toils
> Must he again encounter.
> (III, 982-86)

The verbal echoes in this passage are obvious enough to indicate a definite borrowing from Akenside. Compare Akenside's phrase "Illustrate this perplexing labyrinth" with Wordsworth's "Through what perplexing labyrinths" and Akenside's "through which the feet of man / Are doomed to wander" with Wordsworth's "The earth-born wanderer hath passed." Throughout Wordsworth's argument concerning the place of evil in the world many of the same kind of verbal echoes of Akenside may be found.

A similar reworking of parts of Akenside's plan in <u>The Pleasures of Imagination</u> may also be seen in <u>The Prelude</u>.[9] Aken-

[9] A.F. Potts, for example, sees <u>The Prelude</u> as "a kind of

side's proposed aim, as expressed in the fourth Book of the revised version of his poem, is roughly what Wordsworth accomplishes in The Prelude. In the early version of The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside investigates the nature and function of the mature poetic imagination, but neglects to consider the part played by the poet's early experiences in shaping the poetic faculty, an oversight which was to be rectified in the revised poem. Akenside indicates this in his stated intention of "the secret paths / Of early genius to explore" (IV, 20-21). Many critics have noted that the unfinished fourth book of the revised Pleasures of Imagination anticipates Wordsworth's Prelude to a remarkable degree.[10] The foreshadowing of Wordsworth in this Book is seen not only in its proposed aim of tracing the development of the poetic imagination, but also in its belief that early intercourse with nature helps to mold and foster the poets' creative powers. Akenside pays tribute to the "studies which possessed [him] in the dawn / Of life," (IV, 49-50) as he fondly remembers his youthful jaunts along the banks of his native Tyne:

> How gladly I recall your well-known seats,
> Beloved of old, and the delightful time
> When, all alone, for many a summer's day,
> I wandered through your calm recesses, led
> In silence by some powerful hand unseen.
> (IV, 41-45)

Pleasures of Imagination in reverse; exploration first, theory last," p. 257.

[10]Myra Reynolds sees one passage in the fourth book of Akenside's poem as "strikingly Wordsworthian." p. 358.

The belief, manifest in these lines, that nature has a mysterious influence in our lives, possibly betrays the origin of much of Wordsworth's theory in The Prelude. Indeed, such deistic sentiments found throughout The Pleasures of Imagination may be seen to have influenced Wordsworth greatly in his views on nature.

The tautological argument in The Pleasures of Imagination that the benevolent Creator provides for man's spiritual as well as for his physical needs, is often echoed in Wordsworth. Both Akenside and Wordsworth believe in divine intervention in our lives, when we are faced with important moral decisions. Furthermore, for both poets this spiritual guidance works through nature's harmonizing and inspirational influence. In The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside asserts that nature,

> . . . conscious how infirm
> Her offspring tread the paths of good and ill,
> By this illustrious image, in each kind
> Still most illustrious where the object holds
> Its native powers most perfect, she by this
> Illumes the headlong impulse of desire,
> And sanctifies his choice.
> (I, 357-64)

Wordsworth also attributes his early spiritual development to nature, and like Akenside believes that,

> . . . all of us in some degree
> Are led to knowledge, whencesoever led,
> And howsoever; were it otherwise,
> And we found evil fast as we find good
> In our first years, or think that it is found,
> How could the innocent heart bear up and live![11]
> (VIII, 306-11)

[11] William Wordsworth, The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind,

Wordsworth's well-known theory, therefore, that the sanctity of nature makes men spiritually good, clearly has a precedent in Akenside. The deistic belief that God makes himself manifest to man through nature, and his faith in the divine origin of imagination, assures Akenside that,

> . . . the men
> Whom Nature's works can charm, with God himself
> Hold converse; grow familiar, day by day,
> With his conceptions, act upon his plan,
> And form to his, the relish of their souls.
> (III, 629-33)

This idea is echoed many times throughout The Prelude[12] but it is in The Excursion that we may find a passage which indicates a clear debt to Akenside:

> . . . the man
> Who, in this spirit communes with the Forms
> Of nature, who with understanding heart
> Both knows and loves such objects as excite
> No morbid passions, no disquietude,
> No vengeance, and no hatred--needs must feel
> The joy of that pure principle of love. . . .
> (IV, 1208-14)

The striking resemblance which this passage bears to the lines from Akenside, tends to strengthen the claim that Wordsworth is indebted to The Pleasures of Imagination for the idea that man in contact with nature may benefit spiritually. Many such ideas at the root of Wordsworth's great reverence for nature coincide with Akenside's

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ed. Ernest de Selincourt (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). (All subsequent references to The Prelude are from this edition.)

[12] See (III, 419-52); (V, 223-45); (VIII, 121-28).

poetical representation of the natural religion.

Akenside's speculation concerning the role of imagination in human perception anticipates much of the theory of the natural sublime presented by Wordsworth in The Prelude. Believing imagination "to hold a middle place between the organs of sense and the faculties of moral perception,"[13] Akenside argues that this faculty controls the total shaping of the human psyche. He makes the significant claim that our mental faculties determine the way in which we perceive the natural world when he states that,

> Mind, mind alone, (bear witness earth and heaven!)
> The living fountains in itself contains
> Of beauteous and sublime. . . .
>
> (I, 481-83)

These lines have been seen by one critic as representing the tendency in the eighteenth century "toward the concept of creative perception."[14] The idea that the mind of man, or more specifically his imagination, is the real source of the beautiful and sublime qualities which he perceives in nature, is a key concept in Akenside's theory of aesthetics. In The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside is especially concerned with the distinctive way in which highly imaginative individuals perceive the natural world. These imaginative adepts glean experience from nature of which less fortunate men are deprived. Akenside argues that while all men

[13] Poetical Works, p. 1.

[14] M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 63-4.

find spiritual refreshment in nature to some degree, those blessed with extraordinary imaginative powers are actually afforded glimpses of the infinite through their ability to appreciate the sublime in the natural world (I, 96-101). Wordsworth also argues that the vast and majestic spectacles in nature may be an apocalyptic experience for highly imaginative minds. Akenside's influence may be readily detected in those parts of The Prelude dealing with the concept of the natural sublime as divine revelation.

Both Akenside and Wordsworth argue that the sublime experience has spiritual as well as aesthetic value, because through it the soul of man is momentarily reunited with its divine origin. It is a sign of man's immortal nature, argues Akenside, that the soul is constantly striving to experience the infinite. Wordsworth also maintains in The Prelude that "Our destiny, our being's heart and home, / Is with infinitude" (VI, 604-5). Since the natural sublime is seen by these poets as the stamp of the divine on the physical world, they believe that the soul in contact with the awesome natural spectacles attains its desired goal. In The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside presents the idea that the human soul finds rest only with infinity:

> Even on the barriers of the world, untired,
> She meditates the eternal depth below;
> Till, half recoiling, down the headlong steep
> She plunges; soon o'erwhelmed and swallowed up
> In that immense of being. There her hopes
> Rest at the fated goal.
>
> (I, 207-12)

And the following lines from The Prelude in which Wordsworth

describes the effect of the sublime on the soul of man, clearly echo Akenside:

> The soul when smitten thus
> By a sublime idea, whencesoe'er
> Vouchsafed for union or communion, feeds
> On the pure bliss, and takes her rest with God.
> (VIII, 672-75)

The verbal echoes of Akenside's "Rest at the fated goal" in Wordsworth's "takes her rest with God," possibly reveal the source of this idea in The Prelude. At any rate, the idea that a vital relationship exists between man's aesthetic faculty and his spiritual well-being is a basic premise in The Pleasures of Imagination.[15] Akenside argues that whatever highly imaginative individuals perceive as beautiful must also be morally beneficial, because of the divine affiliation of imagination. He claims that benevolent Providence, "To deck the honoured paths of just and good, / Has added bright Imagination's rays" (I, 546-47). Wordsworth also puts complete trust in the faculty of imagination, arguing in The Prelude that imaginative minds "are truly from the Deity" (XIV, 112). Since imagination is mysteriously drawn to the sublime aspects of nature, such phenomena are seen by these poets as having a mystical significance.

Another concept common to both Akenside and Wordsworth is that the natural sublime is a manifestation of the supreme creative imagination. This view tends to explain the great attraction which

[15] See Poetical Works, p. 4.

the sublime in nature holds for the poetic imagination. Akenside argues that "brute unconscious matter" cannot interest imaginative individuals, because its attraction is merely superficial (I, 527-29). In the works of creative design, however,

> . . . the ambitious mind
> There sees herself: by these congenial forms
> Touched and awakened, with intenser act
> She bends each nerve, and meditates, well pleased,
> Her features in the mirror.
> (I, 533-37)

For Akenside, then, sublime works, whether in art or in nature, are like a mirror wherein imagination perceives its own reflection. In The Prelude, following the account of his experience on Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth assigns the same significance to the sublime in nature:

> The power, which all
> Acknowledge when thus moved, which nature thus
> To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
> Resemblance of that glorious faculty
> That higher minds bear with them as their own.
> (XIV, 86-90)

In the natural sublime the imaginative mind sees an outward showing of divine creativity and thus, "is given a sense of its own 'pure grandeur.'"[16] It may be seen, therefore, that Wordsworth's concept of the poetic imagination as an extension of the divine creative intellect is an idea which is available in The Pleasures of Imagination.

[16] Albert O. Wlecke, Wordsworth and the Sublime (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), p. 61.

Much of Wordsworth's mystical theory of nature in The Prelude is anticipated by Akenside's deistic concept of nature as revelation. The sublime for Akenside represents the highest form of beauty because it shows evidence of creative intelligence. In the revised version of The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside expresses a view which we may find echoed often in The Prelude. Tracing the degrees of beauty from inanimate objects to intelligent life, Akenside concludes,

> Thus hath Beauty there
> Her most conspicuous praise to matter lent,
> Where most conspicuous through the shadowy veil
> Breaks forth the bright expression of a mind:
> By steps directing our enraptured search
> To Him--the first of minds, the chief, the sole.
> (I, 553-58).

Akenside's allusion to the Book of Revelation in these lines indicates the significance that the natural sublime holds for him. Attempting to create a deistic mythology in his poem, Akenside presents a theory of nature which is a forerunner of Romantic "nature-worship." The familiar lines in Wordsworth's Prelude describing his experience on Mont Blanc may be seen to echo this passage in Akenside's poem regarding the mystical significance of the natural sublime. Wordsworth sees the majestic natural features on Mont Blanc as "Characters of the great Apocalypse, / The types and symbols of Eternity" (VI, 453-4). By alluding to the Christian Apocalypse, Wordsworth is demonstrating that the sublime in nature is for him, as it is for Akenside, a revelation of the divine. Both Akenside and Wordsworth believe that imagination is the

faculty by which man attains this brief contact with infinity. Wordsworth's definitive image of the poetic imagination, manifest in the description of his "vision" on Mount Snowdon, may be seen to echo Akenside's account of the natural sublime as divine revelation. Contemplating the sublime spectacle on Mount Snowdon, Wordsworth declares:

> . . . it appeared to me the type
> Of a majestic intellect, its acts
> And its possessions, what it has and craves,
> What in itself it is, and would become.
> There I beheld the emblem of a mind
> That feeds upon infinity.--
> (XIV, 66-71)

Echoes of Akenside's "Breaks forth the bright expression of a mind" in Wordsworth's "There I beheld the emblem of a mind," indicates that the natural sublime held the same significance for these poets. The human imagination is seen by Wordsworth as being in the image of the divine creative intellect, itself infinite and constantly in search of infinity. As noted earlier, Akenside argues that man's fascination with the sublime spectacles in nature is a result of his imagination's quest for the infinite (I, 150-221). Wordsworth's theory in The Prelude regarding the interaction of the poetic imagination with the natural sublime, may therefore be seen to owe a considerable debt to the deistic doctrine of nature as represented in Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination.

While Wordsworth had acquired an appreciation for the purely sensual appeal of nature at an early age, he could learn a great deal from The Pleasures of Imagination regarding the aesthetic and

spiritual value of the natural sublime. Akenside's theory of aesthetics, backed by the authority of contemporary and ancient philosophers alike, often proved to be a valuable touchstone against which Wordsworth could test his own observations and ideas. Akenside's hypothesis in The Pleasures of Imagination is that those natural endowments which control man's aesthetic judgment also determine his moral nature.[17] Imaginative individuals glean not only sensual experiences from the beauty in nature, but also spiritual perfection. Wordsworth, examining his own development as a poet, comes to exactly the same conclusion in The Prelude. It is not surprising, therefore, that we may find many ideas in The Pleasures of Imagination which anticipate Wordsworth in The Prelude, since both poems have the same basic philosophy regarding the role of imagination in man's aesthetic and spiritual development.

B. Coleridge

Coleridgean scholars generally agree that during his formative years the Romantic poet was influenced considerably by Akenside. While the critics have readily acknowledged Coleridge's poetical debt to the earlier poet, they have failed to see any significant connection between Akenside's discourse on imagination and fancy and Coleridge's celebrated theory regarding these mental powers. Coleridge may be indebted to The Pleasures of Imagination,

[17] Poetical Works, p. 4.

however, for much of the groundwork of his own theory; for in his poem Akenside not only makes a clear distinction between the terms "imagination" and "fancy,"[18] but also represents imagination as the essential agent in human perception. The theory of imagination and fancy embodied in The Pleasures of Imagination may therefore be seen to anticipate Coleridge's to a remarkable degree. The critics have generally been reluctant to assign any such importance to Akenside's views on imagination and fancy. Norman Fruman, who has irrefutably demonstrated the derivative nature of Coleridge's speculative criticism, does not indicate that he recognizes The Pleasures of Imagination as a possible source of any of Coleridge's ideas regarding the distinctive roles of imagination and fancy.[19] While it has been the practice of the critics to look to the German philosophers for the origin of many of Coleridge's ideas, The Pleasures of Imagination should not be dismissed as insignificant in this regard. Clear evidence exists to indicate that Coleridge considered Akenside's poem to be an interesting and authoritative work. It is logical to assume that the young Coleridge was influenced greatly by The Pleasures of Imagination, since during the

[18] E.H. King demonstrates that by the mid-eighteenth century philosophers and critics were using these terms to denote two entirely different mental processes. It is therefore not surprising to find such a distinction in The Pleasures of Imagination. See "James Beattie's Literary Essays (1776, 1783) and the Evolution of Romanticism," Studies in Scottish Literature, XI (April, 1974), 208-09.

[19] See Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel (New York: George Braziller, 1971).

period of 1794-1797 Coleridge may be seen to have been fascinated by almost everything that Akenside had written.

An examination of a small sampling of Coleridge's early poetry and prose may demonstrate his great admiration for Akenside's work. In September of 1794 Coleridge submitted to the Morning Chronicle his "Elegy Imitated from Akenside's Third Blank Verse Inscription." The extent of Coleridge's borrowing in this poem is such that he has been charged with merely rhyming Akenside.[20] In December of the same year Coleridge wrote his "Religious Musings," a poem which owes a great deal to Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination. And in Coleridge's Lectures on Politics and Religion of 1795, there is one passage after another from The Pleasures of Imagination or from Akenside's lyric verse. Coleridge was greatly impressed it seems by many of Akenside's odes. In a letter to John Thelwall he praises a poem as being "in the best style of Akenside's best Odes."[21] Coleridge's own "Ode to the Departing Year," written in 1796, is remarkably reminiscent of Akenside's Ode "To the Earl of Huntingdon," a poem which Coleridge knew and seems to have admired considerably.[22] It may be seen, therefore,

[20] Ibid., p. 39.

[21] Letters, I, 307.

[22] At any rate, Coleridge prefixes stanza v.2 of this Ode as a motto for his Moral and Political Lecture. See The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, ed. L. Patton and P. Mann (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1971), I, 3.

that Coleridge was greatly appreciative of Akenside's Odes and Inscriptions and that his early poetry was influenced considerably by these works. But it was The Pleasures of Imagination which Coleridge considered to be most worthy of emulation. In fact, Akenside's philosophical poem may have been instrumental in bringing about what Coleridge considered to be a significant turning point in his career.

For Coleridge The Pleasures of Imagination was a manifestation of the successful treatment of a philosophical subject poetically. Akenside saw no reason why philosophy should not be united with "the works of imagination,"[23] and on this point Coleridge agreed. In a letter to Thelwall, Coleridge demonstrates this particular affinity with Akenside:

> But why so violent against *metaphysics* in poetry? Is not Akenside's a metaphysical poem? Perhaps, you do not like Akenside--well--*but I do*--& so do a great many others.[24]

Here Coleridge is defending his own "Religious Musings," a poem which may be seen as an attempt to imitate Akenside's style in The Pleasures of Imagination. Much of the subject matter in "Religious Musings" coincides with central themes in The Pleasures of Imagination. Frequent verbal echoes of Akenside may also be found throughout "Religious Musings" to indicate Coleridge's debt to the earlier work.

[23] See Poetical Works, p. 71 (n. to l. 31).

[24] Letters, I, 215.

When Coleridge published his "Religious Musings," he prefixed as a motto a passage from The Pleasures of Imagination as an indication of his intention at this time to follow Akenside's example as a poet who combined philosophy with poetry.[25] In his "Religious Musings" Coleridge attempts to come to grips with the question of "Why there is misery in a world so fair" (l. 259). In order to justify the place of evil in man's world Coleridge draws extensively on Akenside's treatment of the same subject. When the Sage of Akenside's allegory mourns man's lot as "The universal sensitive of pain" (II, 218), the "Genius of human kind" demonstrates that it is by divine decree that man is "by Nature formed for all mankind" (II, 262). Coleridge echoes this idea in Akenside when he states that,

> 'Tis the sublime of man,
> Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves
> Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole!
> This fraternises man, this constitutes
> Our charities and bearings.
>
> (ll. 127-31)

In his entire treatment of the place of evil in the world Coleridge may be seen to adopt Akenside's ideas and present them as axiomatic evidence in his own argument. Another idea in "Religious Musings" which may be seen to originate with The Pleasures of Imagination is the view that through his communion with nature man may converse

[25] See The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), I, 108. (All subsequent references to Coleridge's poetry are from this edition.)

with God. Coleridge asserts that to love God is to appreciate all of creation. Conversely, the man who truly appreciates nature may come in contact with the divine:

> From himself he flies,
> Stands in the sun, and with no partial gaze
> Views all creation; and he loves it all,
> And blesses it, and calls it very good!
> This is indeed to dwell with the most High!
> (ll. 110-14)

Many passages like the preceding one, remarkably reminiscent of Akenside's style in The Pleasures of Imagination, may be found throughout Coleridge's poem. Coleridge's "Religious Musings," therefore, attests to the considerable respect which he had for Akenside's "metaphysical" poem.

Like Wordsworth, Coleridge benefited greatly from Akenside's views on moral philosophy; but he is probably even more indebted to the earlier poet's theory of imagination and fancy. Many ideas regarding the distinctive roles of imagination and fancy usually considered to be original Romantic concepts, are already discernible in The Pleasures of Imagination. While Akenside does not actually see imagination and fancy as two different powers, he certainly makes a clear distinction between them in his poem. Like most eighteenth-century aestheticians, Akenside uses "imagination" to represent the sublime aspect of the poetic power, and "fancy" to denote its more capricious side. Arguing that imagination is mysteriously receptive of certain orders of objects in the natural environment ~~(I, 113-15),~~ Akenside asserts that the external stimulus,

> Thrills through Imagination's tender frame,
> From nerve to nerve; all naked and alive
> They catch the spreading rays; till now the soul
> At length discloses every tuneful spring,
> To that harmonious movement from without,
> Responsive. Then the inexpressive strain
> Diffuses its enchantment; Fancy dreams
> Of sacred fountains and Elysian groves,
> And vales of bliss. . . .
>
> (I, 119-27)

It may be seen here that Akenside deliberately employs the term "imagination" to represent that power which is primarily involved in the act of perception. "Fancy," on the other hand, denotes an entity whose function it is to enhance the perceived image with random associations. Throughout Akenside's poem imagination is always regarded as that power which enables man to detect the beautiful and the sublime in nature. In seeing imagination as the faculty responsible for the way in which man perceives his world, Akenside anticipates Coleridge in his well-known definition. The primary imagination, Coleridge declares, is "the living power and prime Agent of all human Perception."[26] For Coleridge, therefore, the primary imagination is, like Akenside's "finer organs" (I, 109-15), the link between the external stimuli and the perceived image. Thus, this part of Coleridge's definition is clearly anticipated by Akenside in The Pleasures of Imagination.

The Romantic poets saw human perception as an active process in which the imagination played a creative role. This idea is inherent in Coleridge's definition when he declares that the primary

[26] Biographia Literaria, I, 202.

imagination is "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation."[27] As an extension of the divine creative energy, imagination as seen by the Romantic poets is continuously striving "to represent the common universe in such a way that we see it as if for the first time."[28] This idea, that imagination recreates the perceived image, is usually seen as the essential difference between the Romantic concept of this faculty of mind and the eighteenth-century view of the power. The idea that imagination colours, and even recreates what the senses perceive, however, is an important premise of Akenside's argument concerning the function of imagination. It is on the basis of this very idea that Akenside believes the imaginative faculty to have complete control over our moral development. As noted earlier, Akenside is headed toward the concept of creative perception when he declares that the mind of man is the real source of the beautiful and sublime as perceived in nature (I, 481-83). Coleridge had undoubtedly encountered such ideas in The Pleasures of Imagination early in his career; and while it was much later that he formulated his mature theory of imagination and fancy, his debt to Akenside is strongly implicated.

Coleridge may even be indebted to Akenside for the concept of the "primary" and "secondary" roles of imagination. In the "Design" to his poem Akenside refers to the primary and secondary

[27] Biographia Literaria, I, 202.

[28] John Spencer Hill, ed., Imagination in Coleridge (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), p. 22.

pleasures of imagination are those which arise as a direct result of our perception of the beauty which exists in nature. The secondary pleasures, however, represent our delight from the imitative arts.[29] It may be seen, then, that Akenside's primary pleasures coincide with Coleridge's explanation of the role of the primary imagination. Akenside, like Coleridge, sees imagination's role in the creative arts as secondary to its function in human perception. Furthermore, when Akenside comes to treat the secondary pleasures of imagination, he describes a process which is almost identical with Coleridge's concept of the role of the secondary imagination.

Although Akenside's theory of the poetic imagination is usually dismissed as being in the tradition of the associationists, he does make a significant break with their views. Unlike the associationists, Akenside sees imagination as being independent of memory.[30] This idea is inherent in Akenside's distinction between the terms "imagination" and "fancy." According to the theory of the mental faculties in The Pleasures of Imagination, fancy, the more frivolous side of the power, is a form of memory. It is the role of fancy, with the aid of "the busy power / Of Memory," (III, 348-9) to recall the images which are presented "Before the curious aim of mimic art" (III, 353-4). It is only after fancy has

[29] Poetical Works, p. 3.

[30] See Martin Kallich, "The Association of Ideas and Akenside's 'Pleasures of Imagination,'" Modern Language Notes, LXII (March, 1947), 167.

retrieved all of the possible associations of an idea that "the plastic powers / Labour for action" (III, 381-2). The actual poetic imagination recreates original images using the myriad of associations presented for its use by the fancy. That power which he denotes by the term "imagination" is viewed by Akenside as an extension of the infinite creative energy. This may be seen in his comparison of the poet's art to the act of Creation:

> as from Chaos old the jarring seeds
> Of Nature, at the voice divine, repaired
> Each to its place, till rosy earth unveiled
> Her fragrant bosom, and the joyful sun
> Sprung up the blue serene, by swift degrees
> Thus disentanged, his entire design
> Emerges.
>
> (III, 399-405)

Thus the poet transforms random images into unified and original works of art. Imagination's ability to create by recreating, explains for Akenside why poetic works "Beyond their proper powers, attract the soul" (III, 418). It is true, therefore, that Akenside "combines the compounding theory with the creating theory. . . ."[31] For while this faculty utilizes the associations of an idea which are recalled by fancy, it is seen by Akenside as a truly creative power. Consider, for example, Akenside's account of the "child of fancy" during the poetic act:

> With fixed gaze
> He marks the rising phantoms; now compares
> Their different forms; now blends them, now divides,
> Enlarges and extenuates by turns;
> Opposes, ranges in fantastic bands,
> And infinitely varies.
>
> (III, 391-95)

[31] Aldridge, p. 780.

The process represented by Akenside's verbs in the preceding passage may be seen as one of modification and recreation. In fact, the creative process as described in The Pleasures of Imagination bears a remarkable resemblance to Coleridge's account of the secondary imagination in action. The secondary imagination, according to Coleridge, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create. . . ."[32] Thus, Coleridge's secondary imagination functions basically the same as Akenside's "plastic" power. It may be seen, therefore, that although Akenside is vague in his theory about where the laws of association leave off and the creative imagination takes over, his argument is a significant advancement in the eighteenth century of the creative theory of imagination. Furthermore, it may be concluded that Coleridge undoubtedly benefited from such ideas in The Pleasures of Imagination.

Many ideas which are essential principles of Coleridge's celebrated theory of imagination and fancy may be found scattered throughout The Pleasures of Imagination. Considering Coleridge's great interest in the subject matter and style of Akenside's poem, it is almost certain that he was familiar with the entire theory of imagination and fancy which is elaborated in The Pleasures of Imagination. The evidence strongly implies that Coleridge may have evolved much of his own theory of imagination and fancy from Akenside's poem. This view is indeed consistent with certain critical

[32] Biographia Literaria, I, 202.

works which have attempted to demonstrate that Coleridge deduced much of his speculative criticism from the writings of others. It is certainly true that as a young man Coleridge considered Akenside to be a poet and philosopher of the highest order. It seems a safe assumption, therefore, that Coleridge's early interest in the psychology of the mental faculties was to some extent kindled by his reading of Akenside's poem. Indeed, Coleridge's mature theory concerning the nature and function of imagination and fancy owes more to Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination than traditional Coleridgean criticism has recognized.

CONCLUSION

Akenside is usually regarded as a forerunner of Romanticism mainly by virtue of certain passages in his Pleasures of Imagination which anticipate parts of the theories of the great Romantic poets. While this kind of an assessment of Akenside's place in the history of English poetry has given him a certain amount of recognition in our own time, it does not give a complete picture of his role as a precursor of Romanticism. Disregarding the full significance of The Pleasures of Imagination, critics have charged that in his poem "Akenside is too abstract. . . . In place of images, he presents the reader with dissertations."[1] In its call for the return of imagination and feeling to English poetry, however, The Pleasures of Imagination represents an important eighteenth-century exercise in poetics.[2] In view of the theory of aesthetics elaborated in The Pleasures of Imagination, Akenside's lyric verse may be seen as an attempt to write the kind of poetry called for in his major poem. Although Akenside's extensive handling of the ode form early in the century has historical as well as literary significance,

[1]Beers, p. 140.

[2]More recent critical works on The Pleasures of Imagination tend to consider the poem from the point of view of its aesthetics and poetics. See John Francis Norton, "Akenside's 'The Pleasures of Imagination': An Exercise in Poetics," Eighteenth Century Studies, III (1970), 366-83.

his lyric poetry is almost totally ignored in this regard. In many of his odes, even while employing a classical poetic form, Akenside betrays his longing to break away from certain literary conventions of his age. Akenside is therefore a significant literary figure in the early reaction against the more restricting aspects of the neo-Classical poetic doctrine. The great influence which Akenside exerted on such Romantic poets as Wordsworth and Coleridge is also an indication of the innovative nature of his work. All the evidence indicates that these poets regarded Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination as a systematic and authoritative philosophical exercise. There is certainly ample evidence to substantiate the claim that Wordsworth and Coleridge owe considerably more to Akenside's poem than most critics have acknowledged.

Despite the eclectic nature of its argument, The Pleasures of Imagination is a systematic philosophical poem with singleness of purpose. In the "Design" to his poem Akenside declares that his intention is

> to enlarge and harmonize the imagination, and by that means insensibly dispose the minds of men to a similar taste and habit of thinking in religion, morals, and civil life. 'Tis on this account that [the author] is so careful to point out the benevolent intention of the Author of Nature in every principle of the human constitution. . . .[3]

This does not mean that Akenside is concerned with arriving at a standard for literary taste; rather, his aim is to demonstrate that

[3] Poetical Works, p. 4.

those natural mental powers which enable man to differentiate between the beautiful and the grotesque, also guide him in his ethical and moral decisions. As R. Marsh asserts, "Akenside cannot be content to be governed by literal distinctions, such as those commonly made between 'aesthetics'. . . and 'morals'. . . ."[4] In The Pleasures of Imagination Akenside argues that man is naturally enthusiastic by the design of a wise and benevolent providence; for his love of beauty ultimately serves to foster man's moral development. In this regard Akenside gives a whole new respectability to imagination when he claims that it is not only the supreme aesthetic faculty but also the power which actually shapes man's moral judgment. In his representation of imagination as being mysteriously conversant with truth, Akenside may be seen to anticipate nineteenth-century Romantic views of the faculty. Such ideas in The Pleasures of Imagination would have been regarded as heretical by strict adherents of the neo-Classical literary doctrine. But for the handful of poets at this time who aimed for more than respectability in their poetry, Akenside's poem provided a philosophical basis for their poetic creed. Regarded in this way, The Pleasures of Imagination becomes a highly significant exercise in poetics. It also tends to explain the great appeal which Akenside's poem held for Wordsworth and Coleridge.

[4]Robert Marsh, Four Dialectical Theories of Poetry: An Aspect of English Neoclassical Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 50.

As a lyrist Akenside falls short of the kind of poetry called for by his Pleasures of Imagination; however, his contribution to the development of English lyric verse is significant. It is easy to see why Akenside's odes have been regarded by some critics as unsatisfactory examples of lyric poetry. When his odes are compared with those of Keats, for example, Akenside's are seen as cold, studious specimens. In order to make a valid assessment of Akenside's importance as an eighteenth century lyrist, one must try to see his odes in their proper context as lyric poems in an age when this kind of poetry was held in low estimation. Akenside's lyric verse, especially his short, intimate odes, represents his urge to explore the "fair poetic region" of his own mind. In their subjectivity, therefore, many of Akenside's odes are noteworthy specimens of lyric poetry in the Age of Reason. The personal note in the odes reflects those concerns which affected Akenside as a man, but more importantly, it is symbolic of the struggle which all lyric poets experienced at this time. The inability to find renewed lyric inspiration is a theme which recurs in many of Akenside's odes. And his treatment of many different themes reflects his striving to attain unencumbered lyric expression. This concern may especially be seen in an ode like "To the Muse," in which Akenside expresses his wish to experience Miltonic vision. If Akenside's odes are often seen as cold, studious specimens of that form, it is not because his subjects did not affect him deeply. Akenside's difficulty with the ode is a symptom of the inspirational

difficulties experienced by all writers in the period who aspired to a truly lyrical poetic style. Nevertheless, in his use of the lesser ode as an instrument for the treatment of his own personal anxieties and poetic difficulties, Akenside may be seen to have exerted some influence on his contemporaries. In fact, echoes of Akenside's lyric verse in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and especially Keats, bespeak his significance as an eighteenth-century lyrist.

While Wordsworth and Coleridge recognized Akenside as a lyric poet of some importance, it was the didactic quality in his work that they regarded as most valuable. For while the sensual appeal of Akenside's poetry may leave much to be desired, he could teach the young Romantic poets a great deal concerning the relationship between beauty and truth. Throughout Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination may be found many ideas which are usually considered to be basic tenets of the Romantic philosophy. Astute literary theorists like Wordsworth and Coleridge were quick to recognize the many implications of Akenside's theory of aesthetics. Akenside's deistic concept of the natural sublime as an extension of the divine creative power may be seen as an important forerunner of Wordsworth's theory regarding the mystical significance of majestic natural spectacles. And the many echoes of Akenside to be found throughout The Prelude and The Excursion suggest that Wordsworth's debt to the earlier poet is considerable. Akenside's speculation on imagination and fancy is another aspect of his poem

which had a significant influence on the Romantic poets' theories. Akenside's idea that imagination is the faculty by which man perceived the divine in nature is one which both Wordsworth and Coleridge adopted in their poetry. Furthermore, Akenside's account of the primary and secondary pleasures of imagination anticipates Coleridge's "primary" and "secondary" roles of the imaginative power. Coleridge's well-known theory of imagination and fancy, therefore, has a close forerunner in an eighteenth-century poem. Many ideas which are basic to the very philosophy underlying the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge may be found in The Pleasures of Imagination. For this reason, Akenside's poem can reveal a great deal about the eighteenth-century origins of many essential principles of Romanticism. Indeed, the hopes for English poetry manifest in The Pleasures of Imagination were only to be fully realized in the work of the great Romantic poets.

It has often been observed that as a poet who called for the return of imagination to English poetry, Akenside's own verse is disappointing. There is much truth in this assessment of his poetry; and yet, his Pleasures of Imagination, in the copiousness of its imagery, is evidence of the fecundity of Akenside's imagination. Akenside certainly seems to have been capable of writing the kind of poetry that the theory in his Pleasures of Imagination prescribes, but he chose to keep his fancy in check. This point is noted by George Saintsbury when he states that "it is a question

whether Akenside wants much to have turned his statue into life."[5] The poetic task which Akenside set for himself may help to explain the obvious discrepancy between his poetic theory and practice. This concern is hinted at many times throughout Akenside's poetry, and quite explicitly restated in his blank verse "Inscription IX." Expressing the belief that he had been selected for a noble poetic endeavour, Akenside declares:

> Me though in life's sequestered vale
> The Almighty Sire ordained to dwell,
> Remote from glory's toilsome ways,
> And the great scenes of public praise;
> Yet let me still with grateful pride
> Remember how my infant frame
> He tempered with prophetic flame,
> And early music to my tongue supplied.
>
> 'Twas then my future fate he weighed,
> And, this be thy concern, he said,
> At once with Passion's keen alarms,
> And Beauty's pleasurable charms,
> And sacred Truth's eternal light,
> To move the various mind of Man;
> Till, under one unblemished plan,
> His Reason, Fancy, and his Heart unite.

These lines reflect Akenside's belief that man is not a purely rational being, but that he also has an emotional side to his nature. For Akenside, as already noted, man's moral judgment and his aesthetic taste are really inseparable, since both of these propensities are shaped and controlled by the same God-given power, imagination. Akenside's concern throughout his poetry, therefore, is to reconcile his own deistic beliefs with the powerful influ-

[5] George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (London: Macmillan and Company, 1925), p. 579.

ence which the rationalists' philosophy was exerting on the literary doctrine of his age. Akenside's poetry frequently betrays a struggle for supremacy between these two strong influences on his poetic art. The spirit which is the very essence of Romantic poetry is evident at times in Akenside's work; but his imagination is usually encumbered by his inability to break away completely from the literary conventions of the neo-Classical Age. From the point of view of his poetic accomplishment, therefore, Akenside can only be classified as a minor poet; and yet, his role as a precursor of the English Romantic movement must certainly be seen as significant. For in his attempt to reconcile neo-Classical rationalism with deistic enthusiasm, Akenside contributed in a very fundamental way to the eighteenth-century movement to reinstate imagination as an essential quality to English poetry.

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