Coleridge and the Language of Adam

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And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

The exegesis of Genesis 2:19 has played a minor, half-submerged, but nonetheless initiatory and intriguing role in the history of speculative linguistics. Several idealist dreams of a perfected language and schemes for returning to paradise, at least in our words if not our bodies, have clustered around this brief verse, so conveniently open to interpretation and embellishment. Nothing in the passage excludes the possibility that Adam merely chose sounds at random, matched these with the beasts presented to him, and thus founded a system of conventions that lasted until its fragmentation at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:7–9). However primal the scene in Genesis, God is little more than a spectator, curious about "whatsoever Adam called every living creature." Language is a human invention, perfect in its referentiality to God's inventions when there was one tongue, but arbitrary in its sound/thing correspondences. Such a reading is consistent with the opinions of Hermogenes in Plato's Cratylus, with Ferdinand de Saussure's model of the structure of the sign, and generally with positivist and associationist theories of thought and language.

An alternative reading also takes its cue from what is not stated, but sees the absence of details as an opportunity for the transcendental. If the entire scene is viewed sub specie aeternitatis, then the names Adam gives to the beasts can be interpreted as partaking in the Divinity whose creations they render intelligible. Adam provides each beast with "the name," not merely a name, and thereby recreates in the secondary realm of finite consciousness what the infinite consciousness of God created in the primary
realm of being. Adamic language is one with human perception, an echo of God's creative Word, differing from the Logos only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. The story of Babel dramatizes not only a division between speakers but also a disruption of the unity of word and world from which all subsequent tongues suffer.¹

My plagiarisms adumbrate my thesis: the reemergence of the transcendent tradition of Adamic language in some of Coleridge's most important statements on mind and its tropological capabilities. Before explicitly confronting that issue, I think it would be helpful to provide an historical context by briefly delineating those facets of linguistic speculation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that speak most directly to Coleridgean themes.

Theories of a universal language which seek a restoration of Adamic unity can be divided roughly into two types, each characterized by a different attitude toward the relationship among the order of things, the order of words, and the processes of mind.² In seventeenth century England, several projectors with strong allegiances to Baconian rationalism and the values of the Royal Society published schemes for written languages in which signs would stand for things rather than spoken words. Francis Lodowick's *A Common Writing* (1647) and *Ground-Work* (1652), John Webster's *Academiarum Examen* (1654), George Dalgarno's *Ars Signorum* (1661), and John Wilkins's *Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668) typify the genre. Their goal is most clearly set forth by Wilkins:

... now if these *Marks* or *Notes* could be so contrived, as to have such a *dependance* upon, and relation to, one another, as might be suitable to the nature of the things and notions which they represented; and so likewise, if the *Names* of things could be so ordered, as to contain such a kind of *affinity* or *opposition* in their letters and sounds, as might be some way answerable to the nature of the things which they signified. ... by learning the *Character* and the *Names* of things, [we would] be instructed likewise in their *Natures*, the knowledge of both which ought to be conjoined. (21)

The passage embodies a problematic at the heart of the rationalist school of language reform. Wilkins would seem to be searching for a motivated hieroglyph, hence the "real" of his title.³ The affinity of such pursuits with the exegetical tradition of Adamic speech is made explicit by Dalgarno's...
desire to discover “some vestigia of that primitive and Divine, or purely rational Sematology, taught by Almighty God or invented by Adam before the Fall” (“Discourse” in Works 164). Yet the bonding of language to nature, founded on the supposedly common ground of logic, subordinates the former to the latter and must finally lead not only away from the divine Word but from a concern with any signs insofar as they participate directly in the nonverbal. While Dalgarno invokes Edenic naming, it is of no consequence to his “rational Sematology” whether the origin of Adamic language is transcendental or human. Wilkins’s emphasis is on the two systems of language and nature and on the internal relationships of their terms. His hope is to be a new Adam and construct a language with a grammar homologous to the structure of nature. Not surprisingly, this is to be accomplished by freeing writing from speaking, thereby eliminating at one stroke those figurative encrustations inhibiting the logical machinery of all known tongues and phonetic alphabets. Words and things will then move on parallel, isomorphic tracks. The mode of their relationship will presumably be a kind of logical allegory constructed by the human mind capable of perceiving one system through the senses and perfectly expressing what it perceives through the other.

Wilkins’s proposal foreshadows the attention devoted to syntax in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century linguistics, but attempts to solve the problem of reference by a radical reduction of both nature and language to mere taxonomies. In a simplistic way this returns us to the scene in Genesis—so many beasts, so many names. John Locke soon disrupted this ideal symmetry by the simple but revolutionary observation that “words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them, how imperfectly soever or carelessly those ideas are collected from the things which they are supposed to represent” (Essay 2:9). While Locke’s anticipation of Saussure’s definition of the signified prepared the foundation for the psychological study of language, his nominalism accepted the arbitrary nature of signs and the schematic approach to their organization.

David Hartley follows in the Lockean tradition. He lays particular stress on the difficulties of determining the nature of Adamic speech in a way that suggests the triviality of such speculations. Hartley does propose, however, “that the language, which Adam and Eve were possessed of in paradise was very narrow, and confined in great measure to visible things,” and “monosyllabic in great measure” (OM 176). The growth of language
occurs only after the fall when “Adam and Eve extended their language to new objects and ideas” through a process of association and growth resembling “the increase of money at interest upon interest” (OM 177). The characterization of the language of paradise descends almost to Hobbesian terms: mean, brutish, and short. In his own proposal for a “philosophical language” (OM 186), Hartley notes the “supposition” that Adam and Eve spoke something “of this kind,” however “narrow” (OM 187), but this is a feeble gesture of little consequence to his goal of establishing the “general Doctrine of Association” (OM 188) as it should manifest itself in language. Clearly, we have nearly reached a dead-end of the Adamic tradition. To a romantic sensibility, Hartley’s linguistic Eden, like those conjured up by Wilkins and Dalgarno, looks more like a desert than a garden, a place where difference and absence have been planted between word and world. Mind is left in the void separating the order of things from the order of words, furiously switching back and forth between two paths that never merge.

The significance of the Adamic tradition to rationalist schemes of language reform has been disputed, but there can be no question of its importance to an alternative tradition of speculative, even mystical, linguistics. Jacob Boehme is the grand exemplar of this school and the main route through which it became known to Englishmen such as Blake and Coleridge. Boehme’s doctrine of signatures, set forth in greatest detail in his Signatura Rerum (4:1–140), provides the foundation for his belief that Adam spoke the language of “all Spirits” (3:196) that was one with the essences God invested in things. Thus, “Adam stood in the divine Image, and not in the bestial, for he knew the Property of all Creatures, and gave Names to all Creatures from their Essence, Form, and Property. He understood the Language of Nature, viz. the manifested and formed Word in every one’s Essence, for thence the Name of every Creature is risen” (Mysterium Magnum 3:80). Boehme also implies in his Mysterium Magnum a rough parallel between the creation of man in God’s image and the nature of Adamic speech as a recapitulation, at a lower level of the spiritual will, of the “Verbum Fiat” (3:66–67). Unfortunately, Adam’s progeny “understood not that God was in the speaking Word of the Understanding” and as a result thought that language was only a “Form” divided from its sensual substance (3:197; see also 3:195). To use the fashionable terminology of our own day, man created difference as he came to believe in an ontological distinction between the physical signifier and the tran-
This in turn led to false ideas about God and the misguided attempt to build a tower to reach that which was still present in the one language of man before Babel (see 3:199–200). Christ, as the incarnate “living Word” (3:204) rejoining form and substance, offers the paradigm for the linguistic recovery that will lead man back to paradise. Christ passed through what Boehme terms the “Death of the Letters,” overcoming “the Whoredom” of fallen conceptions of language (3:204) and revealing to man “the Spirits of the Letters” (3:208). Guided by this revelation, Boehme claims his ability to recover the spiritual meanings residual in lapsarian language. By treating words as things, he finds in them their divine signatures through a process that amounts to little more than punning and etymological transformations similar to his alchemical treatment of substances.

It is not difficult to trace fragments of Boehme’s linguistics through Coleridge’s scattered comments on language. Some dozen years before he began to annotate a copy of the so-called Law’s edition of The Works of Jacob Behmen, Coleridge hinted in “The Destiny of Nations” at his predisposition for a doctrine of signatures:

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
For infant minds; . . .

(PW [EHC] 1:132)

In a letter to William Godwin of September 22, 1800, Coleridge questioned “how far . . . the word ‘arbitrary’” is a “misnomer” in reference to “signs” and expressed the desire, underlying all schemes for the recovery of Adamic language, “to destroy the old antithesis of Words & Things.” This he hoped to do by “elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too” (CL 1:625–26) much as Boehme had treated words as substances subject to alchemical transmutation to recover the linguistic equivalent of gold. Long after he had begun to reject the pantheistic implications of Boehme’s philosophy, Coleridge was not above using the well-chosen pun as an exegetical instrument, as in his reference to “the identity of nomen [name] with numen, that is, invisible power and presence” in many Biblical passages, including the naming of the beasts in Genesis 2:19.7 Perhaps we can even sense the incorporation of Boehme’s views in Coleridge’s admonition in the Biographia Literaria not “to overlook the important fact, that besides the language of words, there is a language of spirits.” The second half of this sentence—“that the former is only the
vehicle of the latter” (1:290)—leaves intact the hope that one can recover the spirit hidden in that vehicle.

The annotations Coleridge wrote over many years, beginning in 1808, in his copy of Law’s edition offer the clearest indication of what he found so compelling in Boehme’s theory of language and what he could not accept. “Even in the most startling [paragraphs], those on the correspondence of Letters, and syllables, to the universal sense of words,” Coleridge sensed “an important Truth hidden in the seeming Blunder of its exemplification” (Marginalia 1:591). To explain this disparity between intuitive principle and the fanciful parsing of German words to find Adam’s, Coleridge proposes a “way of saving Behmen’s credit” by supposing “that he had seen the truth as to the Ideal of Language—and had in his ordinary state confounded the spiritual, perhaps angelic, language with the poor arbitrary & corrupted Languages of men as they actually exist” (629). In short, Boehme had not paid sufficient heed to the fact of man’s fall, that “fundamental postulate of the moral”—and linguistic—“history of Man” (Table Talk 65).

Boehme’s failure to resurrect Adamic speech left as an alternative the rationalist tradition of language reformation. It at least recognized the limitations of contemporary languages. But the substitution of classical logic for the ideal of the motivated sign could not satisfy Coleridge’s transcendental instincts, nor perhaps his needs as a poet. His rejection of the taxonomic view of language is implicated in his criticism of its necessary twin, the taxonomic view of nature, in his annotations to Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten. “The fault common to the Systems & Systematizers of Natural Hystery” is not, in Coleridge’s view, “the falsehood nor even the unfitness of the guiding principle,” but rather the “forgetting that Nature may pursue a hundred Objects at the same time” (Marginalia 1:536). As we have seen, the systematizers of language required the elimination of polysemy. They are blind to the “living powers” of “Words” (Essays on His Times 2:249) much as the taxonomists are blind to Coleridge’s proto-evolutionary sense of nature’s protean dynamics.

Confronted with the narrowness of the rationalist theories of language, Coleridge clung to the essential features of the transcendental position in spite of Boehme’s demonstrative blunders. Coleridge’s strategy was to preserve the ideal of Adamic language by constructing a motivated sign defined in counterdistinction to the mechanical matching of taxonomic
linguistics. The relevant passages in The Statesman's Manual are well known, but it is sometimes forgotten that Coleridge's definition of a "symbol" unfolds in the context of a book about the uses of the Bible, not secular literature. The key term is introduced as "a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the conductors" (29). This "system" fulfills the requirement, proposed by Wilkins and other rationalists, that the words of an ideal language should be properly related to each other, although Coleridge substitutes an organic sense of the "harmonious" for taxonomic logic. He next moves his system beyond intrinsic harmony among signs to propose a unity of signs and their referents, the former "consubstantial with"—that is, one with the same substantial reality as—the latter. Such a sign, which "always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible" (30), is not consubstantial with things but with "truths." Coleridge implicitly accepts Locke's insight about all signs, as he explicitly does elsewhere, and is able to substitute "truths" for "ideas" because he is considering only ideas in the Bible. This higher mode of signification is contrasted to allegory, a product of "the mechanical understanding" that translates "abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses" (30). Coleridge's terminology here might seem to refer only to a poetic mode, but it also refers to a method of reading the Bible and, by implication, to those ideal language schemes that propose merely the alignment of the order of words with the order of things, those "objects of the senses" to which the Baconian logician matches his abstract and arbitrary signs.

With his definition of the symbol, Coleridge does nothing less than resurrect the motivated sign of Adamic language. As A. W. Schlegel pointed out, "protolanguage will consist in natural signs, that is, signs found in an essential relation with what is designated." Such a sign arises logically and historically from the exegetical tradition of Genesis 2:19 exemplified by Boehme, although perhaps it would be unfair to say of Coleridge's theory what he said of Schelling's "System": "it is little more than Behmenism, translated from visions into Logic and a sort of commanding eloquence" (to C. A. Tulk, November 24, 1818; Letters 4:883). The transcendental nature of Coleridge's symbol is indicated by his use of "consubstantial," a term generally applied to the interrelationship of the Trinity (see OED), and by the example he offers from Ezekiel 1:20. Significantly, Coleridge does not take the language of the Biblical passage as itself symbolic; that could fall into the same blunders with English or Hebrew that Boehme
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fell into with German. Rather, Coleridge indicates that Ezekiel's vision of the eyed wheels was the exemplary moment when "the truths and the symbols that represent them move in conjunction and form the living chariot that bears up (for us) the throne of the Divine Humanity" (29). Coleridge does not, indeed could not, claim that the languages of man after Babel are the same as the symbolic language of Adam and of divine revelation. Only when we "suppose man perfect" can we claim that his "organic Acts" are "faithful symbols of his spiritual Life and Cognition" (annotations to Boehme; Marginalia 1:634). That perfection can be restored through transmundane visions like Ezekiel's, but only then is there a "translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal" (Statesman's Manual 30). Unlike Boehme, Coleridge does not forget the fall, standing between sign and referent, signifier and signified, as it stands between Eden and England, Ezekiel's wheels and Coleridge's words.

As several critics have pointed out, no one has been very successful in discovering Coleridgean symbols in secular literature. The reason for this becomes clear when we consider the motivated sign from the perspective of prelapsarian or divine language, the only realms in which it can be fully embodied. Any account of the symbolic experience will itself fall short of that ideal. Coleridge's symbol is not an instrument of a practical poetic or hermeneutic. It is, rather, what Coleridge might call the "Hypopoesis" or "subfiction"11 of a general but transcendent semiotic. The explication of that semiotic always takes the form of an allegory in which the transcendental descends into the rhetorical and the symbolic degenerates into the synecdochic. This linguistic recapitulation of the fall happened even when Coleridge attempted to offer a mundane example of a symbol. In a lecture on Don Quixote delivered in 1818, he stated that "The Symbolical cannot, perhaps, be better defined in distinction from the Allegorical, than that it is always itself a part of that, of the whole of which it is the representative.—'Here comes a sail,'—(that is, a ship) is a symbolical expression" (Miscellaneous Criticism 99). A sail, as a physical object, is consubstantial with the ship of which it is a constitutive part, but the word "sail" no more "partakes of the Reality it renders intelligible" through synecdoche than does any other sign.12 The problem is not one of alternative tropes, rhetoric, or grammar, but the crucial difference between a motivated and an arbitrary mode of signification. As Hodgson has stated, this is "the true and inescapable issue for any rhetoric that would strive to be transcendental" (292).

We are left with a disturbing gap between the conceivable and the pos-
sible, one that thwarts both the desire for return and reunion and makes problematic the alterity of the transcendental. If the symbol is so far beyond us all, how can Coleridge define it? Man, even fallen man, must have some mental faculty by which he can approach, however asymptotically, the union of symbolic discourse without divine intercession. In some fragmentary notes on Shakespeare, written circa 1812, Coleridge tentatively located that possibility in the poetic faculty, with the implication that figurative language is motivated in a way that literal reference is not. He begins with the familiar and necessary distinction between “the language of man and that of nature” (Shakespearean Criticism 1:185). The former is composed, for example, of “the sound, sun, or the figures, s, v, n,” and these “are pure arbitrary modes of recalling the object.” In contrast, “the language of nature is a subordinate Logos, that was in the beginning, and was with the thing it represented.” Thus, Coleridge has defined this Adamic protolanguage, or system of natural signatures, much as he will define “a system of symbols” some four years later, and relates this language to Logos much as he will relate the primary imagination to “the infinite I AM” (BL 1:304) some five years later. The consanguinity of “symbol” and “imagination” is evident here even before their separate births.

With his paradigm established, Coleridge next situates Shakespeare along its vertical axis: “Now the language of Shakespeare (in his Lear, for instance), is a something intermediate, or rather it is the former [language of man] blended with the latter [language of nature], the arbitrary not merely recalling the cold notion of the thing, but expressing the reality of it . . .” (Shakespearean Criticism 1:185). The enabling trope haunting this discourse is not synecdoche but oxymoron of the evanescent and mystic sort soon to be explored by Keats in his attempt to grasp the bourne of heaven. While Coleridge admits that arbitrary signs are “an heirloom of the human race,” Shakespeare’s language becomes “a part of that which it manifests” (i.e., becomes symbolic) through the “valued advantage of the theatre.” This final turn in the argument leads us away from the synchronic structure of signs toward the diachronic mode of their (re)production, as though the transcendent is touched through a dramatic “imitation” somehow consubstantial with the dynamics of God’s creative Word. This process is given its definitive formulation in chapter 13 of the Biographia.

Coleridge’s definition of “imagination” has quite rightly been read, and
reread, as a general epistemological statement which assumes a transcen-
dental truth and describes how mind produces art. I hope it will not be
inappropriate to shift the perspective a little, place the famous four sen-
tences within the traditions of the language of Adam, and view the whole
as a statement about the history of motivated signs and the possibility of
recovering them. Coleridge, after all, begins like Genesis with an utter-
ance, God’s “I AM.” In chapter 12, he characterizes “the great eternal I
AM” as the ground of both “being” and “idea” \((BL 1:275)\), a speech (or at
least semiotic) act linking at their common source both “idea” and “law”
as defined in the “Essays on Method.”\(^{15}\) Much as in his evocation of the
Logos in his comments on Shakespeare, Coleridge has again taken one
step back from Adam naming the beasts as the origin of language to God
naming himself, perhaps with a hidden pun on “Yahweh” and Hebrew
for “I am.”\(^{16}\) Similarly, the nontranscendent “I am” takes on special origi-
nary importance in Coleridge’s Logic, where “the verb substantive (‘am,’
sum, . . . ) expresses the identity or coinherence of being and act” and is
the “point” from which “all other words therefore may be considered as
tending” \((16–17)\).\(^{17}\) The finite “I am” thus repeats, in the realm of lan-
guage, the same generative function performed by the Logos in the world
of things, just as the primary imagination is a “repetition in the finite mind
of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” \((BL 1:304)\). The relation-
ship of infinite to finite “I am” is much the same as Boehme’s sense of the
repetition of the verbum fiat in Adamic speech. In each case, infinite and
finite, the point of origin is an utterance with the oxymoronic structure of
Coleridge’s “symbol,” for each blends into a unity two disparate categories
—being and act, or sign and referent.

The imagination is not, finally, a symbol-making faculty in the sense
that it assumes the prior existence of that which it is meant to create. In a
Notebook entry of April 14, 1805, Coleridge senses this circularity when he
describes the production of symbols as a projection of something within
the subject, not the discovery of a truth about objects of perception.

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon
dim-glimmering thro’ the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seek-
ing, as it were asking, a symbolical language for something within me that
already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when the
latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new
phenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of
my inner Nature. \((CN 2:\S2546)\)
In the Biographia, the imagination is similarly characterized as an active and "inner" symbol, and thus the faculty cannot explain how we can move from the nonsymbolic language of fallen man to Adamic or divine consubstantiality. That question is answered with the psycholinguistic equivalent of the statement that man can know God because there is something godlike in man, an answer which simply denies the absoluteness of the difference assumed by the question. We are perilously close to Boehme's claims, criticized by Coleridge, about the Adamic traces in lapsarian languages. The secondary imagination, as a willed "echo" of the primary, shares its oxymoronic structure—"at once both active and passive" (BL 1:124) and combining both dissolution and unification. Coleridge arranges his definitions as though we are descending hierarchically from the infinite to the finite mind, from logos to poetry, but at no point do we leave the transcendental ideal hidden in the tropology of the motivated sign in any of its several simulacra—symbol, mystic oxymoron, or Adamic speech. Coleridge offers the secondary imagination as "the principle and agent of return" (Christensen 31), but it cannot return our language to Eden because it never leaves that paradise. Indeed, the secondary imagination, as much as the infinite IAM, is defined in counterdistinction to fancy, the mechanical world of arbitrary signs where reside all languages after Babel. The division between imagination and fancy reasserts that ancient division between Adamic and lapsarian language, between motivated and arbitrary signs, with which the ideal language projectors, Boehme, and Coleridge himself all began—and struggled in vain to overcome.

The Biographia takes note of another, competing theory of transcendental language. One of the common strategies in the eighteenth century for positing the former existence of motivated signs, or at least a speech closer to nature than contemporary tongues, was to shift the ground of the myth from Eden to the primitive past of whichever tribe (Britons, Celts, Germans, and others) seemed most susceptible to such inventions. This secularizing substitution plays a major role in the 1802 "Appendix" to the "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth claims that "the earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative" (1:160). Wordsworth here adds a further variation to the myth, for the motivated association is between words and feelings rather than words and things or words and ideas. His theory of the fall from motivated to arbitrary signs is not centered on Babel, but rather on
"Men ambitious of the fame of Poets" who "set themselves to a mechanical adoption" of the "figures of speech" of the earliest poets and "applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever." But just as Wordsworth repeats the familiar story of original union and a fall into division, he also holds out the promise of return. By substituting space for time, he can locate motivated language not just in the primitive past but also in the present countryside. As Wordsworth indicates in the 1800 "Preface," men of "low and rustic life" speak "a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets" who "indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" (1:124).

Wordsworth’s theory of poetic diction is a variation on that same general theory of Adamic language so important to Coleridge. Even the words "philosophical language" intimate something about motivated signs, just as they do in Wilkins’s title of 1668. But by locating that higher mode of speech in the language of common men here and now, Wordsworth makes his theories liable to the commonsensical objections offered in the second volume of the Biographia. We have already seen much the same pattern in Coleridge’s criticism of Boehme’s attempt to rediscover Adamic speech in his own modern German. And just as he found Boehme’s linguistic idealism appealing, in spite of blunders in application, Coleridge proclaimed Wordsworth capable of writing "the first genuine philosophic poem" (BL 2:156) even though he had demolished Wordsworth’s own theory of regaining a philosophical (i.e., motivated) system of signs. At the same time, Coleridge has eliminated one of the options for developing his concept of the imagination, at least as it might apply to secular literature. One consequence of this rejection is the lameness of Coleridge’s attempt, in chapter 22 of the Biographia, to distinguish imagination from fancy in Wordsworth’s verse and to claim that Wordsworth is a master of the higher mode while denying his stated method for rising above the lower. The gap remains between transcendental and mundane language, that gap Wordsworth attempted to bridge with the speech of rural Englishmen.

Coleridge’s turn toward theology is in part predicated upon his theory of language. His success in defining the essential elements of an ideal language, his failure to find a convincing means for transporting the arbitrary language of fallen man back to that ideal, and his rejection of the facile routes to recovery, such as those offered by Boehme’s linguistic alchemy or Wordsworth’s poetic rustication, all led inevitably away from
words to the Word as the locus of transcendence. Only by that means can Coleridge keep from becoming "merely a man of letters" (BL 1:229) whose self-possession is based on the arbitrary marks rejected even by Wilkins and whose spirit is subject to the "Death of the Letters" condemned by Boehme. Only the Father, whose words become things, and his Son, the new Adam and Word incarnate, make consubstantial word and world, idea and law, signifier and signified. While incapable of accepting the presence of Adamic speech in secular texts, Coleridge could believe in the immanence of God's Word in the Bible even if its literal expression was necessarily in human words. While Coleridge had difficulty finding symbols in contemporary language, he could claim the fulfillment of their definition in Christ and in those Christian rituals "of the same kind, though not of the same order, with the religion itself—not arbitrary or conventional, as types and hieroglyphics are in relation to the things expressed by them; but inseparable, consubstantiated (as it were), and partaking therefore of the same life, permanence, and intrinsic worth with its spirit and principle" (Aids to Reflection 15). Even Coleridge's conception of the Trinity as "Iseity," "Alterity," and "Community" (Table Talk 51) replicates the trinitarianism of an ideal grammar he divided into the "being" of the subject, its "action" on an object, and the community of the two in the "verb substantive" (Logic 16–17).

If Coleridge's theology is indeed inscribed with traces of his linguistics, it is because his linguistics was always a theology. If we now have difficulty following him along those merging paths, it is because of a difference in faith, not knowledge. He was too honest and too insightful to claim that he had recovered the language of Adam this side of divinity, but to do so never ceased to be an object of desire and a component of Coleridge's transcendental speculations.