

## COLERIDGE AND HIS THEORY OF IMAGINATION

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And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

— A Midsummer-Night's Dream —

These lines of Shakespeare are enough to show that the idea of Imagination was prevalent among men of letters at the end of the sixteenth century. Imagination here means that faculty which bodies forth the forms of things which were not yet known to the man who imagines. It was Imagination for Shakespeare that created something new for the poets as well as for the readers. Shakespeare is right to think that the power which creates new images for the poets should be called Imagination, but not being a scholar he was not interested in the discussion of the function of this faculty. No, he was a creative dramatist and a poet and not a critic in the ordinary meaning of the term.

Thus in the Elizabethan age we find the term 'Imagination' in some of the poets of the age, but we cannot find any Elizabethans who were specially interested in the meaning of the Imagination and discussed it minutely as critics or scholars. There was, of course, no systematic thinking about the meaning of the Imagination that could be called a theory and we know of no critic who criticized any literary works from the standpoint of the theory of Imagination. There were many critics in the Elizabethan age, such as Sir Philip Sidney, Samuel Daniel and others, whose chief works are within our reach now, but they are all under the influence of Classical literature and their ideas were under the spell of Aristotle's theory of Imitation which was introduced from France and Italy during the sixteenth century.

All through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries English

literary criticism was under classical influence and the idea of originality and imagination was rarely in the critics' minds. Not that they had no idea of originality, but they did not give any serious importance to the original creation of the poets. They sometimes talked of fancy and invention, but the meanings of these words were far less definite than the meaning that the Romantic critics gave to Imagination.

In the eighteenth century, especially in the latter half of the century, some critics, such as Edward Young, discussed the importance of Original Composition, but they did not understand the true meaning of the Imagination. Those who investigated the real meaning of the Imagination in that period were philosophers such as John Locke, David Hume, George Berkeley and others. And it was S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834), among literary critics, who first gave definite delineation to the idea of Imagination from a critical as well as from a philosophical point of view, with the help of his wide reading in literature and philosophy. His reading was so wide that it ranged over ancient, mediaeval, and modern writers, including philosophers and poets. And his theory of Imagination is the consummate result of this reading, and it requires of us abundant knowledge of philosophy and literature to understand the real meaning of his Imagination theory. But with the help of preceding scholars I have done the following interpretation of Coleridge's theory. In 1963 I was in England and had the opportunity to investigate some books which Coleridge read and made some notes upon, which gave me some valuable suggestions on this subject.

## I The Formation of Coleridge's Thought

The theory of Imagination, which was coming to have a very important role in the literary criticism in England, came to maturity toward the end of the 18th century, and was consummated in the criticism of S. T. Coleridge. Before examining the details of his theory, I wish to give a glimpse of his intellectual *milieu* and the background of his thought.

John Coleridge, father of the poet and critic, at once a vicar and the master of King's School, Free Grammar School, was versed in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and was the author of *A Critical Latin Grammar*. Under his influence, his son Samuel read many books from his childhood, and in his early teens he was called by Lamb a

“Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!”<sup>1</sup> According to Lamb, Coleridge was heard reading such books as Iamblicus and Plotinus out loud in the corridor of Christ’s Hospital.<sup>2</sup>

Iamblicus was a neo-Platonist in the 4th century A. D. and Plotinus also a neo-Platonist in the 3rd century and was the author of the *Enneads*. Both of these philosophers, starting from Plato and including the thoughts of Aristotle and Stoics, integrated the Greek philosophers and established a special characteristic philosophy. They both had a conception of the absolute Being as their central idea and, deriving the world from it, thought that One proceeds to many and God is the only absolute Being superior to anything else. Such a philosophy is a kind of speculative philosophy and something like a monistic pantheism. It is a wonder that Coleridge, a fifteen year old boy, could understand such a deep philosophy, but it is a fact that Coleridge was absorbed in such philosophers.

In his “Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism”, written in 1814, we find two long quotations from Plotinus’s *Enneads* for the explanation of Beauty, one of which he also quoted in *Biographia Literaria*. This fact shows that Coleridge’s concern with Plotinus cannot be overlooked, and there are not a few scholars who emphasize the influence of Plotinus on Coleridge. J. V. Baker, author of *The Sacred River*, says that Plotinus’s theory of knowledge especially contributed much to the formation of Coleridge’s theory of Imagination.<sup>3</sup> I. A. Richards, too, quoting *Enneads* V, viii, 1, says that it is certainly one of the origins of Coleridge’s Imagination theory.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Plotinus’s conception of ‘recognition’ is worth considering in this connection, for to him ‘recognition’ is not a mere sensual reception of outward things, but a faculty of unifying actively and positively what the sense has received from the outward world, after selecting it. It is Plotinus’s special feature that he understands ‘perception’ as ‘a creation’, not as a receptive faculty, and here we can see something in common with Coleridge’s thinking about perception.

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1. Lamb: *Essays of Elia*, “Christ’s Hospital Five-and-thirty Years Ago.”

2. *Ibid.*

3. Baker, p. 68.

4. Richards: *Coleridge on Imagination* pp. 26-7.

Coleridge's reading was not limited to such philosophers as Plotinus and Iamblicus. He was taught Greek and Latin by Rev. James Bowyer, master of Christ's Hospital, and his taste was moulded by the master "to the preference of Demosthenes to Cicero, of Homer and Theocritus to Virgil, and again Virgil to Ovid."<sup>5</sup> He also read Shakespeare and Milton, as well as the Greek tragic Poets, as lessons, which built up his literary spirit and taste, together with Bowles's *Sonnets*, Ossian's *Poems*, Darwin's *Botanic Garden*, Percy's *Reliques*, and Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, all of which contributed to bring him to the Romantic awakening. The spirit of Romanticism has its foundation on the awakening of Ego, as I said in a former thesis and naturally on the creative spirit which, at bottom, is nothing but the assertion of Ego, and in the case of Coleridge it was the spirit of Romanticism that brought his idea of Imagination.

Coleridge's craze for philosophy once deviated to the study of Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, but by the advice of Rev. Bowyer, he was brought back to the main road of the empirical philosophy of England. This is clearly shown in a letter to his brother George in 1794 when Coleridge was in Cambridge, in which he says that he is ardently studying the philosophy of Locke and Hartley.<sup>6</sup> Coleridge's devotion to these philosophers is so earnest that he says in the same letter that the philosophy of Locke and Hartley is "delivered on the nature of man by utmost intelligence,"<sup>7</sup> and that he finds there "the point of possible perfection that the world can reach."<sup>8</sup> A year later, Coleridge says in a letter to Robert Southey, that he is "a perfect necessitarian and understands the question in the same way as Hartley and also believes the corporeality of thought beyond Hartley."<sup>9</sup> Every reader who peruses the philosophy of Hartley will easily discern that Coleridge's "Religious Musings" was written under Hartley's influence. His first son who was born in September, 1796, when "Religious Musings" was written, was named after his favourite philosopher,

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5. *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by J. Shawcross, i, p. 4.

6. Coleridge's *Collected Letters*, ed. by Griggs, i, p. 126.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

“the wisest of mortal kind,”<sup>10</sup> David Hartley.

It is evident from the chapters of *Biographia Literaria*, that Coleridge was versed in such philosophers as Aristotle, Plato, the Neo-Platonists, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Des Cartes as well as Locke, Hume and Hartley. But, for Coleridge, Hartley was for years the most familiar of all philosophers and according to him all philosophy is concentrated in Hartley's. Such an opinion did not continue to be held throughout his life, but as late as 1816, he devoted three whole chapters of his *Biographia Literaria* to it, which shows that his concern for Hartley was deep and long continued.

As to Hartley's philosophy, it is generally known that it was characterized as ‘associational psychology’ by Coleridge himself,<sup>11</sup> but it is far from contemporary psychology, especially from what is now called ‘experimental psychology.’ It is a philosophy that interprets such phenomena as preception, idea, understanding, love, fear, memory, and imagination by means of association. It also refers to such questions as God's love, God's fear, Christian truth, and principles of life. Thus Hartley's philosophy being a very far-reaching one, it is no wonder that Coleridge should be fascinated by this book. But we shall now limit our examination only to the problem of imagination, and try to find out what Coleridge learned from Hartley's philosophy. According to Hartley, impressions *ab extra* become knowledge by means of associative power, while the impressions *ab extra* come from a sort of ether. Association is made on the principles of contemporaneity, cause and effect and continuity, and parts become a whole, when they are in the state of co-presence. ‘Contemporaneity, cause and effect, and continuity’ are the principles which sustain association and unification of things. And it is the power of Imagination which regulates the association, which might be considered as an intermediate power. Such thinking of Hartley's on the unification of ideas is very similar to the conception of Coleridge's Imagination as a unifying power. And I think Hartley's influence on Coleridge is evident in this point.

It is estimated that Coleridge first knew the name of Immanuel Kant in 1796. In a letter to Thomas Poole, on May the 5th of that year,

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10. ‘Religious Musings’, 368-369.

11. *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. 7.

Coleridge expresses his wish to go to Germany to obtain the works of this great philosopher. In a letter to Thelwall, in December of the same year, Coleridge again refers to "the most unintelligible Immanuel Kant," the expression telling us that Coleridge was puzzled by some work of Kant. The reason why Coleridge did not understand Kant in those days, chiefly lay in his poor knowledge of the German language. He therefore began to learn German in 1797 and for the purpose of learning German he earnestly desired to go to Germany, which is confessed in *Biographia Literaria*.<sup>12</sup>

We have not enough proof to show that Coleridge studied Kant in Göttingen. Many years ago Miss A. Snyder made public what books Coleridge borrowed from Göttingen University Library,<sup>13</sup> but we cannot find the name of Kant among them, even though we find such names as Hans Saches, Lessing, Michaelis and so forth. According to Brandl,<sup>14</sup> a Boutewek, young professor, was giving lectures on Kant in Göttingen when Coleridge was studying there. We think that Coleridge could not but have heard the lectures of Boutewek, but we cannot find any proof that he did. An evident fact is that Coleridge brought Kant's works to England when he returned from Germany.<sup>15</sup> Thus in 1801 Kant seized Coleridge as "with a Giant's hand,"<sup>16</sup> and Coleridge continued to read his philosophy for more than fifteen years.<sup>17</sup> What then did Coleridge learn from Kant?

As above mentioned, Coleridge was fond of reading philosophical works from his boyhood and devoted himself to such mystical works as Plotinus' or Iamblicus'. Then he grew intimate with English empirical philosophy, especially of Locke, Hume and Hartley; but after becoming familiar with Kant's philosophy, he began to perceive the defects of empirical philosophy, and understood the real meaning of noesis or recognition, i. e. the union of subject and object. Kant may well be said to have brought a Copernican turn in the theory of

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12. Op. cit., i, p. 138.

13. *Modern Philology*, Vol. XXV, 3 (Feb. 1928)

14. Brandl: *S. T. Coleridge*, p. 256.

15. Griggs, ii, p. 368, 768.

16. *Biographia Literaria*, i, p. 99.

17. *Ibid.*, i, p. 99.

recognition. It is needless to say that Coleridge came to understand the real meaning of mental ability — Reason, Understanding, and Imagination — by the aid of Kant's philosophy.

There are many evidences that Coleridge read much of Kant throughout his life. We find Coleridge's remarks written in Kant's works, e. g. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Fünfte Auflage, Leipzig, 1799,<sup>18</sup> *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, Zweiter Auflage, Riga, 1787,<sup>19</sup> *Kritik der Urteilstkraft*, Dritte Auflage, Berlin, 1799,<sup>20</sup> *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Vierte Auflage, Riga, 1797,<sup>21</sup> *Kant's Vermischte Schriften*, Zweiter Band, Halle, 1799<sup>22</sup> etc., all of which we can see in the British Museum.

Some of the remarks have no dates, but in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*,<sup>23</sup> we find two notes with signature and date: '... S. T. C. December 6, 1803, Keswick,' by which we know that Coleridge was reading Kant in Keswick. In *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* we find many notes written with a pencil and ink, which were written in August 1814. *Kritik der Urteilstkraft* has a half-page note written on the 6th February, 1823. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Kant's Vermischte Schriften* also have several notes, but no dates. These notes are enough for us to see how Coleridge read Kant and how he understood him. It is interesting to see, for instance, such a note in *Kant's Vermischte Schriften*, p. 1.

It is an interesting fact in philosophical history, i.e. the History of speculative philosophy, that the "Demundi sensibilis et intelligibis forma et principii" that masterwork of profundity and precision, that model of steady investigation, clear conception, and (as the Cambridge master patricians say) elegant Demonstration, was published 15 years before the Critique der reinen Vernunft and produced no sensible effect on the philosophic Public. The premier work contains all the main principles of the latter and often more perspicuously expressed — yet all remain silent. The Critique der reinen Vernunft appeared — and the Universities of Germany exploded. What was the cause of this difference?

18. B. M. S. M. (British Museum Shelf Mark), c. 126. i. 9.

19. B. M. S. M., c. 126. h. 8.

20. B. M. S. M., c. 126. h. 6.

21. B. M. S. M., c. 126. e. 9.

22. B. M. S. M., c. 126. e. 7.

23. B. M. S. M., c. 124. e. 9. pp. 54-55.

Is it that the same thoughts appeared less strange, less paradoxical, in Latin than in the vernacular Tongue? Or that the ordinary proofs of the higher psychology are exposed more openly and expressly in the Critique der reinen Vernunft than in the former work? Or lastly, that one's mother tongue however philosophized and technically stated produces on us a liveliness of impression which a dead language cannot produce? However this be, the former work shall always be studied and mastered precisely than the study of the Critique der reinen Vernunft and the work that followed it. The student will find it a better auxiliary than 50 volumes of comments, from Reinholz, Schwedt, Schulz, Beck, Tieftrunk, etc. etc. etc. ...<sup>24</sup>

I wish to add here that Coleridge also read Johann Gottlieb Fichte minutely. In the British Museum we find these books of Fichte in which Coleridge wrote his critical comments, such as *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer*, Leipzig, 1794,<sup>25</sup> *Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Principien der Wissenschaftslehre*, Jena und Leipzig, 1798,<sup>26</sup> and *Der geschlossne Handelsstaat, Ein philosophischer Entwurf als Anhang zu Rechtslehre und Probe einer Künftige zu liefernden Politik*, Tübingen, 1800.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that Coleridge was at a loss to understand Fichte's philosophy. He had doubts concerning Fichte's philosophy of science, saying, 'Is not a portion of the obscurity of the *Wissenschaftslehre* attributable to the choice of the "Ich" instead of Soul, or Spirit? With the "I" we habitually connect the present potency of consciousness.'<sup>28</sup> in the frontispiece of *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. He also writes in *Der geschlossne Handelsstaat*, as follows:

I am at a loss to conceive what Fichte can mean by his theory of Property. ... Indeed, the whole system of the *Rechtslehre* stands in no good order with me: it appears a theory of Justice without any reference to virtue of conscience, which passes my apprehension.<sup>29</sup>

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24. Kant's *Vermischte Schriften*, front page. B. M. S. M., c. 126. e. 7.

25. B. M. S. M., c. 126. f. 13.

26. B. M. S. M., c. 126. f. 12.

27. B. M. S. M., c. 126. e. 3.

28. Fichte: *Grundlage der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. B. M. S. M., c. 126. f. 13. Front page.

29. *Ibid.*, In the blank space of 'Einleitung.'



Now I wish to examine the essence of Kant's philosophy in connection with Coleridge's theory of Imagination. According to Kant, Objects are given to us through our Sensibility, which supplies us with Intuition (*Anschauung*). These intuitions become thought through the Understanding (*Verstand*), and thus arise Conceptions (*Begriffe*). In a phenomenon, that which corresponds to the sensation is called the *matter*, and that which causes the matter of phenomenon to be perceived as arranged in a certain order is called the *form*. And the matter of all phenomena is given us *a posteriori*, but the form of them must be ready for them in the mind *a priori*.<sup>30</sup> "Sensibility" is called the "receptivity of our soul," while the "Understanding" is "the power of producing representations, or the spontaneity of knowledge," and "what enables us to think the objects of our sensuous intuition is the understanding."<sup>31</sup> "Without sensibility objects would not be given to us, without understanding they would not be thought by us. Thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."<sup>32</sup> And thus the function of Understanding is very important in Kant's philosophy. "The pure understanding," for him, "is in the categories the law of the synthetical unity of all phenomena, and thus makes experience, so far as its form is concerned, for the first time possible."<sup>33</sup> Generally speaking, Understanding is the ability of recognition and recognition is finding a kind of relation between the given symbol and the object. The Object is that in which various given intuitions are combined under the conception. Understanding therefore is a power directed to an Object and is the cause of formal Unity in Nature and the lawgiver to it. While Reason, on the other hand, is a higher faculty than Understanding. It is a power that gives Ultimate Unity to the world. Kant says:

All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds thence to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason, for working up the material of intuition, and comprehending it under the

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30. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by F. Max Müller, Macmillan, 1896, pp. 15-16.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

highest unity of thought.<sup>34</sup>

And Reason has no direct connection with Experience or Object, but combines with Understanding, which shows that Reason is a higher power of Recognition than Understanding. What Understanding can get is *Notio* and what Reason can get is *Idee*. *Idee* is super-experimental and transcends all the limits of experience. What Understanding can know about nature is what it is, what it was, and what it will be, and not what it should be. What Reason can give is the idea of *Sollen*, transcending all relations of Time.

Kant's philosophy can be said to be based on the idea of Reason and Understanding, and the idea of Imagination comes from the idea of them. Before entering into the question of Imagination I wish to point out that Kant's idea of Reason and Understanding had much influence on Coleridge's philosophy. Let us see the conception of Understanding and Reason held by Coleridge in *The Friend* (1818), Part I.

After admitting that his leading thought was derived from "the works of a continental philosopher," Coleridge gives a minute discussion of the problem of reason and understanding. He defines understanding as "the conception of the sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phenomena of perception."<sup>35</sup> It is also a power of acquainting itself with invisible realities or spiritual objects and can exist with experience without reason. And human understanding possesses two distinct organs, the outward sense and "the mind's eye" which is reason. For Coleridge, reason cannot exist without understanding: "The sense perceives, the understanding conceives; the reason comprehends,"<sup>36</sup> is the abbreviated definition of the three faculties. He further explains it thus:

The first (the sense) impressed through the the organs of sense; the second (the understanding) combines these multifarious impressions into individual notions, and by reducing these notions to rules, according to the analogy of all its former notices, constitutes experience; the third

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34. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

35. *The Friend*, I. Essay, V. Bohn's Standard Library, 1906, p. 102.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

(the reason) subordinates both these notions and the rules of experience to absolute principles or necessary laws: and thus concerning objects, which our experience has proved to have real existence, it demonstrates, moreover, in what way they are possible, and in doing this constitutes science.<sup>37</sup>

Reason is, then, an organ of inner sense and a faculty of knowing invisible realities or spiritual objects. All morality is grounded in the reason, and such ideas as God, the soul, and eternal truth are the objects of reason or they are themselves reason. God is nothing but the Supreme Reason. Coleridge again explains understanding and reason as follows:

By the understanding, I mean the faculty of thinking and forming judgments on the notices furnished by the sense, according to certain rules existing in itself, which rules its distinct nature. By the pure reason, I mean the power by which we come possessed of principles and of ideas, as the ideas of a point, a line, a circle, in mathematics; and of justice, holiness, freewill, etc. in morals.<sup>38</sup>

These interpretations of Reason and Understanding are, I think, enough to show that Coleridge was under Kant's influence in the recognition of these faculties. It is very Kant-like that Coleridge took Reason as the highest faculty of mind which only human beings are possessed of.

Imagination, as it was firmly based on the theory of Reason and Understanding in Kant, was founded on them in Coleridge as well. Kant assumed three subjective sources of knowledge on which the possibility of all experience depends, namely, *sense*, *imagination*, and *apperception*. "Sense represents," Kant explains, "phenomena empirically in *perception*, *imagination* in *association* (and reproduction), *apperception* in the *empirical consciousness* of the identity of these reproductive representations with the phenomena by which they were given; therefore in recognition."<sup>39</sup> Imagination, therefore, is a power of association and reproduction in the formation of knowledge. "The whole of our perception rests *a priori* on pure intuition, the associa-

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37. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

39. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

tion of it (the whole) on the pure synthesis of imagination, and our empirical consciousness of it on pure apperception.”<sup>40</sup> Imagination is a synthetic power and it contributes to the unity of apperception.

Imagination, according to Kant, has two sides, productive (associative) and reproductive. The productive or pure imagination furnishes the ground of the possibility of all knowledge and is the power of synthesis *a priori*, while the principle of the reproductive imagination rests on conditions of experience and is “an active power for the synthesis of the manifold which we call imagination.”<sup>41</sup> And this reproductive imagination is meant to change the manifold of intuition into an image. And this reproductive faculty of imagination is and can be empirical only, as Kant says. It is a power that works on empirical and sensitive intuition and grasps what the sensation received as images. It is an ability to set up a concrete image on the material given by intuition. For instance the triangle which the intuition conceives of may be a right-angled one or an oblique one. It may be any kind of triangle as long as it is a triangle. It is only a general idea of a triangle. But what imagination conceives of as a triangle should be a special and concrete figure of a triangle. When in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant defines Imagination as “an ability to create another nature by the material which the real Nature gives,” he certainly explains the reproductive imagination. It is a power to recreate the real nature and to give a new form to nature. When in *Anthropology*, Kant explains the nature of the sensibility in perception and says that “sense is the power of intuition with the presence of objects, while imagination is the power of intuition without the presence of objects,”<sup>42</sup> he grasps the essence of imagination.

Kant did not apply the imagination directly to literary criticism, but it was enough for Coleridge to make it the foundation of his idea of the imagination, for purposes of criticism in literature and art.

Besides these transcendental philosophers, Coleridge also read such theologians or mystics as Schleiermacher or Swedenborg. *A Critical Essay on the Gospel of St. Luke*, by Dr. Frederick Schleiermacher,

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40. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

42. Kant: *Anthropology*, § 15.

London, 1825,<sup>43</sup> and *Coelum de Coelo et ejus Mirabilibus et de Inferno ex Auditis et Visis*, London, 1758,<sup>44</sup> and *True Christian Religion*, London, 1819,<sup>45</sup> both by Emanuel Swedenborg, have so many scribbles all through the books that one cannot deny Coleridge's concern for the authors. But he is not always in favour of the opinions of these authors. For instance on page 2 of *True Christian Religion*, Coleridge writes of 'Evangelic' and 'Apostolic': "I can neither attach any meaning to these words logically, nor can I find any assertion in the Evangelic or Apostolic writings, by the light of which I might conjecture what the author had in his mind."<sup>46</sup> On the discussion of Swedenborg, expressed in the same book, that "the following things are not creatable: 1. What is infinite; 2. love and wisdom; 3. life; 4. light and heat; 5. activity, considered in itself ...," Coleridge says, "This is either a sad misuse of words, or mere Pantheism: and in both cases a rash appearance of contradiction to the express declaration of Moses — Let there be light, and Light became; i. e. the same 'εγένετο' that throughout Holy Writ contra-distinguish things created from the Eternal and the eternally begotten=τα γεννήμενα. Besides, there is a gross confusion, a Quid pro Quo unworthy of so acute a logician as Swedenborg was, between the μορφή and the ἰδέα, the form super-induced or resulting, and the formans, or forma sufficiens (i. e. *sub faciens*) the substantial Forms of Aristotle."<sup>47</sup>

Among other readings of Coleridge it is worthy of mention here, that one of the sources of Coleridge's idea of Imagination is Johann Gebhard Ehrenreich Maass' *Versuch über die Einbildungskraft*, Halle and Leipzig, 1797. When Coleridge read this book is not certain, but it is evident that he read it with great attention, because he has left so many notes written throughout the book. The reason why this book attracted Coleridge's attention seems that the author lays special emphasis on the nature of *Einbildungskraft* chiefly relating to image (*Vorstellung*) and total image (*Totalvorstellung*).

43. B. M. S. M., c. 126. h. 9.

44. B. M. S. M., c. 126. k. 4.

45. B. M. S. M., c. 126. g. 4.

46. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 2.

47. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 120-121.

## II Coleridge's Theory of Imagination

Coleridge, as above stated, was a man of great learning and his writings have a deep background which extends far into English and European literature and philosophy. Our present question of the theory of Imagination is a very complicated one and especially in the case of Coleridge it is so intricate that it requires a fully detailed explanation for the general reader to understand.

Coleridge's idea of imagination is seen everywhere in his writings, but it is in *Biographia Literaria* that we can find the most coherent expression of it. In Chapter XIII of the book, Coleridge gives us a somewhat thorough definition of Imagination and Fancy. He at first divides the faculty of Imagination into two kinds, Primary and Secondary. He defines the former as follows:

The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.<sup>1</sup>

This primary Imagination is meant to be understood only in the philosophical and epistemological sense. It is important to understand here the meaning of 'all human perception.' I think it is proper to think that Coleridge meant by this 'all human perception' just as Locke and Hume did, i. e., he meant by it 'a mere passive admission of the impressions through the organs of sensation,'<sup>2</sup> and it is 'all those powers of mind which can 'see, feel, think, love, and hate.'<sup>3</sup> Perception is nothing but the ability to obtain impressions and ideas. Therefore we may understand that 'perception' here is equal to 'recognition.' It is in this sense that Coleridge, in the first half of this definition, says that 'Imagination is the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception.' What Coleridge meant by 'the living Power' is important, because he understood Imagination not as a dead or fixed Power, but as a living and active Power. And what Coleridge meant by 'the prime Agent of all human Perception'

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1. B. L. (*Biographia Literaria*, edited by J. Shawcross), i, p. 202.

2. David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford, 1964, p. 73.

3. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 1 ff. Hume: *Enquiries*, Oxford, 1961, p. 17 ff.

is that it is a fundamental moving Power of Perception, i.e. 'a primary activity which is more original than Reason and Understanding.' Imagination is the primary Agent to unite, systematize, and construct these materials which were received by the senses, and is not a secondary Power such as Reason and Understanding, and it contains Reason and Understanding in it.

Next we meet very difficult words—'the infinite I AM.' This expression is not yet fully understood and is often interpreted as being only equal to Oneself.

This 'I AM' is the same as that in "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you," (*Exodus*, iii, 14) and this 'I AM' is one of the problematical words in the Bible and the right meaning should come from its origin. I AM is a translation of *qui sum* or *qui est* in 'Ego sum qui sum' in *The Vulgate* and at once is 'ὁ ὢν' in 'Ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ὢν' in *The Septuagint*. By the Scripture God called Himself 'ὁ ὢν', in Hebrew 'éhyeh' or the first person singular, in future perfect tense of 'hāyāh' and its literal meaning is 'what I ought to be.' For the etymological and theological interpretation of this word I owe much to Dr. Tetsutaro Ariga, authority on theology in Japan,<sup>4</sup> but it is evident that I AM means 'ipsum esse', 'the highest Being.' In *N. E. D.* we know that I AM is the same as 'the Lord Jehovah' or 'Self-existent.'<sup>5</sup>

It is evident that Coleridge used the word I AM knowing its etymological and theological meaning, because he used the word 'I AM' with a modifier 'infinite' which is the most proper modifying word for God the Almighty. In another chapter, Coleridge explains the meaning of 'Sum' or 'I AM' as 'Spirit,' 'self,' or 'self-consciousness,' but in this he means at once 'object and subject,' 'being and knowing', 'each involving and supposing the other.' But it is important to know that Coleridge's self-consciousness always supposes 'sum quia Deus est,' or 'sum quia in Deo sum.' And

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4. Tetsutaro Ariga: 'I AM and hāyāh,' in *Studies in Christianity* (Doshisha University), vol. III, no. 1-2. (July, 1953).

5. Jehovah is a derivative from hāwāh (to be, to exist) the meaning of which is 'that is,' 'the self-existent,' or 'the one evercoming into manifestation.'

when Coleridge elevates his idea of self-consciousness to the absolute self, 'the great eternal I AM,' then "the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality, the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence are absolutely identical, *Sum quia sum.*"<sup>6</sup>

We can here perceive that Coleridge's idea of *Sum* or *I AM* is combined with the principle of being and it always presupposes the existence of Jehovah. To the sentence quoted above, Coleridge gives the following notes.

It is most worthy of notice, that in the first revelation of himself, not confined to individuals; indeed in the very first revelation of his absolute being, Jehovah at the same time revealed the fundamental truth of all philosophy, which must either commence with the absolute, or have no fixed commencement; that is, cease to be philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Coleridge's philosophy always passes into religion and religion becomes inclusive of philosophy. He says:

We begin with the *I KNOW MYSELF*, in order to end with the absolute *I AM*. We proceed from the *SELF*, in order to lose and find all self in God.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the word *I AM* as the subject of recognition consists of the idea of being which came from the idea of *hāyāh* in Hebrew and it may be called hayathological God instead of ontological subject but it has a character of 'Deus' or absolute and infinite 'spirit', which is at once the principle of being and that of knowledge, and the principle of the unity of being and knowledge and of growth of being; therefore it is at once 'living' and the subject of 'eternal act of creation.'

What Coleridge says in the latter half of the definition of Imagination, is that Imagination is that ability which repeats in the finite human mind that infinite and eternal act of creation which only God has. We should notice that Coleridge here uses 'infinite' for God and 'finite' for man. Here he also makes clear that the essence of

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6. *B. L.* i, p. 183.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, i, p. 186.



Jehovah is creation and the same kind of power which appears in man is called Imagination. He thinks that the creative power of man is a revelation of the creative power of God, the Almighty. This kind of thinking is not a strange one, but for us, who are used to think of everything analytically and separately, such a kind of thinking might seem rather strange. But, for Coleridge, who thinks of everything collectively and comprehensively, it was quite natural to consider that every creating activity starts from the absolute Infinite Power of creation. Then comes the question, from what origin such a kind of thinking started. It is impossible for us to think that this kind of thinking started from a single origin, whether it be the Scripture, Plato, neo-Platonism, Jacob Böhme or Kant. It must be a thought summed up from Coleridge's long years of reading and thinking.

Thus what Coleridge meant by the primary Imagination is the most fundamental motive power of human perception or recognition, and the power is the expression of the creative faculty of the Almighty God. What, then, is the relation between the work of human perception and the creative faculty of human kind? Is perception the same power as creation? Or is creative power higher than perception? On this point opinions will not agree, but if we take perception in a broad sense as being equal to recognition, the work of perception will include the work of creation. The mental activity of recognition should be active as well as passive and also be comprehensive, unifying and constructive.

Next we go to the secondary Imagination. Coleridge defines the secondary Imagination as follows :

The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as objects*) are essentially fixed and dead.<sup>9</sup>

The first point we can see in this definition is that it is at bottom the same kind of mental power as the primary Imagination, but is

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9. *Ibid.*, i, p. 202.

concerned with the creation of art. The Primary Imagination is a power of human perception, which repeats the eternal act of creation of God in the human mind, while the secondary Imagination is the echo of the same eternal act of creation of God. Both stand on the idea that the original source of the creative faculty is in God. They are both identical in the *kind* of agency, while differing only in *degree* and in the *mode* of operation. They are 'different in the mode of operation' in the sense that the primary Imagination works in the field of recognition, while the secondary Imagination works in the field of creative activity of art. Both are equally the creative and constructive power, which Coleridge sometimes called "Imagination", sometimes called 'Essemplastic' power, explaining the meaning by its etymological sense, εἰς ἓν πλάττειν (shaping into one).<sup>10</sup> He sometimes called the faculty 'Einbildungskraft' and explained that it is a "*Kraft*" to form ("*bilden*") into "*Ein*." Coleridge also liked to explain the faculty as "multeity in unity" or "unity in multeity,"<sup>11</sup> or "il piu nell' uno."<sup>12</sup>

The same idea is expressed in other words here and there in the same book. When he explains the nature of the poet, described in ideal perfection, he says :

He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by *that synthetic and magical power*, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of *imagination*, This power....reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities : of sameness, with difference ; of the general, with the concrete ; the idea, with the image ; the individual, with the representative ; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects ; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement ; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and artificial, still subordinates art to nature ; the manner to the matter ; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.'<sup>13</sup>

And he adds that 'Good Sense is the Body of poetic genius, Fancy its Drapery, Motion its Life, and Imagination the Soul that is every-

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10. *Ibid.*, i, p. 107.

11. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 230, 262.

12. *Table Talk and Omniana*, Oxford Edition, p. 309.

13. *B. L.* ii, p. 12. (*Italics mine*)

where, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.' <sup>14</sup>

In another place Coleridge talks of the rule of Imagination and says :

Could a rule be given from *without*, poetry would cease to be poetry, and sink into a mechanical art. It would be *μὲρφωσις*, not *ποίησις*. The rules of the Imagination are themselves the very powers of growth and production.' <sup>15</sup>

Now the secondary Imagination is what is called Imagination in literary criticism today, and it is the same as mentioned in the above quotations. It takes its material from images that are already in the poet's mind. The author uses these images not in the raw but uses them after they are dissolved, diffused and dissipated, collecting and unifying them into a new order of images or a new world of images. Such a working is not a mechanical construction, but a chemical fusion. We should pay attention to the chemical terms which Coleridge used in the above definition. Coleridge metaphorically compared the working of the imagination to the chemical operation, because he thought of the working of the Imagination not as a mechanical, but as a chemical one. In connection with this definition of Imagination, I should like to point out that Coleridge especially emphasized the 'vital' quality of the Imagination. That Imagination is vital means that it is a power organic, growing, productive, unifying and intentional.

Coleridge then distinguishes Fancy from Imagination. The difference is not that of degree, but that of kind. In the *Table Talk* we find such a passage as this :

You may conceive the difference in kind between the Fancy and the Imagination in this way, that if the check of senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first would become delirium, and the last mania. The Fancy brings together images which have no connexion natural or moral, but are yoked together by the poet by means of some accidental coincidence.<sup>16</sup>

But for Coleridge Fancy and Imagination are not exclusive or

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14. *Ibid.*, ii. p. 13.

15. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 65.

16. *Table Talk*, p. 309.

inimical to one another. He spoke of the matter in this way :

Imagination must have fancy, in fact the higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower.<sup>17</sup>

This passage shows that Imagination is a higher intellectual power than Fancy, and the former can act by the help of the latter.

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge gives the following definition of Fancy, after giving that of Imagination :

Fancy, on the other hand, has no other counter to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.<sup>18</sup>

By this definition we know that the Fancy Coleridge had in mind was an ability to recall something unexpected or extravagant by association. It is the Fancy that chooses out images in the mind by the will and unites and modifies them with no order of time and space. It is a kind of CHOICE after all. When he says 'emancipated from the order of time and space,' he thinks of such cases as a meeting between Cromwell, an Englishman of the 17th century, and Saigo, a Japanese of the latter half of the 19th century. Both were great revolutionaries in their own ages, and might have had an interesting conversation if they could have met. And the same would be true of Sophocles and Shakespeare. These two persons, in each case, have no connection in time and space. Therefore such a fancy is only fun or a play. It is reasonable therefore that he says 'Fancy has no other counters *to play with* but fixities and definites.' And 'the counters to play with' are not such spiritual beings as God and Spirit but such fixed and definite things that man can easily imagine. It is Fancy that can think of such a fanciful creature as Pegasus or a flying Dragon. Samuel Butler who compared the Sun to a boiled lobster is a man of strong fancy :

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17. *Table Talk*, April 20, 1833, quoted from Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination*, p. 75.

18. *B. L.* i, p. 202.

The sun had long since in the lap  
 Of Thetis taken out his nap  
 And like a lobster boyl'd, the morn  
 From black to red began to turn.

(S. Butler: *Hudibras*, Part II, c. 2, v. 29)

Fancy, after all, is "the faculty of bringing together images" of fixed and definite things by dint of association, and which images "have no connexion natural or moral, but are yoked together by the poet by means of some accidental coincidence."<sup>19</sup>

The following definitions which Coleridge gave in *Omniana* are very brief but pertinent and helpful for us to understand Coleridge's favourite key-words:

These I would arrange under the different senses and powers: the imitative power, voluntary and automatic: the imagination, or shaping and modifying power; the fancy, or the aggregative and associative power; the understanding, or the regulative, substantiating, and realizing power; the speculative reason, — *vis theoretica et scientifica*, or the power by which we produce, or aim to produce, unity, necessity and universality in all our knowledge by means of principles *a priori*; the will, or practical reason; the faculty of choice, and the sensation of volition. ...'<sup>20</sup>

It is not clear when Coleridge began to have an idea of distinguishing Imagination from Fancy, but it seems to have been about in 1808, because, in one of the Lectures in 1808, Coleridge takes up Imagination in contrast to Fancy. Since that year, Coleridge often refers to the distinction between the two, in his lectures and other writings, as is well known. It goes without saying that Coleridge held fast to this discrimination throughout his life. But we should notice that the concept of Fancy is subordinate to the concept of Imagination.

Thus the foundation of the theory of Imagination was set by Coleridge at the beginning of the 19th century as the result of his search for the principle of criticism in literature and it was at the same time in response to the general tendency of the assertion of 'ego' and originality which was the quintessence of Romanticism.

19. Raysor: *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, i, p. 212. *Tables Talk and Omniana*, Oxford Edition, p. 309.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 361-2.

The theory of Imagination reveals not only the spirit of Romanticism, but also the everlasting principle of art and literature, which was inherited by many later critics such as Ruskin, Pater, Wilde, Richards and Read to say nothing of Coleridge's contemporaries, such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Hazlitt, Hunt and others. It is a very attractive study to survey the general current of the theory of Imagination, but I wish to postpone this subject of study to a later time.