

Coleridge as a Critic

- S.T. Coleridge's achievement as a critic is immense and incomparable. S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834) belongs to the long list of writers who combine the creative and the critical faculties. This list includes --Dryden, Pope, Dr. Johnson, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Arnold, Wilde, Shaw, Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Auden etc.
- George Saintsbury has bracketed Coleridge with Aristotle and Longinus and called them "the great critics."
- Coleridge was engaged in trying 'to establish the principles of writing rather than to furnish rules on how to pass judgment on what has been written by others'.
- As a theorist, Coleridge deals with a variety of topics, such as, the nature of the mind, imagination and fancy, the nature of words and their effect on the creative mind.
- His literary criticism includes detailed studies of Shakespeare and Milton, and a highly influential text, *Biographia Literaria* (1817). The *Biographia Literaria* is an eclectic work, combining intellectual autobiography, philosophy, and literary theory

Coleridge's Philosophical ideas and the German Philosophers

- Theoretical findings of Coleridge, known as a prominent figure in the field of literary theory and criticism, assimilate several aspects of the aesthetics of German philosophy. He is probably the first English critic to build literary criticism on a philosophical foundation, which he derived from German idealist thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, and German Romantics such as Schiller, the Schlegels, and Schelling. In fact, his critical insight was sharpened by his philosophical readings of German philosophers Kant, Schlegel and Fichte.
- Coleridge is historically positioned as an English Romantic who introduced or imported into his native tradition some of the principal tenets of German speculative philosophy, tenets that have become identified with the broad spectrum of Romantic movements. These tenets were partly aimed against the mechanistic, fragmentary, and secular spirit of much Enlightenment thought, and they include –(i) the primacy

of subjectivity and self-consciousness,(ii) the elevation of nature beyond mere lifeless mechanism to a spiritual status, and (iii) the perception of a fundamental unity between the human self and the world of nature.

- However, there are many who have viewed Coleridge's efforts as a philosopher as haphazard and irrelevant to his essential literary-critical insights. Besides, there are those critics and thinkers who find that his criticism is derivative and appropriated from German thought and philosophy. He himself does not conceal this fact. The names of Kant, Berkley, Schlegel and Fichte keep recurring in his writings along with their philosophical postulates and findings.
- Coleridge has attempted to overthrow the dominant aesthetic and critical theories of the past century in Britain based on the empirical tradition of John Locke, David Hume and David Hartley. Coleridge offered a philosophy of art based on a mixture of scripture, Neoplatonism, and the transcendental idealism of German thinkers, principally Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller and F. W. J. von Schelling.
- Coleridge attacks empiricism (the theory that all human knowledge is based on experience derived from our senses), materialism (the theory that all existence is reducible to matter), and the theory of association, which, in the work of Coleridge's erstwhile mentor, Hartley, proposed that ideas have their roots in neurological connections, or associations, formed in the brain. Deploying arguments he found in Kant, Coleridge accuses Hartley and others of confusing the mechanical "conditions" of knowledge with its "essence," or principles of possibility
- Coleridge in Chapters 9-13 of , *Biographia Literaria* lays the foundations for his new "constructive philosophy" which combines the Neoplatonic mysticism of Plotinus (ancient Classical thinker who talks about three principles in his metaphysics – the One, Intellect and Soul) with some of the methods of German transcendentalism.
- Coleridge was critical of the modern spirit of commerce and speculation that had thwarted the diverse potential of human beings; like Wordsworth, he lamented the contemporary "frivolous craving for novelty," and what he called the "general

contagion” of the “mechanical” philosophies of the Enlightenment derived from thinkers such as Locke, Hume, and David Hartley.

- Coleridge saw the commercial spirit as underlying the principles which made “immediate utility” and the gratification of the senses as the ultimate criteria of value, and which reduced all relations into essentially economic relations
- Coleridge saw the universal principles of truth and morality contained in the Bible, and insisted that the Bible was the true moral and intellectual foundation of Europe, and that it expressed “a Science of *Realities* . . . freed from the phenomena of time and space”
- The poverty of the modern age, argued Coleridge, rests partly on its inability to recognize any “medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*”: modern thinking either buries faith in the “dead letter” or replaces it with products of a mechanical understanding.
- Coleridge appears to have been influenced by Kant in the manner he sees reason as a higher and more comprehensive faculty than understanding. The understanding, according to Coleridge, “concerns itself exclusively with the quantities, qualities, and relations of *particulars* in time and space”. The understanding, then, gives us a piecemeal knowledge of what Kant called the “phenomenal” world, the world of our sense-experience in space and time. Mere understanding, as elaborated by empiricist philosophers such as David Hume, is fragmentary; moreover, it cannot comprehend the realm of morality. Reason, says Coleridge, “is the knowledge of the laws of the Whole considered as One.” It is “the science of the *universal* ”. So, as with Kant, reason is a faculty which stands above the understanding, organizing the knowledge derived from the latter into a more comprehensive unity. If the understanding is employed in isolation from reason, says Coleridge, it can be directed only to the material world and our worldly interests; he insists that the understanding is merely “the means not the end of knowledge”. This connection between reason and understanding furnishes the broader context for Coleridge’s view of the imagination.
- Coleridge seems to follow Kant in viewing the imagination as a faculty which unites what we receive through our senses with the concepts of our understanding; but he goes further than Kant in viewing imagination as a power which “completes” and

enlivens the understanding so that the understanding itself becomes a more comprehensive and intuitive (rather than merely discursive) faculty.

- Besides, Coleridge appears to view reason as the supreme faculty, one which contains all the others. Just as imagination combines sense with understanding, so reason, placed at a higher vantage point, unites the knowledge derived from all three of these.
- Reason is the supreme faculty or power which embraces the senses, the understanding, and the imagination. Coleridge equates this supreme faculty with religious revelation, i.e., revelation that precedes and enables human experience, furnishing it with a transcendent foundation and meaning.
- He aligns scripture with a mode of writing that he calls symbolic, and for Coleridge, the symbolic is the realm of the imagination.
- Coleridge sees religious writing as intrinsically symbolic, whereby events on the worldly temporal level are understood as meaningful ultimately in their symbolic capacity, their capacity to refer to a higher, spiritual system of significance.
- Coleridge begins with the ostensibly Cartesian principle of self-consciousness. He adopts this principle toward a very different conclusion: instead of arriving at the dualism of Descartes or other modern philosophers, he views the external world as a development of self-consciousness. Coleridge situates the identity of subject and object within an “absolute identity of subject and object” that expresses the eternal and divine “I AM” . Hence all nature is an expression of the self conscious will or intelligence of God: “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.” What Coleridge desires is a “total and undivided philosophy” where “philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy”

Coleridge on Fancy and Imagination:

- The principle of imagination and nature of the mind and creativity engage a great part in Coleridge's critical theory. One of Coleridge's significant contributions to literary theory is his view of the imagination and the way it is conceptualized. Coleridge's views of imagination, and specifically of poetic imagination, are elaborated in his *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge's concept of the imagination covers a wide area of disciplines - -- aesthetics, psychology, philosophy, metaphysics etc.
- Coleridge foregrounds imagination, particularly in his emphasis on the "unique laws proper to the work of art so that no predetermined code can wholly deal with it." This separates his thinking from that of Aristotle or the Neoclassicists.
- Coleridge has presented his concept of imagination and its difference from "fancy" in the following statement:

The imagination then, I consider, either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the Living Power and Prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the external act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination, I consider as an echo of the former co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in "degree", in order to recreate. Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters 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 which we express by the word CHOICE.

- The central issue is here the priority Coleridge gives to imagination and what it can offer to the literary work. Whether it is primary or secondary, imagination is a "re-creating" power while "fancy" is much inferior in that it is fixed. The difference between the two is expressed as Imagination being the Modifying Power while Fancy the aggregating power.
- Primary imagination constitutes only perception and is unconscious, while secondary imagination is continuous with the primary imagination, but coexists with conscious will.

- A long tradition of classical and medieval thought, prevailing into the eighteenth century, had viewed fancy (the Greek *phantasia*) as a more creative power than imagination (from the Latin *imaginatio*): fancy was associated with the free play of thought whereas imagination had been restricted to the role of recalling images.
- The German thinkers overturned this hierarchy, lifting imagination above its merely perceptual role and viewing it as a creative and unifying force, and assigning to fancy the more mundane role of selecting and connecting images.
- Coleridge reproduces, with his own modifications, a distinction between fancy and imagination made by several German thinkers such as Tetens, Kant, Ernst Platner, and Schelling.
- Coleridge's passage on imagination and fancy is an index of some broader and more profound changes of world view between eighteenth-century thought, especially Enlightenment thought, and Romanticism. He saw much modern philosophy as beset by a dualism between the self and the world, a dualism introduced into modern philosophy by Descartes in the form of a distinction between mind and body
- Coleridge's work was part of a growing tendency to ascribe to the imagination a role beyond the merely perceptual function assigned to it by Hobbes, Berkeley, and Enlightenment empiricists such as Locke and Hume. An important element in this elevation of imagination's role was the distinction between this higher faculty and mere fancy.
- Coleridge's view of imagination may be somewhat indebted to Kant, to Schelling, who identified three levels of imagination (perceptual, philosophical, and artistic), and to the psychologist Johann Nicolaus Tetens.
- Coleridge's manipulation of imagination and its vital role is a rewording and successful manipulation of Kant's views in his philosophical books. For instance, the German philosopher in Critique of Judgment has already highlighted this issue when he states that "the imagination has significance in its own right, showing the poetic use of the act of imagination in creating a beautiful object in art and in our aesthetic judgment of a beautiful object in nature."
- Coleridge makes two critical distinctions: first, between the Imagination taken as "primary" and taken as "secondary" Of these, the second is more fundamental to

Coleridge's aesthetics. Coleridge designates as mere "Fancy" what eighteenth-century theorists had generally seen as imagination, i.e. the capacity of the mind to receive, represent and reassemble images gained from experience.

- . For Coleridge Imagination is not passive before the world, but helps to shape it, both on an ontological and a psychological level. This brings us to the distinction between Imagination as "Primary" and as "Secondary". Coleridge sees Imagination in a twofold way: first, in ontological terms (the Primary Imagination) as the principle of divine creativity in human beings, the "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" that connects humanity to God, and unifies knowing and being, subject and object; second, in psychological terms (the Secondary Imagination) as the expression of the same unifying, creative power in the human mind as it "struggles to idealize and to unify" its welter of experience. As a productive, unifying and "vital" power Imagination is more philosophically fundamental for Coleridge than the reproductive, passive and mechanical faculty of Fancy, which "must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association"
- Coleridge refers to imagination as the "esemplastic" power, a term he derives from the Greek *eis hen plattein* meaning "to shape into one"
- It suggests that imagination unifies material in an internal organic matter, changing the very elements themselves that are united, whereas the combinations produced by fancy are aggregative, comprising merely external addition, as in the placing of images side by side.

Primary Imagination:

- What Coleridge designates as the primary imagination is roughly equivalent to what Kant views as the reproductive imagination: it operates in our normal perception, combining the various data received through the senses into a unifying image, which can then be conceptualized by the understanding. In this role, imagination is an intermediary faculty, uniting the data of the senses with the concepts of the understanding.
- Even in this primary role, however, imagination as formulated by Coleridge evokes a wider, cosmic context: the very act of perception "repeats" on a finite level the divine act of creation. In other words, human perception actively

recreates or copies elements in the world of nature, reproducing these into images that can be processed further by the understanding.

- The imagination in this primary capacity helps us to form an intelligible perspective of the world; this understanding, however, is fragmentary: we do indeed perceive God's creation but in a piecemeal, cumulative fashion.
- In order to emphasize the importance of imagination he finds it necessary to use the language of religious experience. Man's creativity is a repetition of God's eternal act of creation.
- The primary imagination is primary in two senses – it is shared by all and is used all the time to make sense of day to day experience, whereas secondary is the imagination of the poet or the creative artist; and it is in its highest achievement, that is in its 'sublime' form when it enables the chosen few to perceive themselves in relation to God ; and as such it is of infinitely greater importance.
- However, there is no originality in the primary imagination: like Kant's reproductive imagination, it is bound by what we actually experience through the senses as well as the laws for associating these data.

Secondary Imagination:

- As Coleridge indicates the secondary imagination is poetic: like Kant's productive or spontaneous imagination, this is creative and forms new syntheses, new and more complex unities out of the raw furnishings of sense-data. It breaks down the customary order and pattern in which our senses present the world to us, recreating these into new combinations that follow its own rules, rather than the usual laws of association.
- Coleridge also stresses in this passage the voluntary and controlled nature of the secondary or poetic imagination; whereas the primary imagination operates in an involuntary manner in all people, the secondary imagination belongs to the poet and is put into action by the "conscious will." Nonetheless, this poetic imagination is still dependent for its raw material on the primary imagination

- Coleridge is careful to state that the two types of imagination differ not in kind but only in degree. The secondary imagination must exert its creative powers on the very perceptions supplied by the primary imagination; it cannot operate independently of them. Another way of putting this might be to say that even the creative poetic imagination is ultimately rooted in our actual perceptions of the world: it cannot simply create from nothing, or from the insubstantiality of its own dreams.
- For, ultimately, the secondary imagination is perceiving the world at a higher level of truth, one that sees beneath the surface appearances of things into their deeper reality, their deeper connections, and their significance within a more comprehensive scheme that relates objects and events in their human, finite significance to their symbolic place in the divine, infinite order of things.

Fancy:

- In Coleridge's formulation, fancy is a more mechanical mode of creativity: it receives its materials "ready made from the law of association," and Coleridge calls it merely "a mode of Memory." In other words, it is a mode of recalling and recombining images that have actually been experienced.
- Two factors distinguish Fancy from Primary Imagination though both depend on experience of our senses. Firstly, though fancy is a mode of recalling, it is nonetheless "emancipated from the order of time and space." Secondly, it is "modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice."
- Fancy has a degree of freedom in the way it recalls images; it is not restricted to the original order of images in time and space; and it can exercise some choice in the way it combines images.
- Unlike the primary imagination, then, fancy is not merely a perceptual agent; rather, it is a creative power but operates at a lower level of

creativity than the secondary or poetic imagination, which has the power to dissolve perceptions entirely and create new combinations.

Coleridge on Poetry and Language of Poetry:

- Coleridge has tried to distinguish a ‘poem’ from ‘poetry’. He states: ‘The writings of PLATO, and Bishop TAYLOR, AND ‘Theoria Sacra’ of BURNET, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contra-distinguishing objects of a poem.....In short whatever *specific* import we attach to the word, poetry, there will be found involved in it, as a necessary consequence, that a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry.....My own conclusion on the nature of poetry , in the strict use of the word, have been in part anticipated in the preceding disquisition on the fancy and imagination. What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet?’(Chapter XIV, lines 201-223)
- Daiches explains the manner in which Coleridge has linked the three entities - the poem, poetry and the poet. He states: ‘Poetry for Coleridge is a wider category than that of a “poem”, that is, poetry is a kind of activity that can be engaged in by painters or philosophers or scientists and is not confined to those who employ metrical language, or even to those who employ language of any kind. Poetry, in this larger sense, brings “the whole soul of man” into activity, with each faculty playing its proper part according to its “relative worth and dignity”. This takes place whenever “secondary imagination” comes into operation.....Thus Coleridge defines poetry through an account of how the poet works; the poet works through the exercise of his Imagination. Whenever the synthesizing, the integrating, powers of what Coleridge calls the secondary imagination are at work, bringing all aspects of a subject into a complex unity, then poetry in this larger sense results. Poetry in the narrower sense – that is, a *poem* – may well use the same elements as a work of poetry in the larger sense but it differs from the poetry in the larger sense by combining its elements in a different way, “in consequence of a different object being proposed.” That different object is the immediate communication of pleasure. But since a poem is also poetry, the communication of pleasure may be its

immediate object but is not its whole function.’ Daiches further says that a poem is distinguished from other arts by the fact that it uses language as its medium. It is distinguished from other works of literature that are not poems by “proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.”

- Coleridge’s views on the nature of poetry and poetic language are intrinsically tied to his broader vision and, in particular, to his views of poetic imagination. While he shares some components of this broader vision with Wordsworth, he has tried to give a detailed explanation, in *Biographia*, to distinguish his positions precisely from those of his friend.
- The most basic point on which he differs from Wordsworth is in his insistence that the language of poetry is *essentially* different from that of prose. Whereas Wordsworth saw the poet as a “man speaking to men,” using the language of “real” life (though in a more refined form), Coleridge, like the New Critics of the early twentieth century, saw poetry as essentially untranslatable into prose.
- Coleridge criticized the poetic practice of neoclassical writers such as Pope for precisely the form, that is, their poetry took the form of logical argument and that it seemed to be “characterized not so much by poetic thoughts, as by thoughts *translated* into the language of poetry”.
- Coleridge acknowledges that metrical poetry is formed from the same elements as prose; the difference lies in the different combination of these elements and the difference of purpose
- Whereas science, history, and other disciplines have the communication of truth as their immediate purpose, this conveyance of truth is for poetry an *ultimate* purpose. Metrical poetry is distinguished from these other realms “by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; it is also distinguished by its insistence on organic unity, such that the pleasure yielded by any component part of the poem is consonant with the pleasure afforded by any other part and by the poem as a whole”
- Coleridge later gives something that is a kind of a definition of organic unity: “*all the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more important and essential parts*”.

- Unlike Pope, who viewed language as the external “dress” of thought, Coleridge sees the unity of a poem as shaped from within, through internal connections of its elements.
- Wordsworth, too, had seen the immediate purpose of poetry as producing pleasure. Coleridge’s explanation of this, however, is different: the ultimate aim of a poem is indeed the expression of truth, but pleasure is derived not merely from our view of this final goal but “by the attractions of the journey itself ”
- This view anticipates many modern conceptions of poetry and poetic autonomy: the primary purpose of poetry is not referential, but rather to draw attention to itself as a linguistic and material construct, to the journey or *means* whereby truth is achieved.
- The key ideas on Coleridge’s doctrine are ‘unity’ and ‘wholeness’, and he upholds that which is generic and representative.

Coleridge on Poets:

- According to Coleridge:
the poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. 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, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control . . . 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; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. (Chapter XIV, lines 228 -246)

- Coleridge presents a holistic view of the poet, his faculty, and his work along with its impact on the reader. An underlying principle of unity links the three entities. A true poet is a whole man, ideal in every way, in possession of sensibility, philosophic wisdom, and imagination, which is the power that unifies – the ‘ensemblastic’ or ‘coadunating’ power.
- Coleridge rates the fundamental unity in the poet’s mind as the highest faculty, and distinguishes different types of poetic gifts.
- Once again, the composing of poetry is seen as distinct, relying primarily on the unifying power of imagination, which is put into effect in a voluntary and controlled manner. What the mere understanding can perceive only in terms of opposites – general, concrete, individual, representative, etc. – imagination has the power to reconcile in a higher vision of unity.
- For Coleridge there is no distinction between the poet and poetry
- This use of the imaginative power lies at the core of metrical poetry’s distinction from prose or from any discursive activity that brings us conventional perceptions of the world: the poet, through imagination, can not only reassemble whatever elements the world presents to our senses but also see the profounder connection of those elements.
- . Nonetheless, while the poet for Coleridge is a kind of genius, set apart from other men, he insists that the reader’s engagement should be with the poetry itself, not with the poet.
- Such an insistence contributes to a conception of poetry as autonomous, and is repeated by the twentieth-century formalists and New Critics.

Wordsworth vs. Coleridge on Poetic language:

- Given Coleridge’s views of the unique status of the poet, it is hardly surprising that he takes issue with Wordsworth’s views of poetic language.
- In his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth had urged the poet to abandon the artificial language of poetic tradition and instead to adopt what he called the “real” language of men. He claimed that language in its purest and most philosophical form

was exhibited in rustic life, which had been uncontaminated by the vulgar idioms and emotions of the city.

- Coleridge's many objections to these statements can be categorized into two central arguments: firstly, the term "real" is equivocal. Every man's language, says Coleridge, has its individualities, as well as properties common to his social class and certain words or phrases that are universally used. Moreover, language varies in every country and every village; given such variety, what would "real" language mean? Hence, for "real," thinks Coleridge, we should substitute the term "ordinary" or *lingua communis* (BL, II, 55– 56). And this, he says, is no more to be found in the language of rustics than in that of any other class.
- The second, more fundamental, objection to Wordsworth is that, far from being the most philosophical language, the rustic's discourse is marked by scanty vocabulary and the communication of isolated facts, rather than the connections or general laws which constitute the "true being" of things.
- The best part of language, according to Coleridge, "is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination, the greater part of which have no place in the consciousness of uneducated man"
- Hence, it is imagination which underlies not only the poet's distinctive role, as set above the sphere of conventional perception, but also his refined use of language: it is this power through which the poet has the ability to see the connections and underlying patterns behind the facts that are received discretely or in a fragmentary and isolated way by the ordinary consciousness.
- Interestingly, and somewhat ironically, though Coleridge and Wordsworth differ on the issue of how poetic language relates to ordinary language, they both claim to follow Aristotle's view that poetry expresses truths which are general and universal rather than individual. Coleridge states: "I adopt with full faith the principle of Aristotle, that poetry is essentially *ideal*, that it avoids and excludes all *accident*; that its apparent individualities of rank, character, or occupation must be *representative* of a class; and that the *persons* of poetry must be clothed with *generic* attributes, with

the *common* attributes of the class; not with such as one gifted individual might *possibly* possess, but such as from his situation . . . that he *would* possess”

- Hence for Coleridge too, poetry focuses on the essential and universal features of a particular situation, and though it might employ individualization to create an emotional impact, such use always carries a broader, generalizing significance.
- Thus as with Wordsworth, Coleridge uses classical Aristotelian precepts – in this case, the poetic expression of universal truths, and poetry as an imitation of nature or human nature – toward Romantic ends. What allows the poet to communicate general and essential truths is the unifying power of imagination, which sees the connections between particular and general, concrete and abstract, individual and representative. It is through this very power that the poet’s “imitation” is itself creative, reaffirming and replicating on a lower level the original creative act of the divine “I AM.”

Biographia Literaria Chapter XVII

Summary and Critical Comments

Lines 265 -280:

Coleridge agrees with Wordsworth and appreciates the following views mentioned by him in the Appendix to ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*’:

1. Strong and true passion of the early poets flowed naturally and spontaneously into their poems as ‘figures and metaphors’ which were appropriate, and moved readers in ways they were not moved in real life.
2. The poets of later ages converted such figures of speech into mere ornaments and adornments in their poems, which were devoid of strong emotions, and were hollow and devoid of natural justification.
3. The readers experience ‘pleasurable confusion of thought’ when they encounter such unusual images and words which are artificial and not a result strong natural feelings. This experience is similar to ‘that state’, in other words the emotive state, which is caused by ‘natural language’ used by earlier poets that was a result of ‘impassioned feeling’.

Lines 315 – 355:

After expressing his agreement with Wordsworth on above mentioned points, Coleridge challenges and refutes following views put forward by Wordsworth in his ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*’:

- I. Proper diction of poetry consists in a language of men in real life, a language which constitutes the natural conversation of men under the influence of natural feelings
- II. Wordsworth’s statement that he has chosen ‘low and rustic life’ for his poetry because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil, in which they can attain maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language
- III. Wordsworth’s statement that he has chosen ‘low and rustic life’ for his poetry because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co exist in a state of greater simplicity, may be more accurately contemplated, more forcibly communicated, and the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings and from the necessary character of rural occupations

IV. Wordsworth's statement that he has chosen 'low and rustic life' for his poetry because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with beautiful and permanent forms of nature

Coleridge's objection to Wordsworth's view no. I (proper diction of poetry consists in a language of men in real life) mentioned above is three-fold:

- i. This principle, that proper diction of metrical poetry consists in a language of men in real life, is applicable to only certain classes of poetry**
- ii. Even within these certain classes of poetry this principle is applicable only in a particular sense that has never been doubted or denied.**
- iii. As a rule this view is useless and may be harmful, and therefore ought not or need not be practised.**

While discussing selection of 'low and rustic life' for poetry, Coleridge states that one may be drawn to rural life and rural speech as (i) it may appear natural, (ii) it may be open to natural imitation, and (iii) it feeds the ego and the vanity of the educated man by making him feel superior.

However, Coleridge refers to Wordsworth and states that he has chosen 'low and rustic life' for the reasons mentioned under nos. II, III ,and IV above.

Line no. 357 – 418:

Coleridge refutes Wordsworth's statements mentioned under nos. II, III ,and IV above by making following assertions:

- i. In Wordsworth's interesting poems like 'the Brothers', 'Michael', 'Ruth' etc. the persons introduced are not taken from 'low and rustic life' as is commonly understood.**
- ii. The thoughts, feelings and language of the English peasantry used in Wordsworth's poems are same and not different from those who may live elsewhere in similar circumstances, in 'every state of life, whether in town or country'. Hence 'low and rustic life' is not the essential condition for development of such sensibilities.**

- iii. The two important factors for development of refinement in thought, feelings and manners are –(a) the sense of independence combined with industry, and (b) religious instruction based on the Bible.
- iv. The denials and negations of rural life are obstacles to growth of healthy feelings.
- v. It is not country life or country labours that develop a healthy spirit. Education and/or original sensibility must exist in a person beforehand for development of a healthy spirit; only in such cases the forms and incidents of nature can make a stimulating and sensitive impact on an individual.
- vi. Sympathy can be more easily aroused in an educated man than in an uneducated countryman. The mountaineers who have been praised for their keen sensibilities and intense sensitivity to nature are in general better educated than men of equal rank belonging to other places.

Lines 418 - 533

Coleridge accepts Aristotle's view of universality in poetry, and the principle that poetry is *ideal* and excludes the particular. The characters appearing in poetry or literature are representative of the class to which they belong. The characters of Wordsworth's poems 'Michael', 'The Brothers', 'The Idiot Boy', 'Harry Gill' and 'The Thorn' are discussed to assert that the characters are representative of the class to which they belong.

Lines 534 – 625

Coleridge states that he cannot accept 'as particular fact, or as a general rule' the following statement made by Wordsworth : 'The language too of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.'

Coleridge's objections and observations are following:

1. Once the language of the rustics is rid of 'provincialism and grossness', and made grammatically accurate, it would be practically the same as the language used in daily life by a person of any class.
2. The faculties of rustics are not fully developed and cultivated due to their confined area of experience and tradition bound beliefs. Consequently, they are able to communicate only a few particular thoughts and facts. The educated man, on the contrary, is able to express general concepts and can perceive the general laws that connect isolated facts.
3. As far as Wordsworth's statement that the best part of language is formed from the objects with which the rustic hourly communicates, Coleridge states that (i) the distinct knowledge of a rustic who is not educated provides him with a very limited vocabulary. He may be able to convey his personal wants with clarity, but will use very general and vague terms to express aspects of nature; (ii) the best part of language is not derived from the words and their combinations obtained from the objects a rustic is familiar with; (iii) the best part of human language is derived from 'reflection on acts of the mind itself'. It is formed when fixed symbols are used to represent 'internal acts' and the 'processes and results of imagination'. The uneducated man has, by and large, very limited access to such words and signs; (iv) the best elements of language found in the vocabulary of rustics have filtered down to them from the universities and the church. During Reformation the refined language of the Universities passed on to the Church and from there to the general public including those residing in the rural areas; (v) the plain and rustic language of the local tribes is so deficient that the missionaries who preach to them find it difficult to convey moral and spiritual ideas entirely in their language.

In response to Wordsworth's statement that 'such a language'(that is, purged of crudities) 'arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is substituted for it by poets, who think they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art in proportion as they indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression', Coleridge states again that removing the oddities of rustics' language would be similar to removing the special features of a particular style of

speech and writing. Once the style loses its distinctive quality, the language used will become same, so much so that the grand style and the journalistic style will not appear different from one another.

Lines 628 to 635:

Coleridge objects to following observations made by Wordsworth:

- i. a selection of the REAL language of men
- ii. the language of these men (i.e. men in low and rustic life) has been adopted
- iii. I propose myself to imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men
- iv. Between the language of prose and metrical composition, there neither is, nor can be any essential difference

Lines 636 to 671:

Coleridge has given following reasons for his objection to Wordsworth's statements : 'a selection of the REAL language of men', 'the language of these men (i.e. men in low and rustic life) has been adopted' and 'I propose myself to imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men'::

- i. The term 'real' is ambiguous, since the language of each man is real to himself. The language of each individual depends on personal factors such as the extent of his knowledge, his activities and his sensibility. It is also marked by three factors: features related to personal use of language of an individual, features depending on the class to which that individual belongs, and words and phrases of universal use. Instead of 'real' the term 'ordinary' or 'lingua communis' is more appropriate according to Coleridge.
- ii. Once the peculiar features of language marked by the class of the speakers is removed the language loses its distinctive quality.

- iii. The process of purifying the language of the rustics will involve major changes in the language used, and it will be similar to the purging the language of tradesmen and manufacturers before adapting it for poetic purpose.
- iv. Besides, Coleridge quotes Dante to state that the ordinary language of a country exists only in parts and not as a whole, that is, it varies from place to place and is influenced by local factors. Hence the language of rustics will be different at different places.

Lines 672 to 704:

Coleridge has given following reasons for his objection to Wordsworth's statement related to associating ideas 'in a state of excitement' in poetry:

- i. The state of excitement does not create new ideas, images or words which are already present in the mind of the speaker. If these are scarce then the language will become repetitive and ineffective

Critical points:

This chapter is important since Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth's theory of poetry remains a fine specimen of literary polemics. Two factors make Coleridge's assessment very significant: first is his close association with Wordsworth in composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and second is his wide scholarship. Coleridge, with his sharp insight, is able to focus on the discrepancies in Wordsworth's statements related to the diction of poems. His objections to Wordsworth's views on 'real language of men' and 'language of rustics' are cogent and reveal his understanding of features of language use. Besides, he has also used psychology in his analyzing Wordsworth's views on mental refinement and emotional profundity of the rustics and also on 'excitement' in relation to words used in poetry. Coleridge's evaluation expresses his sharp acumen, wisdom, and knowledge of the basic issues related to language use.

Salient Points and Critical Comments

Lines 705 – 773

Coleridge continues with his critique of Wordsworth's statement that he has used in his poems 'a selection of language really used by men'. He says

- This attempt is impractical because it implies that the poet already possessed the language from which he made selections; Wordsworth may have selected words from a rustic's language, but Wordsworth's own language, obviously, is not a rustic's language
- Language does not only mean words, but also the word order, That is, the order in which the words are arranged. Wordsworth may have adopted words of that class, but arrangement of words in his poems is according to his own judgment.
- The language of an uneducated person is not marked by coordinated arrangement of ideas according to their degree of importance – a feature found in the language used by educated persons. Coleridge provides an example from Wordsworth's poems to support his statement that the words of the poem are not only of a general kind 'current in all walks of life' but the word order too is not the kind found in a rustic's language. Hence Wordsworth has flouted his own theory in practice.

Lines 774 – 890

Coleridge is very critical of Wordsworth's observation: 'There neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition'. His arguments are given below:

- Though same words are used, the arrangement of these words is different in poetry and prose.
- In the term 'essential difference' Wordsworth is not using the philosophical meaning of the word 'essence' which implies the idea of a particular thing; he is using it in the sense of quality that distinguishes two entities made up of the same substance; in this case metrical poetry and prose made up of the same substance - words. Hence, he is,

in reality, discussing the formal construction or arrangement of words and phrases in poetry and prose when he asserts that there is no essential difference in their language.

- There are ‘modes of expression, a construction, and an order of sentences’ which may be appropriate in serious prose composition, but would not be proper and suitable in metrical poetry. Similarly, arrangements of words and sentences and the manner in which figures of speech are used in a serious poem would be disproportionate in prose. Hence, Coleridge says: ‘I contend that in both cases this unfitness of each for the place of the other frequently will and ought to exist’. In other words there is and must exist difference in the language used in prose and poetry.

Lines 871 to 939: Coleridge discusses the origin of metre to support his argument that there is and must exist difference in the language used in prose and poetry.

. He states:-

- The origin of metre can be traced to the balance in the mind caused by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion. In other words, metre is a result of the exercise of will to control impulse and emotion. This results in poetic composition that provides joy to the readers.
- Since the elements of metre originate in a state of excitement, so the metre is expectedly accompanied by the ‘natural language of excitement’.
- Since the elements of metre are formed as an act of will or volition or purpose, and are shaped artificially for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, there is a union between workings of passion and exercise of will in a metrical composition. This combination of passion and will can be traced throughout such works.
- This union of ‘spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose’ (or union of will and passion) is expressed through many different forms and figures of speech used in poetry and also through the use of ‘picturesque and vivifying language’ in poetry. In other words, this union of passion and will in a metrical composition or a poem provides delight and leads to the use of heightened and patterned language.

- There is a tacit understanding, a ‘compact’, between the reader and the poet regarding the kind of excitement and delight the reader expects and the poet provides in a poem or metrical composition; thus the use of this heightened and intense language is natural in poetry.

Lines 940 to 1076: Coleridge discusses the effect of metre to support his argument that there is and must exist difference in the language used in prose and metrical poetry.

- Metre produces and sustains vivacity in the reader’s mind and retains attention. It is like wine in animated conversation. However, just as appropriate food is required with wine to maintain liveliness, ‘appropriate matter’ or appropriate thoughts and expressions are required along with metre to retain the stimulation of thoughts and feelings.
- Though Wordsworth is accurate in his discussion of the power of metre he did not engage in any independent discussion of the issue.
- The poet uses metre because as Coleridge himself has said, ‘I write in metre, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose.’ This supports the statement that the language of poetry or metrical compositions is different from that of prose.
- Even though the ideas may be appropriate for a good poem, if the language is not suitable and proper, the metre loses its effectiveness.

Lines 1076 to 1123: Coleridge has provided three more arguments in support of his statement that there is and must exist difference in the language used in prose and poetry.

1. Since metre is connected with poetry, hence anything used in combination with metre must possess some property in common with poetry. The word ‘passion’ may be defined as ‘an excited state of the feelings and faculties’. Every passion has its characteristic modes of expression. Moreover, the very act of poetic composition produces in the poet an unusual state of excitement which demands a correspondent difference of language. The intensity found in descriptive passages of the poetry of Donne and Dryden is caused not only by the content, subject matter or ideas but also by the fervent state of the poet in the act of composition. As a result the language of poetry becomes different from that of prose.

2. All parts of an 'organized whole' or a structure must incorporate its important and essential parts. Since a poem is an organized whole and an imitative art, it attempts to fuse sameness throughout what may be radically different, or of difference throughout a radically same base. This implies that the language used in poetry will be concomitant with the other parts of the poetic composition.
3. Through their poetry the poets have proved that there is and ought to be an essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition.

Critical Comments

- Coleridge believes that metre is not something superadded but an organic part of poetry.
- Coleridge regrets that Wordsworth has not given an independent and elaborate treatment to this subject. He, therefore, examines and corrects Wordsworth's views and gives them a more philosophical and cogent treatment. His elaboration are contained under the following points:
 - The origin of metre can be traced to the balance in the mind caused by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion. In other words, metre is a result of the exercise of will to control impulse and emotion. This results in poetic composition that provides joy to the readers.
 - Thus the metrical composition can provide more natural pleasure than a non-metrical one.
 - All other parts in a poem must be made consonant with metre. Rhyme and metre involve an exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound.
 - In a poem the parts mutually support and explain each other, all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting, the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement.

- In a metrical composition there must be a perfect union of ‘an interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose.’
- Coleridge believes that since metre is an organic part of poetry, it is vitally connected with its effects also
- Metre increases the vivacity of the reader’s mind by producing continual excitement of surprise.
- The pleasure of metre itself is conditional. It is dependent on “the appropriateness of the thoughts and expressions, to which the metrical form is superadded.”

Here Coleridge’s views appear to be somewhat inconsistent. At one place he states that metre is superadded while at another he implies that it is necessary in making a poem effective. On the one hand he argues that in itself metre is only an accessory, something superadded, and therefore metrical composition must be accompanied by a rich thought content and ideas, and a proper poetic diction. But on the other hand, later he pleads that metre is ‘the proper form of poetry,’ and that poetry is ‘imperfect and defective without metre.’ In other words it is essential to an effective poetic composition.

- Words in prose and poetry may be the same but their arrangement is different. This arrangement is different because poetry uses metre. Hence there is bound to be an essential difference between the language of poetry and prose.
- To conclude, according to Coleridge metre is a stimulant to the attention of the reader. It has a distancing power; it heightens and removes us from ordinary emotions. Metre is essential to a poem and makes it different from a prose piece; it heightens the effect of a poetic composition, provides pleasure and is an aid to memory; metre also balances the spontaneous overflow of passion in the poet’s mind; metrical language is more suited than prose for conveying excitement. The metrical pattern tends to increase the vivacity of the general feelings and retains the attention

of the reader. The effect which it produces is that of the continued excitement of surprise; metre is also conducive to producing musical delight. Anything related to metre is actually related to the spirit of poetry.

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