SOME ASPECTS OF COLERIDGE'S POETIC THEORY IN THE NOTEBOOKS

by

Isabel Henniger, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

English Department,
McGill University.

April, 1965.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I should like to express my appreciation to Professor Irving Massey for his valuable assistance in the preparation of this thesis. My thanks are also due to Professor A. J. Hartley for helpful suggestions.

CHAPTER I

A COMPARISON OF WORDSWORTH'S "PREFACE" TO THE LYRICAL BALLADS WITH COLERIDGE'S NOTEBOOKS.

The publication in 1957 and 1961 of two volumes of Coleridge's Notebooks[1] has opened to all those who are interested in this writer as man, poet, critic, philosopher and psychologist opportunities to study him and his work anew. Some of the material contained in this text was published previously in Anima Poetae,[2] but many significant entries were left out of the earlier volume, and in some cases, as in CN 383,[3] the meaning of the passages was entirely altered by injudicious omission. Consequently, the publication of Professor Coburn's edition not only supplies us with new knowledge, but corrects the old. There is much of interest in these two books, but more is to come, for there are still three volumes of the Notebooks to be issued, one of which contains a draft for part of Biographia Literaria,[4] but in this thesis I shall be concerned only with those Coleridge

---

[1]The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York, 1957 and 1961).

[2]Anima Poetae from the unpublished notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London, 1895).

[3]Numbers in the text preceded by CN refer to entries in the Notebooks. Numbers preceded by CN and followed by n refer to Professor Coburn's notes. Volume 1 contains entries 1-1842, Volume 2 entries 1843-3231.

[4]Information volunteered to the author in June, 1964 by Professor George Whalley of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Cf. Humphry House, Coleridge, (London, 1962), p.149.

notes to be found in the two tomes which have already appeared, the first one covering the period 1794-1804, the second 1804-1808.

The very wide scope of Coleridge's interests is seen in his notes. A wealth of information is to be found there concerning his relations with his contemporaries, including Wordsworth and his family, his attitude to political and religious topics of the day, and his interest in philosophy and psychology. Also to be gleaned from these volumes are the books Coleridge was reading at a particular time, and his comments on them. Of most interest, perhaps, to the student of literature, however, are his remarks on poetry, and in particular on the theory of poetry, and it is to these observations that we shall pay most attention.

In reading these volumes one is struck by a number of similarities of thought and expression between remarks made by Coleridge in his Notebooks and ideas expressed by Wordsworth in the "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads. The famous "Preface" was written first in 1800, and reprinted in a slightly fuller form in 1802. The coincidences that I have referred to are not really surprising. Coleridge and Wordsworth were close friends at this period and saw a lot of one another. At one time it was intended that Coleridge should write the "Preface"

(CN 787n) and he and Wordsworth no doubt discussed the principal notions. Also, Wordsworth was not the first, nor the last, writer to deal with the subjects mentioned in the "Preface". Coleridge and Wordsworth inherited the same literary tradition, and many, if not most, of the topics Wordsworth touches upon in the "Preface" had been considered by earlier literary critics. It is therefore not remarkable that both men were thinking about the same subjects at the same time. However, it may be of interest to compare Wordsworth's "Preface" to the observations scattered through Coleridge's notebooks, so that we may see to what extent Coleridge was preoccupied with the subjects outlined by his friend.

In the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth is introducing a new type of poetry to the reader as an experiment. He realizes, however, that because his poetry is novel and different it may be at a disadvantage. His reader will probably have attached "the endearing name of Poetry,"[5] to a particular type of composition and it may be difficult for him to broaden his appreciation. Indeed, Wordsworth remarks, "all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honourable bigotry for the objects which have long

---

[5]"Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" in Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London, 1963), p.266. All subsequent references will be to the 1802 text in this edition.

continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased." ("Preface", p.266). Coleridge recognizes this same partiality in the Notebooks. In 1805 he explains that it is "one source of mistakes concerning the merits of Poems that to those read in youth men attribute all that praise which is due to Poetry in general . . ." (CN 2516). However, in the same entry he acknowledges "that both in persons and in poems it is well on the whole that we should retain our first Loves, tho' alike in both cases evils have happened as the consequence-. . . ." But in 1807 he returns to his first opinion: "By the bye, in Poetry as well as Metaphysics, that which we first meet with in the Dawn of our minds becomes our after Fetisch, to the Many at least- . . ." (CN 3156).

While in the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth is presenting what he considers to be an innovation in the style and content of poetry, in his "Preface" he attacks many of the characteristic faults of his predecessors as well as those of his contemporaries who write in the older style. In explaining to the reader why he has written his manifesto, Wordsworth comments on "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers," ("Preface", p.238) to

which many of his contemporaries were accustomed. In a number of passages Coleridge criticizes the same tendency. Late in 1805 he makes the following note: "Modern Poetry characterized by the Poets ANXIETY to be always striking - The same march in the Greek & Latin Poets / Claudian, who had powers to have been any thing - observe in him the anxious craving Vanity! every Line, nay, every word stops, looks full in your face, & asks & begs for Praise." (CN 2728). One should liken this to an entry of May-August 1805:

> In the present age the Poet proposes to himself as his main Object & most characteristic of his art, new and striking Images, incidents that interest the Affections or excite the curiosity of the Reader; and both his characters and his descriptions he individualizes and specifies as much as possible, even to a degree of Portraiture / Meanwhile in his diction and metre he is either careless (W. Scott) or adopts some mechanical measure, of which one couplet or stanza is an adequate specimen, with a language which ~~has~~[6] claims to be poetical for no better reason, than that it would be intolerable in conversation or prose/- (CN 2599).

---

[6]Horizontal lines superimposed on the text indicate cancellations by Coleridge. For an explanation of editorial symbols see p. xlii of Vol. I of Miss Coburn's text. Three or four spaced periods, not enclosed within square brackets, indicate ellipses by this writer.

Later in the same year Coleridge writes "A man's Imagination fitfully awaking & sleeping = the odd metaphors & no metaphors of modern poetry / Language in its first state without the inventive passion" (CN 2723). The distinction between discovery and invention has almost as much significance for him as that between fancy and imagination: "Into a discoverer I have sunk from an inventor," he laments in CN 950. His opinion of modern poetry, we must conclude, is low. Coleridge and Wordsworth, though they use different phraseology, are making the same points here. Wordsworth's "gaudiness" corresponds to Coleridge's "striking images," his "inane phraseology" to Coleridge's "language which claims to be poetical for no better reason than that it would be intolerable in conversation or prose."

Wordsworth also condemns the use of clichés in poetry, and because he feels that "mechanical devices of style" ("Preface", p.244) have become meaningless he has tried to avoid "what is usually called poetic diction." ("Preface", p.245). Wordsworth, therefore, maintains in these observations that his purpose in his poetry is "to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men" and that his wish is "to keep [the] Reader in the company of flesh and blood," for Wordsworth

is persuaded that by so doing he will interest his public ("Preface", p.244). For these reasons, Wordsworth says, he has avoided poetic diction as assiduously as it is normally courted, and he maintains that few personifications of abstract ideas will be found in his works ("Preface", pp.244-5). Of course Wordsworth does use personification, as in the Ode to Duty, but he leaves himself a loophole for this when he says that personification is "a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion" and that he has made use of it as such ("Preface", p.244). Perhaps Wordsworth is being unfair to his predecessors, for surely Pope and his contemporaries felt that they were using devices of style in a fresh and striking way, and only when "prompted by passion." They are unlikely to have used these conventions if they thought they were mechanical and lifeless. And yet in 1806 Coleridge makes a similar remark: ". . . in Pope the quaintness, perversion, unnatural metaphors & still more the cold-blooded use for artifice or connection of language justifiable only by enthusiasm & passion." (CN 2826). Both Wordsworth and Coleridge contend that poetic diction, by which they mean personification, metaphor, simile, apostrophe, while not bad in itself, has been so misused that the phrases no longer convey anything; the words have become trite. To reawaken the imagination from its lethargy, a freshness of

spirit and language is needed. The clichés of former ages only aggravate the reader's torpor.

Wordsworth admits that there are some disadvantages in so studiously avoiding poetic diction, but he feels that they are necessary to achieve his purpose. Not only must he eschew many "phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets" ("Preface", p.245), but he has thought it expedient to abstain "from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower" ("Preface", p.245). Late in 1799 Coleridge writes "of the harm that bad Poets do in stealing & making unnovel beautiful Images" (CN 470), and in September 1802 he copies this remark into another notebook, with slight variations: "Of the harm done by bad Poets in trivializing beautiful expressions & images, & associating Disgust & indifference with the technical forms of Poetry" (CN 1236). From this last observation, we may learn two things. First, Coleridge is bewailing the loss to our language of many beautiful phrases which have become commonplace through misuse. Secondly, however, Coleridge is pointing out that these bad poets have brought the technical elements of

poetry into disrepute. Metaphor, personification, simile when imaginatively used are great assets to the poet, but he cannot use them once they have become trivial and meaningless. The second point Coleridge makes here is important, for it shows that he is not repudiating poetic diction or the technicalities of poetry themselves, only their misuse.

Yet another defect that Wordsworth finds in contemporary society, and which is reflected in the poetry of the day, is a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" ("Preface", p.243). Wordsworth believes that "the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants," ("Preface", p.242) and because of this conviction the feeling developed in the lyrics he has written "gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling." ("Preface", p.242). The result of the "craving for extraordinary incident" ("Preface", p.243) is that "the invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespear and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" ("Preface", p.243). Coleridge condemns this trend in January 1804: "The prodigious Eye-vividness of our modern scenes finds a Counter balance

only in boisterous Event & Bustle. 'All tender Passions, motions soft & grave' must needs be flat to the most of the Spectators & out of place to the most enlightened" (CN 1794). It may be remarked in passing that there is important criticism of Ann Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolphe and M. C. Lewis's The Monk to be found in Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism. In speaking of Mrs. Radcliffe, Coleridge acknowledges her power as a mistress of suspense and invention, but complains that in searching for what is new she is liable to forget what is natural.[7] Concerning that "thirst for outrageous stimulation", Coleridge says that "the horrible and the preternatural have usually seized on the popular taste, at the rise and decline of literature."[8] Because they are very powerful stimulants "they can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite."[9] Wordsworth, it may be noted, sees the Poet as chiefly distinguished from other men, "by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement . . ." ("Preface", p.255).

---

[7] Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1936), p.356.

[8] Ibid., p.370.

[9] Loc. cit.

Yet Wordsworth can see that there are reasons for this desire for stimulation. One of them is "the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies" ("Preface", p.243). Other writers have praised the country over the town. In 1800 Coleridge notes, "Divina natura dedit agros, ars humana aedificavit urbem / God made the city & man made the town- . . ." (CN 815). "City" is thought to be a slip for "country" (CN 815n). Although in Biographia Literaria Coleridge later attacks Wordsworth's concept of the superiority of rustic life, his early letters support the position indicated in the note I have just quoted. In 1795 he writes: "The pleasures, which we receive from rural beauties, are of little Consequence compared with the Moral Effect of these pleasures - beholding constantly the Best possible we at last become ourselves the best possible. In the country, all around us smile Good and Beauty - and the Images of this divine beauty are miniatured on the mind of the beholder, as a Landscape on a Convex Mirror."[10] Later he says, "I am anxious that my children should be

---

[10]Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford, 1956), I, 154.

bred up from earliest infancy in the simplicity of peasants, their food, dress & habits completely rustic,"[11] and he goes on to complain of the unchristian habits that cities teach children.[12]

In the "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth is not concerned only with condemning tendencies in the literature of his time. He also gives his views on the nature of great art. Wordsworth emphasizes the role of passion in creation a number of times in his treatise. Having observed that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" ("Preface", p.240), he goes on to describe the nature of a poet: he is one who has "an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet . . . do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves . . ." ("Preface", p.250). Wordsworth then tells us that the poet "describes and imitates passions" ("Preface", p.250), and that the object of poetry is "truth, not individual and local, but general,

---

[11] Ibid., I, 240.

[12] Loc. cit.

and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion . . ." ("Preface", p.251).

There are some eloquent passages in Coleridge which reveal the place of passion in poetry. During August-September of 1800 he declares that "A child scolding a flower in the words in which he had himself been scolded & whipt, is <u>poetry</u> / past passion with pleasure-" (CN 786). Later he remarks on ". . . poesy, whose essence is passionate order" (CN 3092), and on "Imagination (which is Passion eagle-eyed) . . ." (CN 2112).

For Wordsworth, however, the feeling that is developed within poetry, and through which it is created, is of a particular kind, or, more accurately, at a particular stage. Poetry, Wordsworth writes, "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" ("Preface", p.260). Wordsworth is describing the creative act: "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind" ("Preface", p.260). This is the phrase in its context, for, in fixing

our attention on the word "tranquillity," we sometimes gather a false impression of Wordsworth's theory. The emotion is recollected in tranquillity only until that serene mood is replaced by a new emotion. Wordsworth is not contradicting the remark that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. The expression we have been discussing is recalled in Coleridge's Notebooks during August-September 1800 in a tantalizing fashion, tantalizing because some words are illegible at this point. The entry reads in part, "[. . . . . .], so poetry [. . . .] recalling of passion in tranquillity . . ." (CN 787). Professor Coburn's note, drawing our attention to a suggestion that the idiom may have come to Wordsworth from Schiller by way of Coleridge, is significant.

Wordsworth also stresses the necessity of thought in art. Although "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . , Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply" ("Preface", p.240). Coleridge, like almost all other poets, holds a similar view and in 1799 he writes, "metaphysical Poetry gives me so much delight.-" (CN 383).

However, Wordsworth goes further than just admiring depth of thought in literature. The lyrics he has written are in imitation of the style of the peasant, whose mode of expression "is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets . . ." ("Preface", p.239). Coleridge's mature views on the aptitude of a peasant for philosophy differ from those of Wordsworth, but there is one entry in the Notebooks which has a bearing on the theory of language Wordsworth expounds here. In 1800, the year the first version of this "Preface" was written, Coleridge puts down the following: "Duty of a Poet to write like a Gentleman. Ad. Smith Europ. Mag Aug. 1791. 135" (CN 775). Professor Coburn's explanation reads:

> The reference is to the European Magazine (August 1791) 135, to an article signed "A, Glasgow", on the literary conversation and opinions of Adam Smith. "A" says: "I pled as well as I could for Allen Ramsay, because I regarded him as the single unaffected Poet whom we have had since Buchanan - Proximus huic longo sed proximus intervallo.
>
> "He answered, 'It is the duty of a poet to write like a gentleman. I dislike that homely style which some think fit to call the language of nature

> and simplicity, and so forth. In Percy's Reliques too, a few tolerable pieces are buried under a heap of rubbish'. . . ."
>
> It is easy to see why Wordsworth and Coleridge were antagonistic to Adam Smith the literary critic . . . (CN 775n).

In later years, in Biographia Literaria, Coleridge attacks Wordsworth's notion that the peasant's language is more philosophical. Coleridge states that the countryman's speech, when made consistent with the rules of grammar, will not differ from that of other men, except that the notions he conveys will be fewer and concerned with facts, while an educated man will seek to express ideas, and discover the connection of things from which general laws are deducible.[13] When one has studied Wordsworth's "Preface" and Chapter XVII of Biographia Literaria, one cannot but conclude that Coleridge is right in rejecting Wordsworth's theory of the superiority of a rustic's language.

While passion and thought are vital constituents of a work of art the poet's purpose is to give immediate pleasure, Wordsworth states ("Preface", p.252). Likewise the emotion that the poet is contemplating "of whatever

---

[13] Biographia Literaria, ed. John Shawcross (London, 1907), II, 38-39.

kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment" ("Preface", p.260). In Biographia Literaria and the lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge stresses many times that the object of poetry is pleasure.[14] That the purpose of poetry is to delight, is not clearly enunciated in the early notebooks, however. What Coleridge does do there is link poetry and virtue, and pleasure and virtue. He notes that genius can not flourish without virtue (CN 3136) and, in recording part of Ben Jonson's Dedication to Volpone, recognizes "the impossibility of any man's being the good Poet without first being a good man" (CN 1057). He makes the connection between virtue and pleasure when he remarks that "all Virtue subsists in and by Pleasure" (CN 2210). Coleridge does not, however, directly connect poetry and pleasure at this stage. For Wordsworth the object of poetry is twofold, to express truth and to give pleasure. Coleridge's view, as delineated in the Biographia, is different. "A poem," he pronounces, "is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by

---

[14]e.g. Biographia Literaria, II, 10, and Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor (London, 1960), II, 41.

proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth . . .",[15] but I have not found this theory set down in the first two volumes of the Notebooks.

In defending the use of metre in poetry, Wordsworth asserts that one of the chief causes of the pleasure received from metrical language is the delight the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude ("Preface", p.259). He goes on to say that this principle is "the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin; it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived depend our taste and our moral feelings" ("Preface", p.259). This concept is a fundamental one in Coleridge's theory of life and of art. The appreciation of similitude in dissimilitude and vice versa is connected with Coleridge's concept of the reconciliation of opposites, or, as he phrases it, "Extremes Meet," and this, in its turn, is linked with the notion of balance and with a subject of great importance

---

[15] Biographia Literaria, II, 10.

to Coleridge, organic unity. There are numerous instances of a perception of likeness in difference in the Notebooks, but I can mention here only a few. In the autumn of 1802, Coleridge writes of, "The stedfast rainbow in the fast-moving, hurrying hail-mist! What a congregation of Images & Feelings, of fantastic Permanence amidst the rapid Change of Tempest - quietness the Daughter of Storm.-" (CN 1246). In December 1803, he resolves to leave the last nine pages of his Pocket book to a collection of "Extremes Meet". Among those he writes down are "Sameness in a Waterfall, from infinite Change," and "Dark with excess of Light" (CN 1725). Wordsworth says of this principle that "it is the life of our ordinary conversation," and we find Coleridge in 1796 commenting, "Good Temper & habitual Ease are the first ingredients of ~~conversa~~ private Society - but Wit, Knowledge, or Originality must break their even surface into some inequality of Feeling, or conversation is like a journey on an endless flat-." (CN 85). It is dissimilarity that Coleridge is searching for here. As we shall see in the next chapter, the concept of the reconciliation of opposites, tied up as it is with the theory of organic unity, is of great significance in Coleridge's thought. It is interesting that Wordsworth should have touched upon it in his "Preface".

Having pointed out some of the similarities between Wordsworth's "Preface" and Coleridge's notes, I shall now mention two important ideas expressed by Wordsworth which I have not found referred to in any significant way in the Notebooks, but which Coleridge disagrees with in later years. The first topic we have already touched upon, namely Wordsworth's admiration of the rustic. The second is Wordsworth's contention that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and verse.

Wordsworth writes that the principal object proposed in the Lyrical Ballads "was to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men . . ." ("Preface", p.238). "The language, too, of these men," he goes on to say, "is adopted . . . because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived. . . . Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophic language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets . . ." ("Preface", p.239). We do find one section among Coleridge's notes which is similar to Wordsworth's

belief that the peasant is influenced by a great and good nature, and derives much benefit from his close relationship to nature. In August 1803, while on a walking tour in Scotland, Coleridge records, "Preaching four times a year at the great Bull Stone, by the desire of the Inhabitants / this is one among the many proofs that natural Objects do impress the minds of the Inhabitants who are familiarised to them, tho' they do not use epithets of Delight or Admiration/- . . ." (CN 1475). In the Biographia, however, Coleridge challenges Wordsworth's assumptions by questioning the desirability of rustic life in itself[16] and by pointing out that in Wordsworth's most interesting, dramatic poems, the persons introduced are not taken from low life, and their sentiments and language arise from causes not necessarily connected with their occupation and abode.[17] When Coleridge turns to the superiority of the peasant's idiom he writes: "The best part of human language, properly so called, 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

---

[16]Biographia Literaria, II, 32.

[17]Ibid., II, 31.

consciousness of an uneducated man. . . ."[18]

In Chapter XVIII of the Biographia, Coleridge examines Wordsworth's contention that there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. I have not found this question alluded to in the Notebooks, but Coleridge asserts in the Biographia that there is an essential difference. Metre, Coleridge argues, is worthless by itself, "it is simply a stimulant of the attention, and therefore excites the question: Why is the attention to be thus stimulated? Now the question can not be answered by the pleasure of the metre itself; for this we have shown to be conditional and dependant on the appropriateness of the thoughts and expressions to which the metrical form is superadded. Neither can I conceive any other answer that can be given, short of this: I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of prose."[19] In this criticism of Wordsworth we would, I think, again agree with Coleridge. Wordsworth has gone too far. As T. M. Raysor has put it, "in the impetus of his legitimate attack upon the conventionalized style (not

---

[18] Ibid., II, 39-40.

[19] Ibid., II, 53.

merely the words) of eighteenth century poetry, Wordsworth overshot his mark and betrayed himself into an attack upon <u>any</u> style which differentiates poetry from prose. . . ."[20]

Although I have shown a number of similarities in the thought of Wordsworth and Coleridge at this early stage in their careers, I am not trying to prove influence on one poet by the other. It is quite possible that through their close relationship they did discuss some of the subjects referred to in Wordsworth's manifesto, but it is equally possible that their interest in these topics was aroused independently of one another, for, as I mentioned earlier, Wordsworth and Coleridge were not the first to have written about these ideas. R. D. Havens has said that "the imagination was not a discovery of the romanticists. The Greeks and Romans discussed it, as did medieval and Renaissance critics, and between 1660 and 1800 it became an important topic with literary theorists."[21] Thus we come across Addison writing that the pleasures of the imagination are as great and transporting as those of

---

[20]Thomas Middleton Raysor, "Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth," <u>PMLA</u>, LIV (1939), 501.

[21]Raymond Dexter Havens, <u>The Mind of a Poet</u> (Baltimore, 1941), I, 204.

the understanding.[22]

Likewise, the early nineteenth century writers did not invent passion in poetry, nor were they the first to admire the country life. If we look at eighteenth century writers alone, we will find that they are concerned with many of the same topics as interested Wordsworth and Coleridge. The Earl of Shaftesbury defines and praises simplicity of style.[23] Addison declares that "we always find the poet in love with a country life,"[24] and Thomas Tickell writes on pastoral poetry.[25]

Pope admires poetic diction that is lively and forceful and that is justified by the intensity of the poet's feelings. In the "Preface" to the Iliad he writes:

> If we descend . . . to the expression, we see the bright imagination of Homer shining out in the most enlightened forms of it. We acknowledge him the

---

[22]Joseph Addison, "The Pleasures of the Imagination, I," Spectator, no. 411, in Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, ed. Scott Elledge (New York, 1961), I, 43.

[23]Antony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, Advice to an Author, Part II, Section II in Elledge, I, 195.

[24]"The Pleasures of the Imagination, IV," Spectator, no. 414, in Elledge, I, 51.

[25]Elledge, I, 530-534.

> father of poetical diction, the first who taught that "language of the gods" to men. His expression is like the colouring of some great masters, which discovers itself to be laid on boldly and executed with rapidity. It is indeed the strongest and the most glowing imaginable, and touched with the greatest spirit. Aristotle had reason to say he was the only poet who had found out "living words"; there are in him more daring figures and metaphors than in any good author whatever. An arrow is "impatient" to be on the wing, a weapon "thirsts" to drink the blood of an enemy, and the like. Yet his expression is never too big for the sense, but justly great in proportion to it. It is the sentiment that swells and fills out the diction, which rises with it, and forms itself about it.[26]

Here we hardly see Pope admiring "the cold-blooded use for artifice or connection of language justifiable only by enthusiasm & passion" (CN 2826).

We find passion connected with poetry in Addison's writings: "There is yet another circumstance which recommends a description more than all the rest, and

---

[26]Alexander Pope, "Preface to the Translation of the Iliad," in Elledge, I, 263-4.

that is if it represents to us such objects as are apt to raise a secret ferment in the mind of the reader and to work with violence upon his passions."[27] Dennis is even more explicit: "Poetry, then, is an art by which a poet excites passion (and for that very cause entertains sense) in order to satisfy and improve, to delight and reform, the mind, and so to make mankind happier and better; from which it appears that poetry has two ends, a subordinate, and a final one; the subordinate one is pleasure, and the final one is instruction."[28] Pleasure, of course, is the object of poetry for both Coleridge and Wordsworth.

There is also an interesting passage in Dennis which recalls Wordsworth's theory that the emotion which inspires the poet is recollected. Dennis writes:

> So thunder mentioned in common conversation gives an idea of a black cloud and a great noise, which makes no great impression upon us. But the idea of it occuring in meditation sets before us the most forcible, most resistless, and consequently the most dreadful phenomenon in nature; so that the idea must move a great deal of terror in us, and it is this sort of terror that I call enthusiasm. And it is

---

[27]"The Pleasures of the Imagination, VIII," Spectator, no. 418, in Elledge, I, 66.

[28]John Dennis, The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, in Elledge, I, 103.

> this sort of terror, or admiration, or horror, and so of the rest, which expressed in poetry make that spirit, that passion, and that fire which so wonderfully please.[29]

Even Coleridge's favourite concept of unity in multeity is to be found in the eighteenth century. Francis Hutcheson, writing in An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, says that "the figures which excite in us the ideas of beauty seem to be those in which there is uniformity amidst variety."[30]

To have shown that there are similarities between Wordsworth's "Preface" and Coleridge's Notebooks is of value, I think, for, although many of the ideas that Wordsworth discusses in his "Preface" were current in the eighteenth century, these ideas found their most concentrated and influential expression in the Wordsworth-Coleridge controversies.

Wordsworth's aim in his manifesto was to reform the language of poetry, his "professed purpose was to bring poetry back from her wanderings in Fancy's maze, to 'the common growth of mother-earth.'"[31] The reformation

---

[29]The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, in Elledge, I, 106.

[30]Francis Hutcheson, "Of Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design," An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, in Elledge, I, 357.

[31]Havens, The Mind of a Poet, I, 248.

of poetic diction, however, can not be said to occupy as prominent a place in Coleridge's thought as it does in Wordsworth's. While we have seen that Coleridge does rebel in the Notebooks against some eighteenth century poetic conventions, this is only one of many subjects in which he is interested. In a letter of 1800 to a friend, Coleridge sketches his purpose in his literary criticism: "'I abandon Poetry altogether - I leave the higher & deeper Kind to Wordsworth, the delightful, popular and simply dignified to Southey; & reserve for myself the honorable attempt to make others feel and understand their writings, as they deserve to be felt and understood.'"[32] Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism and at least part of the Biographia arise from this attempt at expounding the works of other poets. But Coleridge's explanations are based on his philosophy of poetry. His interest in theory, and his difference in this respect from Wordsworth, who "felt a certain impatience with 'critic rules' and 'barren intermeddling subtleties' that perplex the mind",[33] is seen in the Biographia where Coleridge compares his object and that of Wordsworth in discussing fancy and imagination:

---

[32]From an unpublished manuscript, quoted by Earl Leslie Griggs, "Wordsworth Through Coleridge's Eyes," in Wordsworth Centenary Studies, ed. Gilbert T. Dunklin (London, 1963), p.59.

[33]Clarence D. Thorpe, "The Imagination: Coleridge versus Wordsworth," Philological Quarterly, XVIII (1939), p.16.

> . . . it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.[34]

In the Notebooks there is a lot of material on poetic theory, while, interestingly enough, there is little practical criticism of Shakespeare or other poets. It is to some of the more important aspects of Coleridge's poetic theory that we will now turn.

---

[34] Biographia Literaria, I, 64.

CHAPTER II

COLERIDGE ON UNITY IN ART.

Coleridge's concept of unity pervades much of his writing. He discusses the theory, in various forms, in the fields of aesthetics, philosophy, biology and religion. Perhaps the idea is worked out most fully in his Hints towards the Formation of a more Comprehensive Theory of Life, a biological treatise written late in his career, but there are many passages in the Notebooks, as well as in Biographia Literaria, which illustrate the interest that the notion of unity, in its many aspects, has for him. For example, in November 1799 he sets down in his notebook: "If I begin a poem of Spinoza, thus it should begin/ I would make a pilgrimage to the burning sands of Arabia, or &c &c to find the Man who could explain to me there can be oneness, there being infinite Perceptions- yet there must be a oneness, not an intense Union but an Absolute Unity, for &c &c " (CN 556). As can be gathered from this quotation, Coleridge finds unity, or oneness, not only absorbing but somewhat perplexing. In a later elaboration of CN 556, he goes on to exclaim: "Eternal universal mystery! It seems as if it were impossible; yet it is- & it is every where! It is indeed a contradiction in Terms: and only in Terms! -It is the co presence of Feeling & Life, limitless by their very

essence, with Form, by its very essence limited -determinate -definite.-" (CN 1561). Yet it is not only in the realm of philosophical speculation but in practical attempts to write poetry that the problem of synthesis arises. In December 1804, Coleridge recalls such an effort: "O said I as I looked on the blue, yellow, green, & purple green Sea, with all its hollows & swells, & cut-glass surfaces -O what an Ocean of lovely forms!-and I was vexed, teazed, that the sentence sounded like a play of Words. But it was not, the mind within me was struggling to express the marvellous distinctness & unconfounded personality of each of the million millions of forms, & yet their undivided Unity in which they subsisted" (CN 2344). As Max Schulz has remarked, "To see that life is multiple and yet one, however, was not enough for Coleridge; how to give external design to this impression so that others could perceive it was an artistic problem with which he struggled endlessly."[1]

An understanding of Coleridge's concept of coalescence in life and art is central to a comprehension

---

[1]Max F. Schulz, The Poetic Voices of Coleridge (Detroit, 1963), p.48.

of his aesthetic theory. However, as I am, in this thesis, concerned chiefly with Coleridge's comments on poetry, I shall sketch in only enough of his general view of unity to make his comments on the integrity of a work of art clear.

The most fundamental aspect of this idea is that, for Coleridge, a whole is made up of parts. There is a significant entry in the Notebooks in which he identifies wholeness with "plurality in unity" (CN 2414). When Coleridge speaks of oneness, he is thinking of a single individual or object, it is true, but one that is made up of at least two ingredients. Coleridge expresses this in his Theory of Life: "That a thing is, is owing to the coinherence therein of any two powers."[2] Thus an animal, or a poem, is a unit in itself, but contains elements within that entirety which yet are commensurate to the aggregate. A similar idea is expounded in his theory of poetry: a poem proposes "to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part."[3]

In his Theory of Life, Coleridge tells us that an explanation of life "would consist in the reduction of

---

[2]S. T. Coleridge, Hints towards the Formulation of a more Comprehensive Theory of Life in The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. [W. G. T.] Shedd (New York, 1856), I, 402.

[3]Biographia Literaria, ed. John Shawcross (London, 1907), II, 10.

the idea of Life to its simplest and most comprehensive form or mode of action; that is, to some characteristic instinct or tendency, evident in all its manifestations, and involved in the idea itself."[4] He goes on to state that "the most comprehensive formula to which life is reducible, would be that of the internal copula of bodies, or . . . the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many."[5] He defines life, then, "as the principle of individuation, or the power which unites a given all into a whole that is presupposed by all its parts. The link that combines the two, and acts throughout both, will, of course, be defined by the tendency to individuation."[6] The word "individuality" in Coleridge's writing should be thought of in connection with words such as "wholeness", and "unity", or its implications may be mistaken. As Gordon McKenzie has pointed out, this term frequently means that which is unique or peculiar to one person, but this is not so for Coleridge, "who looks upon individuality as something strong in itself, to be sure, but more particularily as a force which reaches out and makes new connections and

---

[4] Theory of Life in Works, I, 383.

[5] Works, I, 386.

[6] Works, I, 387.

relations. The greatest individuality is that which has the greatest degree of organization, the largest quantity of relations."[7]

In Coleridge's thought, then, we have on the one hand fragments, which he frequently sees as opposite to one another, and on the other hand we have a tendency in nature for making "a given all into a whole."[8] As Coleridge himself has expressed it, ". . . every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifestation; and all opposition is a tendency to reunion."[9] Miss Snyder has indicated the dual nature of this belief: "He [Coleridge] seems to find positive delight in finding oppositions to reconcile. He never tires of calling attention to the fact that extremes meet, but he is very evidently looking to find in nature as many pairs of extremes as possible. . . . It is this positing of opposites fully as much as their

---

[7] Organic Unity in Coleridge (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1939), p.44.

[8] Works, I, 387.

[9] Works, II, 91, quoted by John H. Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher (London, 1930), p.54, n.2.

reconciliation that is significant."[10]

That Coleridge is concerned with reconciliation is evident in much of his work. Professor Muirhead has written on Coleridge's discussion of logic and has suggested that "if Coleridge had been asked what he considered the most fatal errors of the old logic and the point at which he would begin its reformation, he would have said that it was the dogmatic assumption of the principle of dichotomy . . . without any attempt at mediation."[11] Coleridge devoted a few pages in one of his pocket books to a collection of "Extremes Meet". There he quotes Milton's "The parching Air

Burns frore, and Cold performs the Effect of Fire" (CN 1725). Other examples he gives are "Dark with excess of Light" (CN 1725) and "Partridges towering after a being shot is a certain Proof that they are mortaly [sic] wounded -. . ." (CN 564). Miss Coburn's note to the last mentioned entry reads, "Coleridge's interest here was, perhaps, in yet another example of life-and-death opposites meeting in one spectacular moment." At a later date, in April 1804, he applies this principle to his own

---

[10]Alice D. Snyder, The Critical Principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites as Employed by Coleridge (Ann Arbor, 1918), pp.19-20.

[11]Muirhead, p.83.

emotions. He is addressing Sara Hutchison: ". . . my Heart wishes & yearns, & stirs & bustles about you/ & then stagnates upon you, the wishless from excess of wishing!" (CN 2046).

The manner by which the contraries are brought together in Coleridge's philosophy has been much discussed by critics. Professor Muirhead, when writing of Coleridge on logic, has described it as follows: "Instead of starting with opposing concepts in one or other of which, taken separately, we are to find the truth, we have to 'seek first for the Unity as the only source of Reality, and then for the two opposite yet correspondent forms by which it manifests itself. For it is an axiom of universal application that manifestatio non datur nisi per alterum. Instead therefore of affirmation and contradiction, the tools of dichotomic logic, we have the three terms Identity, Thesis and Antithesis.'"[12] Another critic has seen Coleridge's tenet as a variation of the system of thesis, antithesis and synthesis of Fichte and Schelling.[13] Here the thesis and antithesis combine to form a synthesis

---

[12]Muirhead, p.86.

[13]McKenzie, p.32.

which is yet more than the mere fusion of the converses.

Under Coleridge's gaze, "the world becomes the expression, half metaphysical, half concrete, of unity and variety,"[14] and life, defined absolutely, is the principle of "unity in multeity."[15] Coleridge's conception of the artistic process is closely allied with the idea of an integration of multiplicity in uniformity. In 1805, he writes of poetry: ". . . two sources kinds of pleasure are procured, in the two master-movements & impulses of man, the gratification of the Love of Variety with the grat. of the Love of Uniformity . . ." (CN 2516). Four years earlier he had noted: "Pomponatius de Immort. Animae: -says of abstract Ideas -universale in particulari speculatur -which is the philosophy of Poetry" (CN 943). The methods and aims of philosophy are not as diverse as they might seem, and the world of unity and variety that Coleridge sees through his biological and philosophic studies is also reflected in the realm of poetry. As he points out in his Preliminary Treatise on Method, "Plato was a poetic philosopher as Shakespeare was a philosophic poet."[16]

---

[14]Snyder, p.21.

[15]Theory of Life, in Works, I, 387.

[16]Quoted by Muirhead, p.258.

That Coleridge stresses the coherence of poetry is not surprising. He is remembering "the old conflicts and contradictions that had prevailed in criticism, the conflict between ideal and realistic imitation; the unreconciled opposites of reason versus imagination and emotion, of rational pleasure versus emotional effort, of reasoned judgement versus taste."[17] Just as he strives to escape the old dichotomies in logic, he attempts to merge these distinctions in aesthetics. Shakespeare is the greatest of poets, for Coleridge, and we can therefore expect him to see in the Elizabethan those qualities which he so much admires. Parts of a passage in Greek, written in Coleridge's memorandum book in 1801, concern Shakespeare. Translated, they read "the myriad-minded" and "complex and multiform in the variously versatile wisdom" (CN 1070n). As Miss Coburn has observed, "The ideas combined are of comprehensiveness and multitudinousness, almost Coleridge's favourite 'unity in multeity'" (CN 1070n). Not only does Shakespeare present a comprehensive picture of life, but, as Coleridge is never tired of telling us, his judgement is equal to his genius. Coleridge is here

---

[17]Clarence D. Thorpe, "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," Journal of the History of Ideas, V (1944), 391.

combating a popular notion that Shakespeare is a great dramatist by instinct, "a delightful monster, -wild, indeed, without taste or judgement, but like the inspired idiots so much venerated in the East, uttering, amid the strangest follies, the sublimest truths."[18] Coleridge recognizes the dangers of such dualism as is present in much eighteenth century criticism. He comments on it in his notebook in 1802: "Great Injury that has resulted from the supposed Incompatibility of one talent with another/ Judgement with Imagination, & Taste -Good sense with strong feeling &c -an if it be false, as assuredly it is, the opinion has deprived us of a test which every man might apply -Locke's opinions of Blackmore, Hume of Milton & Shakespeare/&c" (CN 1255).

For Coleridge the poet's function is to integrate the many diverse elements in nature into a whole. "Idly talk they who speak of Poets as mere Indulgers of Fancy, Imagination, Superstition, &c," he declares in December 1804. "They are the Bridlers by Delight, the Purifiers, they that combine them with reason & order, the true Protoplasts, Gods of Love who tame the Chaos" (CN 2355). The poem, the statue, the symphony, are the means by which

---

[18] S. T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1960), I, 194.

the artist achieves this integrality. But art is more than this. "Now Art," writes Coleridge, "used collectively for painting, sculpture, architecture and music, is the mediatress between and reconciler of nature and man."[19] It is only through art that man can express the ideal. "How does man, a mere specimen of natura naturata, become aware of and make evident the process of natura naturans, the realm of essence? It is done, said Schelling, through the medium of art -art is the active bond between the soul and nature, between essence and existence."[20] Schelling's Transcendental Idealism had considerable effect on Coleridge and he seems to have adopted, at least in part, the other's belief that "the consummation of spirit, its perfect development and complete expression, is found only in Art. For in Art the conscious and the unconscious activity are reunited. In Art the unconscious activity works in man "'objectively'" "'without his consent'" as though he were "'under the influence of a force which . . . constrains him to express or represent things which he does not fully penetrate and of which the meaning is

---

[19]S. T. Coleridge, "On Poesy or Art," in Biographia Literaria, edited with his Aesthetical Essays by John Shawcross (London, 1907), I, 253.

[20]Herbert Read, The True Voice of Feeling (New York, 1953), p.16.

infinite.'[21] Yet they cannot be expressed without conscious activity, study, reflection, knowledge."[22] Writing in December 1804, Coleridge maintains that "Poetry in its Grundkraft no less than the Vervollkommung'sgabe [Vervollkommungsgabe] of man/ the seraphic instinct" (CN 2314).[23] As Miss Coburn has explained, this entry is "a form of the idea Coleridge frequently expressed, of art as the reconciler of man and nature, of the particular and the universal, the temporary and the permanent . . ." (CN 2314n). A few months earlier he is describing the work of the inspired as atonement: ". . . Each man will universalize his notions, & yet each is variously finite. To reconcile therefore is truly the work of the Inspired! This is the true Atonement-/i.e. to reconcile the struggles of the infinitely Finite with the Permanent" (CN 2208).

For Coleridge there is yet another aspect of poetry in which unity is to be found: in the form that the

---

[21]Schelling, System des transzendentalen Idealismus in Schellings Sämmtliche Werke (Stuttgart, 1858), quoted by A. E. Powell (Mrs. E. R. Dodds), The Romantic Theory of Poetry (London, 1926), p.95.

[22]Powell, p.95.

[23]Grundkraft: primary force. Vervollkommung'sgabe: [Vervollkommungsgabe]: the gift for achieving perfection (CN 2314n).

work of art takes. The heart of Coleridge's thoughts on this topic is that a composition has life if it is evolved from within the poet's mind. It is purely mechanical if the artist's ideas are placed in a ready made mold. A poem that is created ab intra, as opposed to ab extra, has organic unity. This particular belief has been widely discussed by critics, and has influenced a number of twentieth century writers.[24] The notion is a complex one, and writers have differed in their definitions of it. Because all critics do not give similar interpretations of the term organic unity, and because it has been suggested that there are discrepancies between the theory as expounded by Coleridge and as employed by recent organicists,[25] I shall try to avoid the use of these two words in combination as much as possible. They will, of course, have to appear when I quote from a writer who has used the expression.

Professor Fogle has, I think, presented the fundamental aspects of Coleridge's principle clearly.[26] As a starting point, he quotes Coleridge's statement that

---

[24]See R. S. Crane, "Cleanth Brooks: or the Bankruptcy of Critical Monism," Modern Philology, XLV (1948), 226-245.

[25]Crane, passim.

[26]Richard Harter Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), pp.9-10.

"the organic form . . . is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fulness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such [as] is the life, such [is] the form."[27] The doctrine also includes, firstly "the mysterious process of growth, in which the parts develop simultaneously from a seed in which the matured organism is already contained."[28] Secondly, the inseparability of form and content. "Mechanical unity is predetermined and superimposed from without. . . . In organic unity the formal principle lies within, and the outlines of the formed object are the outer limits of its creative impulse."[29] Thirdly, the inseparability of the part from the whole, and fourthly "the copresence of conscious and unconscious, discursive and immediate, willed and spontaneous."[30]

There are a number of significant entries in the Notebooks which illustrate what Coleridge means by "the growing principle" (CN 1433) in a work of art. The most detailed, though prompted by Coleridge's disagreement with a comment by Samuel Horsley on generation "by the plastic powers of nature" (CN 2444n), expresses very fully his

---

[27] Shakespearean Criticism, I, 198, quoted by Fogle, p.9.

[28] Fogle, p.9.

[29] Loc. cit.

[30] Fogle, p.10.

views on the evolutive method of art, as well as of nature. It has been suggested that the passage should be compared with Coleridge's essay "On Poesy or Art" "where the creative process of the artist is described in terms similar to those used for the life-force here" (CN 2444n). It should be noted, however, that in the entry itself Coleridge refers to art:

> "The inducement of a Form on a pre-existing material" -is this a true definition of Generation? Wherein then would Generation differ from Fabrication, or a child from a statue or picture? It is surely the inducement of a Form on a pre-existing materials in consequence of the transmission of a Life, according to the kind of the living Transmitter, this principle of Life so transmitted being both the principalle of the form induced and induction of the Form, and of the adduction of the pre-existing materials-. The difference therefore between Fabrication and Generation becomes clearly indicable/the Form of the latter is ab intra, evolved, the other ab extra, impressed -the latter is representative always of something not else itself, and the more disparate that something is, the more admirable is the Form, (as in Painting it is more admirable than in solid Wax/ ⟨supposing the

> forms to be ⟩ forms of Flesh -&c.) -but the former is representative of its own cause within itself, i.e. its causative self -and resembles, not represents . . . (CN 2444).

A December 1799 reference to the "famous eloquence" (CN 609n) of James Mackintosh is interesting for it further illustrates Coleridge's belief that art, whether it be poetry or prose, should unfold naturally, like a flower. Anything that is interjected from outside destroys the impression of wholeness: "Mackintosh intertrudes, not introduces his beauties. Nothing grows out of his main argument but much is shoved between -each digression occasions a move backward to find the road again -like a sick man he recoils after every affection. The Serpent by which the ancients emblem'd the Inventive faculty appears to me, in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of Genius. He varies his course yet still glides onwards -all lines of motion are his -all beautiful, & all propulsive- . . . yet still he proceeds & is proceeding.-"(CN 609).

If we think of Professor Fogle's list of some of the more important elements in Coleridge's theory of an evolving work of art, we see that three important aspects of this concept are to be found in the extracts I have

quoted from the Notebooks; namely, the principle of growth itself, the idea that art introduces something from outside that which it is copying and that "the more disparate that something is, the more admirable is the Form" (CN 2444), and that the content of a work of art and the form it takes are proportionate. Coleridge does touch upon the two other facets Professor Fogle has enumerated. In CN 2599 he admires the relationship between the parts and the whole. He is comparing, in this entry, contemporary verse with 15th and 16th century Italian poetry. He hopes, he says, to imitate the style of the Italians, "the studied position of these words, so as not only to be melodious, but that the melody of each should refer to, assist, & be assisted by, all the foregoing & following words of the same period, or Stanza. . . ." Finally, we come to the last point Professor Fogle has listed, the complexity of the creative act, with the presence of active and passive powers. Coleridge recognizes the necessity for an active as well as a passive side to poetic invention when he writes in CN 2086: ". . . I have many thoughts, many images; large Stores of the unwrought materials; scarcely a day passes but something new in fact or in illustration, eeeur rises up in me, like Herbs and Flowers in a Garden in early Spring; but the combining Power, the power to do, the manly

effective Will, that is dead or slumbers most diseasedly. . . ."

Despite the fact that Coleridge is trying to escape some of the dichotomies inherent in earlier criticism, such as the distinction between form and content, certain antitheses do arise from the theory. As James Benziger has put it, ". . . now the old commonsense distinctions between poet and poem, mind and matter, idea and expression, intention and execution, distinctions which German philosophy prided itself upon having repressed - all these reappeared in the new and unbridgeable abyss between the "genial" artist and the ordinary artist, between organic art and mechanical art, and - of course - between imagination and fancy."[31] The contrasts are in fact part of the philosophy, for although Coleridge stresses imitation rather than copying, imagination above fancy, discovery above invention, the second part of the dichotomy creeps in. There are many instances in the Notebooks where Coleridge indicates discrepancies between two concepts which had previously been considered similar.

One of the earliest forms of the distinction

31"Organic Unity: Leibnitz to Coleridge," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 45.

between fancy and imagination in Coleridge's writings is to be found in his notes of May-June 1804, where he contrasts the imagination of Wordsworth with the fancy of Butler: "In the men of continuous and discontinuous minds explain & demonstrate the vast difference between the disjunction conjunctive of the sudden Images seized on from external Contingents by Passion & Imagination (which is Passion eagle-eyed)- The Breeze I see, is in the Tree- It comes to cool my Babe and me- which is the property & prerogative of continuous minds of the highest order, & the conjunction disjunctive of wit-

And like a lobster boil'd the Morn
From black to red began to turn,

which is the excellence of men of discontinuous minds- . . ." (CN 2112).

Miss Coburn has noted (CN 669n) that genius as opposed to talent is for Coleridge, in his other works, a converse practically equivalent to imagination versus fancy. In CN 669 Coleridge puts down, "Like Pope & Dryden till 15, well! -if from thence to 25 or thirty -no hopes of Genius- but may have Talents & make an excellent Lawyer." Other examples are to be found in CN 2557 and CN 2879.

The emphasis Coleridge places on imitation in

contrast to copying is considerable. Imitation is, of course, central to his idea of unity in a poem. The work of art that has grown from within "is representative always of something not itself . . ." (CN 2444). The artist's function is to unify that element which he has introduced with that which he is depicting. In May 1799 Coleridge quotes a German passage which translated reads, "Everyone looks with pleasure on this portrait. Not I, because for me it is only a portrait" (CN 432n, 17). Two other important entries bearing on this topic come late in 1804. In the earlier of the two Coleridge makes a note "To defend the Opera—all the objections against equally applicable to Tragedy & Comedy without music, & all proceed on the false principle, that Theatrical representations are Copies of nature whereas they are imitations." (CN 2211). In the later one Coleridge gives a clear and imaginative account of the nature of imitation:

> Hard to express that sense of the analogy or likeness of a Thing which enables a Symbol to represent it, so that we think of the Thing itself - & yet knowing that the Thing is not present to us.- Surely, on this universal fact of words & images depends by more or less mediations the imitation instead of copy which is illustrated in very nature

> shakespearianized/ -that Proteus Essence that could assume the very form, but yet known & felt not to be the Thing by that difference of the Substance which made every atom of the Form another thing/ -that likeness not identity - an exact web, every line of direction miraculously the same, but the one worsted, the other silk

(CN 2274).

Another difference that Coleridge makes us aware of is that between discovery and invention. "From Into a discoverer I have sunk from an inventor," he writes dejectedly (CN 950). Miss Coburn has suggested (CN 387n) that the above remark is perhaps an allusion to a passage in Klopstock which translates: "He who possesses an unwearying, lucid mind, sharp eyes / And much good fortune,/ Discovers;/ But he who at midnight, roused by Genius,/ Plumbs the depth of original power, measure and beauty,/ He alone invents." Klopstock's distinction, Professor Coburn explains (CN 387n), "is roughly this: A discoverer is one who perceives in existing things something that no one else has seen before; he requires, above all, eyes, and the ardour and perseverance to go on looking. But an inventor is one who organizes what already exists in an entirely new way, and so brings into

being something new which is to be judged by the purpose, goal and intention it manifests." The contrast Klopstock draws between discovery and invention should be compared, although there are differences, to Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination: "Fancy is the arbitrary bringing together of things that lie remote, and forming them into a unity. The materials lie already formed for the mind, and the fancy acts only by a sort of juxtaposition. In imagination, on the contrary, the mind from the excitement of some slight impression generates and produces a form of its own."[32] For Coleridge, then, to feel that he had sunk from an inventor into a discoverer, was a serious indictment of his own poetic powers.

At this point it should be mentioned that Coleridge's concepts of unity and of the growing principle in art are in no way strikingly original. The background of these ideas has been explored by many critics and it is not my purpose here to trace the influences on Coleridge with reference to these topics. However, as I wish to avoid the impression that Coleridge was alone in his views, a few major authors who held

---

[32] Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T. M. Rayser (London, 1936), p.396.

similar beliefs will be briefly cited.

Professor Baker has gone into the origins of Coleridge's thoughts on unity in some detail. He has suggested that the true origin of the principle of the reconciliation of opposites in Coleridge's critical thinking is Neo-Platonic, rather than derived primarily from Fichte and Schelling. He remarks that Coleridge knew that this doctrine went back as far as Heraclitus. Professor Baker also points out that the idea of the One and the Many is central to Plotinus' thought.[33] Aristotle is another possible source of influence. Professor Baker has quoted Aristotle on unity: "'The truth is that, just as in the other imitative arts one imitation is always of one thing, so in poetry the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin or dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole.'"[34]

---

[33]James Volant Baker, The Sacred River (Baton Rouge, 1957), p.130.

[34]Aristotle on the Art of Poetry in The Works of Aristotle, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1946), XI, 1451a, quoted by Baker, p.139.

R. L. Brett has emphasized the importance that the Cambridge Platonists, such as Cudworth, may have had for Coleridge's thought. Cudworth and his fellows challenge the mechanistic philosophy of Hobbes, as Coleridge does those of Locke and Hartley. The Cambridge Platonists adumbrate a doctrine of an organic principle which is held to animate nature.[35] It is a short step to Coleridge's view that the organic principle is to be found in art as well as in nature.

Yet another critic has examined English writers closer to Coleridge's own time. He has declared that "In his [Coleridge's] grand central principle of truth to human nature he began where Samuel Johnson and the Scotch rhetoricians had ended, and from it derived all his indispensable subsidiary principles. And from intimations in Johnson, Warton and Hurd he went on to his theory of organic form."[36]

When one comes to think of the validity of Coleridge's concept itself, a number of objections and qualifications spring to mind, partly to Coleridge's theory, partly to certain critics' interpretations of it.

---

[35]R. L. Brett, "Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination," English Studies, II (1949), 80.

[36]Thorpe, p.409.

I shall discuss certain problems which arise in connection with some aspects of Coleridge's idea of unity in art.

A puzzling contention of Coleridge's is that the form that generation, as opposed to fabrication, takes is "representative always of something not itself, and the more disparate that something is, the more admirable is the Form (as in Painting it is more admirable than in solid Wax- in iron or Bronze rather than Wax/ ⟨supposing the forms to be⟩ forms of Flesh . . .) . . ." (CN 2444). The first question that may be asked is whether our admiration of the form of a work of art is really dependent upon the disparateness of the elements that are introduced from outside into the object that the artist is imitating. In Chapters XVII and XVIII of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge gives an example of an instance where he believes that our enjoyment of a poem would be greater if the artist had combined more diverse factors with it. In these chapters, Coleridge is stating his objections to certain aspects of Wordsworth's poetic theory, and is concerned, among other things, with the problem of imitation and copying. In reviewing Wordsworth's poem "The Thorn," Coleridge explains that

> . . . it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects

> of dullness and garrulity. However this may be, I dare assert that the parts (and these form the far larger portion of the whole) which might as well or still better have proceeded from the poet's own imagination, and have been spoken in his own character, are those which have given, and which will continue to give, universal delight: and that the passages exclusively appropriate to the supposed narrator . . . are felt by many unprejudiced and unsophisticated hearts, as sudden and unpleasant sinkings from the height to which the poet had previously lifted them, and to which he again reelevates both himself and his reader.[37]

In this comment Coleridge is telling us that a poet who copies the language of an uneducated rustic word for word will not produce a successful result. In the following chapter, Coleridge contrasts a stanza of Wordsworth with the way in which he thinks a rustic would tell the same tale.[38] Here Coleridge is saying that there is necessarily a difference between poetry and the conversation of ordinary men because poetry is essentially ideal, because there is "required of the poet an involution of the

---

[37] Biographia Literaria, II, 36-38.

[38] Ibid., II, 44.

universal in the individual."[39] Poetry is "representative always of something not itself" (CN 2444), and therefore the poet must introduce ideas of his own into the scene he is depicting, even if it is only in the choice and arrangement of words. When the form of the peasant's discourse is altered it becomes more effective, because it is different. Coleridge's point is twofold: first, an element of choice must enter into the poet's creation, and secondly, and this leads us back to Coleridge's theory of unity in art, in the peasant's conversation "there is a want of perspectiveness of mind, that <u>surview</u>, which enables a man to foresee the whole of what he is to convey, appertaining to any one point; and by this means so to subordinate and arrange the different parts according to their relative importance as to convey it at once and as an organized whole."[40]

Although, as we have seen, Coleridge gives us an example in the <u>Biographia</u> of the need for the introduction of an external element, when one considers his remark that "the more disparate that something is, the more admirable is the Form" (CN 2444) one hesitates to accept it fully. In the first place, is Coleridge's statement true as a general principle? It does not seem to me that he has

---

[39] <u>Ibid</u>., II, 33n.

[40] <u>Ibid</u>., II, 44.

proved conclusively that the more disparate the introduced factor, the more admirable the form. The other example that Coleridge gives, "(as in Painting it is more admirable than in solid Wax - in iron or Bronze rather than Wax/ ⟨supposing the forms to be⟩ forms of Flesh . . .)" (CN 2444) is particularly tricky. Although many wax-work models are inferior to bronze statues or to paintings, is it because the artist has not succeeded in introducing enough outside factors into his figures or is it for some entirely different reason?

Another objection springs to mind. Although Coleridge shows us in the Biographia that the artist's material must be permeated with something foreign to it, his statement that the more disparate that something is, the more admirable is the form, could lead to extravagance. If the disparity were too great, the reader's or spectator's attention would be struck chiefly by this dissimilarity and the unity of the work of art would be lost. There does seem to be a confusion in Coleridge's own thought on this point, for on the one hand Coleridge measures the success of the unifying principle by the obstacles it has overcome, by the incongruity of the elements that it has harmonized, while on the other hand, he attributes pleasurable surprise, caused by the

bringing together of disparate elements, to wit,[41] not to imagination. In his definition of poetry, Coleridge stresses that a poem proposes to itself "such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part."[42] He points out that "the philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgement of all countries in . . . denying the praises of a just poem to a series of striking lines or distiches, each of which absorbing the whole attention of the reader to itself, disjoins it from its context, and makes it a separate whole instead of a harmonizing part. . . ."[43] In the aspect of Coleridge's theory expressed in the last quotation anything that detracts from the unity of the poem must be suspect, and we should therefore keep in mind the possible tendency to excess which the phrase we have been studying from the Notebooks, if it does not countenance, at least does not rule out.

We now turn to another problem which Coleridge's aesthetic theory raises. In connection with his concept of art as an evolutive entity analogous to a living thing, M. H. Abrams has pointed out the necessitarian

---

[41] Shakespearean Criticism, II, 90-91.

[42] Biographia Literaria, II, 10.

[43] Loc. cit.

implications of the organic metaphor of the growing plant, and its possible effects upon Coleridge's theory.[44] As Professor Fogle has phrased it, "the spontaneous growth of the plant from its seed is predetermined and inevitable, so that if the figure is identical with the theory there is no room for will, judgement, understanding - in short, for 'art' in general. 'Nature' usurps the whole domain."[45] Does Coleridge intend the metaphor of growth in nature to be identical with the unfolding of a work of art? Again, does he recognize the compulsory nature of the metaphor? If so does he really think of the artistic process as "mere will-less, purposeless and unthinking spontaneity"?[46] The questions are difficult to answer. From remarks in the Notebooks we learn that Coleridge does not consider the symbol and its object to be similar. "The understanding of Metaphor for Reality (Loaves and Fishes = Apostles, Fisherman, Christ's Doctrine / &c &c) one of the Fountains of the many-headed River of Credulity which overflowing covers the world with miscreations & reptile monsters, & then gives its huge supply thro' its many mouths into the

---

[44]The Mirror and the Lamp (New York, 1953), pp.173-175, 223-225, cited by Fogle, p.66.

[45]Fogle, p.66.

[46]Thorpe, "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," p.409.

Sea of Blood" (CN 2711), he writes in the autumn of 1805. At the beginning of the same year, he says of an expression he has just put down, "The metaphor is as just as of a metaphor any one has a right to claim . . ." (CN 2402). Perhaps we should not take Coleridge's metaphor of the growing plant as literally as critics such as Gordon McKenzie have done. McKenzie has written: "The development of organic unity is fixed and unchangeable, the gathering of the materials which are unified is a process which is spontaneous, dynamic and inevitable. The finished product is in no way open to substitution or change. If there should be change, that change would necessarily be a continuation of the process; it could never refer to what had already been accomplished."[47] This seems to me to be going beyond what Coleridge says throughout his writings on the nature of poetic creation. Admittedly McKenzie's comment may be deduced from Coleridge's theory, but it is a development which I do not think Coleridge made. With reference to Coleridge's symbol, then, one can only conclude either that Coleridge was unaware of the prescriptive element in his figure of speech, or that he did not expect his readers to take it so literally.

While McKenzie may interpret Coleridge's concept

---

[47]McKenzie, Organic Unity in Coleridge, p.75.

of a poem as spontaneous and inevitable, other critics would not agree. Max Schulz has said that Coleridge believes "that a true poet dreams being awake. He is not possessed by his subject but has dominion over it."[48] It seems to me that any necessitarian view of Coleridge's conception of unity conflicts with Coleridge's aim to escape from the necessitarian implications of Hartley's theory of association. If Coleridge believes that the poetic process is beyond his control, he is tying himself as firmly as if he were to accept Hartley's philosophy.

A further flaw in Coleridge's doctrine of unity is that some writers seek variety rather than unity. Two examples are Sterne in Tristram Shandy and Thomas Nashe in The Unfortunate Traveller. Is the work of an artist who sets out to produce variety rather than unity necessarily poor?

Coleridge's theory can also be criticized for containing a circular argument. We may complain that if the only evidence that a work of art has not achieved Coleridge's particular brand of unity is that we do not like it, perhaps the reason we do not admire it has nothing to do with its organic nature. In the same way, it can be argued that we may enjoy a successful work of art for some

---

[48]Schulz, The Poetic Voices of Coleridge, p.104.

entirely different reason, unrelated to Coleridge's principle. It is interesting, in this connection, that Humphry House should have said of Coleridge that "it is one of the ironies of his life that he who saw so clearly and expounded more fully than any English critic before him, the principle of the organic unity of a work of art, should have achieved that unity so rarely [in his own poetry]: but it is more ironical still that without achieving the unity he should so often, otherwise, have contributed to the very ends which his own principle of unity was designed to serve."[49]

A final issue should be mentioned and that is the interpretation of Coleridge's belief in the inseparability of form and content, of the part and the whole. Coleridge expresses this idea of indivisibility when he writes, "Such is the life, such the form."[50] As James Benziger has put it, "the organic poet's idea develops only at the same time that it expresses itself outwardly in the work of art being created; the organic poet, as it were, does not know very clearly what he is doing until he has done it."[51] Some modern organicists

---

[49]Humphry House, Coleridge (London, 1962), p.16.

[50]Shakespearean Criticism, I, 198.

[51]Benziger, "Organic Unity: Leibnitz to Coleridge," p.28.

would go further than this and declare that ". . . any talk of intention is fallacious and misleading because it implies an element of purposiveness that is alien to the organic nature of poetry."[52] This particular critic is writing of poetry in general, and not about Coleridge, but the attitude is an important one. It means that we may look at the poem only as a whole and not examine any of its parts, such as the diction, what the poet is saying, and so on. However, in the same article this critic has realized that practical difficulties do arise, for instance if a student does not "understand" a particular poem.[53] Professor Thrope points out that "over and over he [Coleridge] refers to Shakespeare's intention, his design, his predetermined plans, his conscious art in creating scenes and characters and moulding all to a set aim."[54] Professor Thorpe gives as an example an analysis by Coleridge of Hamlet: "The first question we should ask ourselves is - What did Shakespeare mean when he drew the character of Hamlet? He never wrote any thing without design, and what was his design when he sat down to produce this tragedy?"[55]

---

[52]R. Jack Smith, "Intention in an Organic Theory of Poetry," Sewanee Review, LVI (1948), 626.

[53]Loc. cit.

[54]Thorpe, p.408.

[55]Shakespearean Criticism, II, 150, quoted by Thorpe, p.408.

There have been a number of attempts at explaining this division between the theory of indissolubility of idea and expression, and its practical application. Gordon McKenzie has repeated the idea of Bernard Bosanquet that "form and substance are really one in principle, but that by a logical fiction we continue to contrast them because there is always some failure to bring them together."[56] James Benziger believes that there are certain intractabilities in art to which one must be resigned. "Modern 'organic' critics," he has written, "may even fall into positive error by refusing to admit a certain basic intractability in the materials with which even the greatest artist must work: rigidities in language and artistic form, rigidities which must be expected in the mind of the reader, rigidities in an old story which cannot quite be bent to a new purpose. Such things William James would term the 'given': and he believed that not even the most impressive monisms can eliminate them. He likewise believed that a pragmatic philosophy should accept them frankly."[57]

I. A. Richards, writing of Coleridge's "theory of the act of knowledge, or of consciousness, or as he

---

[56]McKenzie, p.39.

[57]Benziger, p.48.

[Coleridge] called it 'the coincidence or coalescence of an Object with a Subject,'"[58] contends that because "in the products of knowing we later have occasion to distinguish Subject from Object does not entail their separation in the process."[59] We may perhaps apply Professor Richards' contention to the study of poetry. As long as we keep in mind the fact that the author creates the poem as an entity and not piecemeal, and as long as we read the poem as a whole from time to time, it does not seem to me that we destroy the value of the poem by distinguishing the parts within the whole from one another. In the entry in which he discusses fabrication and generation, Coleridge also differentiates between Unitarianism and Trinitarianism. The passage is a little hard to follow, but the point that is of most interest to us is quite clear: "None but a thorough Theologist can combat successfully with a Christologist - to shew the inanity of Jehovah, Christ, and the Dove admit the adorable Tri-unity of Being, Intellect and Spiritual Action, as the Father, Son and co-eternal Procedent, that these are God (and i.e. not mere general Terms, or abstract ideas) and ⟨that they are⟩ one God (i.e. a real, eternal, and

---

[58] I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (London, 1962), p.44.

[59] Ibid., p.53.

necessary Distinction in the divine nature, distinguishable Triplicity in the indivisible Unity)" (CN 2444). Now if we substitute some such word as "parts" or "elements" for "Triplicity" in the last phrase, we would seem to have an illustration of Coleridge's notion of unity in a work of art. If we insist upon regarding a composition solely as a unit, we ignore Coleridge's example in his literary criticism. But to be aware of the components and yet to see the poem in its entirety is to be consistent with Coleridge's theory and his practice.

CHAPTER III

COLERIDGE ON THE POETIC MIND.

Coleridge believes that "The best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself."[1] His Notebooks, as indeed most of his writings, bear witness to the fact that he is intensely interested in the workings of his mind, and in the subtle ways in which a poem is engendered. His observance of his own mental states is remarkably acute, and, as Professor Coburn observes, his awareness of the unconscious is an anticipation of later systematic psychology (CN 2086). Indeed, I. A. Richards maintains that Coleridge takes "the psychology of the theory of poetry to a new level."[2]

In this chapter we shall study Coleridge's psychological opinions, as they appear in the Notebooks, with special reference to the contribution that these opinions make to his critical theory. The Notebooks are of particular interest in this connection because they teem with Coleridge's thoughts on such aspects of creativity as the relation of the conscious, the semi-conscious and the subconscious to the making of a poem.

---

[1]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, edited with his Aesthetical Essays by J. Shawcross (London, 1907), II, 39-40.

[2]I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (London, 1962), p.10.

We shall also examine, not only those ways in which Coleridge, in his Notebooks, says that a work of art originates, but also certain critics' interpretations and developments of Coleridge's theory of creativity.

If one begins to think of what Coleridge has written on the poetic mind, one immediately recalls the much discussed definition of imagination at the end of Chapter XIII of the Biographia.[3] Because the passage has been considered central to Coleridge's theory of the imagination, I shall quote it in full:

> 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 eternal 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 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 unify. It is essentially vital,

---

[3] Biographia Literaria, I, 202.

even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

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 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.[4]

There has been much discussion of the meaning of this passage,[5] but perhaps James Benziger's interpretation is the most useful:

To Schlegel and Coleridge the earlier criticism seemed to split the human spirit in two with the intellectual faculties of understanding and judgement on the one side and the anti-intellectual faculties of taste, genius, and imagination on the other. But according to the new philosophy of

---

[4] Loc. cit.

[5] Notable, if differing, explanations have been given by John Shawcross, "Introduction" to Biographia Literaria, I, liv-lxxxiii; Walter Jackson Bate, "Coleridge on the Function of Art," Perspectives in Criticism, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p.126; John Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu (Boston and New York, 1930), p.103; I. A. Richards, op. cit., p.59; and Clarence D. Thorpe, "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," Journal of the History of Ideas, V (1944), 399.

> Schelling (and the old philosophies of Leibniz and some of his predecessors), the human soul and all souls in the universe have only one basic faculty, the faculty which Coleridge termed the "primary IMAGINATION." This primary imagination, the "prime Agent of all human Perception," enabled each monad soul to create its own image of the "infinite I AM." It follows that such a human faculty as the understanding is but a mode of operation of the one basic imaging faculty, a mode in which the basic faculty operates with particular precision but only within a very narrow compass. The "secondary imagination," what you and I would call just the "imagination," is a more comprehensive functioning of this same faculty.[6]

I have only been able to find three entries in the Notebooks which have a similarity to the Biographia excerpt I have quoted. In these early memorandum books, there is no mention of a division of the imagination into primary and secondary degrees of the power. However, a contrast is drawn between fancy and imagination. In CN 2112, Coleridge compares a couplet by Wordsworth, "The Breeze I see, is in the Tree - It comes to cool my Babe

---

[6]James Benziger, "Organic Unity: Leibnitz to Coleridge," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 36.

and me," with two lines written by Samuel Butler:

> And like a lobster boil'd the Morn
> From black to red began to turn.

The first couplet, Coleridge says, illustrates imagination, the second wit, but Professor Coburn points out in her notes that the lines from Butler's Hudibras are a favourite example with Coleridge of mere fancy (CN 2112n). However, if we look at the nature of the diversity between fancy and imagination depicted here, and that developed in the later Biographia passage, we will see that there is a difference between the two. Shawcross, commenting on the definition in the Biographia, has written of Coleridge's conception of the dissimilarity of fancy and imagination:

> This, which had originally suggested itself as a distinction of poetic qualities, must by this time have come to have a deeper meaning for Coleridge. His growing conviction that insight into truth is essentially dependent upon the will and the emotions which mould the will, and are themselves moulded by it would here find a ready application. For whereas the activity of fancy is practically independent of the artist's emotional state, it is only under the stress of emotion that the imagination can exercise its interpretative power.[7]

---

[7] Shawcross, "Introduction" to Biographia Literaria, I, xxxi-xxxii.

The entry in the Notebooks exemplifies two types of poetry, one of an imaginative, the other of a fanciful nature. In the excerpt from the Biographia, on the other hand, the divergence has become more general. The artistic imagination recreates; the fancy merely manipulates ready-made materials. This represents a development of the earlier concept.

In October 1803, Coleridge describes the effect incidents have on him:

> Nothing affects me much at the moment it happens - it either stupifies me, and I perhaps look at a merry-make & dance the hay of Flies, or listen entirely to the loud Click of the great Clock/or I am simply indifferent, not without some sense of philosophic Self-complacency.- For a Thing at the moment is but a Thing of the moment/it must be taken up into the mind, diffuse itself thro' the whole multitude of Shapes & Thoughts, not one of which it leaves untinged - between ~~each~~ w^{ch} & it some new Thought is not engendered / this a work of Time / but the Body feels it quicken with me- (CN 1597).

This may be compared with the Biographia assertion that the secondary imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates,

in order to recreate." In the Biographia passage the verb "diffuse" is used transitively, in CN 1597 it is used intransitively, but an analogy may still be made, I think, as Coleridge, in both cases, is stressing that a dispersion, a dissemination takes place.

In September 1807, Coleridge copies a number of distichs from Schiller's Musenalmanach for 1797. Among them is one on the Imitator and the Genius, which reads, in translation, "Even what is already shaped is but raw material to the shaping spirit" (CN 3131 [20] n). This is, no doubt, of interest to Coleridge because of his conviction that the secondary, artistic imagination uses materials in its creative process which have already been formed by the primary imagination, for, according to this theory, all perception is, in a sense, creation.

While these memoranda are interesting, being similar to ideas in the Biographia, they are not the only entries which have a bearing on Coleridge's theory of creativity. In reading the Notebooks, one is struck by Coleridge's interest in the roles played by consciousness and subconsciousness in the creation of a work of art. The relationship in Coleridge's thought between conscious and unconscious activity in the writing of poetry is subtle. While Coleridge, speaking of the nature of fancy

and imagination, describes them as "faculties that are rather spontaneous than voluntary,"[8] we must not forget that he also stresses conscious intellectual effort. In the Spring of 1807, Coleridge is reading Dante's De vulgari eloquentia, from which, in CN 3011, he paraphrases and copies. A. G. Ferrers Howell's translation (supplied by Miss Coburn) of the passage reads, in part:

> Worthy of the highest style are the highest things, such as Safety, Love and Virtue. . . . Let everyone therefore beware and discern what we say; and when he purposes to sing of these three subjects simply, or of those things which directly and simply follow after them, let him first drink of Helicon, and then, after adjusting the strings, boldly take up his plectrum and begin to ply it. But it is in the exercise of the needful caution and discernment that the real difficulty lies; for this can never be attained to without strenuous efforts of genius, constant practice in the art, and habit of the sciences. . . . And therefore let those who, innocent of art and science, and trusting to genius alone, rush forward to sing of the highest subjects in the highest

---

[8] Shakespearean Criticism, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1960), II, 50.

> style, confess their folly and cease from such presumption; and if in their natural sluggishness they are but geese, let them abstain from imitating the eagle soaring to the stars . . . (CN 3011n).

Coleridge's comments on consciousness and sub-consciousness run through both volumes of the Notebooks. There are many references to the varying levels of awareness, to sleep and dreams, to the posture of the body and its possible effect on dreams, to the role that association has in thought and to the "reverie-ish and streamy" (CN 1833) character of Coleridge's own mind. They cannot all be quoted here. I shall mention only a few to indicate Coleridge's interest in the various aspects of consciousness and also those which are of particular importance to us, having a direct bearing on the writing of poetry.

We shall begin with Coleridge's remarks on the levels of cognition in general. The earliest is to be found in CN 6: ". . . -⟨The whole, or sum total of the applications of the word, Faith, reducible to Fidelity - as Loyalty to God, Fidelity to our fellow-creatures - hence the most grevious of Injuries not to be believed - resented as wrong, which seems to imply an original compact, or promise between each Spirit & all spirits in

their depths of Being below, & radicative of, all Consciousness)." It is possible that this excerpt, which is a final interpolation to a long entry, was written in 1812, rather than in 1794 (CN 6n). Another observation that we may note, written in October 1803, comes in a period lasting roughly from October 1803 to May 1804 when Coleridge is particularly aware of this subject. CN 1601 reads: "Some painful Feeling, bodily or of the mind / some form or feeling has recalled a past misery to the Feeling, & not to the conscious memory - I brood over what has befallen of evil / what is the worst that could befall me? What is that Blessing which is most present & perpetual to my Fancy & Yearnings? Sara! Sara!- The Loss then of this first bodies itself out to me/. . . ." Here, in this distinction between "feeling" and "conscious memory," "feeling" seems to be a state in which the author realizes that misery is present but is unable to discover the cause of his unhappiness. The "feeling" has not yet approached close enough to a supraliminal state for him to be able to analyse it.

In January 1804, Coleridge writes, "Of a great metaphysician / he looked at (into?) his own Soul with a Telescope / what seemed all irregular, he saw & shewed to be beautiful constellations & he added to the

Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds" (CN 1798). In this entry, Coleridge remarks, first on the fruitfulness of plumbing the depths of the psyche, and secondly on the enormous territory of the mind that is hidden from our knowledge. Coleridge's discernment of these inter-penetrating regions of the mind is continued in an observation coming from February 1807:

> I fall asleep night after night watching that perpetual feeling, to which Imagination, or the real affection of that organ or its appendages by that feeling beyond the other parts of the body (tho' no atom but seems to share in it) has given a place and seat of manifestation a schechinah in the heart.- Shall I de try to image it to myself, as an animant self-conscious pendulum, continuing for ever its arc of motion by the for ever anticipation of it? -or like some fairer Blossom-life in the centre of the Flower-polypus, a life within Life, & constituting a part of the Life the[9] includes it? A consciousness within a Consciousness, yet mutually penetrated, each possessing both itself & the other - distinct tho' indivisible! - S.T.C.- (CN 2999).

---

[9]Coleridge's slip for "that" (CN 2999n).

The peculiar alertness of Coleridge to the various levels of consciousness is illustrated in this entry. Coleridge says here that he is constantly aware of his consciousness, but that this "consciousness within a Consciousness" possesses "both itself & the other." In other words, Coleridge is saying that he is aware of his consciousness, but that this very awareness is part of the larger consciousness. It is interesting that Coleridge should describe this self-within-the-self as "distinct tho' indivisible," an idea he elsewhere applies to the Trinity (CN 2444) and which is pertinent to his theory of unity in art.[10]

An excerpt from Coleridge's notes of May 1804 indicates the importance that psychology has for him: "Query as to the posture of the Body we being semi-demi-conscious of it in falling to sleep, does it not act sometimes by suggesting the postures of Objects, of inanimates so that I could see them, of the animate partly so as they could look in on me:- On a subject so important no Hint but deserves a Memorandum at least" (CN 2073 b).

Coleridge discusses sleep many times in his memorandum books. No doubt his preoccupation with it

---

[10]See above, p.68.

arises at least in part from the poor nights he experienced, due to sickness, unhappiness, and addiction to opium. An interesting discussion of dreams is to be found in CN 2055, where Coleridge recounts dreams of Isulia, a disguise name for Sara Hutchinson: "My Dreams now always connected in some way or other with Isulia, all their forms in a state of fusion with some Feeling or other, that is the distorted Reflection of my Day-Feelings respecting her / but the more distressful my Sleep, & alas! how seldom it is otherwise, the more distant, & Ist's Hospitalized the forms & incidents - in one or two sweet Sleeps the Feeling has grown distinct & true, & at length has created its appropriate form, the very Isulia / or as I well described it in those Lines, 'All Look' &c." Professor Coburn comments that this entry is a "pre-Freudian observation of the painfulness of the depths below consciousness . . . and of dreams as involving the 'distorted Reflection' of the previous day" (CN 2055n).

Another pre-Freudian comment is to be found in CN 1414:

> Contact - the womb - the amnion liquor - warmth + touch/-air cold + sensation & action of breathing - contact of the mother's knees + all those contacts of the Breast + taste & wet & sense of swallowing-

Sense of diminished contact explains the falling asleep-/ this <u>is</u> Fear, [?not/and] this produces Fear-

Eye contact, pressure infinitely diminished organic Conness (con to ken) proportionately increased.

Coleridge recognizes that there is a connection between dreams and physical objects, as for example in CN 1620 where he realizes, on awakening from a dream, that the ticking of his watch has "fretted" on his ears and he has thought that his son, Hartley, has irritated him by humming and hawing, instead of answering the questions put to him at his christening. Another instance is to be found in CN 2064 (9):

A really important Hint suggested itself to me as I was falling into my first Sleep - the effect of the posture of the Body, <u>open mouth</u> for instance, on first Dreams - & perhaps on all. White Teeth in behind a ~~dim~~ open mouth of a dim face-/ My mind is not vigorous enough to pursue it - but I see, that it leads to a development of the effects of continued Indistinctness of <u>Impressions</u> on the Imagination according to laws of likeness & what ever that may solve itself into" (CN 2064).

Visions, for Coleridge, are closely allied to other activities of the brain. In December 1803, he writes of the link between reverie and dreaming: ". . . O then as I first sink on the pillow, as if Sleep had indeed a material realm, as if when I sank on my pillow, I was entering that region & realized Faery Land of Sleep - O then what visions have I had, what dreams,- the Bark, the Sea, ~~the~~ all the shapes & sounds & adventures made up of the Stuff of Sleep & Dreams, & yet my Reason at the Rudder/ . . ." (CN 1718).

Memory is another realm to which dreaming is akin. One evening during the same month Coleridge (having taken opium, Miss Coburn suggests [CN 1750n]) writes: ". . . but overpowered with the [? ~~emotion~~] Phaenomena I arose, lit my Candle, & wrote - of figures, even with open eyes / of squares, & ▱ & of various colours, & I know not what/ How in a few minutes I forgot such an Assemblage of distinct Impressions, ebullitions & piles of golden colour & thence to think of the Nature of Memory. So intense / & yet in one Minute forgotten~~d~~ the same is in Dreams / Think of this . . ." (CN 1750).

The breadth of possibility for comment on these nocturnal visions is implied in a couple of lines appended

to a description of a nightmare: "I must devote some one or more Days exclusively to the Meditation on Dreams. Days? Say rather Weeks!" (CN 1726).

When we finally turn to poetry and its relation to the subconscious there is less wealth of material in these early record books. However, the two entries that I shall cite are significant, I think, and prove that Coleridge, while he may not in these Notebooks have a well defined theory on the relation of the subliminal to the act of creation, does discern a connection between them. The first excerpt comes again from October 1803: "Without Drawing I feel myself but half invested with language - Music too is wanting to me. But yet tho' one should unite Poetry, Draftsman's-ship & Music - the greater & perhaps nobler certainly all the subtler parts of one's nature, must be solitary - Man exists herein to himself & to God alone/- Yea, in how much only to God - how much lies below his own Consciousness" (CN 1554). Professor Coburn interprets this extract in her note by comparing Coleridge to a later expounder of a similar idea: "Mr. Edmund Blunden says E. S. Dallas 'detected the subconscious as the actual writing force before the term was invented.' Introduction to An English Library by F. Seymour Smith (1943). And Mr. C. Day Lewis repeats the attribution in The Poetic Image (1946) 39. The term and idea were undoubtedly ready to be born, Coleridge having paved the way. It may be of

interest to notice that E. S. Dallas studied under Sir William Hamilton, student and admirer of Coleridge" (CN 1554n).

Following an important discussion of the dwindling of his ability to write poetry, Coleridge gives the following definition of his art: "Poetry a rationalized dream dealing [?about] to manifold Forms our own Feelings, that never were perhaps attached by us consciously to our own personal Selves.- What is the Lear, the Othello, but a divine Dream / all Shakespeare, & nothing Shakespeare.- O there are Truths below the Surface in the subject of Sympathy, & how we <u>become</u> that which we understandly behold & hear, having, how much God perhaps only knows, created part even of the Form . . ." (CN 2086). Professor Coburn's comment on this paragraph runs: "again Coleridge's awareness of the unconscious - and of the likeness of artistic creation to dream-work - is another anticipation of later systematic psychology" (CN 2086n).

It seems to me that in this last entry Coleridge recognizes and acknowledges the notable part that the subconscious plays in the act of creation. Notice the phrases, "that never perhaps were attached by us consciously to our own personal Selves," and "What is the Lear, the Othello, but a divine Dream / all Shakespeare, & nothing

Shakespeare." C. G. Jung has written of that class of art works

> that flow more or less spontaneously and perfect from the author's pen. They come as it were fully arrayed into the world, as Pallas Athene sprang from the head of Zeus. These works positively impose themselves upon the author; his hand is, as it were, seized, and his pen writes things that his mind perceives with amazement. The work brings with it its own form; what he would add to it is declined, what he does not wish to admit is forced upon him. While his consciousness stands disconcerted and empty before the phenomenon, he is overwhelmed with a flood of thoughts and images which it was never his aim to beget, and which his will would never have fashioned. Yet in spite of himself he is forced to recognize that in all this his self is speaking, that his innermost nature is revealing itself, uttering things that he would never have entrusted to his tongue.[11]

The marked similarity of Jung's remarks to CN 2086 is worth noting.

---

[11]C. G. Jung, "On the Relation of Analytic Psychology to Poetic Art," in his Contributions to Analytical Psychology, trans. H. G. and Cary F. Baynes (London, 1948), pp. 235-236.

Although we may see in CN 2086 an acknowledgement of the significant part that the unconscious plays in art, Coleridge has yet been accused of underrating the subliminal powers in the creative process. Professor Baker has written, "And in spite of his awareness of association and the unconscious as potential allies of the poet, he seriously underestimated the power of memory and the 'deep well' to effect a sea-change. For a man who profited by it so much, he was strangely ungracious concerning the alchemy of the unconscious."[12] This seems a surprising statement, for although CN 2086 was not published and is not to be found in Anima Poetae, Professor Baker has cited a number of very illuminating pronouncements by Coleridge on the work of the unconscious in art; for example, ". . . there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius,"[13] and the retelling by Coleridge of his experience in trying to recall a name:

> I feel that there is a mystery in the sudden by-act-of-will-unaided, nay, more than that, frustrated recollection of a Name. I was trying to recollect

---

[12]James Volant Baker, The Sacred River (Baton Rouge, 1957), p.227.

[13]Biographia Literaria, II, 258, quoted by Baker, p.177.

> the name of a Bristol Friend, who had attended me in my Illness at Mr. Wade's. I began with the letters of the Alphabet -ABC etc.- and I know not why, felt convinced that it began with H. I ran thro' all the vowels, aeiouy, and with all the consonants to each . . . in vain. Three minutes afterwards, having completely given it up, the name Daniel, at once started up, perfectly insulated, without any the dimmest antecedent connection, as far as my consciousness extended. There is no explanation of this fact, but by a full sharp distinction of Mind from Consciousness - the Consciousness being the narrow Neck of the Bottle.[14]

In his criticism of Coleridge, Professor Baker would do well to remember that Coleridge is an innovator in his ideas on the subconscious and its relation to poetry. The concept, while it may appear commonplace today, was not so in the early nineteenth century. The Notebooks show Coleridge groping towards the enunciation of an idea so complicated that he hardly fully comprehends it himself. It seems unreasonable to ask for the definitive theory in

---

[14] Inquiring Spirit, edited by Kathleen Coburn (New York, 1951), pp.30-31, quoted by Baker, p.162.

Coleridge's writings that Professor Baker requires.

But what really worries Professor Baker, I think, is Coleridge's attitude to association rather than to the unconscious. Professor Baker says "We believe that Coleridge impoverished and weakened his theory of imagination by resolutely denying the associative power to the imagination and by confining it to the fancy.[15] He is, of course, thinking of Coleridge's definition at the end of Chapter XIII of the Biographia. Professor Baker does admit that fancy works in connection with imagination in Coleridge's scheme, and he quotes the poet's remark that "Imagination must have fancy, in fact the higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower,"[16] but I do not think that he then bears it sufficiently in mind. As I. A. Richards has put it, "Coleridge often insisted - and would have insisted still more often had he been a better judge of his readers' capacity for misunderstanding - that Fancy and Imagination are not exclusive of or inimical to one another."[17]

---

[15]Baker, p.225.

[16]The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London and New York, 1917), April 20, 1833, quoted by Baker, p.227.

[17]Coleridge on Imagination, p.75.

Before discussing the part Coleridge assigns to association in the poetic process, we should consider what the word "association" would mean to a late eighteenth-century writer such as Coleridge. David Hartley's theory of association is complex and wide in its scope. Fundamentally, however, his doctrine is "'the formation of all human character by circumstances, through the universal principle of Association, and the consequent unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education.'"[18] With reference to the connection of sensations with ideas, Hartley enunciates his law of association as follows: "Any Sensations A, B, C, &c. by being associated with one another a sufficient Number of Times, get such a Power over the corresponding Ideas, a, b, c, &c. that any one of the Sensations A, when impressed alone, shall be able to excite in the Mind b, c, &c. the ideas of the rest."[19] Consequently, "every succeeding thought is the result either of some new impression, or of an association with the preceding."[20]

---

[18]J. S. Mill, Autobiography, World's Classical edition, p.91, quoted by Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (London, 1940), p.143.

[19]David Hartley, Observations on Man (London, 1791), Proposition X, I, 65.

[20]Hartley, I, 383.

Hartley's theory carries with it mechanistic and necessitarian overtones, implications which, incidentally, Hartley himself did not recognize until several years after he had begun his enquiries and which he eventually admitted only with great reluctance.[21] Coleridge rejects the necessitarian side of Hartley's theory, in which free-will has a subordinate place. The discarding of certain aspects of Hartley's concept can be seen in the following memorandum: ". . . It is false that the Thunder clap depends for all its sublimity on our notion of the danger of Lightning & Thunder - with its height &c - These aid but do not constitute . . . I am much pleased with this Suggestion, as with everything that overthrows & or illustrates the overthrow of that all-annihilating system of explaining every thing wholly by association . . ." (CN 2093). Coleridge also recognizes that there is more to a thought than we can consciously discern: "Godwin to trace at each sentence, all the thought & associations leading to it - O folly. How little reflected he, how much of Eternity there is in each moment of time!" (CN 1563).

On the other hand, a number of aspects of the

---

[21]Willey, op. cit., p.151.

Observations on Man continued to influence Coleridge. For instance, Hartley, like Coleridge in CN 2064 and 2073,[22] explores the possible effects of the posture of the body on dreams.[23] Coleridge does not abandon the notion of association itself, the power by which ideas become linked to one another, nor does it seem to me that he limits this activity to the "narrow Neck of the Bottle," as Professor Baker implies when he writes that Coleridge "failed to unite association with the unconscious."[24] In CN 2543, "one of the most searching of his attempts in the notebooks to analyse the varying degrees of consciousness" (CN 2543n), Coleridge shows us that the associative faculty is at work beneath the conscious level of the mind:

> I humbly thank God that I have for some time past been more attentive to the regulation of my Thoughts - & the attention has been blessed with a great measure of Success. There are few Day-dreams that I dare allow myself at any time; and ~~of these few~~ few & cautiously built as they are, it is very seldom that I can think myself entitled to make

---

[22]See above, pp. 83 and 81.

[23]Hartley, I, 383-385.

[24]Baker, The Sacred River, p.253.

lazy Holiday with any one ⟨of them⟩. I must have worked hard, long, and well, to have earned that privilege/. So akin to Reason is Reality, that what I could do with exulting Innocence, I can not always Imagine with perfect innocence / for Reason and Reality can stop and stand still ~~by~~ new Influxes from without counteracting the Impulses from within, and poising the Thought. But Fancy and Sleep stream on; and (instead of outward Forms and Sounds, the Sanctifiers, the Strengtheners!) they connect with them motions of the blood and nerves, and images forced into the mind by the feelings that arise out of the position & state of the Body and its different members. I have ~~acted~~ done innocently what afterwards in absence I have ⟨likewise⟩ day-dreamed innocently, during the being awake; but ~~after~~ the Reality was followed in Sleep by no suspicious fancies, the ~~latter~~ Day-dream has been . . . (CN 2543).

Another, and earlier, excerpt than the one just cited also refutes Professor Baker's statement that Coleridge "failed to unite association with the unconscious."[25] In CN 1575 Coleridge again links this

---

[25] Loc. cit.

power, by which ideas are connected and recalled, with the unconscious: "Print of the Darlington Ox, sprigged with Spots.- Viewed in all moods, consciously, uncons, semiconsc. - with vacant, with swimming eyes - made a Thing of Nature by the repeated action of the Feelings. O Heaven when I think how perishable Things, how imperishable Thoughts seem to be! - For what is Forgetfulness? . . . Renew the state of affection or bodily Feeling, same or similar - sometimes dimly similar / and instantly the trains of forgotten Thought rise from their living catacombs! . . ."

John Livingston Lowes, in that monumental work, The Road to Xanadu, has come up with an interesting thesis concerning the workings of association in the sub-conscious. He examines Coleridge's poems The Ancient Mariner and Kubla Khan in the light of what is known of Coleridge's reading, and then assembles a theory of the workings of a poet's mind. Lowes describes how a poet's thoughts, what he has read, things that have happened to him, all sink down into his mind, into what he calls the "deep well." Once these fragments are submerged they begin to have an exciting life of their own, they "fuse, assimilate and coalesce."[26] Lowes depicts the process in

---

[26]Lowes, p.59.

Coleridge's mind: "One after another vivid bits of what he read dropped into that deep well. And there below the level of conscious mental processes, they set up their obscure and powerful reactions. Up above, on the stream of consciousness (which is all that we commonly take into account) they had floated separate and remote; here in the well they lived a strangely intimate and simultaneous life."[27] It is in this way, Professor Lowes maintains, that new ideas and poetic images are born.

It should be noticed that while Professor Lowes does draw on some of Coleridge's prose works, Biographia Literaria, Anima Poetae and the Gutch Memorandum Book, among others, he is primarily concerned with deducing a theory from facts which he gathers from Coleridge's poetry and reading. When Professor Lowes was writing, all the notes that are available to us now, were not yet published. It is interesting to compare the psychology of art which emerges from Coleridge's Notebooks, with Lowes' theory of the creative process, inferred from analysis of images in Coleridge's poems and in his reading.

While Professor Lowes' ideas may be criticized on a number of points,[28] there are a few passages in the

---

[27]Lowes, p.58.

[28]See below, pp.99-106.

Notebooks which seem to have some similarity to the concept of creativity set forth in The Road to Xanadu. I have already quoted in this chapter, in a slightly different context, the entry from the Notebooks which I think most nearly resembles Professor Lowes' idea of the deep well. However, as it is very significant, I will repeat it:

> Nothing affects me much at the moment it happens - it either stupifies me, and I perhaps look at a merry-make & dance the hay of Flies, or listen entirely to the loud Click of the great Clock / or I am simply indifferent, not without some sense of philosophic Self-complacency.- For a Thing at the moment is but a Thing of the moment / it must be taken up into the mind, diffuse itself thro' the whole multitude of Shapes & Thoughts, not one of which it leaves untinged - between ~~each~~ w^{ch} & it some new Thought is not engendered / this a work of Time / but the Body feels it quicken with me- (CN 1597).

This passage puzzled me at first, because I could not understand why Coleridge writes, "Between ~~each~~ w^{ch} & it some new Thought is not engendered" and then continues by saying, "this a work of Time." What does the word "this"

refer to? If the phrase before it is to be regarded as purely negative, "this" can not refer to it. If, on the other hand, Coleridge means that the diffusion of the "Thing of the moment" "thro' the whole multitude of Shapes & Thoughts" is a work of time, then what is the point of the antepenultimate phrase? Comparison with Ernest Hartley Coleridge's text in Anima Poetae[29] is helpful. He inserts in square brackets after "between" [not one of]. Another possibility is to read the passage as follows: ". . . between each w^ch & it some new Thought is not [yet] engendered." In either case the sense of the phrase, as it stands in the Notebooks, if we read it in a literal manner, has been reversed. If the excerpt is understood in an affirmative sense, we have here an important statement by Coleridge on the way in which new ideas originate. The perception, sensation or idea passes into the mind and is assimilated by all the other thoughts and images in the brain, all of which are coloured or affected by it. The new thought results from these combinations.[30]

---

[29] Anima Poetae from the unpublished notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London, 1895), pp.31-32.

[30] A letter to the author from Professor Coburn, dated January 20th, 1965, confirms this interpretation. She writes: "He [Coleridge] is talking about blending of thoughts in the unconscious as giving rise to new thoughts. Naturally he is feeling his way in articulating what was not yet very clear even to himself but I have no doubt, especially in view of the numerous later references to the unconscious, that this entry points in the direction you suggest."

In an entry written later in the same month Coleridge declares, "Sadly do I need to have my Imagination enriched with appropriate Images for Shapes -/ Read Architecture & Icthyology-" (CN 1616). This memorandum tells us that Coleridge felt he could enrich his imagination with images by further reading, and the note might be taken to corroborate Professor Lowes' contention that Coleridge read widely "with an eye which habitually pierced to the secret spring of beauty beneath the crust of fact. And this means that items or details the most unlikely might, through some poetic potentiality discovered or divined, find lodgement in his memory."[31] However, it should be noted that Coleridge feels it is unfortunate that his imagination is in need of fresh supplies. "Sadly do I need to have my Imagination enriched with appropriate Images for Shapes," he writes. The tone of the entry implies that while Architecture and Icthyology may store his mind with images, this is not the primary way in which images come into his mind when he is at the height of his creative power. It sounds as though Coleridge is turning to scientific reading almost as a last resort.

There are a number of possible criticisms of Professor Lowes' book, not all of which can be gone into

---

[31]Lowes, pp.36-37.

here.[32] However, without appraising Lowes' views of The Ancient Mariner and Kubla Khan as poems, or investigating the circumstances behind the writing of the latter poem, or studying the effects of opium on the mind, I shall suggest a number of flaws in Professor Lowes' thesis, in so far as it is connected with the unconscious and association.

It has been pointed out that Professor Lowes' ideas are in many ways similar to the associationist psychology of Hobbes, Locke, Gay and Hartley, whereby images and ideas are formed mechanically and automatically by association. Miss Schneider presents Professor Lowes' opinions as follows: "All the while, through the mysterious working of genius, these fleeting memories from books coalesced spontaneously into visual images and were transformed into corresponding words automatically and organized unconsciously into finished poetic form."[33] She then comments, "Coleridge himself might not have agreed with all this, for Lowes' exposition was more purely Hartleyan than, except perhaps in quite early years, he would have approved."[34] The similarity of Lowes' concept

---

[32]Elisabeth Schneider, in Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan (Chicago, 1953), provides a clear and comprehensive criticism of The Road to Xanadu.

[33]Schneider, p.115.

[34]Loc. cit.

of the mind to seventeenth and eighteenth century psychology can be seen in Dryden's "Epistle Dedicatory of The Rival Ladies" where he writes: "This worthless present was designed you, long before it was a play; when it was only a confused mass of thoughts, tumbling over one another in the dark; when the fancy was yet in its first work, moving the sleeping images of things towards the light, there to be distinguished, and then either chosen or rejected by the judgement; it was yours, my Lord, before I could call it mine."[35]

The concept of the mind as a storehouse for images was not uncommon before Coleridge's time, and in regarding the mind in this way, Professor Lowes is no innovator. Hobbes seems to regard the mind as a warehouse in his distinction between fancy and judgement:

> For memory is the World (though not really, yet so as in a looking glass) in which the Judgement, the severer Sister, busieth her self in a grave and rigid examination of all the parts of Nature, and in registring by Letters their order, causes, uses, differences, and resemblances; whereby the Fancy, when any work of Art is to be performed, findes

---

[35]John Dryden, "Epistle Dedicatory of The Rival Ladies," Essays of John Dryden, ed. W. P. Ker (New York, 1961), I, 1.

> her materials at hand and prepared for use, and needs no more than a swift motion over them, that what she wants, and is there to be had, may not lie too long unespied.[36]

Addison writes that "A poet should take as much pains in forming his imagination as a philosopher in cultivating his understanding. He must gain a due relish of the worth of nature and be thoroughly conversant in the various scenery of country life. When he is stored with country images, if he would go beyond pastoral and the lower kinds of poetry, he ought to acquaint himself with the pomp and magnificence of courts."[37]

Coleridge himself provides refutations of the psychology put forward by the associationists, and indeed by Professor Lowes. In the first place, as we have seen, Coleridge questions in the Notebooks the possibility of tracing the associations that go to the making of a thought or image: "Godwin to trace at each sentence, all the thought & associations leading to it - O folly. How little reflected he how much of Eternity there is in each moment of time!" (CN 1563). Secondly, Coleridge, in a letter of

---

[36]Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's 'Preface' to Gondibert," Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (London, 1957), II, 59.

[37]Joseph Addison, "The Pleasures of the Imagination, VII," Spectator, no. 417, in Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, ed. Scott Elledge (Ithaca, New York, 1961), I, 62.

1803 to Southey, doubts whether ideas or images are ever suggested by other ideas:

> . . . I hold that association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of feeling than on trains of ideas, that the recollection of early childhood in latest old age depends on this and is explicable by this, and if this be true, Hartley's system totters. . . . I almost think that ideas <u>never</u> recall ideas, as far as they are ideas, any more than leaves in a forest create each other's motion. The breeze it is that runs through them - it is the soul, the state of feeling.[38]

Miss Schneider remarks: "Association operates not by idea-links, he thought, but by feeling-links; it is the state of feeling, physical or emotional, rather than a mechanical link between one image and another, that revives in the memory images from the past."[39]

In a letter to Josiah Wedgewood, written in February 1801, Coleridge criticizes the conception of the mind as a depository for images: "In Mr. Locke, there is

---

[38] <u>Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge</u>, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Boston, 1895), I, 427-428, quoted by Schneider, p.70.

[39] Schneider, p.115.

a complete whirl-dance of Confusion with the words, we, Soul, Mind, Consciousness, & Ideas. . . . In short, the Mind in Mr. Locke's Essay has three senses - the Ware-house, the Wares, and the Ware-house-man."[40] It is obvious from this letter that Coleridge would have questioned Professor Lowes' theory of the mind, as he did Locke's.

There is another aspect of The Road to Xanadu at which we should look. Professor Lowes, describing the three stages of creation, writes: "The depths are peopled to start out with (and this is fundamental) by conscious intellectual activity, keyed as it may be, as in Coleridge's intense and exigent reading, to the highest pitch. Moreover . . . it is again conscious energy, now of another and loftier type which later drags the deeps for their submerged treasure, and moulds the bewildering chaos into unity. But interposed between consciousness and consciousness is the well."[41] To back up his statement, Professor Lowes states that Henri Poincaré, the celebrated mathematician, also maintains that there is a period of unconscious work, preceded and followed by periods of

---

[40] Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford and New York, 1956), no. 383, quoted in CN 378n.

[41] Lowes, p.59.

conscious effort.[42] However, there is a difference between Poincaré's theory and that of Professor Lowes. While Poincaré does write of the three stages Professor Lowes mentions, he also speaks of another which he terms "sudden illumination" or "revelation".[43] Jacques Hadamard, who discusses Poincaré's theory of creativity and those of other mathematicians, psychologists and writers in different fields, including poetry, points out that invention in Poincaré's view is divided between four spheres of activity: preparation, incubation, illumination and later conscious work.[44] The preparatory work is conscious, the incubation stage corresponds to Professor Lowes' deep well and is subconscious, illumination is spontaneous, and the final period of work is conscious. The spontaneous revelation can come to the mind quite unexpectedly, without anything in the immediately previous thoughts seeming to have paved the way,[45] or, on the other hand, it may come during "a period of conscious work, but independently of this work which plays at most a role of

---

[42]Lowes, p.62.

[43]Henri Poincaré, The Foundations of Science, trans. George Bruce Halsted (New York, 1913), p. 389.

[44]Jacques Hadamard, The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field (New York, 1954), p.56.

[45]Poincaré, p.388.

excitant, as if it were the goad stimulating the results already reached during the rest, but remaining unconscious, to assume the conscious form."[46]

The concept that ideas spring to the surface of the mind spontaneously is important. It will be remembered that Professor Lowes maintains that it is the conscious that brings the images from the unconscious into the light. He writes: "it is again conscious energy, now of another and loftier type which later drags the deeps for their submerged treasure. . . ."[47] But, we may ask, can we consciously examine our unconscious? Surely this is a contradiction in terms. While Poincaré's theory of creativity may be criticized on some counts - it, too, is reminiscent, at least to some extent, of old-fashioned associationist psychology - it seems to me that the mathematician has succeeded in describing a possible way in which ideas might rise to the conscious mind more convincingly than Professor Lowes has.

There is a remarkable entry, written in May 1804, in which Coleridge discusses the flagging of his

---

[46]Poincaré, p.389.

[47]Lowes, p.59.

poetic energy:

> . . . Whither have my Animal Spirits departed? My Hopes - O me! that they which once I had to check [. . .] should now be an effort / Royals & Studding Sails & the whole Canvas stretched to catch the feeble breeze!- I have many thoughts, many images; large Stores of the unwrought materials; scarcely a day passes but something new in fact or in illustration, occur rises up in me, like Herbs and Flowers in a Garden in early Spring; but the combining Power, the power to do, the manly effective Will, that is dead, or slumbers most diseasedly-. . . (CN 2086).

Coleridge's image of his ideas rising up in him "like Herbs and Flowers in a Garden in early Spring," is particularly expressive, and coincides in some respects with Poincaré's third stage of creation. Coleridge says that he has "large Stores of the unwrought materials." In other words, he is aware of ideas and images in his mind, which have not yet been worked upon, presumably not yet turned either into poetry, or into fully articulated speech. Coleridge does not say that the thoughts in his mind, the seeds in the garden, have come from the outside. He does not tell us from where they have come. He does

say, however, that the materials in his mind rise up in him "like Herbs and Flowers in a Garden in early Spring." It is this spontaneity that gives the passage a similarity to Poincaré's theory. We should also notice that the flowers appear while "the manly effective Will, that is dead or slumbers most diseasedly-." In this entry Coleridge appears to be aware of an undirected step in the thought process.

This is not to say, however, that the spontaneous and involuntary activity is in any way superior to the conscious. As Robert Penn Warren has written, ". . . the unconscious may be the genius in the man of genius. But this is not to define the process as an irrational process. What comes unbidden from the depths at the moment of creation may be the result of the most conscious and narrowly rational effort of the past."[48] Nor, in admitting an undirected step, does this gainsay the necessity of the will in artistic creation. If we turn again to this same entry we shall learn that Coleridge has "large Stores of the unwrought material" (CN 2086). Although new ideas keep coming to him, these have not

---

[48]Prefatory essay to The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, ed. Robert Penn Warren (New York, 1946), pp.114-115, quoted by Baker, The Sacred River, p.246.

been turned into poetry, and it is because the "combining Power, the power to do, the manly effective Will, that is dead or slumbers most diseasedly." Professor Coburn observes of the expression "combining Power," that it is "an early use [in Coleridge's writings] of this phrase as a description of the imagination . . ." (CN 2086n). Here, then, the imagination is firmly tied to the will. This entry is very significant for in it Coleridge implies that although images and ideas may occur to the poet without his seeking for them, poetry will not result without the intervention of the will.

Coleridge's remarks in the two published volumes of the Notebooks do not present a comprehensive theory, but they are interesting in that they show Coleridge feeling his way in a relatively undeveloped field. The poetic mind, we learn from the Notebooks, is subtle, fluid and flexible. It is not divided into tight little compartments, nor is it ruled by a mechanical principle, as was the mind seen by Hartley and other associationists. Coleridge recognizes that association does play a part in the thought process, but he disagrees with Godwin - and no doubt would with Professor Lowes - that the antecedents of an idea or image can be accurately and minutely traced.

Coleridge, it seems to me, assigns to spontaneity a place in the evolving of a poem, but he also recognizes that the will has an important function in artistic creation. Coleridge does not advocate a theory, as we have seen before in the chapter on unity in art,[49] of "mere willless, purposeless and unthinking spontaneity."[50]

However, it might be argued, from the evidence in the Notebooks, that certain aspects of Professor Lowes' thesis in The Road to Xanadu can not be entirely discounted. In CN 1597, Coleridge does write of a "Thing at the moment" diffusing itself through the mind, affecting all the thoughts there, and thus engendering new ideas. It is interesting that Coleridge should have written this entry in October 1803, and the famous letter to Southey in which he suggests that "Ideas never recall Ideas,"[51] in August 1803. It seems to me that while Coleridge begins to question Hartley's theory of the mechanical recalling of ideas by other ideas, he does not, in October 1803, at any rate, reject the conception of the mind, advanced by such critics as Dryden, as a place in which there is "a confused mass of thoughts, tumbling over

---

[49]See above, pp.61 and 65.

[50]Clarence D. Thorpe, "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," p.409.

[51]Letters, ed. E. H. Coleridge, I, 427-428.

one another in the dark."[52] The Road to Xanadu places too much emphasis on the mechanical association of ideas, and the spontaneous forming of images into poetic form. We do not find a similar emphasis in the Notebooks. While Coleridge does appear, in CN 1597, to regard the mind as a place where ideas intermingle to produce new thoughts, it should be noted that Coleridge speaks here only of the engendering of thoughts, not of fully formed poetic images.

While CN 1597 is significant, perhaps the entry in the Notebooks which is most pertinent to a study of Coleridge's thought on creativity, is that in which he describes poetry as "a rationalized dream dealing [?about] to manifold Forms our own Feelings, that never were perhaps attached by us consciously to our own personal Selves.- What is the Lear, the Othello, but a divine Dream / all Shakespeare, & nothing Shakespeare.-" (CN 2086). Here Coleridge acknowledges the important fact that while the poet may write, as it were, in a dream, expressing things he had not consciously thought about, he will yet be "forced to recognize that in all this his innermost nature is revealing itself, uttering things that he would never have entrusted to his tongue."[53]

---

[52] Essays of John Dryden, I, 1.

[53] C. G. Jung, "On the Relation of Analytic Psychology to Poetic Art," p.236.

CHAPTER IV

DIMNESS AND CLARITY.

At the end of Chapter I of this thesis, it was resolved to study certain of the more important aspects of Coleridge's poetic theory, as it is found in the Notebooks. At that time it was pointed out that Coleridge's practical criticism is based on his philosophy of poetry. An understanding of the latter can greatly increase our comprehension of the former. Having, in previous chapters, studied Coleridge's thoughts on unity in art, and on the engendering of a poem, we shall now turn to another aspect of Coleridge's thought, the relationship between ideas and feeling in poetry. In particular, we shall look at a theory which arises with some frequency in the Notebooks: the value of dimness and obscurity, as opposed to clarity and distinctness, of ideas in literature.

Much attention has been paid by critics to the connection between emotion and intellect in Coleridge's poetic theory. An apparent dichotomy in Coleridge's attitude towards feeling and intellect has been remarked upon by such commentators as Marshall Suther,[1] Gordon McKenzie,[2] and J. B. Beer,[3] while Allen Tate[4] and

---

[1] The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York, 1960), pp.14-24.

[2] Organic Unity in Coleridge (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1939), pp.3-5.

[3] Coleridge the Visionary (London, 1959), passim.

[4] "Literature as Knowledge," in On the Limits of Poetry (New York, 1948), pp.36-41.

D. R. Godfrey[5] have pointed out that Coleridge does not solve the dilemma of intellect and emotion. Because the issue of passion versus philosophy, as it arises in the Biographia, Coleridge's letters, and other works, has been much discussed by other writers, we shall confine ourselves to a study of the relationship between passion and philosophy in poetry as Coleridge expresses it in the Notebooks, and in particular to Coleridge's attitude to dimness and clarity, a subject which has not been as extensively treated by Coleridge's commentators.

It should be mentioned, first of all, that there is little evidence in the Notebooks that Coleridge is hostile to philosophy, either per se, or in poetry. Readers of the Biographia have been struck by Coleridge's description of his early interest in metaphysics, where he says,

> Well were it for me, perhaps, had I never relapsed into the same mental disease; if I had continued to pluck the flower and reap the harvest from the cultivated surface, instead of delving in the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths.

---

[5]"Imagination and Truth: Some Romantic Contradictions," English Studies, XLIV (1963), 254-267. While Mr. Godfrey's thesis, that there is a basic contradiction between the poet and the philosopher in the work of Coleridge, is interesting, it should be noticed that it is based on a misapprehension of Coleridge's theory of imitation.

> But if in after time I have sought a refuge from bodily pain and mismanaged sensibility in abstruse researches, which exercised the strength and subtlety of the understanding without awakening the feelings of the heart; still there was a long and blessed interval, during which my natural faculties were allowed to expand, and my original tendencies to develop themselves. . . .[6]

There is every indication in the Notebooks that Coleridge is intensely interested in philosophy but there are few signs that he regards philosophy as having blighted his poetic gifts, and, it should be remembered, the two published volumes of the Notebooks cover the period when Coleridge first becomes aware of the waning of his poetic creativity. There are, however, two entries which, Miss Coburn's notes suggest, signify that there is, or has been in the past, a breach between philosophy and poetry in Coleridge's aesthetic theory. In the first entry (CN 1702), Coleridge is transcribing a passage by Christian Garve, which he later translates in Biographia Literaria.[7] Professor Coburn remarks that Coleridge's transcription

---

[6] Biographia Literaria, ed. John Shawcross (London, 1907), I, 10.

[7] II, 70, noticed by Professor Coburn, CN 1702n.

into his notebooks is not entirely accurate, and that the translation in the Biographia is far from exact (CN 1702n). She comments on the passage:

> The addition of "ready to admit" in the first sentence is . . . significant. It is inseparably linked with an important omission, both in the translation and here in the notebook transcription: on vortreffliche Verse zu machen there should follow the phrase genau zu beschreiben (exactly to describe). Its omission completely alters the meaning. Garve is simply stating the impotence of philosophy to analyse the poetic gift. Coleridge makes it sound as if he were contrasting the gift of the poet with the more limited powers of the philosopher. But this omission in the transcript cannot of itself account for the addition in the translation of "ready to admit" with its implication of unwillingness on the philosopher's part even to recognize the superior gifts of the poet. It would be wrong to magnify what may be a mere scribal error into a psychological oversight. But the combination of the two factors - omission plus addition - does make one wonder whether Coleridge was not moved to this particular misrendering by aggressive feeling towards some philosopher - or perhaps even towards the philosopher in himself? (CN 1702n).

In her notes on a later entry, Professor Coburn suggests that Coleridge is intending to reconcile philosophy and poetry (CN 2112n). She thus implies that there has been a rift in the past. The passage in question reads:

> In the men of continuous and discontinuous minds explain & demonstrate the vast difference between the disjunction conjunctive of the sudden Images seized on from external Contingents by Passion & Imagination (which is Passion eagle-eyed) - The Breeze I see, is in the Tree - It comes to cool my Babe and me.- which is the property & prerogative of continuous minds of the highest order, & the conjunction disjunctive of Wit -
>
> And like a lobster boil'd the Morn
> From black to red began to turn,
>
> which is the excellence of men of discontinuous minds - Arrange & classify the men of continuous minds - the pseudo-continuous, or juxta-ponent mind / metaphysician not a poet - poet not a metaphysician? - poet + metaphysician / the faithful in Love &c- (CN 2112n).

Professor Coburn remarks that "the implication that the poet who is also a metaphysician is a man of 'continuous mind' . . . underlines the intention to reconcile

philosophy and poetry . . ." (CN 2112n).

We shall now turn to Coleridge's attitude to thought in poetry. In an entry of October 1804, Coleridge states clearly the relationship of philosophy to poetry: "Philosophy to a few, Religion with many, is the Friend of Poetry: as producing the 2 conditions of pleasure from poetry, namely, tranquillity & the attachment of the affections to generalizations. God, Soul, Heaven, the Gospel, miracles &c are themselves a sort of poetry, compared with Lombard S^{t} & 'Change Alley speculations" (CN 2194). It is interesting that Coleridge should list tranquillity and generalizations as the two conditions of pleasure from poetry. Poetry, it will be remembered, is the "recalling of passion in tranquillity" (CN 787), and the importance of the general to art recalls Samuel Johnson's contention in Rasselas that the business of the poet is to examine not the individual but the species. Here Coleridge is maintaining that serenity and abstraction are necessary for the reader, rather than the poet. The examples Coleridge gives, showing that such general concepts as God, the soul, Heaven, and so on are poetic, at least in comparison with commerce, underline his argument that an interest in abstract concepts and general notions makes a man susceptible to the pleasures of poetry.

A sentence from the Notebooks which, at first glance, might appear to contradict Coleridge's assertion that philosophy is a friend to poetry, comes from the Spring of 1800: "A great Vice is metaphysical Solution in poetry" (CN 673). However, I do not think that Coleridge is saying that metaphysics itself cannot be a part of poetry. What Coleridge means, is that philosophy may not be utilized to impose a system of beliefs on the reader, perhaps to get the poet out of a difficult situation with a pat answer. The word "Solution" conjures up the poet using metaphysics almost as a playwright does a "deus ex machina." In either case, an outside factor is introduced into the work of art that does not grow from within it in an organic manner. Basil Willey, speaking about the place of philosophy in poetry, quotes Goethe who says that "'a poet cannot have too much philosophy, but he ought to keep it out of his poetry.'"[8] Professor Willey continues: "the business of the poet is not to state, explain, or vindicate propositions, but to communicate experience - the experience of his whole self. If the experience happens to be a thought or a system of beliefs, as it may often be, then the poet's function is to give us the emotional tone of the thought, to 'carry it alive into the heart by passion.'"[9]

---

[8]Basil Willey, "Poetry and Philosophy," The Listener, XLIII (Feb. 2, 1950), 189.

[9]Ibid., p.190.

Coleridge's point is not very different. The ideas that the poem contains must be part of the poem, they must emerge from within it, so that the thought is almost indistinguishable from the poem. The thought must not be used as an answer imposed from without.

The second of the two major elements we are discussing is feeling. That Coleridge assigns a major role to passion in poetry has been illustrated in an earlier chapter,[10] so I shall here only recapitulate briefly. Poetry, Coleridge says, is "past passion with pleasure" (CN 786), it is the "recalling of passion in tranquillity" (CN 787), and the poetic character is typified by passion and strong excitements (CN 829).

In the entries I have quoted, Coleridge is writing of philosophy or of passion in poetry, but not of the two together. There is, however, an important entry in which Coleridge connects thought and emotion in poetry:

> The elder languages fitter for Poetry because it they expressed only prominent ideas with clearness, like others but darkly - Therefore the French wholly unfit for Poetry; because is clear in their Language - i.e. - Feelings created by obscure ideas associate

---

[10] See above, p.14.

> themselves with the one clear idea. When no criticism is pretended to, & the Mind in itself simplicity gives itself up to a Poem as to a work of nature, Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood. It was so by me with Gray's Bard, & Collins' odes - The Bard once intoxicated me, & now I read it without pleasure. From this cause it is that what I call metaphysical Poetry gives me so much delight.- (CN 383).

This entry is not easily understood, but I think we shall comprehend it more fully in the light, first of certain other remarks Coleridge makes in the Notebooks concerning obscurity and dimness, and secondly of theories propounded by earlier eighteenth-century writers who were concerned with concepts of generality, sublimity and infinity.

There are a number of passages in the Notebooks in which the ideas of obscurity and dimness, as opposed to clarity and distinctness, figure. In November 1801, Coleridge asks "Whether or no the too great definiteness of Terms in any language may not consume too much of the vital & idea-creating force in distinct, clear, full made Images & so prevent originality - original thought as distinguished

from positive thought - Germans in general-" (CN 1016). A slightly different form of this theory is given in October 1803: "Mix up Truth & Imagination, so that the Imag. may spread its own indefiniteness over that which really happened, & Reality its sense of substance & distinctness to Imagination . . ." (CN 1541).

Other aspects of Coleridge's notion of dimness are found in CN 2559, "Of that wonderful connection between obscure feelings and Ideas - a speck of blood in the mouth, and immediately a long dream of Blood, wounds flowing - torrents of Blood -," and in CN 2064,

> . . . A really important Hint suggested itself to me, as I was falling into my first Sleep- the effect of the posture of the Body, <u>open mouth</u> for instance, on first Dreams - & perhaps on all. White teeth in behind a dim open mouth of a dim face-/ My Mind is not vigorous enough to pursue it - but I see, that it leads to a developement [sic] of the effects of continued Indistinctness of <u>Impressions</u> on the Imagination according to laws of Likeness & what ever that may solve itself into.

When we turn to earlier eighteenth-century examples of obscurity, we find Browne claiming that dimness

contributes to the work of the imagination. He writes, "indistinctness . . . is the food of fancy."[11] Fancy, it has been pointed out, is the creative faculty in Browne's theory, rather than imagination, the reverse of Coleridge's scheme.[12] Coleridge is unlikely to have read Browne,[13] but the quotation is significant, for, written in 1798, it shows that the idea was current at the beginning of Coleridge's literary career.

A number of eighteenth-century English writers touch upon various aspects of indefiniteness. Samuel Johnson's contention that "Poetry cannot dwell upon the minuter distinctions by which one species differs from another without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination, nor dissect the latent qualities of things without losing its general power of gratifying every mind by recalling its contentions,"[14] has a certain similarity to Coleridge's view of dimness as it

---

[11]Arthur Browne, "On the Distinction between Fancy and Imagination," in his Miscellaneous Sketches: or Hints for Essays, quoted by Earl R. Wasserman, "Another Eighteenth Century Distinction Between Fancy and Imagination," Modern Language Notes, LXIV (1949), 24.

[12]Wasserman, p.23.

[13]Loc. cit.

[14]Samuel Johnson, "Pastoral Poetry, I," The Rambler, no. 36, in Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, ed. Scott Elledge (Ithaca, New York, 1961), II, 577.

is set forth in the Notebooks. Sir Joshua Reynolds follows Dr. Johnson's lead: "The grand style of painting requires this minute attention to be carefully avoided. . . . The Italian attends only to the variable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in human nature; the Dutch, on the contrary, to literal truth and a minute exactness in the detail, as I may say of nature, modified by accident."[15]

Scott Elledge has averred that "Most of what Johnson said about the virtue of generality or the weakness of particularity was simply a restatement of part of the theory of the sublime. . . ."[16] There is certainly a connection between generality, a lack of clarity, and the sublime in eighteenth-century criticism. John Baillie associates the sublime with vastness, infinity, and a lack of particularity:

> Where an Object is vast, and at the same Time uniform, there is to the Imagination no Limits of its Vastness, and the Mind runs out into Infinity, continually creating as it were from the Pattern. Thus when the Eye loses the vast Ocean, the Imagination having

---

[15]Joshua Reynolds, "The Grand Style of Painting," The Idler, no 79, in Elledge, Essays, II, 832.

[16]Scott Elledge, "The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories of Generality and Particularity," PMLA, LXII (1947), 166.

> nothing to arrest it, catches up the Scene and extends the Prospect to Immensity, which it could by no means do, were the uniform Surface broke up by innumerable little Islands scattered up and down, and the Mind thus led into the Consideration of the Various Parts; for this adverting to dissimilar Parts ever destroys the creative Power of the Imagination.[17]

Closest to what appears to be Coleridge's concept of dimness in the Notebooks is Edmund Burke's Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful. Burke writes: "It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination."[18] He gives an example of this:

> If I make a drawing of a palace, or a temple, or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of these objects; but then (allowing for the effect of imitation, which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape would have affected in the reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal

---

[17]John Baillie, An Essay on the Sublime (1747), p.9, quoted by Elledge, "Theories of Generality and Particularity," p.164.

[18]New York, 1859, p.75.

> description I can give raises a very obscure and imperfect idea of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger emotion by the description than I could do by the best painting,[19]

Burke concludes that ". . . hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness which does not make some sort of approach toward infinity; which nothing can do while we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds are one and the same thing. A clear idea, is, therefore, another name for a little idea."[20]

The points we should notice, in the passages I have cited from Burke, are that greatness approaches infinity, and that nothing can do this while we perceive its bounds. I think it will be found that this is at least part of what Coleridge means in the entries I have quoted on obscurity.

We may now try to analyse Coleridge's most significant entry on dimness, CN 383.[21] In the first place, Coleridge is not arguing for lack of thought or for

---

[19]Burke, p.76.

[20]Burke, p.79.

[21]See above, p.120.

a mist of vague emotionalism. Miss Coburn explains, in her note to CN 383, that "the argument is not for obscurity, but against it." Another entry would tend to confirm this interpretation. In CN 1814, we learn of Coleridge's scorn for "dimness of mind":

> Morals never discussed till the Gentlemen retire to the Tea Table.- thence Women the ultimate Oracles of Morals, & those which flatter ⟨them or⟩ their Prejudices, or which most conduce to their Interest, the Orthodox Ethics, and the Point of Precedence among the Virtues settled by in reference to this (the Canon, the Constitution & Pole Star to all subsequent Legislation over the Fundamentals & Ground Work, the Magna Carta & the Sum, Substance, Substratum, vital Spirit & perpetual ut quo, et secundum quid interpretandum est, of the Decalogue . . .). The lines within Crotchets written as a specimen of accumulation of Words & Variation of Metaphors, arising from dimness of mind, & the utter absence of the deciding [the best], not from warmth of Feeling, or from crowdedness of Thought & Fancy.

Miss Coburn has said that Coleridge's argument, in CN 383, is "for the superior discrimination of the imagination" (in metaphysical poetry) "as compared with

the mere logic of the conceptual understanding" (in French poetry) "or the mere instinct of youthful enthusiasm" (with reference to the poetry of Gray and Collins). Coleridge certainly writes, "the French wholly unfit for poetry," because everything "is clear in their language." On the other hand, Coleridge says that he now reads the poetry of Gray and Collins without pleasure. It is only "when no criticism is pretended to, & the Mind in itself simplicity gives itself up to a Poem as to a work of nature, [that] Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood."

Coleridge has two objections in this entry: to poetry which can be understood only generally and not perfectly (e.g. the poetry of Gray and Collins), and to the clear poetry of the French. What, then, is there left to admire? "What I call metaphysical Poetry," Coleridge answers. He also esteems poetry in which only prominent ideas are expressed with clearness, others but darkly, and poetry, it is to be presumed, in which Feelings created by obscure ideas do not associate themselves with the one clear idea. These two phrases are important. In the first, Coleridge is asking for poetry that is not particularized and limited. We recall Burke's assertion that "to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its

bounds, are one and the same thing. A clear idea, is, therefore, another name for a little idea."[22] In the second phrase, Coleridge is saying that obscure feelings must not be ignored or blotted out by associating them with the one clear feeling or idea.

But, if Coleridge is seeking for poetry that is not particularized, why does he no longer admire the poetry of Gray and Collins? A possible answer to this question is that our understanding of some pre-romantic poetry is not capable of development. We may begin by comprehending these writers only generally, and be intoxicated by the feeling of dimness which arises from their works, but we later discover that their poetry is static. In an entry in which he discusses a school of philosophy which he does not admire, Coleridge expresses the necessity for dimness, growth and wonder. This entry may elucidate Coleridge's objection to some pre-romantic poetry, for the ideas expressed in this excerpt could as well be applied to poetry:

> Cause / Duty.- Now if I say to a Paleyan or Priestleyan my <u>mist</u>, my delving & difficulty, & he answers me in a set of parrot words, ⟨quite satisfied, clear as a pike-staff, nothing <u>before</u> &

---

[22]Burke, p.79.

> nothing behind - a stupid piece of mock-knowledge, having no root for then it would have feelings of dimness from growth, having no buds or twigs, for then it would have yearnings & strivings of obscurity from growing, but a dry stick of Licorish, sweet and tho' mawkish to the palate of self adulation,) acknowledging no sympathy with this delving, this feeling of a wonder / then I must needs set him down for a Priestleyan, Paleyan, Barbouldian, &c . . . - from Lock to Mackintosh (CN 2509).

In a similar way, poetry, for Coleridge, should have something "before" and something "behind"; it is obscure because it is "growing" and vital, rather than mechanical and lifelsss. The effect that the work of art has on the observer is complex, and the range of meaning and enjoyment should not be easily exhausted. But Coleridge has grown tired of The Bard and similar lyrics, perhaps because the scope of pleasure and significance is limited and these limits have been quickly reached.

CN 383 is a difficult entry. Coleridge does not tell us why he is no longer excited by the poetry of Gray and Collins, but the interpretation I have given above is perhaps a possible reading of the passage. Coleridge is seeking for poetry with a large range of meaning, and for

dimness in art which is the effect of growth and development, but he does not reject clarity entirely. The languages which are fitter for poetry, he says, express prominent ideas with clearness, it is only less prominent ones that are expressed "darkly".

I. A. Richards has given a helpful reading of CN 383, and has suggested why Coleridge should prefer "metaphysical" poetry:

> What he [Coleridge] is pointing to is the superiority of the characteristic Shakespearean structure of meaning over the characteristic later eighteenth-century structures, or of Blake's over Southey's. And we may equally take him as pointing to the superiority of the poetic structures used by Mr. Yeats in his recent poetry, in his best poetry by Mr. Eliot, by Mr. Auden or Mr. Empson at their best, or by Hopkins - very different though these structures are - their superiority to, let us say, the characteristic structures used by Rupert Brooke or the chief representatives of "Georgian Poetry." The point of contrast can be put shortly by saying that Rupert Brooke's verse in comparison with Mr. Eliot's has no inside. Its ideas and other components, however varied, are all expressed with

> prominence; lovely though the display may be, it is a display, the reader is visiting an Exhibition of Poetic Products.[23]

Mr. Richards' explanation is particularly instructive, I think. When this critic complains that Rupert Brooke's poetry has no "inside", he is essentially seeing the same fault that Coleridge sees in Priestleyan philosophy, that it has nothing "before" and nothing "behind".

Coleridge's notion of dimness, while it can be better understood through an examination of his eighteenth-century English predecessors, is also influenced by certain German philosophers, to whom Coleridge refers in the Notebooks. In CN 902, Coleridge comments on the distinction between klar and deutlich, which he derives from Wolff, who is following Leibniz (CN 902n). The entry reads:

> The excellent distinction between klar und deutlich (clear and indicable) - I have both a clear and indicable notion of Rain - it is a multitude of Drops of Water falling at once together & successively through the air from the clouds or from above at least - it is clear, for I have an

---

[23] I. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (London, 1962), p.215.

intuition accompanying each word which I use in the analysis - and it is indicable, for I can in like manner analyse snow & hail & running water, etc. and shew that Rain is different from them. But Red is a clear ~~idea~~ notion.- I know it when I see it, and I know that it is different from Green, & Blue - but I cannot shew the difference / in like manner the noise of winds, compared with the noise of Water-. and all Tastes & Smells, are clear, but none of them indicable ideas or notion. Quaere - all are unindicable Ideas, one that are clear, elementary or simple? - That is, not composed? -It is ~~clear~~ certain that all indicable notions are compounded, or they could not be analysed / yet I am inclined to believe, that many unindicable notions are composite, and that we are conscious that they are so - there always however remains the possibility of <u>making</u> such notions indicable / and this is the distinction between clear & muddy headed men / & this too the business of Education, in its latter stages. I say, <u>latter</u>, because I believe, nothing more unfavourable to intellectual progression, than a too early habit of rendering all our ideas distinct and indicable (CN 902).

This entry is intricate and the additional comments which Miss Coburn supplies in her notes to the passage make it even more complicated. We cannot go into all the ramifications of the entry, but certain aspects of the excerpt are important for an understanding of Coleridge's concept of dimness. Coleridge is discussing the distinction between clear and indicable notions. He then asks whether all unindicable ideas are necessarily simple, in other words not composed nor capable of analysis. He concludes that many unindicable notions are composite, and that we are conscious that they are so. It is possible to make such unindicable notions capable of analysis, and this, he says, is the business of education, but he warns that intellectual progression can be stultified by a "too early habit of rendering all our ideas distinct and indicable."

For an understanding of this passage, and for a clarification of all these rather complicated terms and distinctions, it will be best to turn to Leibniz, from which the passage largely derives. Through an examination of Leibniz' ideas, Coleridge's entry should become more comprehensible.

Leibniz felt that DesCarte's thesis, that whatever is clearly and distinctly conceived is true, was

inadequate, and consequently he laid down a number of definitions of clearness and distinctness, among which knowledge is described as either obscure or clear, and clear knowledge as either confused or distinct.[24] "As to the meaning of these terms," writes Lord Russell,

> a notion is obscure when it does not enable me to recognize the thing represented, or distinguish it from other similar things; it is clear when it does enable me to recognize the thing represented. Clear knowledge is confused when I cannot enumerate separately the marks required to distinguish the thing known from other things, although there are such marks. . . . Clear knowledge is distinct either when we can separately enumerate the marks of what is known - i.e. when there is a nominal definition - or where what is known is indefinable but primitive, i.e. an ultimate simple notion.[25]

Another important distinction that Leibniz makes is between perception and apperception.

> Locke thought there could be nothing in the mind of which the mind was not conscious. Leibniz pointed out the absolute necessity of unconscious mental

---

[24]Bertrand Russell, A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz (London, 1937), p.167.

[25]Loc. cit.

> states. He distinguished between perception, which consists merely in being conscious of something, and apperception, which consists in self-consciousness, i.e. in being aware of perception. An unconscious perception <u>is</u> a state of unconsciousness, but is unconscious in the sense that we are not aware <u>of</u> it, though in it we are aware of something else.[26]

Perception, besides being conscious (apperception) and unconscious, may also be confused. "A confused perception, we may say is such that we are not separately conscious of all its parts. Knowledge is confused, in Leibniz's phraseology, when I cannot enumerate separately the marks required to distinguish the thing known from other things. And so, in confused perception, though I may be conscious of <u>some</u> elements of my perception, I am not conscious of all. . . ."[27] The distinction between the various types of perception is, therefore, not dissimilar from Leibniz' distinctions between clear, confused and distinct knowledge. The importance of these unconscious perceptions appears from the "Introduction" to the <u>New Essays</u> where

---

[26]Russell, p.156.

[27]<u>Ibid</u>., p.157.

Leibniz writes that it is in consequence of these unconscious perceptions that "'the present is big with the future and laden with the past, that all things conspire, and that, in the least substances, eyes as penetrating as those of God could read the whole course of the things in the universe.'"[28]

Bearing in mind Leibniz' theories and recalling Coleridge's interest in the subconscious and his realization of the significant part it can play in artistic creation, and remembering Coleridge's admiration of art that stretches beyond limited boundaries, it is not surprising that Coleridge should attack the "habit of rendering all our ideas distinct and indicable" (CN 902).

Coleridge's concept of indistinctness is closely connected with his theory of organic unity. Coleridge is searching for poetry that is evolved ab intra, that is implicit rather than explicit, and that has "feelings of dimness from growth" (CN 2509). It is interesting that Coleridge should have criticized the mechanists for placing too great an emphasis on clear images. Coleridge, writing to a friend, said that he "hoped Wordsworth, in his

---

[28]Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, New Essays concerning human understanding by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz . . . , trans. by Alfred Gideon Langley (New York and London, 1896), p.48, quoted by Russell, p.156.

projected philosophical poem, would teach the world 'the necessity of a general revolution in the modes of developing and disciplining the human mind by the substitution of life and intelligence . . . for the philosophy of mechanism, which, in everything that is most worthy of the human intellect strikes Death, and cheats itself by mistaking clear images for distinct conceptions, where intuitions alone are possible or adequate to the majesty of the Truth.'"[29]

In the "metaphysical" poetry which delights Coleridge, poetry in which only prominent ideas are expressed "with clearness, like others but darkly," a balance has been achieved between thought and emotion. The indistinctness of an idea in poetry is not due to "the absence of understanding but . . . [to] the presence of feeling" (CN 921n). It can not be said that Coleridge, in the Notebooks, is greatly troubled by a dichotomy of the heart and the head. In the "metaphysical" poetry he so much admires, Coleridge recognizes that an equilibrium has been attained between thought and emotion.

---

[29] Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London, 1895), II, 649, quoted by Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies (London, 1949), p.30.

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

Baker, James Volant. The Sacred River. Baton Rouge, 1957.

Bate, Walter Jackson. "Coleridge on the Function of Art," Perspectives in Criticism, ed. Harry Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp.125-159.

Beer, J. B. Coleridge the Visionary. London, 1959.

Benziger, James. "Organic Unity: Leibnitz to Coleridge," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 24-48.

Brett, R. L. "Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination," English Studies, II (1949), 75-90.

Burke, Edmund. Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful. New York, 1859.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Anima Poetae from the unpublished notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge. London, 1895.

_____. Biographia Literaria, edited with his Aesthetical Essays by John Shawcross. 2 vols. London, 1907.

_____. Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor. London, 1936.

_____. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 2 vols. Oxford, 1956.

_____. The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. [W. G. T.] Shedd. 7 vols. New York, 1853.

_____. The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Kathleen Coburn. 2 vols. New York, 1957 and 1961.

_____. Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor. New edition. London, 1960.

Crane, Ronald S. "Cleanth Brooks; or The Bankruptcy of Critical Monism," Modern Philology, XLV (1948), 226-245.

Dryden, John. Essays of John Dryden, ed. W. P. Ker, 2 vols. New York, 1961.

Elledge, Scott, ed. Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays. 2 vols. Ithaca, New York, 1961.

_____. "The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories of Generality and Particularity," PMLA, LXII (1947), 147-162.

Fogle, Richard Harter. The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962.

Godfrey, D. R. "Imagination and Truth: Some Romantic Contradictions," English Studies, XLIV (1963), 254-267.

Griggs, Earl Leslie. "Wordsworth Through Coleridge's Eyes," Wordsworth Centenary Studies, ed. Gilbert T. Dunklin (London, 1963), pp.45-90.

Hadamard, Jacques. The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field. New York, 1956.

Hartley, David. Observations on Man. 2 Vols, London, 1791.

Havens, Raymond Dexter. The Mind of a Poet. 2 vols. Baltimore, 1941.

Herford, C. H. The Age of Wordsworth. London, 1919.

House, Humphry. Coleridge. London, 1962.

Jack, Ian. English Literature: 1815-1832. Oxford, 1963.

Jung, C. G. "On the Relation of Analytic Psychology to Poetic Art," Contributions to Analytical Psychology, trans. H. G. and Cary F. Baynes. London, 1948.

Lowes, John Livingston. The Road to Xanadu. Revised edition. Boston, 1930.

McKenzie, Gordon. Organic Unity in Coleridge. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1939.

Monk, Samuel H. The Sublime. Ann Arbor, 1960.

Muirhead, John H. Coleridge as Philosopher. London, 1930.

Orsini, G. N. G. "Coleridge and Schlegel Reconsidered," Comparative Literature, XVI (Spring, 1964), 97-118.

Piper, Herbert W. The Active Universe. London, 1962.

Plotinus. The Enneads, trans. Stephen MacKenna. New York, 1960.

Poincaré, [Jules] Henri. The Foundations of Science, trans. George Bruce Halstead. New York, 1913.

Powell, A. E. (Mrs. E. R. Dodds). The Romantic Theory of Poetry. London, 1926.

Raysor, Thomas Middleton. "Coleridge's Criticism of Wordsworth," PMLA, LIV (1939), 496-510.

Read, Herbert. The True Voice of Feeling. New York, 1953.

Richards, Ivor Armstrong. Coleridge on Imagination. Third edition. London, 1962.

Russell, Bertrand. A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz. Second edition. London, 1937.

Schneider, Elisabeth. Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan. Chicago, 1953.

Schrickx, W. "Coleridge, Ernst Platner and the Imagination," English Studies, XL (1959), 157-162.

Schulz, Max F. The Poetic Voices of Coleridge. Detroit, 1963.

Smith, R. Jack. "Intention in an Organic Theory of Poetry," Sewanee Review, LVI (1948), 625-633.

Snyder, Alice D. The Critical Principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites as Employed by Coleridge. Ann Arbor, 1918.

Spingarn, J. E., ed., Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century. 2 vols. London, 1957.

Suther, Marshall. The Dark Night of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. New York, 1960.

Tate, Allen. "Literature as Knowledge," On the Limits of Poetry (New York, 1948), pp.16-48.

Thorpe, Clarence DeWitt. "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," Journal of the History of Ideas, V (1944), 387-414.

_____. "The Imagination: Coleridge versus Wordsworth," Philological Quarterly, XVIII (1939), 1-18.

Wasserman, Earl. "Another Eighteenth Century Distinction Between Fancy and Imagination," Modern Language Notes, XLIV (1949), 23-25.

Willey, Basil. Nineteenth Century Studies. London, 1949.

_____. "Poetry and Philosophy," The Listener, XLIII (Feb. 2, 1950), 189-190.

_____. The Eighteenth Century Background. London, 1940.

Wordsworth, William, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. London, 1963.