The progress of poets down the ages till modern times has been presented in a nutshell by Peter Viereck:

From the Sublime to the Meticulous in Four Stages

Dante: We were God's poets
Burns: We were the people's poets
Mallarmé: We were poets' poets.
Today (preening): Ah, but we are critics' poets.¹

'Meticulous' in the context echoes 'ridiculous' and the implication seems rather ominous. The epigram humorously highlights the pathetic plight of the modern poet in the wake of his subordination to the analytic critic. The bardic and the long-haired poets have disappeared. Their modern counterparts are much-too-trim.

Writing for the critic, thus, becomes a feature of contemporary self-consciousness, as remarked by John Bayley.² And, the new poetry seems to assume the characteristics of a machine that can be dismantled at will into its constituent parts without losing anything, thanks to critical canons that expect us "to extract, squeeze, tease and press every drop of

² Ibid., pp.69-70.
meaning" out of poetry. Cerebration and analysis have tended to suppress the Romantic Imagination for quite some time. Its withdrawal and reassertion in modern poetry perhaps sum up the history of the Romantic tradition in the twentieth century.

A survey of the fluctuating fortunes of Romanticism in the century may involve a curious exploration of a series of conflicting stances and ironic assertions. For one thing, as Harold Bloom puts it, "modernist poetry in English organized itself to an excessive extent, as a supposed revolt against Romanticism, in the mistaken hope of escaping its inwardness." As has been widely acknowledged, what the so-called enemies of Romanticism like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were reacting against in the early part of the century was Romanticism in its decline. And, they "read their objections to its tone, conventions and world-view back on to the high Romantics." It sounds rather incredible that these eminent men should have had so much difficulty in distinguishing the shadow from the substance. However, as it appeared, their mistaken labours brought about a rejuvenation of the Romantic tradition in the century.

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5. Bornstein, George (ed.) Romantic and Modern - Revaluations of Literary Tradition (1977), Introduction, p. X. Henceforth referred to as RM.
The faint-hearted adherence of the poets of the fin-de-siècle to worn-out Romantic modes had brought much odium on the tradition at the turn of the century. The feeble tone of its Georgian practitioners had also done it harm. Lasselles Abercrombie, for one, would appear to have simplified the matter a little too much, by opposing Romanticism to realism, making no allowance for realities other than physical. His definition of Romanticism as a tendency to rely on inner experience, however, links it up with psychological realities. Traditional critics like P.L.Lucas deprived Romanticism of its charm. Romanticism tended to lose its identity too in the ocean of subjective definitions. In such a context, the fate of Lovejoy's attempt at identifying the common aspects of Romanticism is hardly surprising. The definitions in most cases betrayed the obsessions of the individual critics rather than the true nature of Romanticism. In other words, we may say that the various definitions served as objectives — correlative for expressing the emotions of critics.

The popular fallacy of identifying Romantic poetry with nature-poetry has been much commented on. The fact that the great Romantics were essentially humanists is often lost sight of. But Harold Bloom goes to the other extreme, when


he calls Romantic poetry 'anti-nature poetry', For substantiating his argument Bloom points out that even "Wordsworth managed to have a reciprocity or dialogue with nature only in flashes." But surely, Wordsworth's attempt at subordinating the interests of nature to the concerns of man does not amount to an anti-nature stance. Geoffrey H. Hartman reveals a commendable grasp of the process, when he observes that "Wordsworth subdued poetry to the theme of nature's role in the growth of the individual mind."

"The dream of nature in Wordsworth", he adds, "does not lead to formal romance, but is an early developmental step in converting the solipsistic into the sympathetic imagination; it entices the brooding soul out of itself, toward nature first, then toward humanity." Hartman, thus, traces the progress from 'naturalisation' to 'humanisation' — from the self-conscious to the anti-self-conscious level of the mind — that marks out the Romantics from lesser men.

The modernists' aversion to Romanticism may be attributed, partly at least, to their misunderstanding of the kind of interests the great Romantics brought to bear on man and nature. Eliot, for example, says:

"... there may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters...."

8. NC., p.9.
The "impulse to the spirited phrase" evidenced here seems rather surprising in Eliot. Perhaps it also yields hints of an apathy for life and suggests an unwitting attempt at driving a wedge between life and literature. Obviously, this is one of Eliot's early statements that disturbed him later. T.E.Hulme's objection "even to the best of the Romantics" sounds equally unconvincing.

The humanitarian concerns of Wordsworth and the relevance of the Romantic poetry for the modern man have been impressively brought out by Jane P. Tompkins, when she says of Wordsworth:

He believes that the need for poetry's refining influence has been created by the "increasing accumulation of men in cities", which has "blunted the discriminating powers of the mind ... the uniformity of occupations", moreover, "produces a craving for extra-ordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies." Wordsworth affirms that his poetry will counteract this trend by enlightening the understanding, strengthening and purifying the affections, and enlarging the mind's capacity to become excited "without the application of gross and violent stimulants."

She also points out how, after the French Revolution, the sensibility cultivated for its own sake earlier turns into an effort to show that "poetry's power over the feelings can bind men together by appealing to their deepest human sympathies."

The enormous strides in discursive learning witnessed in the present century do not appear to have undermined the validity of Romantic perceptions by any means. Nor have they blotted out the Romantic instincts of the modern man. What we have been witnessing is only "an accelerating increase in the pigeonholed knowledge by individuals, of more and more about less and less." The need for the more inclusive knowledge yielded by the poetic imagination is only accentuated in the context. The modern psycho-analysis's attempts to delve deep into the infra-rational faculties of the human mind have done signal service to Romanticism. They have provided the Romantic poet with a credible base for his claims on the mode of functioning of the sub-conscious mind. Of course, it is true that there has been, as yet, no successful attempt at distinguishing between the infra-rational and the supra-rational. The Coleridgean view of the confluence of subject and object which happens because of a sense of shared awareness, is misread by the positivist critics like I.A. Richards. And, as for Coleridge's insistence that the secondary imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate",


13. See RC., p.5. Prof. Bloom seems to hold the contrary view.

many suspect the authenticity of the process. The Freudian
depth-psychology has now assured us of a different level
of inner activity that falsifies the pretenses of man. Truth
has, thus, been conceived of as psychological rather than
objective.  

The Romantic creed had no doubt been narrowed and
simplified in the early years of the twentieth century to
a ridiculous extent. Poetry had become a vehicle for simple-
minded emotions and had lost all intellectual bearings.
A. E. Housman’s confession on the process of poetic composition
and the way poetry physically affects the reader takes us
to one extreme. Thomas Hardy’s use of poems for giving
vent to his overwhelming emotions without having resort to
distancing devices exposed him to the charge of sentimentality.
Yet, the credit for giving eloquent expression to the agony
of the disinherited mind for the first time in English poetry
should perhaps be his. Hardy’s contribution towards shifting
the centre of interest from the external world to the poet’s
own consciousness has been nearly Wordsworthian. The theo-
logical questionings of Hardy perhaps befogged the signif-
ificance of his contribution for quite some time. The lovely

15. Spears, Monroe K., Dionysus and the City: Modernism in
Twentieth Century Poetry. (New York: O.U.P., 1970),
p.55. Henceforth referred to as DC.

Housman - Poetry and Prose: A Selection ed.P.C.Hartwood
(London: Hutchinson Educational, 1971 - reprint, 1972),
pp.243-248.

17. Pinto, Vivian de Sola, Crisis in English Poetry 1860-1930
(London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971, reprint
phantasies of de la Mare’s early verse seem to have forced even his admirers to miss the profound symbolism of his later work. The Georgian week-end poets did not fight shy of their escapist leanings and easy emotions. Their bid to breathe a new life into English poetry was pitifully feeble. An understandable partiality for ‘Englishness’ seems to have resulted in the exclusion of Edward Thomas, a gifted poet of the Wordsworthian school, from the Georgian fold. Edward Thomas was, in fact, “distinctively modern”¹⁸ both in sensibility and mode of expression. Yet, he suffered a long neglect.

The literary scene witnessed by the self-styled anti-Romantics in the early part of the century was indeed depressing. And the Coup d’etat they effected was apparently called for. T.E.Hulme’s bid to classicise poetry had a salutary impact on prevailing modes. Of course, in that process, he reduced man to a pitiful thing by reckoning him as “an extra-ordinarily fixed, limited animal”. His suspicion about the infinite was perhaps justified. But we are only amused when we find him count out Keats from the Romantics:

Verse strictly confined to the earthly and the definite (Keats is full of it) might seem to them to be excellent writing, excellent craftsmanship, but not poetry....

Hulme, however, draws a useful distinction between the two types of languages when he says:

The direct language is poetry, it is direct because it deals in images. The indirect language is prose, it uses images that have died and become figures of speech.

The distinction plays a vital role in the resuscitation of the Romantic tradition in the twentieth century. Hulme was evidently the spirit behind the Imagist revolt spearheaded by Ezra Pound. But Pound, surely, was not allergic either to personal emotion or to the infinite as much as Hulme. His definition of Image as an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" and his prescription for the "direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective," suggest that he had an open mind in the matter. His silence on the intrusion of the infinite seems significant in the context of Hulme's obsession with it. But a rigorous adoption of the Imagist

ideals turns out to be far from desirable. A typical Imagist poem like Pound's 'Metro', for all its concentration, brevity and vitality, does not transform the object. Such poems perhaps epitomise the extreme feelings of their authors against the presence of the discursive element in poetry. Imagism was virtually French Symbolism shorn of its magical and mystical pretensions. But the Imagists appeared unaware of their debt to the great Romantics from whom the Symbolists had drawn their technique and carried to an extreme. When T.S. Eliot allowed himself to be schooled by the French Symbolists in his early phase, he, too, revealed little awareness of their debt to the Romantic tradition.

Symbols have always had a vital role in Romantic poetry. Coleridge, for instance, says:

In looking at objects of nature, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for something within me that already exists than observing anything new. 22

As remarked by Bateson, symbols served the great Romantics as "objectives-correlative to their subjective experiences" 23 and testified to a conscious cerebral control in their poetry. With the lesser Romantics it was indeed a different matter. The "rationalisation of Romanticism" 24

24. Ibid., p.
became a crying need because of them. Hulme's insistence on classical virtues in poetry (while, ironically enough, warming to Bergson's Coleridgean view of the artist's function) signalled a movement in that direction. Eliot's aggressive attempt to depersonalise poetry had also a salutary impact on the Romantic tradition. But the 'escape' from personality and emotions that he advocated had allowed scope for a good deal of misunderstanding. But a closer look at his theory of objective correlative might well have helped to clear the air, as it was meant to objectify the emotions of the poet while sharing them with his readers. Eliot's rapport with the Romantic idea of poetry as an emotive language was thus suggested. While his belief in the poet's ability to control the responses of his readers hinted at here might have amused quite a few, the therapeutic value of the objective correlative as a self-disciplining device could hardly be questioned. What he had opposed was the indulgence of emotions, as observed by Eliseo Vivas. His theory of dissociation of sensibility has been critically examined by many in recent times. Frank Kermode, for one, shows how there is little historical propriety in treating the dissociation as a seventeenth century phenomenon. While tracing an imagistic link


between the Romantics and the moderns, he also observes how Donne actually lacked the qualities which Eliot valued most. He says:

Miss Tuve's now famous demonstration that Donne's images have a logical, or at any rate a pseudo-logical function was a direct affront to the basis of the theory that he was a poet of the modern image. Eliot himself veered round to such a view when he prophesied the demise of Donne... 27

Kermode also points out how Donne's poems reveal the note of passion, the true voice of feeling, characteristic of the great Romantics. 28 It was the same note that had made the Romantic a persona-non-grata to Eliot. Kermode's findings seem formidable, though his comments suggest a bias in Milton's favour. Eliot's dissociationist argument, substantial as it is, has obviously been not so sound in its implications.

All the same, it may be unfair to suspect the sincerity of Eliot's anti-Romantic protestations in his early phase, though the means he adopted to cure himself of his Romantic affiliation were odd indeed. What he sought to achieve was a proper distancing between the poet and his audience on the one hand and the man that suffers and the poet that creates on the other. The popular opinion that holds him guilty of

27. Ibid., p.147.
hunting with the hounds and running with the hares at the same time has not perhaps been wholly discriminating. The significant distinction he has drawn between 'verse' and 'poetry' in his essay on Rudyard Kipling may perhaps go a long way towards clearing the confusion.²⁹ And, the views he has expressed in his later essay on "The Three Voices of Poetry" may clinch the issue once for all in favour of Romanticism.³⁰ They will be discussed in the chapter on T.S. Eliot.

The rhetorical discontinuity brought about by the symbolist obsession of the moderns made the modernist idiom, "dry, oblique, learned and extremely compressed".³¹ And, a proper corrective for the malaise turned out to be beyond the reach of the modernists at the moment, thanks to the crying need they felt to keep themselves abreast of the times. Yeats's achievement in steering clear of the modernist excesses, while making use of the Symbolist methods was singular. Broadly speaking, the emphasis in the first half of the twentieth century was on the process of tightening the poetic modes and on delving into the darker recesses of human consciousness. Such tendencies are reversed only in the post-modernist phase that started in the mid 1950's.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.89-102.
This process of 'tightening' has often been taken for an anti-Romantic revolt. The way in which some original minds have deluded themselves into such a notion, perhaps, makes 'irony' and 'paradox' the ruling phrases of the century. The extent to which the great Romantics have been unacknowledged legislators for most of the prominent critics and poets of the modern literary arena should prompt us to attempt a reappraisal of Romanticism in its relation to the modernist poetry.

The devaluation of Romanticism outlined earlier resulted largely from the absence of a proper understanding and assessment of its concepts. First of all, as hinted at already, the humanistic implications of Romanticism got entirely obscured, while its negative aspects were highlighted by both its friends and enemies. F.L. Lucas, for example, in his full-length study of Romanticism, had hardly anything to say about its positive aspects. Yet he seems to have done a real service to the Romantic tradition, when he pinpointed how the Freudian viewpoint "links together various characteristics of Romanticism, some healthy and some morbid, that hitherto seemed arbitrary"
Edmund Wilson also stresses the negative aspects of Romanticism, when he brands both Eliot and Yeats as escapist. George Bornstein has rightly observed that the Blakean view of Romanticism, favoured by Northrop Frye, serves as a corrective to the notions of critics like Edmund Wilson. Wilson's partiality for science and ordinary life, which were slighted by the Symbolists, need not have prompted him to take a dim view of the achievements of Eliot and Yeats. For, the Symbolist technique adopted by them, has not, after all, rendered them blind to the realities of life. The inclination of many modernist critics and poets to treat Romanticism as a disease perhaps suggests fear that it might open the flood-gates of emotions submerging all intellectual barriers.

The anti-Romantic tide that swept the modern arena had apparently gained its vital force from the unfair insinuations of Matthew Arnold. He maintained among other things, that the "Romantics did not know enough." Perhaps, we have reason to be happy about their comparative ignorance, as excessive.

learning might well have "deadened or perverted" their poetic sensibility (as it perhaps happened in Arnold's own case). Arnold himself was certainly aware that true poetry was made in the soul, and not in the wit, and an over-abundance of information could hardly help in the process. 37

Romanticism had, in fact, come as a breath of fresh air. Historically speaking, it had brought about an internalisation - "the shifting of the centre of gravity of consciousness from the cosmos around him into the personal human being himself." 38 It had helped man to cleanse the doors of perception and see into the life of things. As Blake puts it -

"To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour".

(William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence")

And what the great Romantics conceived of and achieved was far from escape or intoxicated dreaming. Theirs was indeed a culture of feelings, but not feelings divorced from thoughts, as the modernist critics apparently believed. Imagination had helped the great Romantics to achieve a fusion of thoughts and feelings and to effect "a coalescence of the subject and the object", as Coleridge calls it. R.A. Foakes puts the Coleridgean theory in perspective:

36. EV., p.52.
Coleridge's theory of the imagination as the supreme unifying and the creative power in the poet, was one aspect of a transcendentalism much less emphasised by modern writers who base their critical outlook on his; the imagination for Coleridge was that faculty which idealises and unifies, the faculty by which he may perceive the unity of the universe, and apprehend God. It is not through Reason and self-knowledge that we approach the divine, but through the highest form of self-consciousness, which is for us the source and principle of all our possible self-knowledge. It is through the individual consciousness represented at its highest in the creative act of the imagination which repeats the external act of creation of God, that we perceive God.39

The fusion of thoughts and feelings occasioned in the process is evidently an achievement of the imagination. And it amounts to the transcendental faculty taking charge of poetry. Denis Donoghue aptly describes imagination as "that mental power which finds unnecessary the strict separation of conscious and unconscious life, of primary and secondary processes, in Freud's terminology; which deals with contradictions not by subordinating one to another but by accommodating all within a larger perspective; and which entertains feelings and motives before they have been assigned to categories or organised into thoughts, attitudes, statements, values or commitments".40 It is implied that the poem resulting from such a deeper awareness is the product of the total personality. And we may safely

assume that the poetry of the first voice or impersonal voice referred to by Eliot,\textsuperscript{41} at its best, results from a similar process. The Inner Voice mentioned elsewhere by Eliot\textsuperscript{42} has to be distinguished from this impersonal voice. As maintained by C.K. Stead, the former is the voice of conscious individualistic thought,\textsuperscript{43} and is taken care of by the self-conscious level of the mind. And, though it may pass for the personal voice in the Eliotian terminology, its affinity to the 'character' of the poet is obvious.

The highest form of self-consciousness has to be identified with the transcendental faculty and associated with the imaginative process that achieves the unifying vision expressed in a poem. This process has at times been misconstrued by the positivists. To I.A. Richards, for example, imagination is "a word like any other and is put to work without special privileges". The Coleridgean conception of unity is thus construed as a 'composure'.\textsuperscript{44} As observed by Gerald Graff, "whereas Coleridge invoked the transcendentalist spiritualism in order to assert that the imagination yields truth, Richards invokes a materialism in order to assert that imagination can never be false".\textsuperscript{45} If Richards has taken the Romantic harm out of the

\textsuperscript{41} OPP., p.100.
\textsuperscript{44} SE., p.1.
word 'imagination' as observed by Denis Donoghue, he seems to have thrown out the baby, as it were, with the bathwater.

Obviously, this highest form of self-consciousness is distinct from human awareness in its popular sense. We may call that inspired consciousness or the common consciousness working in submission to the higher, so that it takes on voluntarily the spontaneity of the latter. The unity achieved in the process marks the moment of knowing which is also the moment of poetic creation. "The knower, then, ceases to exist as subject at all", as remarked by Owen Barfield. And, conversely, when he comes fully to himself as subject, he ceases to know. Barfield adds that "imaginations are generated in the poet's consciousness as he passes from the former state to the latter, and the difficulty is to retain them in the memory". The anti-self-consciousness referred to by Geoffrey H. Hartman may be identified with that state of 'knowing'. In the Blakean terminology what it yields is an 'organised innocence' that is akin to man's original state of innocence and harmony. It is craved for by the Romantic poet as a possible means of getting over dialectical tensions. It is indeed a momentary achievement. The vital force that helps

46. Sc., p.3.


in the process was earlier associated with inspiration and attributed to the whims of the Muse. The poet "himself hardly knew what it was — a kind of wind perhaps, which blew where it listed and might fill his sails at some odd moment after he had whistled for it all day in vain." But "today, we are more inclined to think of inspiration as a mood — a mood that may come and go in the course of a morning's work." We may also liken it to a cerebral stroke, as indicated by Abrams. The new perspective, surely, does not alter the substance of the resultant poetic achievement. And, the effort, when it is of a high order, does not reveal any escapist tendency as the insight afforded thus enables the poet to see not only with but through the natural world, to what may lie beyond it. And, as Allen Tate insists, "an insight of that order never begins at the top; it carries the bottom along with it, however high it may climb." In other words, it involves the apprehension of the essential unity without neglecting the exteriorities. Gerard Manley Hopkins calls it "the dearest freshness deep down things" ("God's Grandeur").

Such a view, however, brings in its train several new

49. FE, p.109.


complications. At the self-conscious level the mind is apt to be over-conscious of its 'esemplastic power' and may, thus, promote 'egotistical' tendencies on the part of poets. What Keats named 'the egotistical sublime' instances such a tendency, albeit in a sublime form. His own negative capability perhaps provided an effective means of controlling such a trend. But in its unrestrained, decadent forms it has brought much odium on the Romantic tradition. Yeats's father goes, understandably enough, to the extent of equating personal utterance with egotism and warns his son against falling a prey to it. He favoured dramatic expression as it helped in the objectivisation of personal feelings. But after his early experiments with the dramatic mode Yeats finds that only personal utterance is after his heart. He believes that it could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. For holding his emotions in leash he has resort to other methods too. They will be dealt with in the chapters on Yeats.

Subjectivity in its extreme form at times assumes the dimensions of a malady, though Geoffrey H. Hartman, for one, (as noted by Harold Bloom) regards it as an inevitable stage in the progress of the mind towards a more humanized imagination. The curbing of it is apparently the concern of

53. RG., p.2.
the self-conscious level of the human mind. It seems to be one of "the craftsman's problems", in the words of T.S.Eliot. The inherent tendency that promotes such a concern also seems to affect only the self-conscious level. Viewed thus, the 'negative capability' exemplified by Shakespeare and Keats would also seem to be a matter concerning the same level of the mind, although it is contrasted with the solipsistic tendency revealed by poets like Milton and Wordsworth. The distinction drawn by Coleridge between the two ways in which the poetic imagination worked in Shakespeare and Milton should go a long way towards identifying the two types:

While the former darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and the blood; the other attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own IDEAL. All things and modes of action shape themselves anew in the being of Milton; while Shakespeare becomes all things, yet for ever remaining himself...  

Ironical as it may seem, the unconscious activity of the mind occasioned by an imaginative perception is influenced by the self-conscious level. In other words, it is the outer consciousness that determines the direction and mode of the unconscious activity, though it has apparently nothing to do with the quality of the vision subsequently achieved. While the solipsistic mode of imagination, promoted either by

54. OPP., p.238.
humanistic concerns or by an unchecked self-consciousness, enables the poet to see himself in every object that he perceives, the sympathetic mode, backed up, as it is, by an in-born feeling for the objects of perception, prompts him to negate his own personality and identify himself with them. In either mode, the imagination's essential function seems to be identical. The reconciliation of the subject and the object - the percipient and the perceived - mind and nature - in the act of cognition occurs irrespective of whether the subject goes out to mingle with the object as it happens in the case of the sympathetic imagination, or the object merges itself with the subject losing its own identity, as it occurs in the solipsistic mode. Such a union of polarities affords a sense of joy and occasions a perception of unity in diversity, of harmony in conflict, of life in the lifeless, and of 'something' as Wordsworth puts it:

... loftier, more adorned,  
Then is the common aspect, daily garb  
Of human life....  

(Prelude, Book V, ll 575-7).

A capacity to achieve such perceptions, either negative or affirmative, may go a long way towards making life worth living. Let us hear Coleridge speak of the Wordsworthian achievement:
The union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing; with the imaginative faculty in modifying, the objects observed; and, above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre and dried up the sparkle and the dew drops.  

But, T.E. Hulme, for one, has ridiculed the Romantic tendency to think in terms of a heaven on earth and to be obsessed with the Infinite. The classical poet, he says, remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. "He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas".  

We can certainly appreciate the sincerity of Hulme's feelings in the context. But his reluctance to acknowledge that the great Romantics had their feet firm on the solid earth, while their mental resources helped them to achieve transcendental perceptions, may not stand to reason. Wordsworth, for example, was keen on looking "steadily at his subject". As pointed out by Frederick A. Pottle, his assertion in this regard in the preface to the Lyric Ballads, paradoxical though, means "grasping objects firmly and accurately in the mode of common perceptions, and then looking at them imaginatively."  

57. TEC., p.96.  
tracing the progress of his inner life ever since his childhood in "Tintern Abbey", he has impressed on us that the insight he gained into the life of things is not the result of a light-hearted fancy. We are convinced that he has cared enough for the physical features of the objects of nature. The insights he gained into essential aspects were surely not at the expense of external features. His endeavour was only to see farther and deeper. H.W. Garrod has observed how the Wordsworthian mysticism was rooted in "sensationalism".59 Coleridge has made a refreshing confession in his "Dejection - An Ode" of a fear that he is losing grip over the faculty of imagination that enabled him to 'feel' things while seeing them:

I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

The confession implies that the capacity to see things in their outward aspects was very much with him earlier. In fact, he reckons it as a mark of genius:

Like the moisture or the polish on a pebble, genius neither distorts nor false-colours its objects; but on the contrary brings out many a vein and many a tint, which escapes the eye of the common observation, thus raising to the rank of gems what had been often kicked away by the hurrying foot of the traveller on the dusty high road of custom. 60


And obviously, there is no "inherent and inescapable conflict" between the scientific and the poetic modes of apprehending realities. They are complementary and supplementary. Of course, we are apt to be carried away by Wordsworth's contempt for the "meddling intellect" which "murders to dissect", and for the "philosopher", who would "botanise on his mother's grave". As indicated by Abrams, these lines have to be read only as his "judgements against the fallacy of misplaced abstraction", and against the scientist whose "laboratory habits are so indurate that he continues to analyze where only imagination and feelings are relevant". Harold Bloom has told us how the dualism in Wordsworth made Blake think ill of him. Of the earlier Romantics Blake alone perhaps reveals a relative obsession with the spiritual aspects of things. Holmes's comments on the Romantics might sound tenable to a certain extent if Blake alone were meant. Of course, it may be unfair to ignore Blake's "sense of human responsibility". And, Shelley's visionary inclinations at times seem to obscure his revolutionary zeal and expose him to the onslaughts of critics. The note of caution sounded

62. ML., p.309.  
63. ML., p.8.  
by some prominent critics like M.H. Abrams and George Bornstein against overemphasising the transcendentalising function of the Romantic imagination is apt to be misunderstood. We are not to lose sight of the fact that the transcendentalising function is not an end in itself but a part of the humanising process.

A self-conscious pursuit of a Unity of Being in the artistic productions of the present century has been typical not only of W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, but of others like Edward Thomas and Walter de la Mare. The achievement of such a unity is perhaps the primary function of the poetic imagination as envisaged by Coleridge and Wordsworth. The fusion of thought and feeling and the elimination of the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the personal and the impersonal, the subjective and the objective as also the coalescence of the percipient and the perceived are aspects of that unity. The theory of the 'undissociated sensibility' brought into vogue by T.S. Eliot may look rather humble in the presence of this all-inclusive theory of imagination propounded by the great Romantics. The unification referred to by Eliot in his early criticism seems to occur at the self-conscious level which attends to the process of versification, leaving the more significant task of poetry-making to an inner, deeper, impersonal, transcendent faculty.

66. TR., p. 8.
identified by him with the poet's soul. And, in the Coleridgean phraseology we may call it a matter of 'fancy' that has nothing to do with the process of imagination. Eliot himself should naturally have realized the inadequacy of his theory in the light of his later convictions. Possibly, he fought shy of redefining it. We remember how, in his early essay on Marvell, he found it difficult to define the complex term 'wit'.

The Coleridgean formulation on the fusion of thought and feeling does not make the role of the conscious level of the mind in the process explicit. But his insistence on the achievement of the highest form of self-consciousness need not be construed as a denial of the role of its lesser forms. The modernists take upon themselves the task of stressing that role, without detriment to their essential affiliation to the Coleridgean thesis. Viewed thus, the difference between the two approaches would seem to be a matter of emphasis.

Borrowing a phrase from Wallace Stevens we may observe that Romanticism represents a significant effort at "present-perfecting" through gaining insights into the life of things with the help of the transcendental faculty of imagination. A cold and calculating rationalism is "a wasteland of dead mechanism and compulsive repetition, Blake's dark Satanic
"Familiar nates is ns more tea a blooming, buzzing confusion until we began thinking as well as percei-
vving", as the narrator in Owen Barfield's **Worlds Apart** maintains. The effort is perhaps more relevant in the modern context, in view of the new stresses and strains, conflicts and contradictions that render the present far from perfect. The modern trend towards an "anarchic surrender to experience" should naturally be of vital concern to the modern Romantic. The primary concern of the Romantic artist should be to impose an order on his experience and thus make life bearable for himself and others. Coleridge's "Dejection — An Ode" gives eloquent expression to that abiding concern of the Romantic poet:

> ... would we sought behold of higher worth, 
> Then that insinuate cold world allowed
> To the poor, loveless, ever-anxious crowd,
> Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
> A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
> Enveloping the earth —
> And from the soul itself must there be sent
> A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth
> Of all sweet sounds the life and element,

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The modern environment has indeed been far from congenial for the Romantic tradition to flourish. For one thing, the Romantic poet always revealed a distinctive tendency to withdraw into himself and live in a kind of self-imposed isolation. And, his interest in the objects around him often seemed to be in proportion to their utility as symbols for projecting his inner awareness. Moderns could seldom brook such a stand-offish attitude. They frowned on the idea of treating the poet as a man apart and aloof. They hated the notion of a break between art and life. But, when we look back at the great Romantics with unprejudiced minds, we are bound to be convinced that there is hardly any novelty about such a stance. The attempt to unite life and art has rightly been called "the crucial point of similarity between Romanticism and the avant-garde." 69

Monroe K. Spears has pointed out how, in the early twentieth century, I. A. Richards ridiculed the 'phantom aesthetic state' and insisted that "poetry is continuous with other forms of experience, and hence open to inspection." T. S. Eliot too, as indicated by Spears, insisted that "the poet was not a mysterious outcast but a man like others." 70 It is amusing

70. DC, p. 25.
to note that the New Critics who propagated the notion of art as the creation of a heterocosm, a world parallel to, but distinct from, the real one, had drawn their inspiration from Richards and Eliot. For, the notion implied an aesthetic discontinuity and a kinship with those against whom the leading lights of our century had declared a virtual war.

The Romantic tradition has revealed remarkable flexibility and vitality in adapting itself to the new situation. The major Romantic poets of the century have not shunned the atrocious facts of modern life. And poetic diction has got approximated to the language of the common man. Obviously, the new effort in this regard has virtually been a repetition of the Wordsworthian endeavour of the earlier century. But, thanks to the all-pervasive seut for democratic values that prevailed in the new context, the need for such a change now has perhaps been all the more imperative. Of course, some major writers of the century like Pound, Eliot and Yeats did not share the moderns' concern either for the common man or for democracy. Their inability to share the ethos of the man-in-the street is apt to be taken for an anti-humanist stance. Indeed their views in the matter were largely at variance with those of the great Romantics. Yet perhaps it hardly matters for the Romantic tradition, as it concerns only the self-conscious level of their minds. Romanticism, as we understand it, depends primarily on an inner level
that helps a deeper perception of the world around us. And
poetry, as Jane P. Tompkins puts it, "must operate at the
most profound level of human experience, rather than dissipate
its force on any particular social issue, in order to achieve
maximum effectiveness." 71 The conscious mental activity that
determines the religious, social and political inclinations
of the Romantics has been expertly analysed by Northrop Frye,
when he says:

...Whether the Romantic poet is revolutionary or
conservative depends on whether he regards this
original society as concealed by or as manifested
in existing society. If the former, he will think
of true society as a primitive structure of nature
and reason, and will admire the popular, simple or
even the barbaric more than the sophisticated. If
the latter, he will find his true inner society
manifested by a sacramental church or by the in-
stinctive manners of an aristocracy. 72

The Romantic conception of a poem as a heterocosm, that
makes a parallel world, seems to have given scope for a feeling
that the modern Romantic has acquiesced in the idea of a
divorce between life and art. Should it be the case, the
tendency to take the Romantic for an escapist, would certainly
be pardonable. But a Romantic poet living in our midst can
hardly afford to turn a blind eye to the realities of life.
He could indeed "cast a cold eye" on them. The parallel world
of his making reveals only an imaginative re-ordering of his
chaotic experiences in the real world. The transcendental

71. BBC, p.216.
72. RR, p.13.
faculty which effects that re-ordering obviously needs the assistance of the self-conscious level of the mind to make its effort relevant from the human angle. And, if the conscious mind bungles it up like a clumsy servant, we would not be justified in blaming it on the Romantic imagination. Denis Donoghue, defines the distinction between the two:

When imagination comes under question, it is often because of its association with the license of self-consciousness, which can easily be given a bad name as curiosity or self-regard.73

Donoghue also mentions how Lionel Trilling associates mind with the idea of order, even the idea of hierarchy, "the subordination of some elements of thought to others."74

Apparently, when the outer-layer of consciousness grows stiff and impervious, it is apt to suppress the inner voice, as it perhaps happened in the case of the later Wordsworth. Obversely, when the inner voice happens to be stern and imperious or when its sources are to be traced to the infra-rational, it may refuse to yield to the manoeuvrings of the conscious level of the mind, as it seems to have happened in the case of D.H. Lawrence. In Lionel Trilling's view, imagination proposes as its ideal the direct, unmediated access to experience in preference to the distance imposed by rational categories. Donoghue says:

... The mind complains of imagination that it is wayward, irresponsible, self-engrossed. Imagination complains of mind that it is totalitarian; it demands immediate obedience, imposes its categories upon experience, it is premature in its orders and conclusions.75

73 Ibid., p. 5. 74 Ibid., p. 7. 75 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
Though mind is, thus, regarded as "a civil servant, a bureaucrat, illiberal in administrative seal", its sobering influence is needed to guard imagination against slipping into negative, unhealthy channels.

The air of artificiality that afflicts certain poems which seek to verbalise genuine visionary perceptions may suggest either the incompetence of the conscious mind or, as in some eminent cases like Yeats's, its earnest bid to regulate such perceptions with a view to achieving either a Unity of Being or other less laudable ends.

The personae and masks adopted by modern Romantics as distancing devices often tend to make the sincerity of their poetic utterances suspect. The adoption of such devices is evidently a concern of the self-conscious level of the mind. We have to look deeper to judge the authenticity of poetic perceptions. As mentioned earlier, the negative capability is also a matter of conscious artistry. It has been rightly called "a way of fending off the logic of subject and object: instead of raging for certitude, one chooses to live with doubts, question marks, divisions". In other words, it involves a conscious effort on the part of the poet to gain an awareness that leads to an identity with the object without the interference of the personal element. Yet, such an effort apparently

76. Ibid., p.22.
needs the backing of an innate tendency in the poet, as hinted at already. While T.S. Eliot's attempt at de-personalizing poetry was perhaps born of a sincere desire to attain an identical capacity, he seemed to have been handicapped a good deal in that endeavour by the absence of such an innate tendency in him. We may identify it with his lack of imaginative sympathy.

Byron may serve as a glaring instance of a poet who managed to cultivate a negative capability to an unusual degree, in spite of his solipsistic leanings. The talent revealed thus does not, however, make Byron essentially a Romantic. René Wellek rightly says:

A man who considers nature dead and inimical to man, who considers imagination merely as a combinatorial associative power, and who does not use symbolic and mythic devices is not a Romanticist... 77

Yet one could hardly object to an attempt at branding Byron and his likes as negative Romantics, when they reveal the intensity of the Romantic process without the accompanying vision. Obviously, they fail to cross the threshold of self-consciousness to gain access to a deeper awareness. In the words of Stuart M. Sperry they are being cut loose from the old certainties, the old orthodoxies, without the attainment of the new insights necessary for progressing on.

to an organic re-integration. And, such a condition causes isolation and despair because it offers no cosmic explanations. The modern world perhaps makes an ideal breeding ground for such negative trends which draw sustenance from nihilistic leanings. They speak of an inability to believe in the power of imagination and of the resultant failure to exploit it.

In a Romantic poet the authenticity of the imaginative perceptions seems to be of greater significance than the sincerity of his professions. Lionel Trilling has spoken of the modern "ideology of irrationalism" which celebrates "the attainment of an immediacy of experience and perception which is beyond the power of rational mind." He pinpoints an inconvenient fact when he adds:

... In our day, it has become possible to claim just such credence for the idea that madness is a beneficent condition to be understood as the paradigm of authentic existence, and cognition. 79

Though Trilling's remark seems to allude to a general deprivation, it speaks of a move to exalt authenticity at the expense of conventional sincerity and rational control both in poetry and life. A scrupulous care for the consistency and sincerity of professions should in any case be the concern of the self-conscious level of the mind. We may call

78. Sperry, Stuart, M., "Toward a Definition of Romantic Irony in English Literature", RM., p.19.
79. Trilling, Lionel, quoted in SG., p.7.
it a matter of character in more than one sense. And, though we may associate it with the personality of a man in common parlance, the poetic personality concerns a deeper level of the human mind. Eliot, as we have noted already, calls it impersonality.

In any case, a proper co-ordination between the two levels of the human mind would seem essential for the making of good poetry. A tendency to listen to the inner, deeper, impersonal voice and record it with the help of the conscious mind may perhaps be deemed the essential aspect of Romanticism. A poet who ignores or suppresses that voice in the name of good health or balance because of the over-assertive nature of his conscious mind, may have to be called a versifier, as implied by Eliot.

The qualities of the verse composed by such a writer may hardly be distinguishable from the "needful qualities of a fit prose", as hinted at by Matthew Arnold. He says:

... The men of letters whose destiny it may be to bring their nation to the attainment of a fit prose, must of necessity, whether they work in prose, or in verse, give a predominating and almost exclusive attention to the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision and balance. But an almost exclusive attention to these qualities involves some repression and silencing of poetry...

The distinction drawn by Eliot between poetry and verse seems to have been influenced in a large measure by Arnold's views in the matter. It also reveals affinities with the distinction drawn by Gerard Manley Hopkins between poetry of inspiration and Parnassian verse.

Such a distinction between poetry and verse is likely to present problems. For instance, a poem, particularly a long one, is bound to have patches of verse in it, as the transcendental perception effected at the unconscious level is unlikely to be long and uninterrupted. In fact, the momentary nature of such perceptions has often made their verbalization a delicate and difficult task. The problem has perhaps been particularly acute in modern poetry, owing to the tendency of visionary perceptions to grow increasingly tenuous. The impact of extreme scepticism on the modern mind may answer for that development. The lack of solidity may not, however, detract from the validity or significance of such perceptions.

D.W. Harding has pointed out how the contemporary poets "are at one with the Romantics in not treating the language as simply amenable to their purposes", though they are averse to the role of the poet as seer. He adds that the Romantics in this respect recovered a characteristic quality of English poetry. His observations concerning the Romantics are enlightening. He says:

82. See TWF., pp. 76-77.
"Their exact intention could not be formulated in advance; it reached definition only in what the language actually produced when worked in it, rather as a sculptor's exact intention cannot exist apart from the materials that define it..." 83

Harding also says elsewhere that unlike Pope and his followers who used language as a tool for their purposes, the Romantics treated it rather as a material or medium and to some extent submitted their purposes to it. In other words, what they sought to verbalize was their original perception and not ideas that existed already. And, the credibility of such perceptions depended largely on the success of the verbalisation attended to by the conscious mind. The problem of the Romantic poet would thus seem to be two-fold. The task of verbalizing momentary perceptions without distorting or diluting them would seem to be no less formidable than the more significant task of achieving them. For, it often amounts to an attempt at expressing the inexpressible. Wordsworth's poetry at its most characteristic is found to be a struggle with the intractability of language. 84 Dorothy Wordsworth has told us of how he tired himself with seeking an epithet for the cuckoo. His effort was, as remarked by John Livingston Lowes, "to express directly what cannot be expressed directly - the sound of cuckoo's wandering voice." 85 At last, he is said


to have successfully translated the cuckoo's literal voice, into terms of inner experience as evidenced by the poem "To the Cuckoo". What tired Wordsworth in this instance would seem to be the twin tasks of translating an outer experience into an inner awareness and of giving it adequate expression.

The struggles of the modern Romantics in this regard have been recorded by poets like Eliot and Yeats. Though Eliot, in particular, consciously equipped himself to tackle the problems of the craftsman, his technique apparently did not measure up to his expectations at times. A passage from "Burnt Norton" bears testimony to his struggle in this regard:

... Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still ...

(ll. 149-155)

It has been observed that "scarcely a poem or fragment of the poet's exists which does not dramatize, in some significant fashion of technique or substance, his own statement that each venture into the expression of poetry is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate With shabby equipment always deteriorating,
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling, Undisciplined squads of emotion."

("East Coker" Lines 179-182)

In the early part of the twentieth century, the modernists showed an excessive feeling for the classical virtues of "concentration, tautness and extreme economy in poetic expression". It was, partly at least, the result of their obsessive aversion for the rhetorical excesses and emotional abuses of their predecessors. The Coleridgean organisatic theory and symbolism served them eminently in the context, though they appeared unaware of their debt in that regard. The poem thus gains a meaningful shape, as observed by A.C. Partridge, though, more often than not, that meaning remains beyond the grasp of the common man. Ironically enough, it happened inspite of a conscious effort on the part of the modernists to eliminate the distinction between the poet and the common man.

Inspired by Eliot's theory of Dissociation of Sensibility the modernists extolled John Donne at the expense of Milton. And, they emulated his colloquial language and speech rhythms, while attempting to unify their sensibility in the light of his practice. But, their desire to endow poetry with the naturalness of speech did not make it less than obscure in most cases. Their failure in this regard was partly due to the extremely complex nature of the experience they had to assimilate. Chaotic experiences were often sought to be

88. Ibid., p.56.
presented in chaotic forms. And this novel imitative form that represented chaos by chaos naturally invited protests from critics like Yvor Winters. The logical disconnection and syntactical fragmentation promoted in the process brought about a rhetorical discontinuity.

Donald Davie makes rhetorical discontinuity his definition of modernism. The tendency, referred to by Monroe K. Spears, of certain critics to attribute it to the pernicious influence of Franco-American Modernism has been pernicious in itself, as it neglects the positive aspects of the modernist revolution. Just as the Romantic revolt was against "the conventionality and tedium of the earlier poetic diction", the modernist revolt perhaps came as a timely corrective for the excesses of the earlier phase. And, it was not too radical either, as it largely affected only the forms and techniques of poetry. Perhaps, we are justified in calling it as a peripheral revolution, inasmuch as the

90. DC., p.20.
91. Harding, p.60.
essential aspects of the English poetic tradition remained in tact in spite of it.

It may be worth pondering as to how the conscious effort at purging poetry of its rhetoric affected the prospects of Romanticism in our century. Rhetoric in most cases seems to have come handy for concealing the vacuums caused by the failure of imagination. And, a poetry that is truly imaginative can seldom be handicapped by its absence. W.P.Ker puts it succinctly:

Imagination can use the simplest diction because it has got at the truth, found what can appeal to the right mind of man, because it is strong in life, thought and language. Rich poetic vocabulary is then unnecessary....

W.B.Yeats may be a classic example of a poet whose poetry remained eminently Romantic on being purged of rhetoric although it reappeared in his later work in modified forms. When he said that "in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts" he was apparently referring to his own effort in that regard.

Yet, he made no secret of his antipathy towards the extremist tendencies of the modernists in versification.

The modernists took to free verse and favoured speech rhythms in their quest for an organic form which Herbert Read regards as a Romantic legacy. But it resulted in a plethora


of new verse by false pretenders to the gift of the Muse and tended to blur the outward distinction between poetry and prose. D.H. Lawrence evolved his own distinctive mode of free verse to give unrestrained expression to his perceptions. While it eminently suited his genius, it was apt to be abused by lesser men. Herbert Read's comment on the Lawrencean mode, however, sounds rather harsh. His view that Lawrence's was a prose-contribution implies a failure to give due credit to the essential aspects of Romantic poetry. It may exemplify the general tendency to blame the faculty of imagination for the failings of the intellect. Indeed we are aware that the Lawrencean verse does not measure up to Herbert Read's idea of the greatest poetry in which "the creative power and intellectual energy wrestle as in a war-embrace".

Edward Thomas's distinguished mode of expression perhaps provides an ideal via media between the traditionalist and modernist extremes. W.B. Yeats sticks to the use of metrical verse all through his life. The traditional form serves him as "ice or salt" for packing his personal emotions, as they tend to rot. He evolves a passionate syntax and manages to verbalize his perceptions in all their intensity with a distinctively Yeatsian flavour.

95. _TWE_, p.100.
96. _Ibid._, p.160.
The mythical method adopted by Yeats and Joyce in their distinct ways has been commended by Eliot. He finds it useful in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. Though it affords a semblance of order to certain works, the method largely fails to deliver the goods, since the modern man has not been responding to traditional myths and metaphors as the writers do. The gap caused that way was sought to be filled by the invention of new personal myths of limited significance.

In a conscious bid to assimilate a wide variety of dreary and dreadful experiences, modern poetry has had to admit a great amount of fresh material, which had hitherto been considered unpoetic. The War poets, for example, had to find a new breed of objectives—correlative on battle-fronts, for giving vent to their unique emotions in the face of the blood-curdling scenes of war. It was indeed a far cry from the blessed forms which the great Romantics had counted on for recording their perceptions. John-Heath-Stubbs' observation that "the language of Romantic poetry is essentially an instrument for the expression of Innocence rather than Experience", might be apt when we relate it to such experiences. The description of a genre of modern Romantic


poetry as poetry of experience would seem particularly significant in the context. 100

The New Critics, who may perhaps be called the unwilling inheritors of the Romantic tradition in literary criticism, maintained that poems are autotelic and favoured close-reading to such an extent that Eliot himself could not help calling them the 'lemon-squeezer school'. Eliot could hardly have anticipated such an alarming growth from the seeds he had unconsciously sown in his early life, along with I.A.Richards. The New Critics encouraged the analysis of poetic imagery for its own sake and accorded a pride of place to metaphor by treating it as the basic unit of poetry. The presence of conflicting elements, thus, became the measure of a poem's greatness. And, "structures of expression gained priority over structures of experience"; as observed by Donald Davie. 101 The emphasis in the context has tended to be mainly on metaphor.

In its commitment to the metaphor, modern poetry has perhaps reached the extreme limit of fragmentation. A poem treated in isolation, as a picture of conflicts and contradictions, may be an apt symbol for the modern man.


101. AE., p.93.
In such a context the Romantic imagination naturally has a challenging task. Has it risen to the occasion? R.A. Foakes, for one, seems inclined to think that modern Romantic poetry has nearly lost its integral vision. But it may be unfair to suggest that even the best of moderns have pitifully knuckled down before the forces of disruption and discord.

If the Romantic sensibility has been eroded by the extreme sceptical learnings of the modern mind, the essential aspects of Romanticism have still managed to survive in our midst, as evidenced by some of the major poetic achievements of our century. The endeavour in the following pages will be to reassess them with a view to determining the authenticity and validity of modern Romantic perceptions.

102. Foakes, p. 16.