Chapter I

Coleridge as a perspective to modern critical thought ...

The seminal value of Coleridge's critical insights for the literary critics of the twentieth century has been reflected in a number of writings on Coleridge that have appeared since John Shawcross published his edition of *Biographia Literaria*. Most of these critics, however,

have produced either general 'all-round' studies or else they have written somewhat compartmentally about Coleridge as a poet, as a thinker, as a philosopher and theologian, or as a critic of society and of politics. Those who attempt to discuss his literary criticism do so rather tangentially and are primarily interested in Coleridge's philosophical and theological thought and only secondarily in his literary criticism. 2 But all these critics, in one way on the other, reaffirm what Herbert Read says in the following words:

... it is my contention that [modern] criticism, derives its penetrative power from the use of the systematic method he [Coleridge] had established by his philosophical speculations. 3

2 J.V. Baker, for example, makes of Coleridge a psychological critic as his purpose is to examine "the role of the unconscious in Coleridge's theory of imagination"; J.R. de J. Jackson makes him a philosophical critic because he believes that "he [Coleridge] was a philosopher or theologian first and a critic second"; and R.H. Fogle, though feeling a need for "a study of Coleridge's criticism itself" asserts that "his [Coleridge's] psychology is one with his metaphysics" see, The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of Imagination. (London: O.U.P., 1957) p. 7; Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959) p xiv; The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism. (London: O.U.P., 1962) pp. x1.

It is thus necessary to closely examine the critical methods and ideas of Coleridge and to place him in a study of the twentieth century critics in order to discuss his relation to them and define the precise nature of his relevance to the development of modern critical thought. The need for such a study becomes more urgent particularly when the proliferation of critical schools, concepts and methodologies during the past seventy years has led to an exciting adventure in criticism with varied implications for the literature of the Western world. What has emerged is a diversity of points of view in approaching literary criticism, ranging from the phenomenological or psychoanalytic to the symbolistic or existential, involving linguistic, stylistic, structuralistic or thematic analyses. Consequently, a serious student of literature is faced with a pluralistic universe that criticism has become a universe influenced by such minds as Freud, Marx, Hegel, Husserl, Bergson, Pound, Saussure, Sartre making for the examination of every major human reality in terms of such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics and phenomenology. Faced with this panoramic complexity of ideas one would seek a clear formulation of certain basic issues, preferably (as far as possible) within a unified theory of literature, for purposes of a proper understanding of the nature of poetry and for reading and appreciation of literary texts.
Viewed in this perspective the critical theories identifiable with the Anglo-American tradition related to the works of T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards become significant and valuable. In this tradition one would also include not only the British critics like Empson but also the American New critics and Genre critics. There are, no doubt, differences of point of view and emphasis among these critics but they profess themselves to be the 'intrinsic critic' (to use the words of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren) and trace their origin to Coleridge (in case of the New Critics) and Aristotle (in case of the Genre critics) without realizing that whereas the organicist conception of art ultimately derives from Aristotle's emphasis upon form, the immediate source of organism for the twentieth century formalists is Coleridge. Since the New critics and Genre critics have been quarrelling with each other and stand at the opposite extremes, there is obviously something questionable in their approach to Coleridge and Aristotle.

By taking into consideration the utility and consistency of Aristotelian 'dialectics' and Coleridge's

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'method' one would not only realize that these 'seminal' minds are better critics than their professed followers but also notice against the assertions of M.H. Abrams\(^5\) many similarities between their approaches. It is a perspective which is lost sight of when the twentieth century 'intrinsic' criticism is divided into 'monistic' and 'pluralistic' approaches associated with Coleridge and Aristotle respectively. One must, in the right perspective, look at the roots of several tendencies in modern critical theories, stemming from attempts to reinterpret Coleridgean theory of imagination. Such an approach will prove helpful to the defining of the exact relationship between 'formalist' or 'intrinsic' criticism and Coleridge on the one hand and Coleridge and Aristotle on the other.

The roots of the critical tendencies, referred to above, can be analysed by looking at the second half of the

\(^5\)M.H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (London and New York: O.U.P., 1953) maintains that Coleridge, the spokesman of the romantic theory of poetry, inaugurated a decisive break in the continuity of critical theory. Undoubtedly, the theory of imagination advocated by Coleridge has reoriented the whole critical milieu. Yet to consider it a decisive break from 'mimetic' to 'expressionistic' stance is unconvincing as would be discussed, in greater detail in the last chapter of this thesis.
nineteenth century when science made new advances, which had a great impact on the critical and philosophical thinking of the early twentieth century. These advances came not from physics and mathematics, as they did in the later decades of the eighteenth century with its 'mechanistic' theories which Coleridge refuted, but from biology. Darwin's theory of evolution as propounded in *The Origin of Species* (1859) reduced man from the heroic stature to which the romantics had tried to raise him, to that of a hapless animal at the mercy of the forces around him. To Darwin, and Huxley after him, Nature was not spiritual or organic as most of the nineteenth century Romantics had believed but had a physical basis and was neutral. This "Naturalization of Nature" as Richards calls it\(^6\) came to be known as Naturalism, forcing man into rethinking upon his view of himself both as a physical and a moral being in the changing situation when the "magical view associated with religion"\(^7\) was negated by science. Similarly, reeling under the onslaughts of Darwin, Lamarck, and DeVris, the ideas of static empiricism or infinite categorical rationalism which had for long been the very core of English pragmatic philosophy and an influential


\(^7\)Ibid, p. 51.
form of Kantian metaphysics turned, as it were, into a kind of scientism which would deny philosophy its character as a Weltanschauung.

In this situation the twentieth century formalist critics asserted the superiority of poetry against the confident assumption that science had fairly well settled most moral and religious issues, and would shortly get round to verifying the rest. By specifying the individual qualities of the aesthetic object, rather than dismissing it, like Eastman\(^8\), as no longer of much importance, they reinforced Coleridge's dictum:

... Poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, [had] a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes.\(^9\)

Hulme's 'intensive' and 'extensive' manifold, Eliot's 'impersonality of art' and 'objective-correlative', Richards' 'pseudo-statements' and 'metaphor', and a number of resultant critical terms in the American New Criticism and, Genre Criticism have been used to indicate


the uniqueness of an art object in formulating experience in the way science cannot. These terms, however, show how Coleridge's theory of organicism and imagination have been interpreted in the light of various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and medical sciences. Each of the above mentioned critics seems to have approached Coleridge with a set of preconceived ideas which invariably condition his explication and results in a prejudicial assessment of Coleridge. Like Coleridge finding an image of himself in Hamlet, these formalist critics have found images of themselves in Aristotle or Coleridge with the result that it is not the organicist theory of Aristotle or Coleridge that we get from them but only "an incomplete and corrupted version of it" which "would never by recognised by their fathers in the present condition". ¹⁰ The root cause of this 'corruption' (or crystallization) is the influence of such diverse and often contradictory sources — a point which Frank Kermode has apparently neglected — as Edger Allen Poe, the French Symbolists, Matthew Arnold, Bergson, Benedetto Croce, T.E. Hulme, Rene de Gourmont — influences

which turned Coleridge's conception of imagination into a "pattern of concrete images threaded together."\textsuperscript{11}

Kermode's synthetic intention in \textit{Romantic Image}\textsuperscript{12} has the defect of not taking into account philosophical differences in the critical tradition he traces from Blake and Coleridge to Arnold, Pater, the French Symbolists, the English poets of 1890's, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the New Critics. Kermode tends to revise the critical ideas of the English romantics, particularly Coleridge, from Mallarméan perspective as a result of which he is able to perceive likenesses among the apparently disparate. That Kermode gives only a partial assessment of Coleridge in relation to the twentieth century formalist critics can be indicated by comparing the critical stance of Coleridge with that of Valéry — the two representative critics of the nineteenth century Romanticism and French Symbolism.

Both Coleridge and Valéry focussed on the crucial disjunction between consciousness (of self and of objects)


and the formal shape of things. Valéry's concerns, however, lead to an exploration of the life of the mind which is not paralleled by any investigation of Coleridge's. The organisational activity of the mind which in 'Valéry's analysis, supplementary to conscious invention' acquires value when considered as the automatism of mind interacting with the phenomenological world. Indeed, to Valéry self-awareness is the constituent result of intricate, even sophisticated, operation of the mind. The Valérian scheme of the operations of the human mind has the merit of being able to accommodate the 'internality of experience' — based on the Platonic assumption of a universal structure of mind — which is capable of encompassing aesthetic, spiritual, moral, and physical realities.  

On the other hand, Coleridge defines imagination as a reconciling and mediating power, which "incorporating the reason in the images of the sense, and organizing the flux of the senses by the permanent and self-circling energies of reason,

In fact, it may be observed here, that all symbolist doctrines rest either upon some kind of idealism or else deny the dualism of ideality and materialism, altogether by considering these opposed concepts to be abstractions out of a prior and deeper reality in which they lie undifferentiated. Symbolism is an attempt to penetrate beyond reality to a world of ideas, either the ideas within the poet, including his emotions, or the ideas in the platonic sense that constitutes a perfect supernatural world towards which man aspires. Consequently symbolism, among other things, may be defined as an art of expressing ideas and emotions not by explaining them but by suggesting them through indirections.

How this concept went side by side with Coleridge's imagination, and sometimes dominated it, would be discussed in Chapter IV.
gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves and consubstantial with the truths of which they are conductors".  

In other words, by defining poetry as "the expression of the imagination," Coleridge attributes to human mind the active power not only to create but also to respond creatively to the impressions showered upon him by the external world. A negligence of this aspect of Coleridge's view of Imagination has led the critics to consider the poem rather exclusively as a thing in itself without paying attention to the process by which it comes into existence. This resulted in statements like "the business of the poet is not personal expression but craft", "poetry is a matter of images and metaphors", "honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry", "the only way of expressing emotions in the form of art is by finding an 'objective-


correlative';"¹⁷, "it is never what a poem says which matters, but what it is"¹⁸ --- statements which paved the way for the American New Criticism followed by their rejection by the Neo-Aristotelians. Underlying all such assumptions is the belief that imagination is the shaping power bringing artistic elements into wholeness, a concept which is more akin to the 'imagism' of Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Amy Lowell than to Coleridge. In order to understand the shortcomings of this oversimplification of imagination, it is necessary to explore the basis of Coleridge's concept of imagination which interprets the poem as a creative act, and, at the sametime, views it as an 'autonomous artifact'.

Trained to think from his school days, that "poetry has a logic of its own"¹⁹, Coleridge spent the best years of his life enquiring into this mode of logic. He devoted much of his speculative energy to arrive at a

solid foundation [of poetical criticism], on which permanently to ground my opinions, in the component faculties of the human mind itself, and their comparative dignity and importance. ²⁰

¹⁸Richards, Poetries and Sciences p. 33.
²⁰Ibid.
He once told Byron that his (Coleridge's) purpose was "to reduce criticism to a system, by the deduction of the causes from principles involved in our faculties." He thought of establishing the "the principles of writing, rather than to furnish rules how to pass judgement on what has been written by others." It was obviously an enquiry into creative process and in order to describe it adequately and with a philosophical concern Coleridge used the word "Philocrisy" by which he meant "the preponderative inquisition of the strengths and measures of the human mind."

In other words, Coleridge's investigations centered on the relationship between our consciousness and our projecting of consciousness, and the relationship between our consciousness and the external reality. The choice of this specific quest had been dictated by historical necessity in that a changed sensibility — such as that of the European mind after the French Revolution — could no longer posit consciousness in mechanistic terms.


22Biographia Literaria vol., II p. 63

23MS Logic quoted by G.N.G. Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969) p. 73
Moreover, a shift in the very fulcrum of the European socio-economic and socio-political consciousness took place, resulting in the creation of new attitudes towards the handling of experience. These new attitudes needed being influenced, as it were, by the contemporary philosophy of science and the impulse leading to the industrial revolution. It is no wonder, thus, that there should be a search for new ideological apparatuses for both appraisal and projection of experience.

English philosophy of the eighteenth century was dominated by the theories of Locke, Hobbes, Berkeley, and Hume, and the predominant psychological stance was that of Hartleyean associationism. These philosophers assumed that in perception the mind is wholly passive, a mere looker-on on an external world, 'a mirror and reflector of external objects' as Abrams indicates in The Mirror and the Lamp in which he uses the pair of images borrowed from Yeats. Their account of mentation, as summarized by R.L. Brett\textsuperscript{24}, describes the materials of consciousness as firstly sensations; secondly, simple ideas or images which

are copies of sensation, or sensations which remain even after the sense object which causes them has been removed; and thirdly, complex ideas which are produced by relating simple ideas together. These correspond to the three stages in the process of mentation, namely Sensation, Memory and Thought and the principle by which the mind operates is the associative principle of Locke's. Infact, David Hartley, against whose ideas of associationism Coleridge revolted, himself explained that he had taken the doctrine of vibrations from Newton, and that of associationism from Locke and his followers, and professed to model his own research on "the method of analysis and synthesis recommended and followed by Sir Isacc Newton."  

The philosophy discussed above underlies the eighteenth century poet's conception of man as someone apart from nature, someone introduced into the universe from outside and remaining alien to all that he finds there in. Accordingly, poetry then was a matter of 'wit.'


26It is worthwhile to point out here that the eighteenth century conception of 'wit' was different from the twentieth or even the seventeenth century metaphysical point of view. In the eighteenth century it became "witticism" which is the capacity to use repartee.
and the task of wit was to combine ideas and to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions by means of the law of association. These pictures and visions were expressed in a vigorous and direct language to achieve what "oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd". The greatest art was that which was capable of being understood by a man of taste, and — to the extent that 'taste' depended on 'cultivation' — having the kind of appeal such as tastefully produced poetry can have. The greatest poet was supposed to avoid the expression of personal idiosyncracy and to bring all things near a plain statement wherein language was a mere tool of cultivated expression. It was believed that in poetry words, like ideas, are associated with each other in the way bricks are brought together to build a wall — that is, each word has a carefully established relationship to a thing which it represents physically.

Being a voracious reader, Coleridge in the beginning of his literary career studied seventeenth and eighteenth century associationist philosophy and in 1794 declared himself as a "complete Necessitarian" believing

27 Alexander Pope, Essay on criticism, line. 298

28 Collected Letters vol. I., p 137.
that the impressions one gets from the senses are necessarily and mechanically connected with other impressions or with the ideas derived from them. Coleridge's understanding of this philosophy is indicated by his own assessment of the eighteenth century poetry. He points out that the excellence of the school of Pope consists in just and acute observations on men and manners in an artificial state of society, as its matter and substance; and in the logic of wit, conveyed in smooth and strong epigrammatic concepts, as its form ... the matter and diction seemed to me characterized not so much by poetic thoughts as by thoughts translated into the language of poetry. 29

It was when a manuscript poem of Wordsworth was read to him that Coleridge found himself in the presence of a power and activity which could by no means be adjusted to an associationistic scheme of mentation. For here the mind appeared no more passive but an active 'self-forming and self-realizing system'. Wordsworth had not merely copied the images from Nature and accurately 'represented' them in words but had modified them by his "imaginative faculty before rendering them in words." 30

29 quoted in Kathleen Raine, Coleridge (London: Oriental longmans, 1953) p. 23

30 Biographia Literaria vol. I p. 59
Writing to William Sharp in 1804, Coleridge clearly speaks of Wordsworth's unity of interest and homogeneity of character. This "most original poet" he says, "this greatest philosophical poet has effected a complete and constant synthesis of thought and feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the modifying power in highest sense of the word in which I have ventured to oppose it to fancy, or the aggregating power." This peculiar excellence, he tells us, "I no sooner felt, than I sought to understand" — a phrase which according to Basil Willey, 'epitomizes' Coleridge's distinctive quality as a critic: that he first felt, and then tried to understand what he felt.

Coleridge's attempts to 'understand' — attempts always informed by his religious bent of mind — led him to formulate his own theory of mind and, thereby, a

31 Collected Letters Vol. II pp 103-4
32 Biographia Literaria Vol.I, p 60
theory of poetry. This theory presupposes that the human mind has been modelled on the image of the Divine Mind and just as God created the world out of chaos and gave it order and form so the human mind is capable of imposing order and form upon the raw material provided by the sensation. The human mind, says Coleridge, "is made in God's image, and that too in the sublimest sense the Image of the Creator". The greatest prerogative of genius" says Coleridge

is now to swell itself into the dignity of a God, and now to subdue and keep dormant some parts of that lofty nature, and to descend even to the lowest characters — to become everything, in fact.

Such heights, it may be pointed out here, may not be within the grasp of many artists, and accordingly we have a scale of values in Coleridge's critical theory determining the various literary genres. The reduction of Coleridge's theory of imagination to a 'monistic' approach, as attempted by the New Critics, fails (as

35 Collected Letters Vol.II p.709

would be analysed in greater detail in two later chapters of this thesis) because these critics seem to ignore that in Coleridge the scale of genres is determined by the awareness and by the embodiment of reality on the part of the artist and by his capacity to mould this reality into something refined and more artistic.

It was in obedience to, and not in defiance of, the faith of man created in the image of God that Coleridge devoted himself to the study of German Idealism and spent a great deal of energy in refuting the eighteenth century mechanistic philosophy which, he concluded, was a misplaced application of Newtonian science:

Newton was a materialist — Mind in his system is always passive — a lazy looker-on on an external world. If the mind be not passive; if it be indeed made in God's image, and that, too, in the sublimest sense — The Image of the Creator — there is ground for suspicions, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system. 38

37 Frederick Denison Maurice, in "Disciple and Interpreter of Coleridge: 'Constancy to an Ideal Object' by A.J. Hartley", Ariel vol.3; No.2, (April, 1972) p 6. takes a correct, but rather exaggerated view, when he says "Theology is the foundation of Coleridge's thought and that, whatever ideas he expressed and in whatever form he expressed them, he began and ended with man and his relation to God". The same view has been expressed by Robert J. Barth, "Symbol as Sacrament in Coleridge's Thought" Studies in Romanticism vol. XI (Fall, 1972) pp 320-331.

Coleridge's dissatisfaction with Hartley and the tradition of thought he belonged to is fully explicated in *Biographia Literaria* and in *Notebooks and Letters*. In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge has devoted five chapters to elaborate his growing dissatisfaction with an intellectual system which seemed to him to turn not only the world of Nature but also the human mind itself into a machine. He maintains instead that mental experiences are arranged in three main classes, "the passive sense, or what the school-men call the merely receptive quality of the mind; the voluntary; and the spontaneous, which holds the middle place between both". 39

It is necessary to point out here that Coleridge's revulsion from associationist philosophy has been attributed to his study of Kant and other German philosophers. Although the extent of this influence has been exaggerated and even questioned, one must guard against the danger of ignoring the debt altogether, 40 or over-emphasizing it. 41

39 *Biographia Literaria* vol. I, p. 66.

41 Norman Fruman in *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971) charges Coleridge of plagiarism; and Rene Wellek in *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* vol II *the Romantic Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) p. 152 indicates that "whatever the ethics or psychology of the situation it seems impossible to give Coleridge credit for ideas simply quoted literally."
The danger of ignoring the debt is evident in the limited nature of our understanding of Coleridge's contribution to future critical theories and in our misunderstanding of some of Coleridge's critical concepts. Similarly, over-emphasizing the debt has also led to misunderstanding of the peculiar bent of Coleridge's mind. This bent of mind may be characterized by one word 'search': a search guided by a total faith in the existence of a personal God. In fact Coleridge himself acknowledges his indebtedness to German writers, particularly to Kant whose writings, he says, "took possession of me as with the giant's hand" and "more than any other work, at once invigorated and disciplined my understanding." He also writes at some length of Schelling but observes

I can not only honestly assert, but I can satisfactorily prove by reference to writings (Letters, Marginal Notes, and those in books that have never been in my possession since I first left England for Hamburg etc.,) that all the elements, the differentials, as the algebraists say, of my present opinions excited from me before I had ever seen a book of German Metaphysics... 43

42 Biographia Literaria vol. I, p. 99

43 Collected Letters vol. II, pp. 735-36
Whether there is any exaggeration in this statement or not, one can still conclude that Germans gave his thought coherence, they enabled him to fit this into a comprehensive philosophical system.\textsuperscript{44} As Mary Warnock appropriately points out

\begin{quote}
he [Coleridge] found in German Metaphysics just the materials he needed to justify his own belief that in understanding one's feelings one can understand the riddle of the world. \textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Coleridge's belief in the creativity of the human mind, stimulated by William Wordsworth, and reinforced by German metaphysics, led him to an analysis of the relationship between our consciousness and external reality. In place of the philosophical assumptions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that our cognition must conform to the object, Coleridge believed that the object must conform to our cognition — that is, in all experience the unknowable 'things in themselves'.

\textsuperscript{44}Stemple Daniel in "Coleridge and Organic Form: The English Tradition", Studies in Romanticism vol.VI (Winter 1967) pp 89-97 has attempted to establish that Germans, and therefore Coleridge, ultimately derive their philosophy from Hume and other English thinkers. This doesn't effect the point of view established here because the immediate influence for Coleridge are German thinkers.

\textsuperscript{45}Mary Warnock, Imagination (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) pp 102.
are inescapably structured by the mind. This idea is clearly expressed in the entries for 14 April 1805 in the Notebooks, where Coleridge says ——

In looking at the objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim —glimmering through the dewy windowpane, I seem rather to be seeking as it were asking, a symbolic language for something within me that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet I still have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim Awaking of forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature. 46

It is a belief that in observing the world we are necessarily aware of ourselves, or that we carry in our actual awareness of the world an awareness of the self for whom the world is presented and by whom it is organized. This is not to say like Morse Peckham that in Coleridgean formulation "value enters the world through the self, which is not supported by any perceptible social or cosmic order, and the self projects upon the world an order which serves to symbolize that self-generated value". 47 The common definition of fine


arts, Coleridge wrote in 'Poesy or Art', is that they all, "like poetry, are to express intellectual purposes, thoughts, conceptions, sentiments, that have their origin in the human mind." 48 He at the same time remarked that the 'mechanical philosophy' of the eighteenth century insisted on a world of mutually impenetrable objects subjected to a "despotism of the eye"; 49 since this theory of 'despotism of eye' was rejected by him, Coleridge believed that "the object is perceived vividly, usually with great specificity; the husk is then dissolved; and when the phenomenon has at last become "spiritualized" it passes into the core of the subjective intelligence" 50 which is another name for self.

Coleridge learned this idea of the self from German philosophy derived from Kant, or from an actual reading of Kant. It was Kant, more than anyone else, who maintained that "the self is the vehicle of all concepts" 51 and therefore, is presupposed in all knowledge

49 Biographia Literaria vol I, p. 74
51 Critique of Pure Reason B. 132, and B. 400 quoted by Mary Warnock in Imagination p. 76.
we may have of the external reality or the world outside. Hence a philosopher, according to Kantian formulations, who wishes to frame a theory of knowledge of imagination or of perception, would in fact be framing a theory of the self — the transcendental and not the empirical self. That Coleridge believed this accounts for a good deal of his rather mystical claims, for example, to be exploring "the world without and the still more wonderful world within" or to be about to publish a book entitled "The Mysteries of religion grounded in or relative to the Mysteries of Human Nature," or to write an essay "concerning poetry and the pleasures to be derived from it" which would "supersede all the books of metaphysics, and all the books of morals too."

Here it is necessary to point out that Coleridge, neglecting the Kantian distinction between the transcendental and the empirical self, follows Schelling and Fichte who had shaped the Kantian theory of the self into a premise that it was insignificant whether one spoke of the mind (consciousness) or of Nature (external reality) because, according to them, during the act of

52 Collected Letters vol. III p. 279
53 Ibid
self-perception the perceiver and perceived become one. Coleridge himself explains this possibility of identification when he writes

*I think of the Wall —— it is before me, a distinct Image —— here, I necessarily think of the Idea and the Thinking I as two distinct and opposed Things. Now [let me] think of myself —— of the thinking Being —— the Idea becomes dim whatever it may be —— so dim that I do not know what it is —— But the Feeling is deep and steady —— and this I call "I" —— identifying the percipient and the perceived.*

So like Schelling and Fichte, Coleridge believed that to form a theory of the mind (including a theory of imagination) was also, at the same time, to form a theory of art and Nature. It is in this context that one must study the important assumptions of Coleridge's remark that he "laboured at a solid foundation in the component faculties of the human mind, and their comparative dignity and importance," or the important implications of Coleridge's 'philocrisy'.

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56 The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge Entry No. 921.

The chief outcome of Coleridge's 'labour' was the relation he established between Fancy and Imagination on the one hand, and that between Sense, Understanding, and Reason on the other. The prevailing confusion regarding the precise meaning of these and other allied terms led Coleridge "to investigate the seminal principle and then from the kind to deduce the degree." An analysis, therefore, of these and other basic terms that he uses — and which bear a bewildering variety of connotations — will clarify Coleridge's notion of Words and Things, or Consciousness and External Reality, and show how through the faculty of imagination a poet is able to perceive and modify Nature or Reality (Things) and then project it in words. In other words, it is possible to attempt an explanation — through a careful analysis of the precise connotation of some of Coleridge's basic terms — of the relationship between the perceiver and the object perceived on the one hand, and the relationship of these to the central problem of self-consciousness in Coleridge's thinking.

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Biographia Literaria vol. I, p.64.
By Sense Coleridge means the faculty or power of which "different senses are organs", and without which it will be impossible to perceive the external reality. Coleridge writes

under the term SENSE, I comprise whatever is passive in our being ... it is the recipient property of the soul, from the original constitution of which we perceive... all things under the forms of space and time.

Accordingly, a man's knowledge of the external realities, or of the material objects derives its whole and sole evidence from sense experience. As Jackson Bate puts it: "By sense, Coleridge means the faculty which allows us to perceive our environment, and which makes us aware of the material things."

It may be pointed out here that in his discussion of the term Sense Coleridge is in agreement with the

59 Collected Letters vol. IV, p. 790


61 Walter Jackson Bate, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism p. 118.
associationist philosophers that 'outside objects impinge on our sense organs and produce impressions on the mind' — a point which is the basis of Richards' argument that Coleridge did not completely ignore the 'mechanistic philosophy' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{62} In fact, although Coleridge himself wants us to see that imagination exists independent of sense, or that it involves no visual factor, he also observes: "If the check of the senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first (=fancy) would become delirium, and the last (=imagination) mania."\textsuperscript{63} Thus of all his contemporaries, Coleridge was most concerned with the problem of how the poetic mind acts to modify or transform the materials of sense without violating truth of nature. Towards its solution (as we shall see further on), he formulated the Keystone of his critical system, his theory of imagination.

\textsuperscript{62} Richards, \textit{Coleridge on Imagination} p. 17

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Table Talk} 23 June 1834 also quoted in \textit{Biographia Literaria} vol. I, pp. 225-6.
According to him sense impressions are always "chaotic", "shapeless and passive" and, therefore it is fancy, the second term in Coleridge's hierarchy, which puts "cosmos into these chaotic impressions". The concept of Fancy, a "degree" of intelligence as "seminal principle", as Barfield calls it, forms the basis of the theory of association of ideas in three chapters (V, VI and VII) of the Biographia to which theory it is closely related. In his lengthy discussion where he reviews and criticizes the history of mental mechanism through its culmination in Hartley, Coleridge tells us that he intends his faculties of Memory and Fancy to incorporate everything that is valid in the associative theory of the eighteenth century, and, in conclusion, to "appropriate the remaining offices of the mind to the reason and the imagination." In Fancy, therefore, the

65 The hierarchy appears in one of the marginal notes on the end papers of a volume of Tennemann's Geschichte der Philosophie, British Museum copy quoted by Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism p. 115 and by Owen Barfield in What Coleridge Thought p. 219
66 The Friend vol. I, p 171
67 Barfield, What Coleridge Thought p. 84
68 Biographia Literaria vol. I, p. 73
mind merely assembles the past objects which are the "fixities and definities" grouped together through associative links, "by some one point or more of likeness distinguished". Again he writes

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 the 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.

Consequently Fancy, in Coleridge's terminology, appears to be the mechanism of the reproduction of sense-impressions, and to that extent it is passive and associated with mechanical memory. In other words, according to Coleridge, Fancy like Memory is "the aggregative and associative power" acting only "by a sort of juxtaposition."

70 [Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism vol.I., p. 212]
72 [Ibid, p. 73]
74 [Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism vol. I p. 387]
Looking at it practically, Coleridge indicates that Shakespeare "possessed fancy, considered as the faculty of bringing together images dissimilar in the main by some one point or more of likeness distinguished." 75

The above observations clearly indicate that, according to Coleridge, the proper and benificent role of Fancy, in the genesis of consciousness as a whole, is conversion of perception into memories. In other words, it is a 'mode of memory' derived from 'sense impressions' after they have got related through the law of association which Coleridge, in his own way, explains in the following words:

The true practical general law of association is this; that whatever makes certain parts of a total impression more vivid or distinct than the rest, will determine the mind to recall these in preference to others equally linked together by the common condition of contemporaneity, or (what I deem a more appropriate and philosophical term) of continuity. 76

Fancy is the result of this kind of association and it enables the poet to 'memorize' the impressions received.


76 Biographia Literaria vol. I, p. 87
through senses. But memory alone is not sufficient; the impressions are to be related in order to form concepts, and Understanding is the faculty that forms concepts.

The term understanding is perhaps the most confusing among all Coleridgean terminology though he believed that the source of all error in the eighteenth century was the 'growing alienation' and 'self-sufficiency' of the understanding. Against the eighteenth century conception of it, Coleridge believed that "the notices furnished by the Sense "are taken into "distinct thought" or raised into "objects of reflection" by understanding without which man's sensations "would be a delirium, a chaos, a scudding cloudage of vapours." Accordingly, understanding brings order into chaos but the difficulty here is that 'understanding' is a term that appears twice with two different connotations. Coleridge writes

the Understanding is in all aspects a medial faculty, and has therefore two extremes or poles, the sensual ... and the intellectual pole, or the hemisphere (as it were) turned towards reason. 78


This has led G.N.G. Orsini to believe that Coleridge accepted Kant's categories of the understanding. Sensual understanding, which generalizes and arranges by means of the categories as well as empirical concepts, is for Coleridge 'mere understanding' because it does not possess the use of Reason. It tells us nothing of natura naturans; it is only concerned with natura naturata. In Coleridge's words

the understanding whenever it does not possess or use the Reason, may be defined the conception of sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phenomena of perception; that faculty, the functions of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward experience.

'Intellectual Understanding', on the other hand, possesses Reason and is therefore capable of becoming aware of the supersensuous substratum of the sensuous.

Instead of indulging in a controversy on the use of the term understanding in two different senses

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79 Coleridge and German Idealism p. 107

80 The Friend vol.I., p. 156
and indicating their relation, it may be appropriate to regard the two 'understandings' as one faculty. Coleridge divides the term to indicate that it may be applied to two quite different sorts of consciousness: the one that starts from the finished concept of the 'I' and the other that achieves the picture of the 'I' out of itself: or, in other words, a view of consciousness that sees a reflection of the structure of the mind as constituting reality, and another view that sees consciousness as a power that imposes form on reality — grasping every object as assimilating it to its perception. That this is a plausible interpretation of the dual meanings of 'understanding' is borne out by the contrast Coleridge provides between understanding and reason, a contrast summed up succinctly by Basil Willey when he writes that Coleridge gives meanings of his own to 'Reason' and 'Understanding', which are not those of ordinary parlance: Reason is 'the organ of the supersensuous'; Understanding is the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phenomena of perception. Reason is 'the knowledge of the laws of the whole considered as one'; Understanding is 'the science of phenomena'. Reason seeks ultimate ends; understanding studies means. Reason is 'the source and substance of truths above sense'; Understanding is the faculty which 'judges according to sense'. Reason is the eye of the spirit, the faculty whereby spiritual reality is spiritually discerned; Understanding is the mind of flesh.81

81 Basil Willey, Nineteenth century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold p. 29
The above should warn us against the danger of looking in Coleridge for any consistent or detailed use of Kant (or of any other philosopher) because nothing could be farther from Kant than the Coleridgean view of Reason indicated above. For Kant, Reason is not the 'mind's eye'\footnote{The \textit{Friend} vol.I p.157.} as Coleridge says of the Supersensuous. The ideas of Reason are for Kant extensions of the pure concepts of understanding and therefore, unlike Coleridge's, have no corresponding object in sense experience and give no knowledge of any reality. Thus while agreeing with Kant that Reason is the highest faculty of the human mind and the source of all ideas, Coleridge does not assert like him that the ideas of Reason cannot be embodied in experience because they lie outside our grasp; this to Kathleene Raine is the greatest achievement of Coleridge as a thinker\footnote{Kathleene Raine, \textit{Coleridge} p. 30} — the ideas of Reason are communicable and are always conveyed.

It is clear that Coleridge believes in two kinds of ideas: the most intuitive and originative ideas of
'Reason' and the ideas formed through the faculty of 'Understanding', or ideas that arise out of an organization of Nature 'out there'. The two kinds of ideas are to be unified and this is where Coleridge, unlike Kant for whom the question of mediation between Reason and Understanding does not arise at all, introduces the term imagination — the 'esemplastic' power of the mind which means 'shaping into one'. Elsewhere he gave the word the form 'esenoplastic' and thought of it apparently as a transition of the German Einbildungskraft.

In order to understand the connotations Coleridge gave this term and the functions of this term in his critical thinking it is necessary to look into the Biographia Literaria where an attempt at a synthetic definition of the term is presented thus:

84 The word 'esemplastic', as Coleridge himself points out in Biographia Literaria chapter X, was coined by him in the belief that a new term would best convey the new sense he had in mind. The new sense was the conception of the imagination as an instrument 'bringing into one' and giving a coherent shape to disparate elements. vol.I, p. 107.
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 as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. 85

Here, as Mary Warnock indicates, there is a clear reference to the function and the role of imagination 'in all human perception', and therefore, all knowledge of the world. 86 This is the role of imagination set out in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason but, as already pointed out, there is a great difference between Kant and Coleridge so far as their analysis of the term is concerned. Coleridge does not agree with Kant in that the imagination of the poet or the 'man of genius' is simply a special and heightened form of imagination we all possess. His (Coleridge's) idea of imagination, on the other hand, is more like

86 Mary Warnock, Imagination p. 93
Schelling's which distinguishes between the 'productive' -
intuitive and the 'poetic faculty' and, like Schelling,
Coleridge believes that the artist performs largely
consciously what the rest of us perform unconsciously.

It may be pointed out here that the distinction
between primary and secondary imagination has caused
some confusion among the critics since Shawcross' edition
of the *Biographia Literaria* appeared. Shawcross, as one
can see from his Introduction, seeks to assimilate a
Coleridgean theory to a Kantian one and, therefore,
equates Kant's reproductive, productive and aesthetic
imagination with Coleridge's fancy, primary imagination
and secondary imagination respectively.\(^{87}\) Shawcross's
scheme, though neat, is questionable because it is based
on the assumption that Coleridge is an uncritical
disciple of Kant and that there must be a one to one
correspondence between the theories of the vigorous
German and the imaginative Englishman. W.J. Bate, on
the other hand, suggests that "Coleridge himself for
that matter, probably regarded the distinction between

\(^{87}\) *Biographia Literaria* vol. I, pp. LXIII-LXIV
primary and secondary imagination as a straw across the path; for, as Shawcross notes, he considered removing it." 88 Similarly J.A.Appleyard remarks that "Coleridge apparently considered removing the sentence about primary imagination — a good reason for not labouring unreasonably to discover exactly what he meant by it. Shawcross refers to Sara Coleridge's remark in the 1847 edition of the Biographia Literaria that the sentence was struck out in the copy of Biographia literaria." 89

Coleridge is not so bewildering and confusing as his commentators have sometimes made him appear to be. According to Coleridge the distinction between the primary and the secondary forms of imagination — as is clear from the lines quoted above — involves a differentiation of the unconscious from the conscious activity. The truly artistic imagination, Coleridge avers, is "an echo of the primary", and yet differs from it because the former "co-exists with the conscious will". Still it is


89 See J.A.Appleyard, Coleridge's philosophy of literature p. 203.
"identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, differing only in degree and in the mode of its operation." That such is the plausible interpretation of the two 'imaginations' is attested to by Coleridge himself. He mentions Schelling in whose "NATUR-PHILOSOPHIE", and the "SYSTEM DES TRANSCENDENTALEN IDEALISMUS", I first found a genial coincidence with much that I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do —

and like Schelling, he believes that for an artist the imagination is — at least in part, subject to 'conscious will' otherwise identical in kind to 'common man's imagination'. In other words, an artist voluntarily creates what all of us involuntarily create for ourselves through the faculty of imagination. What the imagination creates is an idea — and this idea is a unification of the ideas of reason and ideas of understanding — which the artist projects into words. This is the main reason why Coleridge does not retain the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' imagination in his later

90 Biographia Literaria vol. I p. 202

91 Biographia Literaria vol. I, p. 102
writings where he elaborately discusses imagination as a faculty that mediates between Understanding and Reason.

Coleridge's greatness as a critic, it is to be noted, lies in the fact that he goes beyond Schelling in finding the evidence of organic union, under the aegis of imagination, in the language of the poem, as the words come to earn from within what the Kantian faculties have imposed upon them from without. The raw material of unmediated passion come to be mediated by a conscious act of will: devices like metre and figures of speech, at once stimulants of attention and conductors of order, are introduced 'artificially, by a voluntary act'. The American New Critics (as would be analysed in Chapter IV) developed a theory of 'paradoxes' out of this Coleridgean conception without keeping in mind Coleridge belief that "Language and all symbols give Outness to Thoughts/and this [is] the philosophical essence and purpose of language."92

In short, imagination, as Coleridge conceives it, attempts to synthesize the impressions and conceptions derived from the concrete external world with the insights

92 The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Entry No. 1378.
offered by reason; and in this process imagination mediates between the various faculties and activities of the mind and body. Viewing the whole discussion of imagination and other related terms from a purely epistemological standpoint, imagination — both primary and secondary — is that 'esemplastic' power, which "while incorporating the ideas of Reason in the concepts of Understanding and organizing the concepts of understanding by the self-circling energies of Reason gives rise to a system of symbols." It resolves oppositions into harmony by virtue of the fact that opposites have originated prior to the interaction of the ideas and sensations. A further extension of this idea (as would be taken up in chapter V) can clearly indicate its resemblance with the Aristotelian conception of 'inherent forms' which is the nucleus of the Genre critics' theory of literature.

The 'esemplastic' power, imagination, is dialectical because it is both constitutive and regulative of the mental process. It is a power setting at nought all the

contradictions by revealing the true character of identity and striving towards the reconciliation of the universal with the particular, essence with existence, natura naturans with natura naturata. The most obvious instance of this process in human being, according to Coleridge, is that of a poet who

described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. 94

The poet, accordingly, voluntarily assimilates external reality or Nature into his own consciousness, diffuses 'a tone and spirit of unity', forms ideas and projects those ideas into words which become symbols. In other words, the primary materials fused into symbol by the creative imagination are taken from both objective nature and the mind which inspires (and even guides the creation), the symbol is part of what it represents. 95 The poet also

94 Biographia Literaria vol. II p. 12.

imparts something of his own character to the works he produces so that every good work of art reveals not only the creative process but also other aspects of mental activity. In this light it has been emphasized that 'the poet brings the whole soul of man into activity'.

It might be argued that in Coleridgean terminology a work of art is itself a 'symbol' which mediates between the world of 'things' and 'thoughts'; Coleridge opposes 'symbol' to allegory in the way he opposes imagination to fancy or the 'organic' to the 'mechanical' form. A symbol, according to Coleridge, is not a copy but a form breathing life. It always "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible" and, while it enunciates the whole, "abides itself as a living part in that unity, of which it is representative." 96 'Idea' and symbol are not opposed to each other, as allegory and symbol are, because a symbol is characterized as

a translucence of the special in the individual, of the general in the special, of the universal in the general; above all the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. 97


97 Ibid.
What emerges from the above discussion is that, according to Coleridge, the task of the poet is to embody his consciousness — an identity of the perceiver and perceived, subject and object — in symbols, and the task of critic should be to judge how successful that task has been. The critic is to see whether the poet has simply translated his thought into the language of poetry — a charge Coleridge levelled against Pope and other eighteenth century poets — or whether he has projected his thought in symbols in such a way that the symbol and what it symbolizes are virtually inseparable. This is what Coleridge means by the 'organic form' of a work of art and it is what he had in mind while analysing the Shakespearean plays. It will be seen that some of the basic twentieth century critical concepts and terminology — e.g. metaphor, ambiguity, tension, paradox — are largely a modification of this 'organicist' concept. But since the vital core of Coleridge's philosophy related to 'organic form' is lost, the concepts of the twentieth century formalist critics — concepts

How Coleridge's critical method is the outcome of his conception of imagination as "the synthesis of opposites fused into a universal whole" has been discussed by Lois Josephs in "Shakespeare and a Coleridgean Synthesis: Cleopatra, Leontes, and Falstaff", Shakespeare Quarterly vol. XVIII: I (Winter, 1967) pp. 17-21.
which have their origin in Coleridge's analysis of 'organic' form — remain devoid of the universal significance which Coleridge's imagination was able to grasp. According to Coleridge, true poetic form is not a mould separate from the material, into which the material is poured out. "Could a rule be given from without", he says, "poetry would cease to be poetry and sink into a mechanical art".\footnote{Biographia Literaria vol.II p. 65}

Coleridge, like Schlegel, distinguishes between 'mechanical' and 'organic' forms by asserting that the latter 'is innate', that it shapes as "it develops from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with form".\footnote{Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism vol.I, p.224.} On the other hand, "the form is mechanical when on any given material we impress a predetermine form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material".\footnote{Ibid.} It is in relation to the concept of 'organic form' that one should understand the validity and significance of Coleridge's definition of a poem as
that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part. 102

Here Coleridge explicitly indicates that the form of a work of art, or the 'combination' of the elements in a work of art, depends upon the nature of the intended aim or end — science having one end in view, while poetry has another. Accordingly, 'the works of Plato, Bishop Taylor and Burnet', in spite of their use of metre, are not poems because their object is truth, 103 and, at the same time, the delight arising from the whole is contributed by the parts and yet 'it is other than their totality'. 104 On the other hand, according to Coleridge, Shakespeare is a perfect dramatist and a genius. His dramas, far from being 'dramatic romances' —

102 Biographia Literaria vol. II, p. 10

103 Ibid vol. II p. 11

104 Ibid vol. II p. 10
as Hoheisel calls them 105 — are perfectly organic plays because there breathes in them a spirit of wholeness through which "images usually modify each other". 106 Shakespearean drama, according to Coleridge, is not an imitation in the eighteenth century sense of the word when it acquired the sense of direct copying because, we do not get in them a picture of the world recorded by observation but an experience which has its origin in the "unfathomable depths of his own ocean mind". 107 This does not mean that Coleridge made the mistake of regarding "the personal writer as superior to the objective writer." 108 For he clearly states.

It is easy to clothe Imaginary Beings without our own thoughts and Feelings, but to send ourselves out of ourselves, to think ourselves into the Thoughts and Feelings of Beings in circumstances wholly and strangely different from our own hoc labor hoc opus and who has achieved it? Perhaps only Shakespeare. 109


Coleridge explains the paradox of Shakespeare's union of subjectivity and God-like impersonality in several alternate ways. In metaphysical terms, Shakespeare, in his introspective meditation, imitates, not the natura naturata, "his own nature as an individual person", but the natura naturans, the universal potentiality "of which his own personal existence was but one modification". One hardly needs affirming the fact that "far from neglecting the form of Shakespeare's plays, Coleridge was the first English Shakespearean critic to write serious formal criticism". Yet he differs from other formalist critics in that for him the 'organic form' has its origin in the intuition of the artist which is realized through the objects on which it is actually imposed — both being important in their own way.

The concept of organic form coupled with the idea of 'the reconciliation of opposites' has paved the way for much of modern criticism playing an influential role in the critical thinking of the twentieth century in general.

110 Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism vol.I pp. 43-44.

Hence the appeal to inclusiveness as the criterion of poetic excellence — to the co-existence in a poem of opposite or discordant qualities, provided that these have been blended or 'reconciled' into unity by the synthetic power which Coleridge attributed to imagination. How twentieth century Anglo-American formalistic criticism reacted to and reformulated some of Coleridge's critical concepts and what is its true relationship to Coleridgean thought are the questions which are investigated in the present thesis.