CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
Every poetic generation will frame
its own laws with varying dependence
upon the precedent of the past.


All English critical theories right from antiquity
until the current times have been the outcome of
contravention and reformulation of the immediate critical
climate preceding them. Aristotle's philosophical tenets
enumerated in *The Poetics* — an invigorating refreshment
to different schools of criticism — originated in an attempt
to answer the charges leveled against poets and poetry by
Plato. And yet, it was the Platonic ideology which provided
him with the tools to examine and extend it. The nineteenth
century, reflecting an individualistic and innovating
re-orientation, which in the eighteenth century would have
been regarded as anarchic and iconoclastic, could be, to this
extent, called subversive. But, at the same time, one cannot
deny that the Romantics accepted some of the canons of the
eighteenth century aesthetics. Similarly, T.S. Eliot's
emphasis on the poem rather than on anything the poem may
communicate brings him in sharo opposition to the 19th
century theory of Expressionism. But, it would amount to
misconstruing his concept of 'Tradition' if we assume that
his target was to dismiss the Romantic credo in totality. On the contrary, his conception of the creative process is rooted in the aesthetic core of the 19th century. The 19th century was no exception to the rule and emerged as a sharp reaction against the Metaphysicals which it held to be 'a digression from the literary practice of classical antiquity'. The 18th century, however, struck an innovative note in that it broke completely with the Metaphysical aesthetic of poetry yet remained exceptionally dependent on those poetic principles which had been framed by classical antiquity. The Metaphysicals, vigorously individual and adventurous, were held by the neo-classicists to proselytize from the comprehensible orderliness of the theoretical principles of the writers of classical antiquity. The bone and sinew of all art therefore became an adherence to these rules. This imitative aesthetics, the cardinal feature of the 18th century, was a necessary corollary to the change in the notion of true wit embodied in the often quoted definition:

'What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.'

Great poetry was to avoid the expression of personal idiosyncrasies and concentrate on the cultivation of 'uniformity of sentiment' to be comprehended and extolled by a man of taste. This servile fidelity to ancient rules and

existing assumptions was expected from all men of letters and any deviation, whatsoever, was traduced as apostasy. The tenuity of this literary traditionalism and severe standards became evident within the age in which these precepts were laid down. They were questioned and even undermined by such attractive alternatives as the novel and mock-heroic — the latter a calculated distortion of the rules and the former setting an unprecedented value on the newness and uniqueness of individual experience and, therefore, indicative of the counter forces operative in the period.

However, in the early years of the 13th century the exertion of creative ability continued to be directed toward the formulation and re-enforcement of certain basic laws of aesthetics — calculation, judgement, reason, contrived language decontaminated from all vulgar associations — wherein the artist was looked upon as a skilful manipulator affecting excessive correctness, artificiality and affection while conditioning art to the needs and requirements of the audience. This pragmatic orientation highly reminiscent of ancient rhetoric and a far cry from the theory of mimesis did strike a different chord in the principal aesthetic attitude of the western world but with its insistence on discipline, derivative and mechanical order and imposition of artificial
limitations, it was bound to retreat from life and cripple the imagination — a living corpse which was to be resuscitated by the next generation of artists. But, in the meantime, these artists developed a vigorous disposition to challenge and remould rather than debase the standards of good writing by grafting their theoretical principles, resulting from sheer academic conformism, upon earlier works. This habit of thought was implanted and further nurtured by the philosophical theories of the age heralded by Locke, Hobbes, Berkeley, Hume and Hartley. The domineering trend of these philosophers was to explain Man and Universe in materialistic and mechanistic terms and was rooted invariably, in the mechanical concept of the mind promulgated in Greek and Roman times. Plato’s reference to mind as 'mirror' and Aristotle’s comparison of it with 'lens' left an indelible mark on these philosophers who came to view the mind to be passive, mechanical and a recorder of objects, reproducing them in the same order in which they were seen. Locke’s empirical aesthetics churned well in Cartesianism, was to deny the existence of innate ideas and regard the mind analogous to a 'camera lens' or 'lens' reflecting that which is fed into it. Hume, however, marked a considerable advance over Locke in his appreciation of imagination for its power
to envisage images in the absence of the object perceived. Imagination, the image-making faculty, was segregated from memory which, according to Hume, was recollection and reproduction of images in the same order. Imagination and Fancy on the other hand reordered these images in accord with the principle of association of ideas brought about by three factors, viz: resemblance, continuity in time and space and causal connection. This kind of a compounding imaginative process — a standard one in the 18th century usage — would ineluctably yield a cold and inanimate world by eschewing the role of the perceiving self in comprehending the world and concentrating on the recombination and recreation of sense-data according to the associationist theory. All philosophers came under the influence of the Newtonian concept of Necessitarianism believing that the impressions one gets from the senses are necessarily and mechanically connected with other impressions or with the ideas derived from them — a belief that was inimical and sacrilegious to the mysterious element in creation making mechanism and artisanship the paradigm for inventive process. In their endeavour to free men's minds from the bonds of ignorance and superstition —
fanaticism of the 17th century — the 18th century went to the opposite extreme of abjuring, rather mounting guns against, the wise ordinance of providence. However, it was Hartley who, in his Observations on Man (1749) served to exclude the mysterious element of the mind by deeming sensation to be all-pervasive and the genesis of all complex mental processes.

There was an obverse side crisscrossing the 18th century conformity to traditional practice and objective consciousness as a way of experiencing reality. P.B.S. Stone views the 19th century as an age of revolution rather than one of evolution but one can, against his assertions, point to a limitless number of challenges that were arising to the main culture in its later decades, pointing forward to Romanticism. The most important challenge came from the novel which not only set an unprecedented value on originality but also plumbed the subconscious realms for an unbridled display of sentiment. Accordingly, Richardson, moving ahead of conventions and fixed attitude, deploys the subversive forms of behaviour both through his epistolary form — thereby fostering a subjective approach — and in his Clarissa where the heroine is shown to counter all authority. This new attitude towards the handling of
experience was further emboldened by the shift in the European socio-economic and socio-political consciousness engendered by the American War of Independence and the French Revolution which sloughed off irksome restraint imposed by artificial rules of authority to the extent that even the founders of the rigid establishment were seen as depicting an ambivalent attitude. Dr. Johnson who had unabashedly admonished heavy dependence on antecedent literature is now seen as dispensing the rules, artificiality, frigidity and intellectual coxcomery. It is Young, who makes an unusually confident start and his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) — well named — not only upbraids the sanctity of old rules but also unfolds a spate of theorizing on genius and creative imagination. It was left to the Romantics to meet the exigencies of this new experience and help quicken the unborn world whose outlines were reflected in Young, James and Reynolds, and give countenance to it.

The Romantic movement emerged as a cataclysm, to throw off not only the stultifying prejudices of 19th century imitative — rationalistic aesthetics but also to form a dangerous crack through its foundation and the stock-in-trade of literary critics for three generations — the theory of Mimesis. Yet the champions of this movement cannot
be looked upon as revolutionaries bent on breaking away from the traditional system but as experimenters working within its framework and the multiple ramifications of their aesthetics are but an offspring of that single note of dissent struck by Longinus in his famous treatise *On the Sublime* when antiquated classicism had dug its roots deep. Wordsworth in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* addresses and woos the public and acclimatizes them to the subjective dimension of literature by shifting the focus to the personality of the artist and viewing all good poetry as the product of the personal thoughts and sentiments of the artist. His definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"² was not only to romp through the contemporary literature of the 19th century as the leitmotif of the expressionistic theory of art but led to an apotheosis of the faculty of Imagination which had been defiled by the 18th century theorists. This attitude led to an exaggerated notion of the human personality and reached its climax by bestowing a prophetic status upon the artist whose personal experiences came to be identified with the direct experience of the Absolute itself. Poetry was no longer an assemblage of ideas under the controlling reason.

and steady direction to some pre-conceived blue-print but a fortuitous activity in which inspiration and intuition gained ascendancy. William Blake — the original architect — launched his four-fold vision, a decade before the Wordsworthian manifesto, and tore down the psychological and philosophical basis of the mechanistic climate by emphasizing the creative role of the mind in stating the dependence of the external world on the self, imbuing imagination with the mystical power to apprehend that truth which underlies all temporal and mundane phenomena. Religious leanings being unavoidable for Blake, he centered his doctrine on the religious dogma of original sin and postulated the oradual redemption of the unrepentant man through his imaginative powers which would enable him to escape both from the self-hood and the world of appearance for a sympathetic involvement with the common humanity. This is in conformity with the discovery bequeathed by Rousseau: man restores and recovers his lost paradise in his harmony with the world around him. This exaltation of the eco was eventually responsible for the metamorphosis in Blake who was seen to break with religious conservatism and end in denigrating God in his fascination for Gnosticism.
The final rebuttal, however, to the 18th century, mechanistic philosophy based on the 'despotism of the eye' was to ensue from Coleridge's protest. Imagination almost invalidating the external world. Coleridge's philosophical system definitely smacks of plagiarism as he always remained hospitable to a wealth of ideas in German metaphysics and, therefore, like the Germans, centred his investigations on the relationship between the self and the external reality, emphasizing a coalescence of the two unlike the 18th century philosophers whose specific quest was to emphasize the object of Imagination. Coleridge's revulsion of the mechanistic world becomes evident in his diminution of the 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."\(^4\)

He, thus repudiates the 18th century shibboleth — to emphasize the object of contemplation to the detriment of the creative self in poetry — by the primordial utterance


\(^4^\)Ibid, p. 709.
that the human mind is modelled on the image of the Divine
Mind and from here, he opens a vista towards a new stage
of aesthetic culture — just as God marshalled the world
out of a tangled mesh, so the human mind activated by
imagination is capable of imposing form and order on the
medley of events provided by the sensation. Stimulated by
both Wordsworth and German metaphysics and gaining
clairvoyance through his excursion to Shakespearean scholar-
ship, he desynonymised Fancy and Imagination and carved
his distinction between primary and secondary imagination.
He retains the empirical/associational framework, but only
to assign to it a subordinate position, when he defines Fancy
as the faculty to link and recombine the passive images of
sense mechanically — a sheer mechanical dexterity to give
us 'natura naturata'. Imagination, on the other hand, was
neither a surrealist dream-activity nor Blake's unworldly
vision but while it admitted an unconscious component, it was
vitalistic, dynamic, bound and governed by conscious will
and, therefore capable of rendering 'natura naturans'. This
is evident when he writes:

"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."

His distinction between the primary and secondary Imagination amounts to the naive distinction of the conscious and unconscious activities of the mind and by assigning the conscious part to the poet he parts company with Kant for whom the Imagination of the poet was simply a special and a heightened form of that Imagination we all possess because of its force and vivacity, and joins Schelling's synthetic distinction of the term as the 'productive intuition' and the 'poetic faculty'. The poet voluntarily assimilates the external reality and transforms and modifies it by imparting to it something of his own character. With the result, the work of art, emanating from this coalescence of primary materials and creative

imagination, becomes a symbol mediating between the world of 'things' and 'thought'. Thus, Coleridge attributes to man the active power to respond creatively to the external world rather than a passive entity in the manner of the 'Eolian harp' that is sounded by whatever strikes it.

Wordsworth, too, contemplating the activities of the mind, invested man with divine potentialities. In his early stages he was led to a narcissistic attitude. As he writes, "I was unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature." Yet his mature view, as expressed in his great poems like *The Prelude*, was that of the coalescence of the subject and the object.

The second generation of the Romantic writers, though far less influential in the 19th century, looked askance at the unsurmountable Romantic temper. Their work cannot be described to be a mere echo of the Romantic credo, even though they served as codifiers and popularizers of the Romantic doctrines against the mechanistic epistemology of the 18th century empiricists. The defection of these writers to the Romantic sensibility was partly due to their having stepped late on the literary scene and, therefore

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having little or nothing to say, and partly due to the retrograde stride of the first generation, especially Wordsworth. Byron's éclat for the poetry of Pope as a product of craftsmanship and the critical acumen of Dr. Johnson, Shelley's political rejuvenations turning him into an agent of apocalyptic change, and Keats, being pulled in two directions at once and looking forward to future developments to redress the imbalance of the emotional imperialism, are distinct facets which mark off these writers from the romantic milieu. Yet these avant-garde artists also found themselves inclined to the truth and contemporaneity of the 19th century aesthetics in its rejection of the imitative-rationalistic temper and promulgation of a view of poetry centred on the communication of emotion. Byron sounds like the arch-priest of enthusiasm in his eulogy of Imagination which squares with tributes running through the Romantic mainstream but which he was to disparage intermittently: "poetry is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake."7 The focus is on private experience — the irrational function of the mind above reason. Shelley seems closer to Blake's identification of the poet with the prophet. He leaves everything to the inspiration of the moment in

7 *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p.139.
holding the poet to be an inspired being in whom the power of inspiration emanates from within capturing the Platonic one in the many or the reality beyond reality. This evanescent revelation, which has its origin in the intuition of the author, sporadically stimulates the imagination not only to apprehend the transcendental truth but also to harmonize the flux of sense-impressions. By centering the power of Imagination in the visionary power, he not only reinforces but also makes the basis of his theoretical principles that part of the literary process which exists independently of will and consciousness and over which the author has no control. Any attempt to close it would lead to a decline of this divine illumination. Thus, "when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline,..."³

Investing the artist with an extra-temporal vision, Shelley not only deprecates the 19th century as "an evil-minded faculty of calculation" but is equally supercilious to Coleridge's secondary Imagination. Yet, he also emerges as a purveyor of the Coleridgean aesthetics in his susceptibility to the organic conception of poetry, which had its source in the classical tradition, in presuming the occult forces of growth in a work of art which takes

³John Shawcross, ed. Shelley's Literary And Philosophical Criticism (Folcroft Library Editions, 1976), p. 294.
is shone naturally as a result of which an art-product proliferates into its ultimate form like an autonomous and living entity without a deliberate plan. This Romantic emphasis on the biological evolution of a work of art was an answer to the 18th century scientific view of the human mind as 'tabula rasa'. But, where Wordsworth and Coleridge stressed a delicate adjustment between impulse and control, Shelley squeezed out the last droop of discipline from this theory only to give a sharper edge, the Romantic theoretical stance. Poetry came to lose its specific meaning and remained confused with religion and esoteric philosophy largely the product of intuition.

Keats deliberately sets out to dismantle the Romantic framework in his remarks on the poet's impersonality or negative capability. Yet the nature of the Romantic spirit permeated both his creative writings and criticism and self-criticism occurring in non-literary and semi-literary contexts although the corner-stone of his concepts continued to remain tilted toward the ideal of objectivity revealing an unmistakable anti-Romantic propensity. His axioms on Spontaneity, Inspiration and Imagination are a convincing evidence of this stance. His deification of Imagination is similar to that of the other Romantics:
"I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth whether it existed before or not, for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love; they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty ... The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream — he awoke and found it truth; I am the more zealous in this affair because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning." 9

Thus the second generation of the Romantics followed the beaten track to contribute to the process of enlargement of the 18th century critical theory set in motion by the first generation of the Romantics — Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and together they helped demolish the mechanistic philosophy.

This study aims to survey the vicissitudes of aesthetic thinking among the second generation of the Romantics, marked by Shelley in his attempt to preserve everything in an all-embracing eclectic scheme and Keats's struggle to work his way out of a form he only gradually realized was inimical

to his deepest purposes. Keats was the more original and the more seminal mind and his critical acumen seems to be sharper than Shelley. Keats's views on poetry have greater appeal to modern sensibility and have received considerable critical attention in the twentieth century. Tearing down the idols of his apprenticeship period he strikes a distinct anti-Romantic note by laying great stress on the ideal of objectivity. However in his poetry he, in spite of himself, does not succeed to achieve this objectivity, though his last poems show some progress towards it.

Both the collapse of the French Revolution — the quintessence of Romantic yearning — and Wordsworth's apostasy from social liberalism were responsible for Shelley's unbridled idealism to impugn divine providence by his apocalyptic expectations. The failure of the French Revolution, however, did not evince the same kind of passionate idealization in Byron and Keats, who, in coming to terms with mortality, display a deeper sense of the complexity of human nature. In Shelley it occasioned his turn to politics, subservience of art to social purpose and his obsession to recapture paradise here and now and his poems came to earn the title 'microcosmic revolutions', setting forth, as they do, the beau ideal of the French Revolution.
to forestall further failures. However, in the finest works of his artistic maturity, the active political crusader reversed his position as the idealistic impulse became perverted and frustrated, as did Keats who, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, becomes the poet of social and moral regeneration when he speaks of two kinds of poets and extols that sort who make the misery of mankind their misery -- a development which he had held detrimental to the establishment of a genuine theory of literature when he advised Shelley to bring down to size his 'magnanimity and be more of an acutely conscious artist. This study will, therefore, examine this critical development of Shelley and Keats which was to exercise such tremendous influence on critical theory in its later development.

Having discussed in this introductory chapter how the critical insights of Shelley and Keats contributed to the process of enlargement of the 19th century critical theory, I propose to complete the project in four more chapters including the conclusion. Chapter II entitled *The Theoretical Foundations of the Criticism of Shelley and Keats* will examine Shelley's major critical statements like *A Defence of Poetry* and other main works on which his reputation as a critic rests and Keats's criticism and self-criticism occurring in
non-literary and semi-literary contexts to understand their views of poetic creation better. It will also concentrate on those poems of Shelley and Keats which have a bearing on their views of art, poems which either project a theoretical concept or illustrate a principle which has been set forth in their prose writings.

The theoretical critical stances of the two poets determined very naturally their idiom and style of writing. Shelley, as a believer in untrammelled inspiration, did not take as much care to chisel his language as Keats, as an acutely conscious artist, did. In consequence we meet with two different styles of writing in the two poets. This difference will be brought into relief by a detailed examination of some of the important works of the two poets in Chapter III entitled: The Poetic Idiom of Shelley and Keats.

With all their limitations and apparent prejudices, Shelley and Keats were able to formulate certain principles of literary art which anticipated much that is regarded as sound and significant in critical theory in its later development. Chapter IV bearing the title, Impact of the Critical Tenets of Shelley and Keats on the 20th Century Criticism will throw some light on their tremendous and lasting influence on subsequent critics. It will also focus on the expansion and elaboration which their critical theories underwent at the hands of later critics.