CHAPTER II

THE COLERIDGEAN FRAMEWORK

The present chapter seeks to delineate briefly the theoretical framework that underlies Coleridge's Shakespearian criticism. Theory and practice in Coleridge are so inextricably interwoven that the latter cannot be understood in isolation from the former. Moreover, our central concern in the present thesis, the contention that Coleridge's Shakespearian criticism in the ultimate analysis has more a philosophical than a psychological bearing, envisages a framework of critical and philosophical dimensions. In view of these reasons, it has been considered necessary to give some account in a coherent manner of certain elements in Coleridge's theoretical framework. We have isolated Coleridge's views of the imagination and of organicism for brief consideration. These constitute, it may be asserted with some confidence, the corner-stone of Coleridge's theoretical edifice distinguishing him from the Shakespearian critics of the eighteenth century. Now, since Coleridge's theories have a definite epistemological bearing, we have preaced them with a concise account of the main epistemological developments from Descartes onwards. Our view is that Coleridge's Shakespearian criticism should be approached only in this philosophical perspective.

We may begin by pointing out that the pre-romantic philosophical thought, in particular, and world view, in general, were characterized by the fact that the human mind was regarded as incapable of achieving truth except through the application of analytic reason. We may also point out that the philosophical position which supports Coleridge's philosophy of literature was in revolt against these dominantly rational and empirical views of knowledge. Coleridge, through his theories of imagination and organicism, questioned the very basis of these prevalent views and provided a new basis for literary
criticism. However, before coming to Coleridge's point of departure, let us cast a hurried glance at the main epistemological developments from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards.

I

Descartes (1596-1650) was basically concerned with epistemological problems and his greatest contribution is to the theory of knowledge. He was the pioneer of a scientific-rationalistic approach and a dualistic philosophy against which Romantic writers, in general, and Coleridge, in particular, revolted. This philosophy had fostered the development of neo-classical approach in the literature of the time. Since poetic perceptions in general are reinforced and supported by philosophical truths, the writers and the poets of the time found the most powerful justification of their thoughts in Cartesian philosophy.

The Cartesian theory brought to completion the dualism of mind and matter. His system presents "two parallel but independent worlds, that of mind and that of matter, each of which can be studied without reference to the other". According to him, all bodies are different from one another so far as their basic internal properties are concerned. We, however, can perceive their outward behaviour only. Therefore, whatever can be perceived through our senses is not true. Our sense impressions merely beguile or deceive us for they do not give "the knowledge of the thing in itself". What they provide is only subjective reality which is irrelevant for the purpose of mechanics. Only our intellect can approach a totally objective knowledge, and it does so "by filtering sense impressions as clear as possible of subjective ingredients".

He considered the mind to be indubitable when he said: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore, I am). Thus even 'I' was reduced to the position of a mere thinking being, an "intellectual abstraction" as Basil Willey calls it. However, mind cannot transcend matter. True knowledge would be knowledge to which the mind itself had contributed nothing.

Descartes believed that only "clear and distinct" ideas contain "reality", and that truth can be apprehended only through mathematically conceived ideas. The Cartesian spirit led to a denial of all types of knowledge other than that of a scientific and mathematical nature since truth can be known only by a process of analytical abstract reasoning. His greatest attempt was to exclude subjectivity from the search for truth.

Descartes' insistence upon sound and plain reason made him say that poetic truths were only superficial, a sort of ornaments only "which might be agreeable to fancy" but which were recognised by judgement as having no relation with reality. He discarded the role of imagination and intuition altogether. "The imagination because its contribution is necessarily gleaned from sense perceptions must be strenuously prevented from interfering: the attempt to conceive rational truths, by means of it is impossible, and those, for example, who try to imagine God or the soul are like those who would use eyes to hear sounds or smell odours".  

Hobbes (1588-1679) was an empirical theorist who accepted a kind of "mechanico-materialism" in the world. He was a firm believer in the supremacy of analytic reason and universal law which he thought were physical. "The universe is

---

corporeal, all that is real is material, and what is not material is not real". According to Hobbes, material laws of the universe are immutable and a knowledge of these laws of the universe would solve the riddle of life. The world is not a mystery for it can be "measured, weighed and mastered". He says: "Fear and reverence Nature no longer; for she is no mystery, for she worketh by motion". His belief in the material nature of the universe made him think in the mechanical nature of all living beings. A body, natural or real, is one which occupied space, was divisible and movable or, in other words, a body which behaves in a geometric manner is a living one. Only geometry can provide reliable kind of knowledge for she is the only science "God has yet vouchsafed to us".

Hobbes thought that even human perceptions and thoughts are nothing but the motion of corporeal particles. Thought is a form of "motion in matter" and the ideas are only "vibrations in matter of brain or nerves". Motion can be governed or directed through some physical sensory organ; only then it can be conveyed to the brain, "where the corresponding motions can give rise to the seeming which are 'ideas'":

Whatever accidents or qualities our senses made us think there be in the world they be not there, but are seeming and apparitions only: the things that really are in the world without us, are those motions by which these seemings are caused.6
(Human Nature)

His classification of mind with matter made it the subject of strict causation. Hobbes did not make any distinction between imagination and fancy as both were used in an inter-changeable manner. Even the faculty of imagination was denied as a

4 Quoted from Basil Willey, op. cit., p.100.
5 Ibid., p.101.
6 Ibid., pp.107-8.
transcending and intuitive faculty. Hobbes considered imagination as a "decaying sense":

Of imagination... after the object is removed or the eye shut, we still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latins call Imagination, from the image made in seeing, and apply the same, though improperly to all the other senses. But the Greeks call it fancy.... Imagination, therefore, is nothing but decaying sense; and is found in men, and many other living creatures, as well as sleeping and waking...

... When we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old and past, it is called Memory. So that Imagination and Memory are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names.7

(Leviathan, Ch. VIII)

Epistemology, or the search for truth and knowledge, was the main concern of Locke (1623-1704) in the last thirty years of his life. Like Descartes and Hobbes, he thought that our knowledge is ultimately based on our experience. Only logic and mathematics are exempted from this rule. There are no innate ideas as such and mind is a passive receiver since ideas presented to it are "readymade" from the outward world of sense experience. M.H. Abrams describes this by borrowing a few pair of images from Yeats:

[The mind is like] a mirror which fixes the objects it reflects or... it is a tabula rasa on which sensations write or paint themselves or a (...camera obscura in which the light entering through a small aperture, throws an image of the external scene on the wall), external and internal senses are said to be 'the windows by which light is let into this dark room'.... Alternatively, the mind is a 'waxed tablet' into which sensations like seals, impress themselves.8

Ideas, Locke argued, emanate from two sources: (1) from the experience of the external world, the knowledge of which can be acquired through senses, and (2) from the inner world of physical happenings which can be achieved through perception of functioning of mind. Since we can only think by means of ideas and ideas originate in sensory and introspective experience, "none of our knowledge can antedate experience". However, the empirical knowledge thus acquired is uncertain and improbable because certainty should be the main criterion of knowledge. This ideal of knowledge is possible only in mathematics. Only mathematics combined with careful reasoning can provide true knowledge.

Locke's ideas of imagination and fancy can be understood by his remarks on wit and judgement. Wit, for Locke, as for Hobbes and Dryden, consists in a certain "quickness of parts" so as to make the contents of memory readily available whenever needed. Men with a great deal of wit and prompt memory need not have the "clearest judgement" or "deepest reason". For wit is a faculty of "assembling or combining any ideas which may seem to have some congruity with each other and thereby it makes up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy".\(^9\) Wit is not at all concerned with truth. This is the function of another faculty which, in Lockian terms, may be called judgement. It distinguishes one idea from another wherever any difference is possible so as to avoid being "misled by similitude". Locke thus makes a clear distinction between the methods of wit and judgement.

Locke does not have a very high regard for poetry. In his *Thoughts Concerning Education*, he declares that, if a child has a poetic vein, the parents should "labour to have it stifled and suppressed as much as may be". The air of

\(^9\) Basil Willey, op. cit., p.287.
Parnassus may be pleasant but its soil is barren. Such a demeaning view of poetry is no indication of a blindness of perception: it emanates from the intensity of a particular insight that Locke, like other empiricists, was obsessed with. In its concern with truth in its experimental aspect, the tradition of British empiricism was eager to dispel what it considered to be delusions of fancy or imagination. Poetry, this tradition felt, was the anti-thesis of mathematics and mechanics, and hence something that should be approached with maximum of distrust. This suspicion is inscribed not only in empiricist philosophy but also in the texts of contemporary literary criticism, and is fused in the general world-view prevalent at the time.

The line of philosophers from Descartes to Locke may also be extended to include Berkeley and Hume. There are no doubt differences of point of view but their basic emphasis is the same, i.e., the world in reality is nothing more than what is given in "sense data" as Russell calls it, certain patches of colours, sounds, tastes, smells, etc. with certain spatio-temporal relations. Accordingly, knowledge comprises knowledge of the sense experience only. Since the movements of matter were determined by physical laws, mental events must be equally determinate.

This critical and philosophical thinking remained at the very core of English philosophy through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — until it was attacked by the transcendental philosophy of Kant and other German idealists. In fact, this new approach transformed the very nature of philosophy and gave it a new character and a new "weltanschauung".

10 Ibid., p.288.
II

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who influenced Schlegel and through him exercised a deep influence on Coleridge's mind, reacted strongly against the British empiricists. Kant rejected the idea of the mind being a blank sheet of paper, as advocated by the empiricists. According to him, this sheet of paper, i.e., the mind, is watermarked with a complicated pattern. It was already ingrained with a pattern of external world - with substantiability, identity, power and necessary connection, and all the rest. "This water mark was not stamped upon the mind by experience. It was simply brought out by experience".\(^\text{12}\) It began to show itself the moment experience began to write upon it. Thus, it was the preliminary condition, not the result, of knowledge. Knowledge is not derived simply from sense experience, it only depended upon experience for its material.

Kant termed his philosophy as transcendental. By this he means that he is not at all "concerned with the content of experience but only with the forms or ways in which the human mind, by virtue of its constitution, is obliged to react, in perception and in thought, to any and every content the touch of an external world may stimulate within it, whatever the nature of our sense organs and our sensible experience".\(^\text{13}\) Contrary to the British empiricists, Kant suggested that these forms of mental activity are \textit{a priori}. They exist independently of sense experience and prior to it. "They are the agents by which experience is influenced and built up into the shape in which it is presented to us".

About art and artist, Kant thought that an artist is a "creator" as well as a "spectator". "The creative genius of the

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.218.
artist is to be checked by the esthetic taste he shares with the public, if the beauty of his work is to be communicable to others". In this sense he must combine imagination with understanding. His imagination helps him in looking at the things with an entirely new perspective while the understanding gives the concepts and ideas an added aura. Since the artist's vision is free and spontaneous, "undetermined by anything except himself, his results are unique and cannot be imitated by any one". Of all the arts, Kant ranks poetry highest because of its superior power of expanding "the mind by setting the imagination at liberty".

Imagination, according to Kant, is the power which operates between "the phenomena of the Sensuous Manifold and the categories of the understanding". As a reproductive power, it is empirical only. Here it brings a synthesis of the Sensuous Manifold "which it apprehends according to laws received from the understanding, enabling the phenomena to be 'reproduced' in the understanding". As a productive or transcendental power, it is the faculty of synthesis a priori, providing the necessary unity, through the laws of the understanding, which makes possible the synthesis of the manifold of phenomena". It is this transcendental faculty of imagination which makes possible the whole of our sense experience, "without which no concept of objects could ever come together in one experience".15

It was possibly Kant's notion of the imagination as a mediating faculty that influenced Coleridge in his view of the imagination. Shawcross roughly identifies Coleridge's fancy

---
with Kant's reproductive imagination, Coleridge's primary imagination with Kant's productive imagination and the secondary imagination with what Shawcross calls Kant's aesthetic imagination.

There is no doubt that Coleridge was helped in the development of his theory of imagination by Kantian rejection of the rationalist-empiricist stance regarding the passivity of the human mind. However, as M.H. Abrams has suggested, both Wordsworth and Coleridge were encouraged in their view of the freedom of the human mind - the idea that it is mind that not only imposes form on matter but is also free of it - by their reading and especially the latter's, in the Cambridge platonists of the seventeenth century. In their early formulations, neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge relies on Kantian ideas. Instead, Coleridge reverts to the philosophical tradition that had flourished outside of Hobbes and Locke and prior to them.

In their search for an appropriate metaphor that would indicate the true understanding of the relationship between mind and reality, the Cambridge platonists had reverted to Plotinus, the founder of neo-platonism, rather than to Plato himself for whom the mind had been a passive reflector mirroring reality. Plotinus, on the other hand, thought of the mind as a radiating sun whence meaning and significance emanated. The Cambridge platonists were thus more the followers of Plotinus in this respect than of Plato. Coleridge, as Abrams points out, had read the Cambridge platonists intensively, and hence had been encouraged to reject the rationalist-empiricist philosophical tradition before he had come into contact with Kantian thought.

Keeping thus in mind the fact that the Coleridgean view of imagination may have sources other than that of Kantian

epistemology, we may again come back to the influence of German idealism and see how it shaped Coleridge's theories.

Coleridge, a voracious reader, was familiar with Schlegel and other philosophers of German transcendentalism, and through them came to be acquainted with Kantian metaphysics. In german philosophy, he got the material he needed to justify his own belief in the creativity of the human mind. He pictured the mind as an active agent in perception and not as an inertly receptive passive organ. Rejecting the mechanical philosophy of the eighteenth century, he tried to establish the idea that the object is perceived vividly, usually with great specificity, "the husk is then dissolved", till the perception is internalized. Contrary to the theorists of the previous centuries who believed that our cognition must conform to the object, Coleridge maintained that the object must be in conformity to the process of our knowledge. His ideas, which found their parallel in German transcendentalism, led him to reject outright the empirical and associationist views of Hartley by which he was once greatly influenced and which he regarded as 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 suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system.17

It was in the beginning of his poetic career that he studied associationist philosophy and declared himself a "compleat Necessitarian". (C.L., I, 137)

Coleridge first read Hartley during his student days in Cambridge in the fall of 1794. He felt strongly influenced by the two parts of his Observations on Man (1749) so much so that he named his child Hartley to show to posterity that his (Coleridge's) heart was once saturated with the truths so ably supported by that "great master of Christian philosophy". (C.L., I, 236) As Basil Willey rightly points out, "Hartley was both a necessitarian and Christian, materialist and religious, and as this was approximately Coleridge's position in 1796 one can understand the reverence Hartley inspired in him". Here, however, it seems necessary to recount precisely, the basic features of Hartley's theory to trace the extent of his influence on Coleridge's mind and his reaction to the theory.

The Observations on Man is in two parts. The first part contains Hartley's doctrine of vibration and related to it his view of the mechanism of sensation. Hartley explains the mind in purely physical and mechanical sense since he believed that "the working of the human mind can be truly pictured in some such mechanical fashion". In the first part, we find "a disquisition on the mechanism of human mind and consequent necessity of thought and action involved". On the other hand, the second part is a "moral superstructure" based on his own theory of association.

---

19 Ibid., p.138.
20 J.A. Appleyard, op. cit., p.25.
For a very short time Coleridge sported with this doctrine of deterministic materialism and accepted the mechanistic workings of the mind. Various passages may be quoted to show that Coleridge accepted the associationist doctrine for a few years. To Mary Evans, he writes about the influence of Hartley on himself: "My associations were irrevocably formed, and your image was blended with every idea". (C.L., I, 130) To Thelwall, he writes: "The difference in our tastes it would not be difficult to account for from the different feelings which we have associated with these ideas". (C.L., I, 281) To Southey, while criticizing one of his poems, he wrote:

You, I doubt not, have associated feelings dear to you with the ideas... and, therefore, do right in retaining them.

(C.L., I, 290)

And again, "As to Harmony, it is all association... Milton is harmonious to me, and I absolutely nauseate Darwin's poems". (C.L., I, 216) Similarly, the famous passage from the "Religious Musings" may be quoted to show the influence of Hartley on Coleridge.

This influence, however, lasted for a very short time and it was not very profound and deep. Appleyard says that Coleridge was not at all influenced by Hartley's mechanistic philosophy; he was influenced, if at all, by the second part of Hartley's book. The Godwin-Hartley phase of Coleridge lasted from 1794 to 1797. Hartleian thought was against the innate bent of Coleridge's mind which was essentially "Platonic, mystical and mythologizing". He could not, therefore, have accepted for long the theory of the passive and mechanistic

---

idea of the mind. In fact he was a believer in an active and dynamic concept of the mind. Coleridge's thought resembles more closely the moral and religious principles which are implicit in the first part of Observations on Man and become the basic idea of the second part. Appleyard comments:

The real cause of the attention paid to associationist psychology in the study of Coleridge is not to be found in his political and religious thought during the decade of the 1790's, but in the later years when he turned to psychology and epistemology. It was then that he realized retrospectively the errors of the Hartleyan system and its foundation in Locke and Hobbes. There is more about associationism in the Biographia Literaria than anywhere else in Coleridge's writings, because he was at that time concerned not to refute a philosophy which he had never followed in its extremes for more than a year or two but to reject the whole drift of contemporary thought in the direction pointed out by Locke and Hobbes, of which Hartley was only a prominent popularizer and a convenient adversary.22

In March 1801, Coleridge happily declared the overthrow of association when he wrote to Thomas Poole that he had rejected "the doctrine of association as taught by Hartley and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern infidels—especially the doctrine of necessity". (C.L., I, 706) This rejection of the association can be found in Biographia Literaria too, where he refutes the view that "the will, and with the will, all acts of thought and attention are parts and products of this blind mechanism, instead of being distinct powers, whose function is to controul, determine and modify the phantasmal chaos of association".23

22 Appleyard, op. cit., p.25.
23 Biographia Literaria, ed. with his aesthetical essays by J. Shawcross, 2 Vols. (London, 1907); Vol.I, Chap. VII, p.81. All the subsequent citations from B.L. are incorporated in the text itself with vol. no. and p.no.
It can be said that Coleridge's theory of imagination was the result of his strong dissatisfaction with the empirical and mechanistic views of the time and "in the persuasion that certain kinds of knowing demand an explanation that admits of subjective participation in the knowledge act". He rejected the "tyranny of the senses" and despotism of the eye and called it a mistaken notion that "what is not imageable is likewise not conceivable". It may, in passing, be pointed out that though Coleridge insisted on going beyond the senses, the richness of the sensuous is not totally denied by him. We will, however, revert to the point later.

The realization of the great power of imagination, which he suddenly discovered in one of the poems of his friend Wordsworth (B.L., Chap.IV; I, 58-9) led Coleridge to examine its nature and genesis - what it is and how it is set in motion. In this poem, Coleridge found the presence of a power which could by no means be adjusted to an associationistic scheme of mind. For here there was "a union of deep feeling with profound thought". The mind appeared not as a passive receiver of sense impressions but an active self-creating system. Wordsworth had not merely copied the images from nature and realistically depicted them in words but there was a "fine balance of both in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed".

Coleridge calls imagination as an essential gift and proud privilege of a poet. Poetry, and indeed all creative activity, according to Coleridge, is an act of imagination. The

---

24 J.A. Appleyard, op. cit., p.94. In chapters V to IX of Biographia Literaria Coleridge traces the growth of his mind from Hartleyan associationism to transcendental idealism.
great faculty of imagination enables the poet to image the original faithfully. Imagination, according to Coleridge, is that special power of the mind which mediates between subject and object. It is thus a divine faculty which fuses keen perception with deep meditation and thus gives the effect of living organic beauty to the creation.

One significant point of Coleridgean thought is his discovery of an emphatic distinction between fancy and imagination. No such distinction was made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both were used in a "vaguely synonymous way to refer to the realm of fairy tale or make-belief".\(^{25}\) Addison, for example, in the eighteenth century had limited the scope of imagination by making it dependent on the sense of sight. "It is this sense which furnishes the imagination with the ideal, so that by the pleasures of imagination or fancy (which I shall use promiscuously), I here mean such as arise from visible objects, either when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions or any the like occasion".\(^{26}\) (The Spectator, No.411) By the pleasures of imagination, Addison means only such pleasures as arise originally from sight, and he divides these pleasures into two kinds, one "which entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes" and secondly, "which flow from the ideas of the visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious". He defines "primary" pleasures of imagination as those experienced upon our actually seeing certain objects and "secondary" pleasures as those experienced in our seeing good representations of the same kinds of objects.

\(^{25}\) Whimsatt and Brooks, op. cit., p.385.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.257.
Burke enhances the function and scope of imagination and includes not only sense perceptions but much that comes "within the province of judgement", which is improved by attention, and by the habit of reasoning. He defines it as "the power of the mind to represent voluntarily the images of things in the order and manner in which they are received by the senses, or to combine them in different order and manner".  

Thus, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the conception of imagination was more or less determined by sensationalist psychology. Moreover, even though imagination was considered to be as necessary in the creation of a work of art, it never meant to them the "whole imaginative conception of a work of art, or by implication the serious business of reducing the chaos of experience to an artistic shape. When applied to Shakespeare, the sense is even more specific: it invariably meant his ability to create supernatural characters".

For Coleridge, however, the distinction between imagination and fancy presented itself "as the distinction of two types of philosophy even as for Wordsworth it might symbolize the distinction of two kinds of poetry, the poetry of nature and of artifice". (B.L., Intro., p. XXV - VI) In fact, there is no real difference between Coleridge's and Wordsworth's concepts of imagination though the latter once objected to Coleridge's definition of fancy as including some function of imagination also. Coleridge mentions in his Biographia Literaria:

---

...Mr. Wordsworth's 'only objection is that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the imagination as to the fancy'. I reply that if, by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination; and I am disposed to conjecture, that he has mistaken the co-presence of fancy with imagination for the operation of the latter singly.

(B.L., Chap.XII; I, 194)

It is clear from the preface to Lyrical Ballads that Wordsworth had made no such theoretical distinction and had used the terms virtually interchangeably. In reality, however, the only point of difference seems to be that while Wordsworth was interested in the practice of these principles, Coleridge provided a theoretical background. Wordsworth regarded both fancy and imagination as creative powers but Coleridge did not regard fancy as a creative power at all. It is only a combinatory power. In his famous definition, Coleridge defines fancy as:

Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definities. The fancy is indeed no other than the mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready-made from the law of association.

(B.L., Chap.XIII; I, 202)

Fancy combines the things into pleasing shapes, in stead of fusing and giving them shapes of its own. The original material is offered in a new combination by the function of fancy. It, therefore, deals with the "fixities and definities". The essential difference in fancy and imagination is that while "Imagination modifies the things it combines, and that is a
process of living growth", fancy can only "combine or recombine". Fancy can "shake up the counters but cannot transform them". Fancy is only an aggregative and associative power involving images and impressions; imagination deals with insights, intuitions and emotions. Fancy is a conscious, willing and free activity of our choice; imagination deals with the unconscious. The difference between them, as Coleridge says, can be conceived in this way that "if the checks of the senses and reason are withdrawn, the first would become delirium and second mania"\(^{29}\) (also B.L., Chap.IV; I, 62). To make the distinction clear, Coleridge himself quotes from English poetry. While imagination is a distinguishing quality of the poetry of Shakespeare and Milton, fancy characterises poets from Donne to Cowley. I.A. Richards describes the difference between the two examples as given by Coleridge. Whereas, in fancy, he says, "there is an absence of interaction between the parts of comparison", in imagination, there is a harmonious "blending of images and feelings"\(^{30}\) Differentiating the two, M.H. Abrams considers fancy as a mechanical power.\(^{31}\) He says that Coleridge himself describes fancy as a "mirrorment... repeating simply, or by transposition", acting only by a sort of juxtaposition. The imagination, on the contrary, is a "synthetic", a "permeative" and a "blending, fusing power" based on his theory of organic growth. (B.L., I; Chap.V, 73; Chap.XII, 193)

Rene Wellek, too describes the difference while making a parallel combination and contrast between imagination and genius on the one hand and fancy and talent on the other.

---

\(^{29}\) See Shawcross' note B.L., I, 225-6 quoting Table Talk June 23, 1834.


\(^{31}\) M.H. Abrams, op. cit., p.168.
Imagination, he says, belongs "to the level of Coleridge's holistic and dialectic thought". In contrast, fancy is only "combinator and thus mechanistic and associative". The preservation of fancy, according to him, is another attempt to "keep empirical and associationist thought undisturbed in a subordinate position below an idealistic system". It is difficult to agree with Professor Rene Wellek here. In fact, when Coleridge defines fancy as the associative and aggregative power, "he is perhaps using 'associative' in the strict sense of aggregative, or the arranging of parts according to mechanical laws, by juxtaposition, increase by additive process, or time and space likenesses and contiguities. He is distinguishing this from that mental process which in philosophy has been called 'the law of association' and which is adequately characterized by a theory accounting only for the aggregative process, which is fancy's realm.

Fogle is nearer to the point when he accepts that fancy is inferior to imagination. It arranges but cannot, like imagination, recreate and transform its materials. In its sphere, it is valuable nevertheless. Without fancy, imagination would suffer, both in definition and as a critical tool. Organic unity is likewise superior to, but not independent of, mechanical unity. T.S. Eliot and Livingston Lowes insist that the difference between imagination and fancy is one of degree and not of kind. Eliot is of the view that Coleridge

---

had "done no more than to impose it". Lowes considers imagination only as an intenser form of fancy, which is an aggregative and assimilative power. He emphasizes "source investigation" as the basic means of tracing the creative process. Richards rejects Lowes' view that the distinction between imagination and fancy is one of degree only. Coleridge had already shown us the error to which Lowes' analysis often seems to be tending in his statement about the difference between the methods of Beaumont and Fletcher, and those of Shakespeare. The former two work, as it were, "by fitting together a quarter of an orange, a lemon, a pomegranate to look like the round fruit. But nature which works from within cannot do this". Lowes tends to emphasize the elements, Coleridge, the growth into unity.

Another significant characteristic of Coleridge's theory of imagination is his distinction between primary and secondary imagination. At the end of *Biographia I*, Coleridge says:

> 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 finit 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. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

*(B.L., Chap.XIII; I, 202)*

The primary imagination is the basis, the foundation, while the secondary is the more specialized form of the same power.
Primary imagination makes perception possible. It is simply the power of perceiving the objects of sense - persons, places and things - both in their parts and as wholes. "It functions as a faculty in its own right and achieves the fusion of the concrete with the general and of the idea with the image". It enables to form a clear picture of the object perceived by the senses. It is an involuntary act of mind when confronted with a mingled mass of matter. In other words, it reduces, though unconsciously, to shape and size, making perception possible. Without it, we would be confronted with irregular juxtaposition of things, a virtual chaos. It is repetition in the human mind of the divine act of creation in the external universe. The divine consciousness is objectified in nature and likewise through this vital agency of the primary imagination, we are able to perceive the unity of the system which underlines God's creation. Thus it is clear that the primary imagination is a general faculty which in a way belongs to all but by its keener manifestation it helps human beings to have a vision of sublimity and creates a sense of awe.

The secondary imagination is the conscious use of this power. It is a composite faculty of the soul, consisting of all the other faculties, perceptions, intellect, will and emotions. It is a more active agent than the primary imagination. The secondary imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate". "It tries to create - i.e., draw into a closer unity with Reason - the entire flux of images of Sense". The secondary imagination is a "shaping and modifying power". From its "plastic stress", objets emerge fashioned in its own likeness. It steepes them in its own light and shade. They are not what they are in the external world of nature but as mind

37 Ibid., p.48.
conceives them to be. In this process, the mind and nature act and react on each other. The mind colouring nature becomes one with nature and nature coloured by the mind becomes one with the mind. The internal is made external and external, internal. In this process, object and subject are fused into one. The secondary imagination is akin to the primary in so far as both perform the common function of creating order out of the confusion of sense impressions. The essential difference between the two lies in the fact that the secondary imagination does not work involuntarily but is dependent on human will. With the active co-operation of human volition, it works on the phenomena furnished by the primary imagination.

Thus the function of imagination, both primary and secondary, is the basis of all artistic activity. In the elaborated thesis of Coleridge, the function of imagination is operative and creative and is guided by will, understanding and good sense. Inner sense and higher subjective faculties help imagination achieve the fusion referred to above.

The Coleridgean analysis and description of imagination, as contradistinguished from fancy, constitute a turning point in the development of critical theory and aesthetic judgement. It also marks a critical moment in the history of literary appreciation. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Aristotelian framework of imitative and representational realism had become defunct, and the time was ripe for the advent of a philosophical re-appraisal of the exact relationship between mind and reality. In a way, it was not a sudden development; its seeds may be discovered not only in neo-classical theory of the post-Restoration era but in the earlier Renaissance humanism. The great humanists of the sixteenth century had in a way turned their attention away from the object of perception to perception itself, from external reality, to the mind that apprehends that reality.
Speculation about the nature of thought gradually led thinkers like Bacon, and later, the Cambridge platonists to mind as a creative agent in its interaction with objective reality. The developments, however, in mechanics, physics, optics and the mathematical and experimental sciences from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards changed the perspective for a while, and the growing scientism of the age coincided with the growth of empiricism in philosophy. The materialistic tendencies were nevertheless bound to result in a reaction, and the Coleridgean theories were an inevitable product of this reaction.

The most significant result of Coleridge's view of the imagination was to provide criticism with a new and philosophically satisfying scale of values for literary appreciation. The concept of the freedom of human mind from the contingencies of the circumscribing material-empirical reality led, on the one hand, to the almost miraculous creative activity in the early years of the nineteenth century, and, on the other hand, it gave criticism a measure of the greatness of poets like Shakespeare and Milton. The distinction between imagination and fancy served in the hands of Coleridge as an extremely useful tool for the analysis of the sources of Shakespeare's true greatness. It will be our endeavour in the central chapters of this thesis to see how Coleridge's greatness as a critic of Shakespeare emanates from his philosophical concern with the nature of imagination. Coleridge's insistence that Shakespeare's judgement was commensurate with his genius, his highlighting of the non-mechanical nature of the unity of Shakespeare's plays, his occasional attempts to view aspects of the psychology of Shakespeare's characters as proceeding from the underlying unitive vision of particular plays, all these are dependent upon Coleridge's theory of the imagination and it was for this
reason that we chose to traverse some familiar ground in the preceding pages. It is for the same reason that in the remaining part of this chapter we will discuss the organicist theories of Coleridge. From German philosophers and thinkers, Coleridge derived the main idea of his theory of organicism. Apart from A.W. Schlegel under whose "tutelage" Coleridge first distinguished between organic and mechanical forms in arts, he was very well acquainted with other philosophers of German organology like Plotinus, Giordano Bruno, Leibnitz, Boheme and other writers in the occult tradition. Coleridge himself acknowledges his indebtedness to Schlegel in a very short lecture note where he clearly points out that the thought of organicism comes to him from "a continental critic". However, apart from the influence of German writers, Coleridge's theory of organicism may be regarded as the indirect outcome of his views of imagination and fancy. It will become clear from the following definition that he considers organic form as the product of imagination and mechanical form as the product of fancy. While making a distinction between organic and mechanical forms, Coleridge says:

The form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of the outward form.39

39 Coleridge's Shakespearian Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor, Vol.I, p.224. In further references of this chapter, the work is cited as Raysor, with vol. no. and p.no.
Thus organic unity implies the inseparability of form from the content. In organic unity, the formal principle lies within, and "the outlines of the formed objects are the outer limits of creative impulse". In another of his lecture notes i.e., in the ninth lecture of the 1811-12 series, Coleridge makes the distinction more clear:

Before I go further, I may take the opportunity of explaining what is meant by mechanic and organic regularity. In the former the copy must appear as if it had come out of the same mould with the original; in the latter there is a law which all the parts obey, conforming themselves to the outward symbols and manifestations of the essential principles. If we look to the growth of trees, for instance, we shall observe that trees of the same kind vary considerably, according to the circumstances of soil, air or position; yet we are able to decide at once whether they are oaks, elms or poplars.40

From the above definition, certain characteristics of Coleridge's view of organic form can be derived: Organic form is characterized by its individual quality. Coleridge here differs from Aristotle and the neo-classical writers. Contrary to them, Coleridge maintains that each work of art is unique and it is this criterion of uniqueness that makes it different from other works of art. Each work of art can be judged only according to those laws that are proper to its own nature and not by any other outside principle. For example, he says that the growth and development of trees like oaks, elms or poplar are influenced by the circumstances in which they grow. The qualities of each tree have something in common with the other trees of the same class but it is known precisely by its own inherent qualities. This recognition of the claims of individuality does not, however, lead to critical anarchy. Fogle says "Coleridge, as he seeks balance everywhere, seeks

here the perfect balance between the universal and the particular and tries to describe his objects as individual, in kind and in its universal significance". This individuality of a work of art can never be realized in isolation of the parts from the whole since the parts are only the "outward symbols and manifestations of the essential principle". Thus conceived, the relation between the whole and the parts is a vision of unity in variety or, as Coleridge prefers to say, "of unity in multitude".

It is in relation to the concept of "organic form" that we can understand the 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.

(B.L., II; Chap.XIV, 10)

Here Coleridge indicates that the distinction between a work of art and that of science depends upon the nature of the intended aim or end - science having one end in view, while poetry has another. The end of poetry is to provide pleasure and not truth and this pleasure resulting from the whole is contributed by the parts. "Poetry" he says, "would cease to be poetry and sink into a mechanical art" if a rule is given from without. If every part of a work of art, every word in poetry contributes towards the setting forth of "truths" embodied in it, its meaning, its main theme and interest, then the form is to be praised. Otherwise, the work is deficient in form. To Coleridge, the complete inter-dependence of constituent

41 Fogle, op. cit., p.53.
elements of a play is always the criterion of dramatic excellence. This is perhaps the reason that in spite of his enthusiasm for *Romeo and Juliet*, Coleridge regards it as an "immature work" compared with other plays of Shakespeare. Through this distinction between organic and mechanical forms in art, Coleridge could settle the dispute over the superiority of genius or judgement which had remained unresolved till the end of the eighteenth century. Neo-classical critics like Dryden, Addison, Pope and Johnson were all bewildered by the skill of Shakespeare in the dramatic field. Shakespeare did not follow any rule which they considered necessary for the composition of a work of art, yet he was mysteriously more successful than any of his contemporaries. Dryden and his contemporaries appreciated Shakespeare's "wild genius" and regarded him as a "child of nature" but could not accept him as equal to Ben Jonson. They tried to defend him, yet the gap between genius and judgement, art and nature remained unresolved. It is to be noted here that Coleridge did not reject the method of neo-classical critics but transcended it. For him, Shakespeare possessed a native wisdom and intuitive judgement which enabled him in creating plays that are still considered superb. In Shakespeare, there is a reconciliation of the two dialectic approaches.

Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms. Each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror. And even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet, of our own Shakespeare, himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.43

Coleridge considers that genius and judgement, though opposites, can be blended harmoniously. In fact, both are complementary as one cannot be realized in the absence of the other. Shakespeare did not observe the superficial rules of art but there is no lawlessness or "chaos" in his works since there is an inner law which gives his works an organic unity not imposed from outside but developed within the play. As we shall see in a later chapter, Coleridge treats a Shakespearian character not only as an individual but as part of the total design of the play. Some basic philosophic idea shapes his entire play. "Shakespeare", Coleridge says, "adheres to the great law of nature that opposites tend to attract and temper each other" and Shakespeare produces a whole by "the balance, counteraction, inter-modification, and final harmony of differents".

Having recapitulated for the reader the main elements of Coleridgean theory in the present chapter, we will now go on to trace at some length the significant features of Shakespearian character criticism in the eighteenth century. We would plead with the reader of the present work to bear with us for a while as we attempt to show that what pre-Coleridgean criticism of Shakespeare's characters lacks is exactly the kind of theoretical framework that Coleridge provides for the first time in the history of Shakespeare's criticism in England. Neither the chapter just concluded nor the one that follows may be considered as irrelevant to our present thesis. The two chapters are, as we said in the Preface, crucial to the central ideas underlying the present work: Coleridge is a psychological critic, no doubt, but much more importantly, he may be regarded as the founder of the philosophical criticism of Shakespeare. In the second place, Coleridge's greatness as a Shakespearian critic rests on his discovery and development of a sound theoretical standpoint from which to approach Shakespeare's creative genius. The two ideas, it is also our
contention, are inter-related. While engaged in theoretical issues like the nature of imagination and of organic form, Coleridge was working his way towards a discovery of the vision of life underlying Shakespeare's plays. To say that Shakespeare's plays are products of unifying, idealising and dialectically-oriented imagination is tantamount to saying that Shakespeare was engaged in discovering and evolving significant and coherent forms out of the welter of experience. And that is the same as to say that Shakespeare was concerned in the most creative way not only with imaginative beauty but also with the truth of imagination.

In order to realize the full force of the two ideas in chapters IV, V and VI, we have to go back to the origins of the character-criticism of Shakespeare at the end of the seventeenth century and see how the neo-classical framework of decorum and propriety was replaced towards the end of the eighteenth century by psychological and non-Aristotelian realism. During the whole course of this progress, however, we never once come across the ideas that Coleridge was to bring to bear on Shakespeare criticism.