Chapter - II

Knowledge and Creativity: Coleridge and Wordsworth
Chapter 2

KNOWLEDGE AND CREATIVITY:
COLERIDGE AND WORDSWORTH

This chapter will review the theories of Coleridge and Wordsworth regarding the knowledge formation and the poetic process. Both the poets examine the active and passive propensities of the mind, the fusion of the object with the subject and the role of imagination in the creative process. Their inquiries also focus upon the requisites of a poet, the essentials of writing poetry and the aim of poetry. The shift in the epistemological views during the late eighteenth century is evident in the theories of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

I

Coleridge was the first English poet philosopher to be motivated by the German philosophers. His investigations into the mental processes include the following issues: how the mind works, how the mental images are formed and how the objective reality impinges itself upon the subjective self? Coleridge's theory of knowledge is not bound in neatly organised prose writing but is scattered in his lectures, letters, notes, journals and autobiographical writings. The focus in this section will be mainly on the Biographia Literaria and some other sources which elucidate Coleridge's philosophy and literary theory.
The eighteenth century English philosophers, Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Hartley dominated the literary and philosophic minds for over a century. They propagated the theory that the mind is a passive recorder of the sense impressions; it stores them as memories which are activated individually or can be combined and recalled by various stimulants. In such a system the will has no role to play. Judgement, understanding, will and reason are the effects of mechanism, not its faculties. Coleridge refutes such a system in which a random impression may conjure any previous impression without a determining cause. On the other hand, if stimulants recall the existing impressions in the order they were recorded, there would be total chaos.

According to the materialistic theory, the self becomes a mere puppet in the hands of the external causes which are themselves subservient to other motions. The individual cannot act voluntarily; all actions and movements of the body are determined by extraneous causes. Coleridge further mocks the theory, stating that according to materialism the inventor of the watch cannot actually be an inventor but a mere onlooker and his invention just a result of the external forces outside his control.1 Similarly, painters and poets do not create any artefact but the external causes impel them to act in a particular way. Also, those concepts which are not tangible cannot actually have an existence in the mechanistic theory. On the other hand, if such concepts are supposed to be innate then the whole theory is vanquished.

Coleridge stipulates that if the external object impresses itself upon the mind, the mind too exerts to meet this motion. The reaction of the action is made possible by motion on both sides. According to Coleridge, the mind is an active and not a dormant participant in the act of perception. The very
fact that the mind knows an outside reality involves a process, an act — so it cannot be passive. In fact, he claims that in the process of thinking there are two powers at work — the active and the passive and the functioning of these two powers is made possible by the intermediate faculty, i.e., imagination:

In every voluntary movement we first encounter gravitation, in order to avail ourselves of it. It must exist, that there may be a something to be counteracted, and which, by its re-action, may aid the force that is exerted to resist it.²

In the process of thinking every active movement is counterbalanced by a passive resistance. The outer impressions act upon the mind which reacts in order to interpret them. The act of accepting these impressions is the passive tendency of the mind and the act of reacting to them, or interpreting them, is its active propensity. The difficulty arises when one has to remove oneself from one’s own thinking process and look at it objectively, as an outsider. When one composes something, the mind at first goes blank and then starts thinking according to the object or the concept in consideration. The mind first assimilates the external data before composing. The acts of accepting and then creating are the passive and the active processes of the mind and the faculty that makes it possible for the opposite powers to work together is imagination. Kathleen Wheeler extends Coleridge’s metaphor of composing:

It acts only as a general clue to the metaphor of reading involved in the passage, which has already been suggested by the line, ‘Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing’. For the reading process is correctly conceived of as an analogue of the process of composition...

The movement of the mind in reading along the current of the narration, being carried away by the force of this stream, is to be counteracted by the will, operating in pulses of attending and thinking, or rather, halting in the current of the narration to
think. The thinking is the active pulse, while attending is the passive. A passive yielding to the current is analogous to reading sequentially and in a linear way. But this yielding to the narrative current should occur only in order that the mind should gain a fulcrum to propel itself upward against the stream. Such specifically metaphorical passages in the *Biographia* are fulcra: something for the mind to resist in order to propel itself against the current of the more discursive passages of the narration.  

Coleridge also rejects the idealistic philosophy. He states that Berkeley, Boehme and Spinoza did not appeal to his reason:

In order to explain *thinking*, as a material phaenomenon, it is necessary to refine matter into a mere modification of intelligence, with the two-fold function of *appearing* and *perceiving*. Even so did Priestly in his controversy with Price! He stript matter of all its material properties; substituted spiritual powers; and when we expected to find a body, behold! we had nothing but its ghost! the apparition of a defunct substance!

The theory that posits the mind as the only reality and denounces the objective world does not explain the process of knowledge. To separate the mind from the body and render one superior to the other is too facile.

The problem of knowledge is to prove how matter and intelligence, belonging to totally different realms, can interact; or “how *being* can transform itself into *knowing*.” The material objects cannot be transformed into intellect and the mind cannot adorn the attributes of the objects. Immanuel Kant’s philosophy fuses the concepts of materialism and idealism. Coleridge accepts Kant’s epistemology but does not conform to it completely. He complies with the theory that the senses and the intellect are conjoined by imagination to provide knowledge but he rejects the divorce of
the things as they are and as they appear. He departs from Kant’s theory at
this junction and endorses Schelling’s views about the object and the
subject. Schelling solves the object - subject polemic by suggesting a close
kinship between the two. The spirit that runs through the intellect energises
the phenomenal world too. Nature is unconscious, whereas the mind of the
subject is conscious but both have an inherent spirit that pervades through all
things. The conscious and the unconscious, the ideal and the real, and the
finite and the infinite have a link. He subscribes that tangible nature is
invisible spirit and invisible spirit is tangible nature. Nature reaches its
highest goal in the human self-consciousness. Reality is an organic whole
composed of several parts that cannot be severed from the whole. The
outside world is not mere dead matter, it has life and purpose. Schelling’s
oneness of spirit gave the Romantic poets a platform to look at the natural
objects with sympathy and love and search for hidden meanings beyond the
outer appearances.

In a similar strain, Coleridge suggests the presence of a single spirit in all
objects in his letter to John Thelwall:

    I can at times feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in
    themselves, & for themselves – but more frequently all things
    appear little – all the knowledge, that can be acquired, child’s
    play – the universe itself – what but an immense heap of
    little things? – I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are
    all little! – My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know
    something great – something one & indivisible – and it is only
    in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns
    give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! – But in this faith all
    things counterfeit infinity! -  

    There is something beyond the visible and the corporeal which lends majesty
    and sublimity to these objects. Coleridge identifies that as the spirit of
infinity. The closeness to Schelling’s concepts of infinite in finite and finite in infinite is evident.

Nature, for Coleridge, is not a world of objects but taking his cue from Schelling, he assigns nature two powers, the produced, i.e., passive and the productive, i.e., active. In The Friend, he refers to nature as a productive power, i.e., natura naturans and as an agent, i.e., natura naturata. Both powers have the same spirit in them. The question is how this spirit in the active nature and the passive nature gets communicated to the intelligence or the self? Coleridge propounds a unity in all the objects of nature as well as the individual self. In a letter to William Sotheby, he states, “Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of its own, & that we are all one Life.” How this unity is cognised and achieved is the basis of Coleridge’s theory of knowledge and his theory of art. In chapter XII of the Biographia Literaria he stipulates:

All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject... For we can know that only which is true: and the truth is universally placed in the coincidence of the thought with the thing, of the representation with the object represented... During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs. There is here no first, and no second; both are coinstantaneous and one.

He explains further what he means by object and subject: “Now the sum of all that is merely OBJECTIVE we will henceforth call NATURE, confining the term to its passive and material sense, as comprising all the phænomena by which its existence is made known to us. On the other hand the sum of all that is SUBJECTIVE, we may comprehend in the name of the SELF or INTELLIGENCE.”
The union results in the knowledge of the outside world as well as the knowledge of the self. Coleridge scrutinises his precepts by separating the object and the subject for the sake of examining his postulation. If the object precedes the subject, i.e., nature precedes the self, then the problem of the subjective intervening arises. How can nature transform into intelligence? If all the laws of nature turn into the laws of intellect then it becomes mere intelligence and the objective disappears. If the subject takes precedence then the problem faced is, how does the material coincide with it? If the subjective world exists outside the consciousness there will be no proof of its existence. Even if the subject precedes the object, it alone cannot achieve or conceive any knowledge without falling into prejudices or drowning in complete idealism.

The subject and the object dissolve their individual identities to bring about the act of knowledge. Susan Eilenberg elucidates:

The provision that subject and object are positions defined and brought into being by their relationship to one another and not instances of absolute entities saves the self, this first principle of the dynamic philosophy, from involvement in an infinite regress of representation. Subject and object are perpetual self-duplications, but not for that reason deferred from their origins.\(^{11}\)

Once the fusion is complete the sense of the two being different or antithetical fades away and only the truth of the knowledge remains.

This is how the self achieves fusion with the objective world. But what about the self-consciousness? The self needs to look at itself to gain knowledge about itself. Does it become the object or does it remain the
subject? This is where Coleridge and Schelling objectify the subject. Coleridge refers to it as, “a subject which becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject.”

For Schelling too, truth of one’s self leads to self-consciousness, “since the self (as object) is nothing else but the very knowledge of itself, it arises simply out of the fact that it knows of itself; the self itself is thus a knowing that simultaneously produces itself (the object).” Schelling claims that there are different levels of awareness of the self in this act. For Coleridge, the self becomes a distinct object in the act of self-consciousness, whereas for Schelling, the subject confronts another part of itself in this act. Schelling states that the self, being infinite, has to become finite in order to know itself:

Beyond self-consciousness the self is pure objectivity. This pure objective (non-objective originally, precisely because an objective without a subjective is impossible) is the one and only in-itself there is. Only through self-consciousness is subjectivity first added thereto. To this original, purely objective activity, that is limited in consciousness, there stands opposed the limiting activity, which cannot, on that very account, itself become an object. To come to consciousness, and to be limited, are one and the same. Only that which is limited me-ward, so to speak, comes to consciousness: the limiting activity falls outside all consciousness, just because it is the cause of all limitation... The limiting activity does not come to consciousness, or become an object, and is therefore the activity of the pure subject.

Though the object and the subject are part of the self yet the subject is not aware of itself as the subject but only as an object in the act of self-consciousness. The self is only aware of itself as the subject when it is
gaining knowledge of the material world. Therefore, in the act of self-consciousness there is an act of limitation as the self can only look at itself as an object. Coleridge does not fall into this controversy of the self, limiting itself or of being aware of itself as the subject in self-consciousness. He makes the fusion complete – the self can gain knowledge of the outside world by looking for itself or the common spirit in the objects of nature.

The faculty that transpires the fusion of the subject with the object is that of imagination. Coleridge accords imagination with the potential to assist perception as well as creativity. In fact, when he expounds his theory of poetic creation, i.e., secondary imagination, it is preceded by his epistemological views, i.e., primary imagination. The realm of perception is not far removed from the realm of creation.

The act of perception is identified with the primary imagination yet it is not merely perception. It is the awareness of the outside world created in the mind by self-consciousness. At the same time, it brings about the awareness of the infinite. Coleridge defines it in apocalyptic terms:

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.\textsuperscript{15}

As it is named primary, it comes first and before the secondary imagination. It is the “living Power”, “the prime Agent of Perception”. It is not something to be ignored or glossed over. Basil Willey explains the concept of primary imagination:

Coleridge is affirming that the mind is essentially and inveterately creative: ‘we receive but what we give’, and in the commonest everyday acts of perception we are making our own world. We make it, indeed, not \textit{ex nihilo}, but out of the influxes
proceeding from Nature, or as Coleridge preferred to say, ‘the infinite I AM’. Whatever we perceive is what we have made in response to these stimuli; perception is an activity of the mind, not a merely mechanical registering of impressions.\textsuperscript{16}

Primary imagination is the faculty that combines the finite and the infinite. The finite phenomenal reality is fused with the infinite spirit, “I AM”. It merges the matter and the mind. The fact that this faculty recreates the infinite in the finite indicates that it is generative and creative. Stephan Prickett suggests that Coleridge “applied the word ‘creative’ to perception in this context to emphasize it as a process of active mental organization: neither simple projection on the one hand, nor passive sense-reception on the other, but always a razor-edge balance between the two.”\textsuperscript{17} The act of perception is creative because the mind does not merely project the images of the outside world, it creates the world of images in itself. Perception is active yet works at an unconscious level because in the process of knowledge the individual does not analyse the object subject fusion in the mind at each moment in life. Imagination is an essential faculty of the mind that renders the material world intelligible.

The earliest mention of the term “imagination” in Coleridge’s writings can be traced in the “Lecture On The Slavé-Trade”:

To develop the powers of the Creator is our proper employment — and to imitate Creativeness by combination our most exalted and self-satisfying Delight. But we are progressive and must not rest content with present Blessings. Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination that stimulates to the attainment of real excellence by the contemplation of splendid Possibilities that still revivifies the dying motive within us, and fixing our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness still urges us up the ascent of Being, amusing the ruggedness of
the road with the beauty and grandeur of the ever-widening Prospect. [The noblest gift Imagination is the power of discerning the Cause in the Effect a power which when employed on the works of the Creator elevates and by the variety of its pleasures almost monopolizes the Soul. We see our God everywhere — the Universe in the most literal Sense is his written Language.]  

Imagination is a faculty gifted by God to imitate His creativeness. To progress further the individual must apply this faculty to exalt to divine heights. It reveals the cause behind the effect, i.e., it discloses the truth of the external world. Once the cause is located in the effect, the symbols in the objects of nature can be translated. God’s creation can be comprehended and recreated in the human mind.

Johnathan Wordsworth suggests that Coleridge’s primary imagination is not the ordinary perception of all human beings, it is primary not in the sense of being first but is more important: “Whatever its purpose, the prose exultantly proclaims an incarnation of the eternal in the finite, a personal re-enactment of God’s original, and endlessly continuous, moment of self naming.”  

Coleridge equates everyday perception with the Absolute. He states, “We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM.” “I AM”, here denotes God, whereas at other places, it also denotes the self. Coleridge alludes to the spirit in the self as that of God. Between the subject and God are the objects — the creations or the language of God. In order to reach God, the subject has to interpret that language, by looking for the spirit that resides in God, the universe and the subject too. In the process of knowledge, the self comprehends itself while comprehending the objects and also communes with God.
The secondary imagination does something more than the primary imagination:

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.21

The secondary imagination is similar to the primary imagination, differing in intensity and the mode of its functioning. The process of fusion which the mind or the self achieves with the outside world takes place with the secondary imagination also but this faculty does something more. The fusion results in a new reality under the guidance of the free will which works on its own volition. This is the creative impulse of an artist or the philosopher. The faculty of the primary imagination can exist in all human beings, whereas the secondary imagination is the region of the artists.

Coleridge claims:

The first range of hills, that encircles the scanty vale of human life, is the horizon for the majority of its inhabitants. On its ridges the common sun is born and departs. From them the stars rise, and touching them they vanish. By the many, even this range, the natural limit and bulwark of the vale, is but imperfectly known. Its higher ascents are too often hidden by mists and clouds from uncultivated swamps, which few have courage or curiosity to penetrate. To the multitude below these vapors appear, now as the dark haunts of terrific agents, on which none may intrude with impunity; and now all a-glow, with colors not their own, they are gazed at as the splendid palaces of happiness and power. But in all ages there have been a few, who measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls have learned, that the sources must be far higher and far inward; a few, who even in
The truth is there for everyone to discern but it is only explored by a few. Most people are satisfied with their limited perception, only some creative minds have the ability to look at the world and find the truths, not hidden but disguised by the outer coverings of appearances. The seekers of truth realize that what they see is only a part of the reality – a reality that has to be seen as well as understood at a much deeper level. Discerning reality beyond appearances is the Platonic quest. Plato’s cavemen are analogous to the ordinary minds mentioned by Coleridge, who do not possess the ability to look beyond a restricted horizon. Only the ones in pursuit of higher truths possess the courage to break the shackles and find the reality. The difference is that Plato’s cavemen are totally ignorant, whereas Coleridge’s ordinary minds are equipped with the primary imagination. Shawcross states, “The imagination of the ordinary man is capable only of detaching the world of experience from the self and contemplating it in its detachment; but the philosopher penetrated to the underlying harmony and gives it concrete expression. The ordinary consciousness, with no principle of unification, sees the universe as a mass of particulars; only the poet can depict this whole as reflected in the individual parts.”

Perception and artistic creativity spring from the same faculty, i.e., imagination. Primary imagination helps the self to understand the external world in a creative way. The secondary imagination, on the other hand, dismantles the given perceptions by rearranging, unifying or even destroying the old patterns to create new paradigms. Basil Willey explains the role of imagination in creativity:
Here speaks the seer, the poet and the romantic; not content with the automatic ‘poetry’ which we all create, and which we call the world of everyday appearances, he would transcend this for a vision more intense, more true, than is afforded by the light of common day....

The Imagination, then (we may now drop the word ‘secondary’), is the mind in its highest state of creative insight an alertness; its acts are acts of growth, and display themselves in breaking down the hard commonplace which so easily besets us, and in remoulding this stubborn raw material into new and living wholes. ²⁴

This is where Coleridge differs from Kant, who assigns to imagination the role of synthesising senses with intellect but not the role of creating new realities. Coleridge elevates the role given to imagination by Kant.

Defining fancy, Coleridge contrasts it with imagination:

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and defines. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. ²⁵

Coleridge assigns a very passive role to fancy, it is the faculty that deals with fixed and definite concepts. It reproduces images placed in different time and order, organised by a calculative mind. The raw materials of fancy are not created anew but are ready made. It is an organising power. Shawcross elucidates the concept of fancy:

As connected by the fancy, objects are viewed in their limitations and particularity; they are ‘fixed and dead’ in the sense that their connexion is mechanical and not organic. The
law, indeed, which governs it is derived from the mind itself, but the links are supplied by the individual properties of the objects. Fancy is, in fact, the faculty of mere images or impressions, as imagination is the faculty of intuitions. 26

The individual parts do not come together in a fusion, only as a mixture. The separate parts do not lose their identity but are placed together without creating any new reality. In a letter to William Sotheby, Coleridge refers to imagination as a “modifying, and co-adunating Faculty” and fancy as an “aggregating Faculty” of the mind. 27 Imagination, according to Coleridge, evokes numerous visions suggested by the images represented, whereas fancy delivers fixed images. Fancy creates images without fusing them, so they remain separate entities. On the other hand, the secondary imagination not only blends the images but also gives them a new meaning.

In the Table Talk, Coleridge states:

You may conceive the difference in kind between the Fancy and the Imagination in this way. - that if the check of the senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first would become delirium, and last mania. The Fancy brings together images which have no connection natural or moral, but are yoked together by the poet by means of some accidental coincidence.... 28

Fancy is similar to delirium in which there is a haphazard jumbling of words and sentences. Imagination, on the other hand, is like a mania, in which obsession leads diverse things to a single point of focus. Fancy presents fixed images without dissolving or re-creating. Objects are accepted as they are, with determined features by the uncreative mind. The same objects, when seen imaginatively, can be infused with an energy which comes from the mind. The perception of the external world can be transformed by a
creative mind. The objects remain the same; it is the mind perceiving them that makes the difference.

The eighteenth century philosophers and poets posit the mind as a reflector of the external world and assign to it the task of assembling, storing, associating, arranging and reproducing these images. Coleridge subscribes to a mind that is creative, reflective, volitional and organic; a mind that imposes its own visions upon the outside reality. The eighteenth century poets refer to the mind as a mirror that merely reflects the external objects. The Romantic poets allude to the mind as an illuminator of the external reality. M.H. Abrams aptly defines the two polemic movements in human thought in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. He states, “The title of the book identifies two common and antithetic metaphors of mind, one comparing the mind to a reflector of external objects, the other to a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives.”\(^{29}\) The mind as a mirror is only a mediator, making no changes to what it reflects but the mind as a lamp does not reflect anything, it throws its own light upon the objects around it.

Coleridge’s distinction between reason and understanding is in a way parallel to his contrast between imagination and fancy. He elevates the faculty of reason beyond that of understanding. The concept of reason is not limited to logical thinking by Coleridge. Reason is the faculty that comprehends the spiritual and the universal, it is also identical to them. “Thus God, the Soul, eternal Truth, & c. are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves reason.”\(^{30}\) Reason is also self-consciousness and “the organ of the Super-sensuous”\(^{31}\). Understanding, on the contrary, is the “conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and
arrange the phænomena of perception: that faculty, the functions of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward Experience."\textsuperscript{32}

Understanding arranges the materials provided to it by the senses and regulates them. Reason acquaints the mind with the inner realities, with the universals and also with the eternal. But in the process of knowledge, all three, i.e., sense, understanding and reason are required. The sense perceives, the understanding conceives and the reason comprehends.

Reason cannot exist alone, without the help of understanding because "Understanding and Experience may exist without Reason. But Reason cannot exist without Understanding; nor does it or can manifest itself but in and through the understanding...."\textsuperscript{33} Reason takes the sense impressions, their conceptions and forms laws and principles from them. It reveals not only the spiritual truths but it also exposes the scientific truths. It brings together the facts of several experiences to trace a singular purpose.

In the \textit{Biographia Literaria}, before defining poetry, Coleridge investigates the seminal question – what is a poet? The process of creativity is prior to the product, i.e., poetry. How the poet creates gains priority over of what he creates. Hence, the analysis of the mind shifts to the analysis of creation. Imagination, the mental faculty essential for epistemology, is also required for aesthetic creation. Part of Coleridge's question – what is a poet? - has already been answered by him in the discussion of the secondary imagination. A poet cannot be creative without the faculty of secondary imagination. In chapter XIV of the \textit{Biographia Literaria}, he defines a poet:

The poet, described in \textit{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. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control... reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.34

This is a tall order for a poet but it is a continuation of Coleridge's deliberation over imagination which is posited as a synthesising power. It dissolves all contraries and creates unity out of diversity. The ideal poet is an energised and a passionate soul who possesses various faculties (sense, imagination, fancy, reason and understanding) but accords priority to the vital faculties. Imagination is posited as the magical power that can transform the perception of the objects of nature. Yet it works out of volition and cannot exist without understanding. The opposites are reconciled and given a new existence and reality.

Does the poet perform this reconciliation consciously or unconsciously? Once again, the question of talent and genius arises. Since Plato, the source of artistic creativity has been debated upon. Coleridge follows the German theory of organic growth. Man, being a part of nature, is organic. Like a plant, he takes nourishment from the environment and grows in his abilities. Abrams states, "Alternatively, an individual genius may himself be

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envisioned as an unconsciously growing plant. This poet is not so much unconscious of the ideas germinating in his creative imagination, as he is unself-conscious, in the sense that he remains unaware of his own powers and potentialities."  

The work of art is not dependent upon architectonics but is a natural growth. Kant defines genius as “the innate mental aptitude (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art... where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not himself know how the ideas for it have entered into his head....” Each artist has an inherent tendency that cannot be underpinned and is not tangible yet it produces works of art which are not incomprehensible and unregulated. The power within the genius is self-motivated. According to Kant, nature and the work of art are alike. Schelling also combines spontaneity with regulation in creativity.

Coleridge denounces the mechanical theory of creativity. According to him, an artist does not merely conjure up images stored in the memory or create a work of art by consciously putting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle with dexterity. The impulse to create arises from within. He states, “a great Poet must be, implicate if not explicite, a profound Metaphysician. He may not have it in logical coherence, in his Brain & Tongue; but he must have it by Tact / for all sounds, & forms of human nature, he must have the ear of a wild Arab listening in the silent Desart, the eye of a North American Indian tracing the footsteps of an Enemy upon the Leaves that strew the Forest--; the Touch of a Blind Man feeling the face of a darling child.....” Coleridge emphasises the natural instinct of the human mind over the conscious and calculated actions. Genius comprises of unconscious activity. Yet he does not go to the extreme that Shelley preaches. For Shelley, the poet’s inspiration is absolutely divine. Coleridge’s genius, like Schelling’s artist,
combines the conscious and the unconscious elements. The extremes are reconciled.

Talent rests "content between thought and reality", whereas geniuses "must impress their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality." Inspiration, judgement, taste and even talent are the ingredients of a genius. "Genius must have talent as its complement and implement, just as, in like manner, imagination must have fancy. In short, the higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower." Fancy and talent, though lower intellectual powers, are the pre-requisites of creativity. Hence, the mechanical and the organic too reconcile in the work of art. Premeditated and impulsive faculties are both part of the creative process. The substratum of Coleridge's theory of creativity is reconciliation of the opposites. "In every work of art there is a reconciliation of the external with the internal; the conscious is so impressed on the unconscious as to appear in it; as compare mere letters inscribed on a tomb with figures themselves constituting, the tomb. He who combines the two is the man of genius; and for that reason he must partake of both. Hence there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius."

Imagination penetrates beyond the superficial appearances; therefore, the ontological status of the phenomenal reality also changes. What the artist discerns is the innate reality, the essence of the objects. One has to look beyond the surface to know something completely. Coleridge puts it eloquently, "the more the husk drop off, the phenomena themselves become
more spiritual and at length cease altogether in our consciousness. The cognition of the material appearance gives way to the cognition of the inner reality. But if the poet is not depicting the outer appearances, how does he represent the material world? Coleridge’s answer is – through symbols. The phenomenal world comprises of objects that are symbols of God’s language. The mind can decipher this code language, can understand the unity in diversity and comprehend the spirit behind all creation:

Essence, in its primary signification, means the principle of individuation, the inmost principle of the possibility of any thing, as that particular thing. It is equivalent to the idea of a thing, when ever we use the word, idea, with philosophic precision. Existence, on the other hand, is distinguished from essence, by the superinduction of reality. This essence or idea can be represented by the symbol. The symbols in the corporeal reality signify a deeper meaning about the objects of nature.

The artist cannot represent the essence of the phenomenal objects by mere copying of the external form. Coleridge calls art “the imitatress of nature”. Coleridge differentiates between imitation and copying. The impression of a wax seal is not an imitation but a copy of the seal itself. To copy is to produce external likeness but to imitate is to acknowledge the difference and create the likeness within the object. “If the artist copies the mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry... Believe me, you must master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of the man.” Mere copying will produce only appearances, not the principle within the object. Imitation, distinct from copying, is not external representation but looks for sameness in opposition, it is a fusion of disparities. It is the beauty in nature that has to be imitated. In the abstract it is unity in diversity and in the concrete it is
fusion of form and essence. To copy just the "natura naturata" is "idle rivalry" because copying the form of beauty will only produce hollow and fake duplicates. But if the artist represents the "natura naturans", the inner beauty will give the work of art liveliness and energy - the spirit which is in nature and in the mind that creates it.

For Coleridge, art and reality are not separate realms though they might appear to be. The moot point of Coleridge’s theory is that art is intensified perception. He delineates it in the distinction between primary and secondary imagination in the Biographia Literaria, though he refers to it at several places in his prose works. Art and reality correspond to poetry and philosophy. The poet, for him, has to be a metaphysician as well:

In philosophy equally, as in poetry, genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues the stalest and most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission… Truths, of all others the most awful and mysterious, yet being at the same time of universal interest, are too often considered as so true that they lose all the powers of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors.45

Philosophy, like poetry, does not view the world through the spectacles of familiarity but searches for freshness and novelty every time an object is looked at or contemplated upon. Familiarity breeds degeneration of perception.

The mind projects itself upon the objects it attends to. Coleridge states, “the spirit in all the objects which it views, views only itself….”46 Experience, for Coleridge is not based only on the senses:
Our senses in no way acquaint us with Things, as they are in and of themselves... the properties, which we attribute to Things without us, ...are not strictly properties of the things themselves, but either constituents or modifications of our own minds.  

Poetry does not aim to present the stark reality of the phenomenal world. The poet views the inner essence of the objects, not just their outward appearance because the aim of poetry is pleasure not truth. Yet the pleasure derived from poetry is not mere delight. By pleasure Coleridge means much more:

It is that pleasurable emotion, that peculiar state and degree of excitement, which arises in the poet himself in the act of composition; and in order to understand this, we must combine a more than ordinary sympathy with the objects, emotions or incidents contemplated by the poet, consequent on a more than common sensibility, with a more than ordinary activity of the mind in respect of the fancy and the imagination. Hence is produced a more vivid reflection of the truths of nature and of the human heart, united with a constant activity modifying and correcting these truths by that sort of pleasurable emotion, which the exertion of all our faculties gives in a certain degree; but which can only be felt in perfection under the full play of those powers of mind, which are spontaneous rather than voluntary, and in which the effort required bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed.

The feeling of pleasure is the mental state of the poet, required for composition, which is more intense than ordinary feelings, a state that allows the poet a keener insight into various objects, emotions or incidents. The mind is activated by the excitement felt and this energised mind enables him to form a deeper sympathy with external beings and circumstances. The activated mind contemplates upon the inner essence of what it views, leading to extraordinary perceptions which an ordinary, merely receptive
mind would not be able to cognise. In this state of excitement, the poet forms relationships (based on his extraordinary perceptions) which would not have been possible in the absence of pleasure or excitement felt by him. The nexus comprehended in this stimulated state leads to truths which are more vivid and even modified compared to the truths derived by a mind that is not in such a state. This intuitive perspicacity of the mind is a spontaneous, not a conscious activity.

Coleridge admits that intellectual intuition or constructive imagination cannot be given to anyone. The harmonies of nature are discerned by an imaginative mind, not by a receptive mind that cannot perceive beyond the passive sense impressions. Nature does not have the same significance for everyone. It is only a few who possess "the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar."49

Nature, according to Coleridge, is the "art of God."50 The creation of art is analogous to the creation of nature. Art is the "mediatress between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation; color, form, motion, and sound, are the elements which it combines, and it stamps them into unity in the mould of a moral idea."51 Art stands between the thoughts and the things, it is the link between the idea and the external reality. "As soon as the human mind is intelligibly addressed by an outward image exclusively of articulate
speech, so soon does art commence."52 Hence the external and internal infuse, "to make nature thought, and thought nature".53

Coleridge's concept of beauty is intriguing. In the "Essay On Principles of General Criticism" he claims that beauty represents harmony and unity. He defines it as "Multeity in Unity",54 a concept in which disparate identities merge into one. The crystallised frost on the windowpane, resembling a tree appears beautiful because it pleases one to trace the similarities between two distinct things - the form of the frost and the shape of the tree or the plant it resembles. Beauty is not dependent upon form only but "that namely which is naturally consonant with our senses by the pre-established harmony between nature and the human mind...."55 In another essay, "On Poesy or Art", Coleridge claims that absolute likeness of art to reality will not please anyone. Just like wax imitations of human figures do not please because they are too close in likeness to reality. There should be "likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness, and a reconcilement of both in one...."56 The simulation should not be exact because the difference in the two - the object and the piece of art - will make the traces of resemblance more pleasurable. As in the frozen frost, the likeness in some aspects corresponds to the branches or the trunk of the tree but is not an exact replica of the plant.

The mind delights in discovering similarities between diverse things, not identical objects. Beauty lies in the perception of an object, not the object itself. "What then will be the result, when the Beautiful, arising from regular form, is so modified by the perception of life and spontaneous action, as that the latter only shall be the object of our conscious perception,
while the former merely acts, and yet does effectively act, on our feelings? Kant also asserts that aesthetic experience is subjective not objective. "That which is purely subjective in the representation of an object, i.e., what constitutes its reference to the subject, not to the object, is its aesthetic quality. On the other hand, that which in such a representation serves, or is available for the determination of the object (for the purpose of knowledge), is its logical validity." One judges an object in respect to oneself – how it corresponds to one’s inner self. The harmony between the structure of the object and one’s perception of the object will make it beautiful for the individual.

II

Wordsworth’s theory of the poetic process is also based upon his epistemological beliefs. For both, Wordsworth and Coleridge, the process of poetic creation is initiated by the process of knowledge. Wordsworth does not offer any formal theory, like Coleridge but his prefaces and letters imply a preoccupation with the mental processes.

Wordsworth’s prose and poetry incorporate the beliefs of Hartley, Locke, Kant and Schelling. His delight in the phenomenal reality and his emphasis upon sensations bring him closer to the associationists and the empiricists. At the same time, his belief about the greater unity places him in the company of the transcendentalist philosophers. It is difficult to categorise him as an empiricist or an idealist, follower of Locke, Berkeley or Kant. There are strains of both the views in his theory as well as poetry, yet he is
not a dualist. The external reality never loses its ground for him. 

Wordsworth does not speak “with two distinct voices”, he is a poet of multiple voices and beliefs.

Wordsworth’s defiance against the eighteenth century poetry is not a reaction against the philosophic beliefs of the century. His philosophy grows out of empiricism and culminates in idealism but he does not abandon one doctrine to adopt another. He accepts the Lockean premise that the origin of knowledge lies in sense experience and that the material objects impress upon the mind through the senses. But Wordsworth is an empiricist with a difference. For one, he does not accord a passive status to the mind and secondly, he ascribes to the material objects moral and spiritual attributes. The external world impresses upon the human mind and the soul to produce sense impressions and moral values.

Wordsworth accords validity to the material reality of the phenomenal nature. The external world is not a construct of the mind but is a corporeal fact which cannot be ignored. In a letter to John Wilson he says:

Now it is manifest that no human being can be so besotted and debased by oppression, penury, or any other evil which inhumanizes man, as to be utterly insensible to the colours, forms, or smell of flowers, the [voices] and motions of birds and beasts, the appearance of the sky and heavenly bodies, the general warmth of a fine day, the terror and uncomfortableness of a storm, & c. & c. How dead soever many full-grown men may outwardly seem to these things, all are more or less affected by them; and in childhood, in the first practice and exercise of their sense, they must have been not the nourishers merely, but often the fathers of their passions.
The appearances of the phenomenal world work upon sensitive as well as insensitive minds. In fact, Wordsworth ascribes to the natural objects the ability to form the human character, as they are "the fathers of their passions". In the same letter, he goes on to say that the objects of nature also mould national character "not merely from the impressions of general nature, but also from local objects and images". Wordsworth endorses the view that environment shapes the personality of the individuals:

From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.

The Prelude, bk XIII, ll 1-10

Wordsworth subscribes to the belief that nature formulates moral and spiritual values and inculcates characteristics like strength and purity. If the external reality impresses upon the subject, what is the role of the mind in this process? Does it have a dormant existence, totally dependent upon the sense impressions? Like Coleridge, Wordsworth too rejects the possibility of the mind being passive. Mind has the unique capability of receiving sense impressions from the outer world but is not a slave to them:

Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.

The Prelude, bk II, ll 257-60.
The mind is lord and master – outward sense
The obedient servant of her will.

The Prelude, bk XII, ll 222-3.

The mind has inner power, strength and autonomy in its perceptions. The power of the mind can attribute deeper meanings to the external reality. It has the potential to project itself upon the outer world. The mind does not create a fantasy, it perceives and recreates the objects. It is a productive faculty that bestows its own colours upon the external world. This ability enables the mind to look into reality, beyond the sense impressions.

The two powers – that of mind and nature - do not act individually but in conjunction. The external and the internal conjoin to constitute a complete reality. Wordsworth attributes the process of knowledge to “certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it.”63

The mind has the power to assign a reality to what it perceives. The truth has to be discerned from what is diffused around us and the mind, by its own potential, posits meanings to these truths. Wordsworth states that the mind “searches, discovers, and treasures up, - infusing by meditation into the objects with which it converses an intellectual life; whereby they remain planted in the memory, now, and for ever.”64 The activity and the autonomy of the mind are aided by the sense impressions that are received from the objects but the mind holds the potential to probe and discover a life in the objects around it. It is also capable of communicating intellectually with these objects. Wordsworth further adds, “Nature has irrevocably decreed, that our prime dependence in all stages of life after infancy and childhood have been passed through (nor do I know that this latter ought to
be expected) must be upon our own minds; and that the way to knowledge shall be long, difficult, winding, and oftentimes returning upon itself."

His poetry reiterates the view:

An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye:
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport.

The Prelude, bk II, ll 368-76.

Knowledge emanates from the mind and returns to it after the interfusion of the object and the subject. The epistemological transaction takes place between the self and nature. The process begins with the mind, meanders through the ontological objects and returns to the mind to complete the process of knowledge.

Wordsworth’s originality lies in unique observation. He apprehends things in unusual ways, looking at aspects ignored by others. Coleridge claims that the plan behind the “Lyrical Ballads” was to:

give charm of novelty to things of everyday and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish sollicitude we have eyes, yet not see, ears that hear not, hearts that neither feel nor understand."

The epistemological process is the same for everyone but with time the repeated perceptions lead to stock responses of the mind inducing “lethargy
of custom." The mind produces repeated perceptions of the objects it is
familiar with; the result is that they appear fixed and lifeless, unable to
commune with the active mind. But if the "film of familiarity" is lifted, the
mind can perceive the beauties of nature which are inherent in these objects.
Everyone possesses the means of perception, like eyes and ears but most
people do not use them adequately to actually see or hear. The most
common object or incident can gain novel dimensions when looked at by an
active and energetic mind. How does Wordsworth achieve the novel and
unfamiliar perceptions? He claims to have a keen observation. In the
"Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" (1800), he confesses, "I have at all times
endeavoured to look steadily at my subject." His uniqueness ensues from
the intensely observed phenomena. For him, a most simple object or
happening can attain unusual and even spiritual heights because he
apprehends "things not as they are, but as they appear; not as they exist in
themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses, and to the passions." Wordsworth posits the truth of the phenomenal world as it impresses upon
his senses and the passions of his mind. Hence, he observes the external
objects as they "appear" to his mind:

To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

The Prelude, bk III, ll 127-32.

H.W. Garrod affirms that with Wordsworth, "the familiar took on a guise of
unfamiliarity: took on, that is to say, a certain newness of aspect. This effect
he traced, so far as the mental condition of the beholder was concerned, to
an act, or accident, whereby the mind or senses are for the time set free from
custom and that tie of habitude which the use of the world binds upon us."69

Complete knowledge can only be attained when one looks beyond the
surface, into the essence of the objects, cognise them as they appear to the
senses and the mind:

Moreover, each man’s Mind is to herself
Witness and judge; and I remember well
That in life’s every-day appearances
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world – a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted, and to other eyes
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws
Whence spiritual dignity originates,
Which do both give it being and maintain
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.

The Prelude, bk XIII, ll 366-78.

The faculty that enables the mind to break through the habitual perception in
order to view or review the material objects is imagination. Imagination
plays a creative role in presenting and representing ordinary objects in an
original way, giving old things new meanings. Wordsworth rejects the early
eighteenth century concept of imagination being merely an image-making
faculty. In the “Preface to Poems” (1815), he states:

Imagination, in the sense of the word as giving title to a class of
the following Poems, has no reference to images that are merely
a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects;
but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind
upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition,
governed by certain fixed laws.70
Imagination either bestows certain characteristics upon an object or abstracts some properties. It also merges various images and modifies them, rendering a recreation of the objects perceived. Wordsworth stipulates:

Thus far of an endowing or modifying power: but the Imagination also shapes and creates; and how? By innumerable processes; and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number, - alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers.71

Wordsworth regards Coleridge’s definition of fancy as too general. He suggests that to associate and aggregate is the function of imagination as well as fancy. The difference between the two lies in the materials combined by the two faculties - the materials fused under different conditions, for different purposes:

Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent…The law under which the processes of Fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender, or pathetic, as the objects happen to be appositely produced or fortunately combined.72

Imagination, on the other hand:

She recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite… When the Imagination frames a comparison, if it does not strike on the first presentation, a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows – and continues to grow – upon the mind; the resemblance depending less upon outline of form and feature, than upon expression and effect; less upon casual and outstanding, than upon inherent and
internal, properties: moreover, the images invariably modify each other.

The striking difference between the two faculties is that fancy attempts to bring various images together in the form of a mixture, in which each part holds its identity. Contrarily, imagination affects to coalesce the diverse parts of, not the form but the "inherent and internal" essence of the images. The mind grasps imaginatively when the image formed is not startling and incredible but grows upon the mind, penetrating the inherent truth which is not obvious to a casual onlooker. Fancy detects and associates the hidden affinities in diverse images but this association is transitory. Imagination looks for permanent and far reaching effects. The objects and images attain a new reality when transformed by the faculty of imagination. "Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal." Wordsworth bestows fancy with creative powers though they are playful and inferior as compared to the serious and superior potentials of imagination.

The difference between Wordsworth’s use of the term fancy and that of Coleridge is that Wordsworth appropriates fancy with a limited creative power, whereas Coleridge only assigns to it the role to associate and aggregate sense impressions and images. Wordsworth subscribes that the materials fancy touches upon might modify but they do not transform. "Rapidity", "profusion", and "felicity" are its attributes which make its work endearing but not enduring. Yet the frivolous play is not bereft of creativity and subtlety with which it can detect the implicit connections. Coleridge relegates fancy to fixed and dead materials which can only be brought together in a heterogeneous manner. Wordsworth emphasises the
comradeship of fancy and imagination because “Fancy ambitiously aims at a
crivalship with Imagination, and Imagination stoops to work with the
materials of Fancy.”

Wordsworth’s concept of imagination is that it begins with novel perception.
He goes on to suggest that imagination forms images of the objects and
experiences that are absent and bestows a special perceptive insight upon the
poet:

The power, which all
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
Resemblance of that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With the whole compass of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Kindred mutations; for themselves create
A like existence; and, whene’er it dawns
Created for them, catch it, or are caught
By its inevitable mastery,
Like angels stopped upon the wing by sound
Of harmony from Heaven’s remotest spheres.

The Prelude, bk XIV, ll 86-99.

Imagination is the power that breaks the façade of custom and allows the
mind to penetrate the objective reality in a creative manner. Everyday
objects gain new significance and transform habitual perception.
Imagination also has the potential to form images of what has been
perceived in the past or imagined by the mind. It forms and fuses various
images creatively.
The poet's interest in this inquiry is - how can an artist use creative perception to write poetry? The novel mode of perception offers a penetrating insight to the poet who adds and subtracts attributes of what he perceives, in order to fuse and transform what lies before him as well as the diverse images in his mind:

Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.

The Prelude, bk XIV, ll 189 - 92

Wordsworth prescribes the laws of imagination whereby the faculty is active in "consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number". Both, Coleridge and Wordsworth, base their poetic theory upon their epistemological beliefs. Creative perception consequently, leads to poetic creation.

Wordsworth defines the poet in the "Preface" (1800):

He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.

The poet is like other men but with much more potential. He possesses all the fine sensibilities of human nature in a more pronounced manner. Enthusiasm, tenderness, knowledge, joy, pleasure and passion are more intensely existent in his character than in other men. He rejoices in the
discovery of the spirit that resides in all objects of nature. Where he does not find similar passions, he creates them. In fact, by the time Wordsworth is through with his definition, the poet nowhere resembles an ordinary man; he appears more like a man with extraordinary abilities.

To these qualities Wordsworth adds that the poet possesses "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events... a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels... without immediate external excitement." Even in his comprehensive definition of the poet, Wordsworth first refers to the fact that a man can be a poet only if he is endowed with a perception keener than that of other men. The "lively sensibility", "more enthusiasm and tenderness", "comprehensive soul" and contemplation of "volitions and passions" inside and outside him are all attributes of an unusual perception.

Wordsworth continues to prove how original perception can transform the way one looks at things with the help of imagination, even in the absence of things or events. The poet does not always need an immediate stimulus to activate his imagination. His potential lies in creating and recreating images, feelings, emotions and thoughts without a present stimulus. Wordsworth shifts from perception, to imagination and finally to creation:

That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each his own peculiar faculty,
Heaven's gift, a sense that fits him to perceive
Objects unseen before, thou wilt not blame
The humblest of this band who dares to hope
That unto him hath also been vouchsafed
An insight that in some sort he possesses,  
A privilege whereby a work of his,  
Proceeding from a source of untaught things,  
Creative and enduring, may become  
A power like one of Nature's.

The Prelude, bk XIII, ll 301-12.

In the "Preface" (1815), Wordsworth prescribes certain powers required for writing poetry. The primary powers are observation and description. The "ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them," whether the things are actually present or stored in the memory. The second requisite is sensibility and "the more exquisite it is, the wider will be the range of a poet's perceptions; and the more will he be incited to observe objects, both as they exist in themselves and as re-acted upon by his own mind." Next is reflection which makes the poet realise the relevance of actions, images, thoughts and feelings. Fourthly, imagination and fancy are the requirements, without which good poetry would not be possible. The fifth requisite recommended by Wordsworth is invention, "by which characters are composed out of materials supplied by observation; whether of the Poet's own heart and mind, or of external life and nature." Judgement is the sixth power which rules over all the other powers and decides which faculty has to be used and to what extent.

These six faculties correspond to the potentials of the poet assigned by Wordsworth in the "Preface" (1800). In delineating the duties of the poet, Wordsworth propounds his theory of knowledge:  

He [the poet] considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this
with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an over balance of enjoyment... He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.

The inter-dependence of the object and the subject is outlined in the creativity of the poet. The external world and the poet's mind act and react upon each other. The poet contemplates upon the relationship between the external and the internal. He also reflects upon the similar relationship between other men and the worldly objects. Out of this relationship emerge man's convictions and deductions which over the time become intuitions. Such intuitions make him aware of the existence of the life principle or energy that is present in all creation because man and nature are part of the same unity.

Wordsworth begins to define poetry but ends up delineating the process of creating poetry. In the famous lines from the "Preface" (1800) he states:

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions
whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment.

Primarily, the poet requires a subject to write poetry. The effusion of creativity is controlled by distance and isolation from the object or event that stimulates the poet. The inspiration comes from the poet’s contact with some object or incident, in the present or in the past which provides an imperus for the imagination to infer a unique harmony between the poet and the stimulus. But creativity does not take place just then. The poet has to be removed from the stimulating object, place and time to contemplate upon the effect of the object or the event. On the one hand, the poet has to be careful not to be too spontaneous. On the other hand, he has to recall the emotion that he felt during the contact with the stimulus, so that at the time of writing poetry, his passion does not diminish. Wordsworth advocates a fine balance of spontaneity and restraint. Poetic creation can take place only when the emotion is intensely evoked in contemplation of the experience. Emotion has to be collaborated by thought because “our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts”. The mind’s role is dominant in poetic creation. But creativity cannot commence in the absence of pleasure. The mind has to be in a constant state of pleasure if it has to create anything.

In the “Preface” (1800), Wordsworth refers to objects that influence the poet but are not present before him. While describing the poet he states that he is affected by things that are absent and creates without the immediate presence of a stimulus. Wordsworth defines poetry as recalled emotions in which the subject is not present before the poet but is contemplated upon. Very distinctly, Wordsworth relies upon images in writing poetry.
imagination, for him, is the image making power that recreates things which are not before the poet. He does not refer to the mechanical reproduction of Hattiean ideas but to the reflection upon the stores of memory and the creative reproduction of the various images harmonised together. Mary Warnock emphasises that for Wordsworth, "It is the original function of the imagination to reproduce things, to enable us to think them, and above all to feel them, when they are not actually before our eyes; so the poet is credited by Wordsworth with an intensified version of the very faculty which we all of us exercise at the moment when we reflect on the past, the future, or the otherwise absent." For Wordsworth, the past is always as important as the present and the future.

Wordsworth's crusade against the poetic diction of the eighteenth century is a continuation of his attack against inveterate perception. Wordsworth advocates democratic ideals in pleading the argument for the usage of the ordinary language. The disparagement is against "the gaudiness and inane phraseology" used by poets. Wordsworth's insistence upon the actual language spoken by the ordinary people stems from the desire to record sincere emotions in poetry. He applauds the earlier poets in the appendix to the "Preface" (1800) because they portray genuine passions in their verses:

The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative. In succeeding times, Poets, and Men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirious of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly
produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation.88

The language of the earlier poets originated from personal experience or real events. Their passions excited and inspired them to write a “daring, and figurative” language which was permeated by sincerity. Wordsworth’s diatribe is against the poets who adopt mechanical imitation of the older poets. Such poets write in the absence of genuine passion but retain the inherited poetic language. Consequently, the language used in their poetry gets distanced from the language spoken by the ordinary people. Wordsworth’s charge is against the habitual use of the poetic language which runs parallel to his disparagement of habitual perception. Just as the truth of the objective reality is inherent in its form and in its essence, similarly language loses its life if it is merely imitated in the external form and not evoked by real feelings.

A succession of phrases written for an effective result and ornamental value will not have any emotional appeal. The original language of the people will bring out the true passions, not the stock responses of the poet as well as the readers. Wordsworth’s states in the “Preface” (1800) that his aim is “to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.”89 The emphasis is upon language used in “a state of vivid sensation” and the aim is to impart pleasure. At various places in the “Preface”, Wordsworth insists upon passion being the fundamental element for writing poetry. Poetry results from “the manner in which we associate
Ideas in a state of excitement”. For Wordsworth, the poet binds together the vast empire of human society by passion and knowledge.

Wordsworth relates language to the life style of the speakers. People living in natural environment speak a more sincere and less artificial language:

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated ... The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike and disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.'

The rustic’s language is “plainer and more emphatic”, not artificial and contrived like the language of the city folk. The rustic’s expression, though simple, is “more philosophical” after the defects are purified. The language is less inhibited. It is not used to impress the readers but expresses the inner feelings of the speakers who “communicate with the best objects from which
the best part of language is derived”. How can language be derived from the
equal objects? Wordsworth’s contention is not that the vocabulary is
obtained from the phenomenal objects. He advocates that language portrays
truthfully what it describes. If the idea and the subject chosen for poetry are
natural, not artificial, the language that follows will also be appropriate to
the idea and the subject.

Does Wordsworth intend to propound ordinary language, without defects, as
the poetic language? Is that why he finds no difference between the
language of poetry and that of prose? At the very beginning of his
discussion on poetic language in the “Preface” (1800), Wordsworth
confessses to write “a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid
sensation”.

He claims to throw over the incidents “a certain colouring of
imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an
unusual aspect”. Passion and imagination are inherent not only in the poet
but are also present in the language of poetry. External reality is perceived
in novel ways by the poet and is expressed in a language which is familiar to
the ordinary rustic.

Does that mean poetry portrays uncommon perceptions in common
language? If the phrases regarding poetic language in the “Preface” (1800)
are read carefully it will be clear that Wordsworth does not refer to a
comprehensive use of the common rustic language. Wherever he refers to
the “real language” of men, he qualifies it as “a selection of real language of
men”. Wordsworth uses the word “selection” at least six times in the
“Preface” (1800). If the poet makes selections from the language that he
uses, he chooses arbitrarily. His raw material might be the words used
ordinarily but his choice is made judiciously. H.W. Garrod contends that for Wordsworth, language too originates from imagination:

Just as poetry cannot work upon the objects offered to it by senses (but they must submit to a selecting and universalising process), so it cannot work with the language of common sense, the language offered to it by real life. The language of poetry, like the stuff of poetry, comes from the imagination. The imagination operates freely, whether upon the visualized objects which are its material, or upon the language which is its principal instrument, only after there has already operated a selecting faculty. The language of poetry is to ‘the language really spoken by men’ exactly as the objects which the imagination visualizes are to their correlates in the sphere of sense. In both classes the imagination renders back purified and dignified what came to it, through eye and ear, confused and ignoble.\textsuperscript{95}

Selection plays a significant role in poetry. The poet selects an object or an incident out of several to look at it from an original aspect. He also selects words very carefully in order to verbally recreate that object and experience to the readers. Just as the phenomenal reality, which is the same for everybody, appears distinctive and different to the poet, similarly language, which is the possession of everyone, is transformed in the hands of the poet. Poetic language does not mean using words and phrases appreciated by the learned only. The language of poetry, for Wordsworth, belongs to the masses, is selected by the poet and transformed into poetry to please the intellectuals as well as the common man. Wordsworth declares, “But Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men”, therefore, “he must express himself as other men express themselves”.\textsuperscript{96} But the power to select arbitrarily gives the poet the discretion to use his imagination even in the language of his poems.
Imaginative language can correspond to the connotative characteristics of Romantic poetry. F.W. Bateson differentiates between the denotative and the connotative language of the eighteenth and nineteenth century poetry. He claims, "exactness of denotation and clarity of progression were qualities that only embarrassed the Romantic poet. They were positive impediments to the expression of the subliminal excitement he exploited. The language that had been evolved through the eighteenth century was a language of the surface. Its words had been restricted to their first, immediate, meanings, and had lost the sub-intentions, the aura of circumambient suggestion, that poetry normally requires." 97 This is a concept of the organic language that grows and is not static. Connotative language is more flexible and can be moulded to suit various thoughts and feelings. Denotative language, on the other hand, can be rigid and static. Wordsworth's inquiry is, "in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other." 98

The source of creativity for Coleridge and Wordsworth is the inference of the inherent truth in the phenomenal nature. They postulate that poetry originates when the poet encounters the unfamiliar that is implicit in the familiar. Imagination is the creative faculty that renders a complete fusion of the object and the subject. A poet possesses the potential to search for innate meanings of the external world and consequently, poetry manifests the infinite spirit of the finite reality. The next chapter will examine how certain concepts of Coleridge and Wordsworth come close to the principles of the Indian theory of knowledge.
Chapter 2


27. *Imagination in Coleridge*, 45.


34. *Biographia Literaria*, vol. II, 12.


39. *Table Talk*, 252.


42. *Biographia Literaria*, vol. II, 47.


44. *Biographia Literaria*, vol. II, 257.


55. *Biographia Literaria*, vol. II, 233.
   All subsequent references to Wordsworth's poems are from this book and will be given with line numbers in the text of this thesis.
64. *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, 70.


