

Coleridge Fancy and Imagination

In chapter 13 &14 of Biographic Literaria Coleridge tells us a good deal about imagination and fancy. In chapter 13 Coleridge writes:

“The imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be living power and prime agent of all human perception.....
.....The secondary I consider as an echo of the former
.....It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create.....

In chapter XIV Coleridge goes on to say that a poet have that magical and synthetic power which is known as imagination. According to Coleridge, imagination diffuses a tone and spirit of unity. It balances and blends the opposites, such as sameness and difference, the general and particular, the idea and the image, the individual and the representative, emotion and order, and judgment and enthusiasm.

In Coleridge’s view, Imagination has two forms primary and secondary. Primary imagination is merely the power of receiving impressions of the external world through the senses. It is an involuntary act of mind; the human mind receives impressions impression unconsciously, reduces them to shape and size, so that, the mind is able to form a clear and coherent perception of outside world.

The primary imagination is also possessed by all. The secondary imagination is also possessed by others but it is peculiar and distinctive attitude of artist. Secondary imagination makes artistic creation possible because it is more active and conscious in its working. It works upon what is perceived by the primary imagination its raw material is the sensations and impressions supplied to it by primary imagination. It has , “a shaping and modifying power”, which by its

'plastic stress' re-shapes objects of the external world and steepens them with a glory and dream that never was on sea and land. It is an active agent which dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate secondary imagination is peculiar privilege enjoyed by the artist only.

Fancy is not creative power at all. It only combines what it perceives into beautiful shapes, but like imagination it does not fuse and unify. "The difference between the two is the same as the difference between mechanical mixture and a chemical compound a number of ingredients mixed up but they do not lose their individual properties. On the contrary in a chemical fusion different ingredients no longer exist as separate identities. In Coleridge's view fancy are merely mechanical juxtaposition and not a chemical fusion.

For Coleridge good sense is the body of body of poetic genius, Fancy is its dress, motion is its life and imagination is its soul.

For Coleridge owned his interest in the study of imagination to Wordsworth . But Wordsworth was interested only in the practice of poetry, and he considered only the impact of imagination on poetry; Coleridge on the other hand, is interested in the theory of imagination. He is first critic to study the nature of imagination and examine its role in creative activity. Secondly, while Wordsworth uses fancy and imagination almost as synonyms Coleridge is the first to distinguish between them and define their respective roles. Thirdly, Wordsworth does not distinguish between primary and secondary imagination. Coleridge's treatment of the subject is, on the whole, characterized by greater depth, penetration and philosophical subtlety. It is unique contribution to literary theory.