7

Imagination and Fancy (2)

The nature of primary imagination, and therefore of imagination as a whole, as Coleridge presents it, can really only be understood in terms of that relation between the act of thinking and its product, thought, which formed the subject of our own first chapter. Between the act of thinking, the "act of self-consciousness" [1] and the "act of imagination" no very sharp distinction transpires. This is because the act, as such, is one and the same, while the name chosen for it is varied according to which one of its several effects is being expressed in the context. Mathematical lines, points and surfaces, Coleridge avers in his *Treatise on Logic,* are "acts of the imagination that are one with the product of those acts." [2] If then, being first thoroughly seised of the reality of the act distinguished as an act, we accept, for the purpose of further contemplation, its 'oneness' nevertheless with its own product, we shall then see imagination as a varying interplay between active and passive elements in the *relation* between self and world, of such a nature that the two elements themselves may change, the one into the other. Or, we may say, between man and nature. Only, in using those terms, we must remember that the boundary here presumed between man and nature is by no means the currently fancied one. It is not the boundary of a fixed "outness." Within *that* schema the only possible mental interaction between active man and passive nature occurs at or within the skin. Whereas the interplay, which is imagination, though it is involved with body and space, is not their creature; and it would be as true to say that it occurs in nature as to say that it occurs in man.[3] We have seen that the life of nature is at all levels a power of "separative projection," and separative projection ("the eternal act of creation") is what the act of self-consciousness—what the act of imagination—is. The underlying reality (sub-stance) of things is thus not matter, nor any equivalent inanimate base, but immaterial relationship.[4] For Cole-

ridge, because man did not create himself, there is indeed an actual (I–Thou) relation between subject and natural object; but, since man is to be free, it is also a genetic and progressive one. Phylogenetically that progressive relation is nature. Ontogenetically it is imagination.[5]

Primary imagination, then, is an act, but it is an act of which we are not normally conscious. It becomes secondary, whether philosophically or poetically, when it is raised to, or nearer to, the level of consciousness and therewith becomes expressible. Whereas the only thing that could be called the "expression" of primary imagination as such is the familiar face of nature herself. The "rules" of secondary imagination are, however, still "the very powers of growth and production," [6] for that is what they were already at the primary stage, when they were simply the laws of nature. In other words, they are not rules at all, though critics had been trying to turn them into rules. They are powers. Nor is it very difficult to see what sort of powers Coleridge had in mind, and would have written further of, had he actually composed the chapter whose "main result" he summarised in the two paragraphs we are now considering. We have already seen (in Chapter 3, above) that the part of Chapter XIII that *was* written, that is the opening paragraphs, is an attempt to introduce the reader to those two forces of the one power, and the relation of polarity between them, on which his theory of life itself is constructed. It is these forces which are "the very powers of growth and production" and the deduction of imagination, which he promised, must needs have taken the form of showing how these forces may operate, not only unconsciously and half-consciously as life in nature, but also self-consciously as the same life in human nature. "They and they only," he had written in the previous chapter:

> can acquire 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; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennae yet to come. They know and feel, that the *potential* works *in* them, even as the actual works *on* them.[7]

We have observed in some detail, in previous chapters, what it meant to Coleridge to say that the potential (that is, *natura naturans*)

"works" whether as formation or at the later stage of unself-conscious instinct. Let us place alongside of that one of the earliest passages on the psychology of imagination to be found in the *Biographia Literaria,* taking the liberty to italicize in order to bring out the point now being made:

> Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing . . . Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets . . . and will have noticed how the little animal wins its way up against the stream, by *alternate pulses of active and passive motion,* now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* [original italics] for a further propulsion.

But the point here is, not merely the fact that imagination is an interplay between active and passive elements in the relation between man and nature, but also the further fact that that interplay may be consciously experienced. The water-insect, he continues,

> is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION. But, in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary control over it.[8]

In referring to "common language, especially on the subject of poetry" it is fairly clear that Coleridge had in mind the *lingua franca* of literary criticism and aesthetic theory, in which the word *imagination,* under the influence of Addison, Akenside and others, had recently been coming to play a more and more important part. But it should be equally clear by now that "the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking" was, for Coleridge, by no means the exclusive affair of poets and poetry. In philosophy, and indeed in science, it entails a new freedom to select and apprehend the "central phenomenon"[9] in nature, as in poetry a new freedom to select and apprehend the relevant symbol. It gives in fact the possibility of "secondary" imagination.

In the many and scattered passages where Coleridge, in his capacity

as a literary critic, addresses his mind to the topic of poetry and drama and through that to the nature of imagination, there are two predominant themes. In poetry and drama it is a special quality in the relation between the whole and its parts; in imagination it is the principle of "unity in multeity." [10] Looking first at the latter, we shall find that the various distinctions with which he operates, such as that between imitating and copying, between genius and talent, between imagination and fancy, between Shakespeare's "universal" characters and the abstract stereotypes of inferior dramatists, between principles or laws and mere 'rules,' are all of them applications of that root principle of an antecedent unity in all natural variety, which it was the purpose of the *Theory of Life* to "explain." They are all based on "the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many." [11] They all tend to demonstrate how the imagination acts chiefly by creating "a oneness, even as nature, the greatest of poets, acts upon us, when we open our eyes upon an extended prospect." [12] They conceive imagination as the process of "separative projection" at work in an individual mind; and the individual mind in which this process occurs is what Coleridge means by "genius." Shakespeare was his favourite example of genius, and when he describes Shakespeare as "a nature humanized" Coleridge is not speaking metaphorically:

> Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms. Each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within . . . 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.[13]

Today, when we read of "a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness," we are in danger of jumping to conclusions and identifying it over-hastily with "the unconscious" of modern psychology, safely ensconced somehow or other within the cuticle of an individual organism. Still more so, perhaps, when we read, in the essay *On Poesy or Art,* that "there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius"; and of the conscious having to be "impressed on the unconscious." Was Coleridge, then, a depth-psychologist in advance of his age? Yes and no. We need to read the whole essay[14] to see what *he* meant by "the unconscious."

> In the objects of nature are presented, as in a mirror, all the possible elements, steps, and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness, and therefore to the full development of the intelligential act; and man's mind is the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature . . .

It is the function of art

> to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature . . . body is but a striving to become mind . . .

Genius therefore must "master the essence, the *natura naturans,* which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man." It is its business to acquire

> living and life-producing ideas, which shall contain their own evidence, the certainty that they are one with the germinal causes in nature . . . For of all we see, hear, feel, and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves.

This is certainly depth-psychology; but it is a depth-psychology which twentieth century theory has not yet overtaken.

"The power which discloses itself from within as the principle of unity in the many," the "productive unity" of nature, results in a manifold of parts having an "organic" relation with the whole and, through that (*totus in omni parte*) with each other. In apprehending this we are moved by the *beauty* of nature. The same power, at the level of imagination, creates another manifold having a similar relation between parts and whole; and in apprehending it we are moved by the imagination of the poet. In the *Theory of Life* we saw "totality dawning into individuation" and, following that, an increasingly complex and increasingly reciprocal, part-whole structure. It is this element that Coleridge stresses in his treatment of poetry and drama, and occasionally of art in general. Only now the "tendency to individuation" has been replaced by the power to give pleasure or delight.

> A poem is 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 dis-

> criminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole,* as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part.*[15]

Or, as he had phrased it a little earlier; "by the production of as much immediate pleasure in parts as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole." [16] A work of art will be "rich in proportion to the variety of parts which it holds in unity." [17] The unity in multeity, the *totus in omni parte,* of nature herself grows

> more intense in proportion as it constitutes each particular thing a whole of itself; and yet more, again, in proportion to the number and interdependence of the parts which it unites as a whole.[18]

And hence:

> Nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part; and a work of art will be just in proportion as it adequately conveys the thought, and rich in proportion to the variety of parts which it holds in unity.[17]

While, then, imagination at its primary stage empowers experience of an outer world *at all,* at its secondary stage it both expresses and empowers experience of that outer world as the productive "unity in multeity," which results in a whole and parts organically related to one another.

There remains the second of the two paragraphs at the close of Chapter XIII: the distinction between Imagination and Fancy. This is a concept about which, over the years, there has been a great deal of controversy.[19] The question always is whether or no there is really a difference in kind between fancy and imagination (as Coleridge is taken to have held) or whether they are after all merely different degrees of the same power. It is doubtful however whether it has often been noticed that, precisely in connection with this question of fancy and imagination, Coleridge himself had a good deal to say on the true significance of "degree" and "kind" in general.

The distinction between imagination and fancy was one that meant much to Wordsworth, who used it extensively in his 1815 Preface. Now Coleridge's own original apprehension of it was inextricably in-

volved with the impact upon him of Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth, he had written in 1804, in a letter to Richard Sharp, is

> the only man who has effected a compleat and constant synthesis of Thought and Feeling and combined them with Poetic Forms, with the music of pleasurable passion and with Imagination or the *modifying* Power in that highest sense of the word in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the aggregating power.[20]

And some twelve years later he recalls, in Chapter IV of the *Biographia Literaria,* "the immediate impression on my feelings, and subsequently on my judgement" made by the union, in Wordsworth,

> of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed . . . This excellence, which in all Mr. Wordsworth's writings is more or less predominant, and which constitutes the character of his mind, I no sooner felt, than I sought to understand. Repeated meditations led me first to suspect, (and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties, their appropriate marks, functions, and effects matured my conjecture into full conviction,) that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or, at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.[21]

Here is a clear enough statement that the difference between fancy and imagination is a difference, not of degree but of kind. Nevertheless it appears that Wordsworth, with whom he had had "frequent conversations on the subject," had made too much of it. Referring to the observations on fancy and imagination in the latter's 1815 Preface, Coleridge comments:

> The explanation which Mr. Wordsworth has himself given will be found to differ from mine, chiefly perhaps, as our objects are different . . . it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude their diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle and then from the kind to deduce the degree.[22]

What are we to say? Here, only a page or so after the passage previously quoted, is an almost equally clear statement that fancy and imagination differ, *not* in kind, but only in degree!

The object of this book is, not to contend that Coleridge invariably expressed himself in the way least calculated to confuse his readers, but to disclose, if possible, what he in fact thought. And for this purpose we do well to turn to a later passage in the same work, where (in a different context altogether) he addresses himself for a moment to the relation between "kind" and "degree" as such:

> The first lesson of philosophic discipline is to wean the student's attention from the DEGREES of things, which alone form the vocabulary of common life, and to direct it to the KIND abstracted from *degree*. Thus the chemical student is taught not to be startled at disquisitions on the heat in ice . . .[23]

The naïve man, he appears to be saying, sees all *obvious* differences as differences in kind. It is only when we go more deeply into it—only when we get down to the *real* "kind"—that we discover his error. And now, if we return to the former passage, the implication transpires that Wordsworth, in his Preface, had taken imagination and fancy as differing in kind in *the same way* that the naïve man takes "hot" and "cold" as differing in kind. Further that he had done this because he was first and foremost a poet and no psychologist. He was, as I. A. Richards has observed, "more interested in the products [poems] than in the process."[24] "My friend," Coleridge continues:

> has drawn a masterly sketch of the branches with their *poetic* fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.

In fact his own purpose, as he has just said, was "to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree."[25]

Thus, in terms of the three questions (or three forms of the one question: What is imagination?) distinguished at the beginning of the last chapter, one could perhaps say that, for the purposes of the first question, fancy and imagination are different in kind, but for the purposes of the second, and still more certainly of the third, question they must be seen as differing only in degree. It is unfortunate that, at the point where he told us that his own object was "from the kind to deduce the degree," Coleridge did not specify more precisely *what* kind it is that includes both fancy and imagination as degrees. For that we

have to jump on from Chapter IV to Chapter XII, where we learn that the "kind" in question is the intelligence present both in nature and in man, from which may be "deduced" not only poetic fruitage but all forms of consciousness and indeed of life:

> Bearing . . . in mind, that intelligence is a self-development, not a quality supervening to a substance, we may abstract from all *degree,* and for the purpose of philosophic construction reduce it to a *kind,* under the idea of an indestructible power with two opposite and counter-acting forces. The intelligence in the one tends to *objectize* itself, and in the other to *know* itself in the object.[26]

This, then, is clearly the direction in which he would have developed the topic in Chapter XIII, where (he tells us): "it will probably appear . . . that deeming it necessary to go back much further than Mr. Wordsworth's subject required or permitted, I have attached a meaning to both fancy and imagination, which he had not in view." [27]

That is said at the end of Chapter XII, where Coleridge reverts for a moment to the issue between himself and Wordsworth. Look deep enough and the alternative: *either* kind *or* degree becomes unreal. Indeed one who was inclined to consider too curiously might say that, in Chapter IV, he has hardly ceased opting for "kind" rather than "degree" as marking the difference between fancy and imagination, before he goes on to raise, at least implicitly, the question whether the difference between kind and degree is itself a difference in kind or only in degree! What matters is of course the actual nature of the relation between the two. Or rather, assuming that we already understand fairly well the nature of imagination and its place in Coleridge's system, the question is: what is fancy, and what place does *that* occupy in it? And if, at the end of our enquiry, there shall still remain an element of doubt or ambiguity about fancy, which we do not feel about imagination, it may transpire that that is not entirely Coleridge's fault but is due rather to a quality inherent in fancy itself.

In the first place, if, in the light of the foregoing, we regard fancy also as being, after all and in the deeper sense, a "degree" of intelligence as "seminal principle," we are granting her a place in that "ascending series of intermediate classes" between the lowest degree of the principle and the highest, of which life itself consists. That Coleridge regarded fancy in this light is suggested by a good many of his

observations. It is a series in which each lower degree, or intermediate class, has the higher degrees potential in it or, as Coleridge sometimes put it, is "irradiated" by them. "Nature in her ascent leaves nothing behind, but at each step subordinates and glorifies:—mass, crystal, organ, sensation, sentience, reflection." [28]

> Potential sensibility in its first epoch, or lowest intensity, appears as growth: in its second epoch, it shows itself as irritability or vital instinct. In both, however, the sensibility must have pre-existed, or rather pre-inhered, though as latent: or how could the irritability have been evolved out of the growth . . . or the sensibility out of the irritability . . . ? [29]

Animal, vegetable and mineral differ in kind, if any things do; yet they are all degrees of the one "seminal principle"; which is the kind of kinds. And, above the level at which consciousness begins, the same principle continues to apply as between the lower faculties or manifestations of intelligence and the higher. So, Wordsworth's deficiency in fancy sometimes lamed the expression of his imagination and in the *Table Talk* we find Coleridge expressly remarking that:

> 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.[30]

In short, fancy is given an indispensable place, and thus an honourable status, in "the world of intelligences with the whole system of their representations," which Chapter XIII promised it would "cause to rise up before you." [31]

But now let us place over against this some of the other things said about fancy. And first, as we have seen, it was not only Wordsworth, but Coleridge also who at first suspected, and then became convinced, that fancy somehow differs from imagination in kind, and *not* only in degree. Moreover it was this conviction that originally prompted him to go deeply into the whole subject. So far—in view of Coleridge's observations on the philosophical reduction of naïvely apprehended differences in kind to actual differences in degree (*heat* in ice)—the difficulty can perhaps be met by phrasing the argument somewhat in this way: 'On the analogy of the natural world, the difference between fancy and imagination is more like the difference between one natural kind and another than it is like the difference between two species

of one kind or genus. It is true that even the former difference is ultimately to be seen as a difference in degree only; true also that the relation between nature and mental operation is not in fact merely one of analogy—that they are themselves ultimately of one kind: but let that pass, since at the moment it is more important to stress the divergence between fancy and imagination than the unity.'

Does this make it all plain sailing? Not quite. Let us take one more look at the two paragraphs at the close of Chapter XIII. Whereas the secondary imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate," fancy "has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites." What is it, then, that imagination dissolves and dissipates? Clearly, the same fixities and definites which fancy can only rearrange. Fancy is the *aggregating* power; it combines and aggregates given units of already conscious experience; whereas the secondary imagination "modifies" the units themselves. Moreover, in doing so, it shows itself to be "identical in the *kind* of its agency" with the primary imagination, on which all conscious experience is based. It is *one with* the primary imagination (that is, the seminal principle) in a way that fancy, distinguishingly, *is not*. For it modifies "sense" itself,[32] that common sense, or koenaesthesis, which fancy must take, and leave, as it finds it. "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 the last mania." [33] It was because Wordsworth had so little idea of all this that he managed to make at once too much and too little of the difference between the two.

But, besides its characteristic activity, fancy also has a merely passive role. For, in his three chapters on Hartley's associationist psychology, Coleridge speaks of "the universal law of the passive fancy and the mechanical memory." [34] Schemes which promise an artificial *memory,* "in reality can only produce a confusion and debasement of the fancy." [35] And again, our fancy is "always the ape, and too often the adulterator and counterfeit of our memory." [36] This linking of it with *memory* indicates fancy's playing a part in the genesis of consciousness at an altogether earlier stage than literature could be concerned with. Besides "playing with" the fixities and definites that are given to it, fancy has evidently taken a hand in producing them—in rendering them the very fixities they are. And, especially in his references to this stage, the pejorative vocabulary (*dead, mechanical, artificial, ape, adul-*

terator) strongly suggests, no longer a natural degree within the one ascending series that manifests the seminal principle of mind or intelligence, but an almost hostile interference with it from a source outside itself.

Here, then, is the final ambiguity. Our attempt at resolving it will take the form of a general account of the nature of fancy, as we suppose Coleridge to have conceived it, taking into consideration, not only his specific observations on that subject, but the important place it occupies in the *Biographia Literaria,*[37] and bringing to bear on it our whole understanding, for what it is worth, of Coleridge's system.

In the first place, then, fancy has its proper and beneficent place in the genesis of consciousness as a whole and, particularly, in the conversion of perceptions into memories. But it is easily debased. In its debased form it is, as *passive* fancy, more or less identical with precisely those characteristics of human perception, which it is the function of imagination (by modifying perception) to overcome, namely: "the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude," in consequence of which "we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not . . ." or, more shortly, "the lethargy of custom." [38] The mind is in thrall to the lethargy of custom, when it feeds solely on images which itself has taken no active part in producing. But there is more to it than this. For the debasement of *active* fancy carries this process further. Where the mind deliberately *chooses* to feed only upon such images, there you have the debasement of active fancy; and there the lethargy of custom becomes that deliberate practice of reducing "the *conceivable* within the bounds of the picturable," at which Coleridge never tired of pointing his warning finger.[39]

The significance of active fancy thus extends far beyond the limits of literature, in which indeed it is least likely to occur in a debased form, and where its debasement perhaps does least harm. Fancy is at work, for instance, wherever the unobservable in nature is converted, for handling, into supposed observables. Instances of it therefore would include, not only the *Rape of the Lock* and Mercutio's speech in *Romeo and Juliet,* but also the epicycles of Ptolemaic astronomy (so far as they were not conceived as pure geometry), the psychology of Locke and Hume, Hartley's "vibratiuncles," phlogiston, the ether of classical physics, the Rutherford-Bohr planetary atom, and all other scientific hypotheses not distinguishable from some fancied 'model.' [40]

Passive fancy and passive memory are closely allied, if not indis-

tinguishable. But active fancy involves a certain "emancipation" from the order of time and space,* and it is this very emancipation that makes possible the higher faculty of *understanding*. Nevertheless it is a very different sort of emancipation from time and space than the one which *reason* (in Coleridge's sense) alone makes possible. This however is to anticipate. Moreover it would appear to be this memory-cum-fancy that gives rise to "fixities and definites"; and it follows from the whole tenor of Coleridge's thought that these latter include objects themselves ("all objects [*as* objects]"), the "deadness" of natural objects as such being that very "outness" of theirs which memory-cum-fancy has helped to project.

Lastly, active fancy is exercised by a personally biased will ("the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE")* and not by the absolutely free will, which (again anticipating) is one with reason, nor by an individual will acting in accord with reason.

Imagination *is,* and fancy is *not,* "the very power of growth and production";† and we have seen how it is *this* power which, as its own two opposite forces, works at all stages of the process, at first of nature and then of consciousness leading to self-consciousness. And yet the "outness" of objects is or has been, itself, an essential element in that process at its later stages! It is even described as "a law of our nature." ‡ It would seem then that fancy *is* part of the process; and there is much in Coleridge to suggest that it is. But in that case why should fancy be so very decidedly *not* a power of growth and production? The process is the whole process that constitutes nature and man, so that, if fancy is no part of the process, its provenance must lie somehow outside of nature and of man; and again there is a good deal in Coleridge to suggest that it does. There *is* ambiguity[41] then; but it could be argued that it is an inevitable one, and we shall be less inclined to fix the blame on Coleridge's system, if we reflect that there is a similar ineluctable ambiguity about the cosmic status of evil. The specific relation he detected between fancy and death points up such a parallel without pressing it. Matter itself (which is the *violent* "out-

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* See Chapter 6, p. 75, above.

† See p. 77, above.

‡ See Chapter 5, p. 65, above.

ness" of objects—outness congealed into absolute and idolatrous detachment) is evil as entailing the agonies of death and bereavement, but beneficent as enabling the maximum individualization of detached spirits—and, therewith, the birth of freedom and of love.

We might well leave it at that. But we are tempted to essay one further step towards a resolution of the ambiguity, or the paradox—a resolution that is perhaps implicit in Coleridge's system, though we believe he never explicitly propounded it. We have seen something of the nature of those "two opposite and counteracting forces" [42] in looking at the *Theory of Life* and the *Biographia Literaria,* and we may recall from the first paragraph of Chapter XIII of the *Biographia* that the one of them "tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or *find* itself in this infinity," and again, from the previous Chapter XII, that "The intelligence in the one tends to *objectize* itself, and in the other to *know* itself in the object." [42] Now imagination is precisely an advance of the mind towards knowing itself in the object. We have seen also that it is characteristic of the relation of polarity that, although one pole, one force, cannot be without the other, yet there is always also a *predominance* of one over the other; further, that it is upon these varying and alternating predominances that all evolution, and indeed life itself depends. But how could such predominances occur, if the two forces were not "oppugnant" as well as "opponent"—if it were not that each force—from its own point of view, so to speak—*is* literally *"striving"* for total ascendancy over the other—in blind ignorance, or ruthless disregard, of the inevitable consequence: that, if it 'had its way,' polarity, and with it life itself, would cease.[43]

Can we say then that, in the case of fancy, or in some cases of it, there is an *undue* predominance of the (centripetal) force that seeks to apprehend or find itself by "objectizing"; whereas, in the case of imagination, the two forces are working in harmony, that is to say, with the necessary, but without any undue, predominance of the one over the other? And is this the "irremissive though gentle and unnoticed control (*laxis effertur habenis*)" which is "retained by the will and understanding," when the poet

> 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 appropriated the name of imagination.[44]

Imagination is, or it is striving to become, the ultimate polarity of self and world experienced *as such*. In its fullness that experience would be the reconciliation of the two forces, not their cessation. But the finite activity of poetry, like every other motion, still requires a predominance, however slight, of the one pole over the other. This is exemplified in the fine contrast which Coleridge detected between Shakespeare and Milton—"his compeer, not rival":

> While the former darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and flood; the other attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own IDEAL. All things and modes of action shape themselves anew in the being of MILTON; while SHAKESPEARE becomes all things, yet for ever remaining himself.[45]

But it is also exemplified in the contrast, which at the same time deepened the affinity, between Wordsworth on the one hand and Coleridge himself on the other. They are both of them "nature-poets" and both of them also "mind-poets," if the expression may be allowed. But for Wordsworth, although the sub-title of his longest and perhaps greatest poem is "The Growth of the Poet's Mind," it was nature that was the predominating factor in the polarity between mind and nature. He looked for, and found, inspiration in nature considered, or certainly *felt,* as another being altogether rather than as counterpoint to his own mind. Coleridge also looked for, and sometimes found, inspiration in the same way. But his was a mind in which the opposite factor predominated—which was more inclined therefore to consider, and certainly to *feel,* how

> We receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does Nature live.*

It was out of this subtle difference of emphasis, discovered, explored and fruitfully mated by the two poets during those walks in the Quan-

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* *Ode to Dejection.*

tock hills, that the *Lyrical Ballads* came into being. In that volume, Coleridge says

> it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as *to transfer from our inward nature* a human interest and a semblance of truth . . . Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, 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* . . .[46]

The conversations, we are told, "turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry," which are on the one hand "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature," and on the other "the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination."[47] But the poems were nearly all by Wordsworth, and we believe it does no disservice to Coleridge's own greatness as a poet (with which this book happens not to be concerned) to suggest that what Wordsworth illustrated by his poetry for poetic experience Coleridge demonstrated in his thought for all experience: namely that the two cardinal points of poetry are such because they embody the two cardinal and constitutive principles of the human spirit itself, antagonists indeed and poles apart, yet still, and somehow in spite of themselves, two forces of the one power.