

COOCH BEHAR PANCHNAN BARMA UNIVERSITY COOCH BEHAR

B.A. HONOURS IN ENGLISH

UNDER CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM

B.A. HONOURS IN ENGLISH: 5TH SEMESTER

Q. Critical Analysis of Coleridge's Imagination and Fancy

In eighteenth century literary theory, imagination and fancy were regarded as a mode of memory. Hobbes defined imagination as “nothing but decaying sense” and concluded that, “imagination and fancy are but one thing, which for divers consideration have divers meaning,” During renaissance period fancy was meant, ‘the less responsible king of imagination.’ On the other hand, Wordsworth in his preface ‘to the poems of 1815’ offers an illuminating idea on the functions of fancy and imagination detailing the former as a ‘capricious’ and ‘evanescent’ creative power.

In opposition to these theories Coleridge developed his theory of imagination. In chapter four of ‘Biographia literaria’, Coleridge tells that fancy and imagination are not two names with one meaning or the lower and higher degree of the one and the same power but are two distinct and widely different faculties.

In chapter thirteen of Biographia Coleridge introduces the distinction between two kinds of imagination- primary and secondary.

Primary Imagination:- It is the faculty by which we perceive the world around us. It is merely the power of receiving impressions of the external through our senses. It perceives objects both in their parts and as a whole. It is an involuntary act of the mind. The human mind receives impressions and sensation from the outside world, unconsciously and involuntarily it imposes some sort of order on those impressions, reduces them to size and shape, so that the mind is able to form a clear image of the outside world. It is in this way that clear and coherent perception becomes possible. Coleridge describes primary imagination as the “mysterious power” which can extract “hidden ideas and meanings” from objective data.

Secondary Imagination :

The primary imagination is universal and possessed by all. The secondary imagination makes artistic creation possible. It requires an effort of the will and conscious effort. It works upon what is perceived by the primary imagination; its raw materials are the sensations and impressions supplied to it by the primary imagination. It selects and orders the raw materials and reshapes and remodels it into objects of beauty. It is 'ensemblastic', and it 'dissolves, diffuses and dissipates, in order to create.' The secondary imagination is at the root of all poetic activity. It is the power which reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite and discordant qualities and Coleridge calls it a magical synthetic power. It fuses the various faculties of the soul, subjective with objective, the human mind with external nature, the spiritual with the physical or material. The primary and secondary imagination do not differ from each other in kind. The difference is only of degree. The secondary imagination is more active, more conscious and more voluntary than the primary one.

Fancy:

Imagination and fancy differ in kind and nature. Whereas, imagination is creative, fancy, which is common possession of man, is not creative. It is a mechanical process which receives the elementary images which come to it readymade and without altering these; fancy reassembles them into a different order from that in which it was received. It only combined what it perceives into beautiful shapes, but does not fuse or unify. It is a kind of memory that arbitrarily brings together images, and even when brought together, these images continue to retain their separate and individual properties. They receive no colouring or modification from the mind.

Coleridge has called fancy the 'aggregative and associative power'. However, Wordsworth argued that, "to aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to imagination as to the fancy." But Coleridge explained that aggregating or collecting is beneath the dignity of imagination because it not necessarily an act of uniting. The materials have to be assembled before imagination can get to work and make the transformation and synthesis. Fancy has to do this act of collecting and so fancy presupposes imagination.

