THE ROMANTIC TREND: A
COMPARISON OF REPRESENTATIVE PRE-ROMANTIC
AND ROMANTIC ENGLISH WRITERS

BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

About the middle of the eighteenth century a group of English poets and critics began to exhibit signs of the revolt against the rule of neo-classicism which eventually matured as the romanticism of the nineteenth century. There was considerable groping in the dark on the part of the members of this group, a groping which is reflected in the numerous inconsistencies and conflicts which appear in their critical writings.

Among this group of men were Joseph and Thomas Warton and Richard Hurd, each of whom published books or essays in the 1750's which showed definite signs of dissatisfaction with certain facets of neo-classicism, and as the century wore on these signs appeared in their later publications. At the same time there is evident a conflict between their neo-classical background with its emphasis on reason, universal nature, and reality and their conviction that the best interests of poetry were not served by this emphasis.

This study will compare the literary theories of the pre-romantic movement as represented by Bishop Hurd, Joseph Warton, and Thomas Warton with those of the romantic movement as represented by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. The purpose of this comparison is to show that the latter movement rep-
resents a narrowing of the literary theories of the pre-romantic poets, who were unable for the most part to arrive at any adequate solution to the problem raised by their conflicting neo-classical and romantic pulls.

The investigation will depend for the most part upon primary sources, not upon paraphrases of these sources by students of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a few cases use has been made of secondary sources which contain direct quotations from primary sources not otherwise available to this writer or which make a contribution quite valuable to the field encompassed by this study. Moreover, the investigation will be primarily limited to direct and implied statements of literary theories as contained in writings essentially critical in scope and in letters and will not attempt to analyze the practice followed in the actual writing of poetry by the individual poets. Frequent recourse will be had to quoting directly from the original sources in order to better illustrate the theories of literature held by each of the seven men previously named.
CHAPTER II

SHIFTING CONCEPTS OF KEY WORDS AND TERMS

In comparing the critical theories of any group or groups of writers, a most important prerequisite is an examination and comparison of key words and terms which appear in the critical writings of the period. This is certainly necessary in studying the critical theories of the pre-romantic and romantic periods as represented by the men previously named. Unfortunately, it is sometimes not a simple matter to determine precisely what poets and critics mean by the terms they use, and this is particularly true of Bishop Hurd and the two Wartons. In contrast with a writer such as Coleridge, who often stops to define in so many words his concept of a term, Hurd and the Warton brothers seldom bother to render that service. As a consequence it has been necessary to note each occurrence of a key term in the writings of these three men and from the context attempt to draw an inference as to the concept held by the writer. The same process was sometimes necessary in the case of the nineteenth-century writers, but not nearly so often. The fact that Hurd and the Wartons are not always consistent in their use of terms adds to the difficulty of deriving accurate definitions of important words.

Of the many terms found in the critical writings of the seven men under consideration, there are six (excluding imagination and fancy
which are taken up in the chapter immediately following) which are used repeatedly in the criticism of these men and which might be considered key terms in so far as an understanding of critical doctrines is concerned: (1) nature, (2) sublime, (3) taste, (4) genius, (5) imitation, and (6) sensibility.

Nature. One of the most important terms used by both romantic and pre-romantic writers and, at the same time, one of the most difficult to define is the term nature. Actually no single definition could be worked out that would adequately explain every use of the word. So far as the two Wartons and Hurd are concerned there seem to be three fundamental meanings assigned to the word. First of all, as a result of their closeness to the neo-classical scene, nature might mean the typical, the universal, the general, or, as Professor Lovejoy has stated it, "the universal and immutable in thought, feeling, and taste; what has always been known, what everyone can immediately understand and enjoy." Thomas Warton, for example, condemns the Italians of Ariosto's day for departing from the normal and general by using unnatural events and improbable adventures, thus not adhering "to that decorum which nature dictated, and which the example and the precept of antiquity had authorized." His elder brother Joseph follows the same trend of thought when he comments on the similarity which sometimes exists between the descriptions of two authors:


I am sensible . . . that a want of seeming originality arises frequently, not from a barrenness and timidity of genius, but from the invincible necessity, and the nature of things: that the works of those who profess an art, whose essence is imitation, must needs be stamped with a close resemblance to each other, since the objects material or animate, extraneous or internal, which they all imitate, lie equally open to the observation of all, and are perfectly similar. Descriptions, therefore, that are faithful and just, must be uniform and alike.¹

He also lays stress upon "those fundamental rules which nature and necessity dictate and demand to be observed."² Nature as the universal and general is also meant by Bishop Hurd when he states that truth in poetry is "an expression as conforms to the general nature of things, falsehood, that which, however suitable to the particular instance in view, doth yet not correspond to such general nature."³

A second way in which nature is used by the three pre-romantics is in referring to the exterior world of things, events, and manners and customs, as when Thomas Warton praises Chaucer's description of the "grand objects of nature" and Froissart's "striking pictures of life, drawn without reserve or affectation from real nature."⁴ Joseph Warton states that "nature is more powerful than fancy . . . . Events that have actually happened, are, after all, the properest subjects for poetry."⁵ Hurd expresses a somewhat similar idea in commenting that

² Ibid., p. 21.
⁵ J. Warton, op. cit., I, 249-250.
the old romances "began with reflecting an image indeed of the feudal
manners, but an image magnified and distorted by unskilful designers"
and that common sense therefore became "offended with these perversions
of truth and nature."1 It must be noted, however, that he objects
strenuously to limiting nature to the external world or, as Hurd ex-
presses it, "the known and experienced course of affairs in this
world." He would extend nature to include the realm of imagination
and the supernatural, but only if it has a basis in popular belief or
superstition:

The poet has a world of his own, where experience has less to
do, than consistent imagination.
He has, besides, a supernatural world to range in. He has
Gods, and Faeries, and Witches at his command. . . . Thus in the
poet's world, all is marvellous and extraordinary; yet not un-
natural in one sense, as it agrees to the conceptions that are
readily entertained of those magical and wonder-working Natures.2

The third meaning which nature may have in the writings of the
two Wartons and Hurd is that of human nature or natural instincts.
Thomas Warton writes of the medieval minstrels who "poured forth sponta-
aneous rhymes in obedience to the workings of nature" and of "the
genuine efforts of nature working more at large in uncultivated minds."
Later on, in discussing the works of the Scotch poet Gawen Douglass he
declares that they exemplify the "original workings of genuine nature."3
The younger Warton occasionally limits nature more closely to feeling,

1Edith J. Morley (ed.), Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance
with the Third Elizabethan Dialogue (London: Henry Frowde, 1911),

2Ibid., pp. 135-138.

3T. Warton, History of English Poetry, I, xxiv, II, 247,
455-456.
as when he insists that Wyatt is not equal to Surrey "in elegance of sentiment, in nature and sensibility. His feelings are disguised by affectation, and obscured by conceit."\(^1\) His brother Joseph evidently had human nature in mind when, in his criticism of Pope, he wrote:

Representations of undisguised nature, and artless innocence, always amuse and delight. The simple notions which uncivilized nations entertain of a future state, are many of them beautifully romantic, and some of the best subjects for poetry.\(^2\)

Hurd, in his famous defense of imagination near the end of his Letters, in one place defines nature as "the real powers and properties of human nature."\(^3\)

The four nineteenth-century poets follow the example of their predecessors in using nature to refer both to human nature and to the exterior world but avoid using it to mean the universal and general. Of the two meanings which the men of both centuries use in common, that which refers to the external world is most often used by the nineteenth-century writers. Coleridge, for example, defines nature as the sum total of existence: "Whatever is representable in the forms of Time and Space, is Nature," and "now the sum of all that is merely objective we will henceforth call Nature." In his preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth stated that the poet

... considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other... He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man

\(^1\)Ibid., III, 42.
\(^2\)J. Warton, op. cit., II, 65.
\(^3\)Morley, op. cit., p. 138.
as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.¹

Less often nature is used to mean human nature, as when Shelley wrote in a letter dated November 16, 1819:

The 'Cabellos de Absolom' is full of the deepest and tenderest touches of nature. Nothing can be more pathetically conceived than the character of old David, and the tender and impartial love . . . with which he regards his . . . sons.²

Coleridge said that Shakespeare "was a child of nature, but it was of human nature and of the most important of human nature."³

Wordsworth and his three contemporaries used the term in one manner not found in the works of the two Wartons and Hurd: they thought of it often as the essence of things, as a spiritual force. In "On Poesy or Art" Coleridge states: "You must master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between Nature in the higher sense and the soul of man."⁴ Wordsworth held a similar concept of nature:

A great Poet ought . . ., to a certain degree, to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feelings, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things.⁵


⁴Coleridge, op. cit., II, 257, 259.

Again, in *The Prelude*, Book 13, l. 279-299:

Nature for all conditions wants not power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
The outside of her creatures, ... . . .
Of Nature have a passion in themselves,
That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him. . . .

Shelley wrote in a letter to Peacock dated January 26, 1819: "They [the Greeks] lived in a perpetual commerce with external nature, and nourished themselves upon the spirit of its forms."¹

To sum up briefly, both the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century poets used nature to mean either the external world or human nature. In addition, the pre-romantics adhered to the neo-classical concept of nature as the general and the universal, a concept which the romantic school did not share. The nineteenth century, however, added a new meaning to nature as a vital, spiritual force innate in every living thing and acting upon the poet.

**Sublime.** A second term used freely by both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets, more so by the former than by the latter, is the word *sublime*. It seems to have been one of Thomas Warton’s favorite words and occurs time after time in his *History of English Poetry and Observations on the Fairy Queen*; in fact, he uses it so indiscriminately that the term almost becomes meaningless, a fault which is apparent in his use of certain other terms. In one passage it may mean the pathetic; in another, the picturesque. In still others it means the majestic, the marvellous, the terrible, the supernatural or, on occasion, merely the unusual.

¹ Ingpen, op. cit., II, 666.
Although Coleridge is the only one who actually attempts to define what he means by the term, an examination of the word in its various contexts does reveal a certain similarity among the poets' uses of it. For both the pre-romantic and the romantic poet, the sublime challenges the imagination and carries a great deal of suggestiveness. In discussing Spenser's description of a cave as "a dreadful depth, how deepe no man can tell," Warton states that "our imagination is left at liberty to exert its utmost arbitrary stretch, to add fathom to fathom, and depth to depth, till it is lost in its own attempt to grasp the idea of that which is unbounded or infinite." It is a concealment of this kind from which "arises the Sublime."\(^1\)

To his brother Joseph it was not simply the gigantic: "It is well known, that the Egyptians, in all their productions of art, mistook the gigantic for the sublime, and greatness of bulk for greatness of manner." According to him, some causes of the sublime were extension, a sense of the vastness of the universe or of the omnipresence of God, and that which was picturesque or awe-inspiring.\(^2\)

Richard Hurd wrote that

Shakespeare . . . with a terrible sublime (which not so much the energy of his genius, as the nature of his subject drew from him) gives us another idea of the rough magic . . . of fairy enchantment. . . . The fancies of our modern bards are not only more gallant, but, on a change of the scene, more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers.\(^3\)

Hurd insisted that the poetry which was most sublime and creative

\(^{1}\) T. Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen, II, 256-257.

\(^{2}\) J. Warton, op. cit., I, 320, 350, 391; II, 72-74.

\(^{3}\) Morley, op. cit., pp. 111, 114.
addressed itself "solely or principally to the Imagination; a young and credulous faculty, which loves to admire and to be deceived."\(^1\)

Coleridge agreed with Hurd that the sublime resulted from a strong appeal to the imagination; moreover, one of the best ways of achieving this appeal was by creating an impression of the infinite, the unlimited. One of Coleridge's best illustrations of his concept of the sublime is recorded in Allsop's collection of his letters:

> When the whole and the parts are seen at once, as mutually producing and explaining each other as unity in multitude, there results shapeliness... Where neither whole nor parts [predominate] but unity as boundless or endless allness—the sublime. So I should say that the Savior praying on the mountain, the desert on the one hand, the sea on the other, the city at an immense distance below, was sublime. But I should say of the Savior looking towards the city... that he was majestic, and of the situation, that it was grand.\(^2\)

Coleridge thought that the best poetry called on the imagination "not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, ... the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image."\(^3\)

The other three nineteenth century poets by and large echo Coleridge's concept of the sublime in what little they have to say about it. Wordsworth calls the sublime "the lofty and universal in thought and imagination," and Keats writes in a letter that "Scott endeavours to throw so interesting and romantic a colouring into common

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1Ibid., p. 138.
2Coleridge, op. cit., II, 309.
and low Characters as to give them a touch of the Sublime."\(^1\)

**Taste.** The criticism of both the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century poets, particularly the former, contains numerous references to that very necessary faculty called taste, and the writers of both centuries agree rather closely in their definitions of it as an ability to enjoy, to judge, or to appreciate. Typical of the pre-romantic's use of the term was Thomas Warton's statement that "the scholars of that period wanted taste to read and admire them."\(^2\)

Shelley called taste "the sense of approximation" to the "order or rhythm . . . from which the hearer and the spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other," while Keats felt that taste was the ability to judge or appreciate beauty.\(^3\) Wordsworth and Coleridge also associated it with the faculty for enjoying or appreciating.\(^4\)

While Wordsworth and his contemporaries agree rather closely with the two Wartons and Hurd as to what taste is, there is some disagreement about its source. Both schools believed that taste was the product of experience and had to be cultivated. Joseph Warton, for

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example, stated that "correctness, and a just taste, are usually not attained but by long practice and experience in any art."\(^1\) Coleridge wrote that the poet should govern his style

... by the principles of grammar, logic, psychology! In one word by such a knowledge of the facts ... that most appertain to his art, as, if it have been governed and applied by good sense, and rendered instinctive by habit, becomes the representative and reward of our past conscious reasonings, insights, and conclusions and acquires the name of TASTE.\(^2\)

Coleridge, however, did not support the eighteenth-century theory that true taste was innate, even though it did have to be cultivated by experience, because it was founded on universal reason, a theory which, in spite of intermittent waverings, both Wartons supported in occasional passages in their writings.\(^3\) Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats each denied the validity of a spontaneous, innate taste. "Taste," wrote Coleridge, "is the intermediate faculty which connects the active with the passive powers of our nature, the intellect with the senses."\(^4\) Near the end of his preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth asserted that "an accurate taste in poetry ... is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition."\(^5\) Keats underscored the same idea in a letter of April 24, 1818: "There is but one way for me. The road lies through

\(^{1}\)J. Warton, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 98.

\(^{2}\)Coleridge, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 64.


\(^{4}\)Coleridge, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 227.

\(^{5}\)Wordsworth, "Observations," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 517.
application, study, and thought.\textsuperscript{1}

Thus, while both schools were alike in feeling that taste could be developed and refined through training, the nineteenth century rejected the idea that it was an innate faculty. It might become intuitional or, as Coleridge phrased it, be "rendered instinctive" by habitual use, but it was not innate.

**Genius.** By most neo-classicists the term \textit{genius} was used to indicate the possession of exceptional natural ability, and the two Wartons and Hurd used the word primarily in this sense. Joseph Warton thought that genius was a special natural ability which distinguished the poet from the mere versifier. "The most accurate observation of dramatic rules without genius," he wrote, "is of no effect."\textsuperscript{2}

Thomas Warton's inclination to use his terms rather loosely has been previously mentioned, and his use of \textit{genius} is another illustration of this fact. At times he uses it to mean exceptional natural ability, as when he calls Gray a "real poet" and "one who has shewn us that all true genius did not expire with Spenser."\textsuperscript{3} At other times \textit{genius} is used to indicate merely that the poet or writer is better fitted for one particular type of composition than for another, and at times one wonders whether Warton thinks the writer under scrutiny is very well fitted for either one. For example, he berates Skelton for his coarseness and obscenity and then goes on to write:

\textsuperscript{1}Stephens, Beck, Snow, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 627-628.  
\textsuperscript{2}J. Warton, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 69-70.  
His subjects are often as ridiculous as his metre; but he
sometimes debases his matter by his versification. On the
whole, his genius seems better suited to low burlesque, than
to liberal and manly satire.¹

Warton hardly gives the impression of believing that Skelton's talent,
such as it is, is anything exceptional. A similar thought is contained
in such statements as "the natural complexion of his genius is of the
moral and didactic cast" and "whose genius seems better adapted to de-
scriptive than religious subjects."²

Neither Shelley nor Keats has too much to say about a definition
of genius. Shelley is the closer of the two to the pre-romantic concept
held by the Wartons and Hurd. He wrote in a letter to Thomas Medwin,
"Poetry, although its source is native and involuntary, requires in its
development severe attention." Genius is thus innate ability. For Keats
genius was a creative power: "The Genius of Poetry must work out its
own salvation in a man: it cannot be matured by law and precept, but by
sensation & watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create
itself."³

In this statement Keats comes close to the views of Coleridge
and Wordsworth, both of whom conceived genius to be a creative power.

In his "Essay Supplementary to Preface" (1815) Wordsworth wrote:

Of genius the only proof is, the act of doing well what is
worthy to be done, and what was never done before. . . .
Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual
universe: or . . . the application of powers to objects on which


²Ibid., I, 30; II, 448.

³Forman, op. cit., VII, 122.
they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown.\footnote{Wordsworth, "Essay Supplementary to Preface," op. cit., p. 350.}

Coleridge had a great deal to say about genius. In the first place, it is more than mere talent:

I am aware, that in advanced stages of literature, when there exist many and excellent models, a high degree of talent, combined with taste and judgment, and employed in works of imagination, will acquire for a man the name of a great genius.\footnote{Coleridge, op. cit., I, 24.}

His writings, Coleridge added, may even become more popular than if he were a true genius. Some of the component parts of genius which he listed were a profound sensibility, good sense, fancy, imagination, and method. Elsewhere Coleridge compared genius to "the power of doing something new" or "a creative power."\footnote{Ibid., I, 30, II, 13, 268; T. M. Raysor (ed.), Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), pp. 52, 404.} Coleridge's concept of genius is well summed up in the following statement:

To perceive and feel the Beautiful, the Pathetic and the Sublime in Nature, in Thought, or in Action--this combined with the power of conveying such Perceptions and Feelings to the minds and hearts of others under the most pleasurable Forms of Eye and Ear--this is poetic Genius.\footnote{Coburn, op. cit., p. 151; J. Warton, op. cit., I, 108.}

Coleridge has thus succeeded in setting down in writing what Joseph Warton probably had vaguely in mind when he said that genius was "extremely rare . . . The man of rhymes may be easily found; but the genuine poet, of a lively plastic imagination, the true maker or creator, is . . . uncommon."
Imitation. In the eighteenth century the term imitation had, generally speaking, two broad meanings. The first was that of literary imitation—following the example set by another writer, particularly the ancient Greek and Roman authors—and included the imitation of themes, modes of approach, techniques, and forms. It was this doctrine of literary imitation which Richard Hurd defended in his essay On Imitation, and which Thomas Warton decried when he wrote that "the universal ambition of rivalling those new patterns of excellence, the faultless models of Greece and Rome, produced that bane of invention, IMITATION."¹

The second was that of imitation of nature, and by nature the two Wartons and Hurd had in mind that which was general or universal, as when Hurd wrote,

Truth may be followed too closely in works of imitation. . . . For, the artist, when he should give a Copy of nature, may confine himself too scrupulously to the exhibition of particulars, and so fail of representing the general idea of the kind. . . . We see then that in deviating from particular and partial, the poet more faithfully imitates universal truth.²

Thomas Warton expressed a similar idea when he said that heroic poetry should "compound rather than copy nature."

The three pre-romantics seem primarily to reduce imitation to description, though to description in a very broad sense, as when Joseph Warton indicates that poets may describe "objects material or animate, extraneous or internal" in a passage quoted earlier in this chapter to illustrate his theory of nature. According to this statement of principle, description could include persons or things, ideas or objects.

²Hurd, op. cit., I, 256.
The elder Warton had earlier stated that he did not believe that poetry which described purely the external world was "equal either in dignity or utility, to those compositions that lay open the internal constitution of man, and that IMITATE characters, manners, and sentiments."¹

Coleridge consistently defines imitation as a union of sameness and difference and hence not a mere copy as is the impression of a seal upon wax.

In all imitation two elements must coexist, and not only coexist, but must be perceived as coexisting. These two constituent elements are likeness and unlikeness, or sameness and difference, and in all genuine creations of art there must be a union of these disparities.

The composition of a poem is among the imitative arts; and imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the SAME throughout the radically DIFFERENT, or of the different throughout a base radically the same.²

In Campbell's report of Coleridge's lecture series of 1818-1819 there is a good illustration of this idea:

Copy is imperfect if the resemblance be not, in every circumstance, exact; but an imitation essentially implies some difference. The mind of the spectator, or the reader, . . . is not to be deceived into any idea of reality . . . ; neither . . . is it to retain a perfect consciousness of the falsehood of the presentation. There is a state of mind between the two, which may be properly called illusion, in which the powers of the mind are completely suspended; . . . the judgment is neither beguiled, nor conscious of the fraud, but remains passive.³

Wordsworth, when he suggested that the poet who "imitates passions" must remove "what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion," and Shelley, when he wrote that poetry "transmutes all that it touches" and "creates anew the universe," expressed a similar

¹J. Warton, op. cit., I, 49.
²Coleridge, op. cit., II, 56, 256.
³Rayson, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 321-322.
concept of imitation as a union of sameness and difference. Had Joseph Warton and Bishop Hurd shared this theory they would not have attempted to defend poets for turning out a description which bore a marked resemblance to that contained in the poem of another author by arguing, as Hurd did, that since poetry is an "original copying" of nature and since "in any supposed combination of circumstances, one train of thought is, generally most obvious, and occurs soonest to the understanding," it is inevitable that poets should resemble one another. Coleridge's idea that "imitation essentially implies some difference" made it unnecessary that, as Joseph Warton wrote, "descriptions . . . that are faithful and just, must be uniform and alike."

Sensibility. The final key term, sensibility, shows little or no shift in meaning from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, for both the pre-romantics and the romantics used it to show the capability of feeling or of arousing in the reader an intensity or sensitivity of emotion.

Thomas Warton thought that "the powers of imagination must be awakened and exerted . . . to heighten our natural sensibilities. It is not the head only that must be informed, but the heart must also be moved." He often used sensibility and feeling synonymously, as when he wrote that Spenser's poetry was the "careless exuberance of a warm imagination and a strong sensibility. . . . Spenser wrote rapidly from

his own feelings." 

His brother Joseph did not believe that true genius could reside "in a cold and phlegmatic constitution" but that "the same temperament and sensibility that make a poet or a painter, will be apt to make a lover and a debauchee." 

Coleridge believed that one of Wordsworth's excellencies was "a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man. . . ." 

Wordsworth also identified sensibility with feeling or a state of vivid awareness, and Shelley thought that Ariosto lacked the "gentle seriousness, the delicate sensibility, the calm and sustained energy, without which true greatness cannot be." He did not possess the "tender and solemn enthusiasm of Petrarch—or even the delicate moral sensibility of Tasso." 

Terms Peculiar to the Pre-Romantics. There are four important terms that appear repeatedly in the criticism of Hurd and the two Wartons which the romantic school makes little or no use of in its essays, letters, and other writings. The first of these terms is perspicuity, or clarity of expression. Thomas Warton praised Hawes for being greatly superior to his contemporaries in clear expression and ranked Wyatt below Surrey partly because he was inferior to the latter in "perspicuity of expression." 

A second important term is probability: a

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2 J. Warton, op. cit., I, vii-viii. 
3 Coleridge, op. cit., II, 122-123. 
correspondence to reality. The poet must show what could actually happen in real life. Joseph Warton insisted that adherence to the unities of time and place was necessary to maintain probability on the stage, while Hurd affirmed that "that, which passes in representation and challenges as it were, the scrutiny of the eye, must be truth itself, or something very nearly approaching to it." The third term, decorum, was a corollary of probability, and in general was used to refer to probability of manners and language. Joseph Warton, for example, said, "Complaints of immoderate heat and wishes to be conveyed to cooling caverns, when uttered by the inhabitants of Greece, have a decorum... which they totally lose in the character of a British shepherd." The fourth term was propriety: the quality of being proper or fitting to the occasion. The mixture of comic and serious elements was one of the most frequently cited breaches of propriety. Thomas Warton pointed out that "neither the writers nor the spectators saw the impropriety, nor paid a separate attention to the comic and the serious part of these motley scenes" in the early morality plays, and his brother Joseph stated that "such incongruities" as "strokes of pleasantry and humour" in a "grave and majestic" poem certainly offended propriety.

Wordsworth and his contemporaries ignore propriety and decorum completely, and only Coleridge has anything to say about perspicuity.

1 J. Warton, op. cit., I, 74-75; Morley, op. cit., p. 140.
2 J. Warton, op. cit., I, 4.
and probability. Even his references to these two terms are negligible. For example, he tempers his recommendation that a poem be perspicuous by adding, "It is enough, if a work be perspicuous to those for whom it is written, and 'Fit audience find, though few.'"

Terms Peculiar to the Romantics. The romantic poets added practically no new terms to their critical vocabulary; in fact, there appear to be only two new terms of any consequence. One of these is ventriloquism, a term used only by Coleridge and that on but a very few occasions. The term is not important in understanding his critical theories, for he merely used it to refer to the fault of a writer's expressing his own personal feelings or opinions through the characters of his poem. An example of his use of this term is his censure of Jonson for his ventriloquism: "Ventriloquism, because Sejanus is a puppet out of which the poet makes his own voice appear to come."

Both Schiller and Wordsworth are also criticized for occasionally displaying this fault. "A poem does not admit argumentation," insisted Coleridge. "I have no admiration for the practice of ventriloquizing through another man's mouth." 2

The other term is Negative Capability, a term which Keats used only once, but of which an understanding is necessary if one is to form an adequate concept of Keats' philosophy of life and poetry. The term appears in a letter to George and Thomas Keats (December 22, 1817):

1Coleridge, op. cit., II, 120.

2Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 53-54, 394, 411.
It struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.¹

It was Keats' belief that the only way of grasping truth was by means of the imagination.² Through sympathy and intuition the imagination was capable of embracing truth, or "the reality of life," a truth which, since it is realized intuitively, cannot be explained to the satisfaction of reason and hence must be always accompanied by "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts." Coleridge, said Keats, after intuitively glimpsing a ray of truth, would lose it in his attempt to explain it logically to his reason. Coleridge was thus, according to Keats, frustrating his search for truth "from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge," by trying, in other words, to explain away every uncertainty and doubt.

As Bate points out, Keats himself attempted to practice Negative Capability.³ In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, the poet wrote:

I am, however, young, writing at random, straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness, without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion.

¹Forman, op. cit., VI, 104.
²Cf. Walter Jackson Bate, Negative Capability: the Intuitive Approach in Keats (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 16-25, on which the following exposition is largely based.
³Ibid., pp. 17-18.
Yet, may I not in this be free from sin? May there not be superior beings amused with any graceful, though instinctive, attitude my mind may fall into as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer?  

Keats is, in short, endeavoring to remain "content with half-knowledge."

General Summary. Considered in toto, the manner in which the key terms, nature, sublime, taste, genius, imitation, and sensibility, were used by the pre-romantic and the romantic schools reveals a narrowing trend on the part of the latter, for the poets of the nineteenth century dropped some meanings which their predecessors gave to the terms and also tended to limit the meanings by defining the words more accurately and specifically. The same narrowing trend is evident in the fact that the romantic school makes but negligible use of probability, decorum, propriety, and perspicuity, four terms which recur throughout the critical writings of the pre-romantics and the emphasis of which shows that the pull of the neo-classical school was still rather strong upon them.

1Forman, op. cit., VII, 258.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPT OF THE IMAGINATION

In order to compare the pre-romantic and the romantic concepts of imagination, it is first of all necessary to determine what thoughts concerning the imagination each writer of a period held in common with his contemporaries. This can best be accomplished by commencing with an examination of each individual author's theory of imagination.

Pre-Romantic Concepts of Imagination

**Thomas Warton.** The younger of the two Warton brothers thought of the imagination as primarily a creative faculty, often linking it with invention or inventive poetry. Examples are given to illustrate the "creative imagination" of both Sackville and Spenser, and in comparing the latter poet with Ariosto he praises Spenser's imagination as compared with the Italian poet's lack of a "picturesque invention."

Warton also expresses the opinion that *The Pastime of Pleasure*

...is almost the only effort of imagination and invention which had yet appeared in our poetry since Chaucer. ... Hawes has shown no inconsiderable share of imagination, if not in inventing romantic action, at least in applying and enriching the general incidents of the Gothic fable. In the creation of allegoric imagery he has exceeded Lydgate.¹

One purpose of this "creative imagination" was to enable a

writer to evoke or a reader to respond to visual imagery. For example, Warton writes that the tale told by Chaucer's knight "is the effort of a strong imagination, unacquainted with the selection and arrangement of images," and then quotes examples of "pathetic description," while other passages are characterized as "very great in the gothic style of painting" or "sublimely conceived." In his discussion of the old allegorical poem Le Chateau d'Amour, he says, "The structure of this castle is conceived with some imagination, and drawn with the pencil of romance."¹

Thomas Warton also links the imagination with the supernatural on numerous occasions. He reports that in Lydgate's Fall of Princes the figures of "spectres" are "sometimes finely drawn," thus opening a source "for a display of imagination." One such example is the figure of Liberty with "her hundred hands, her burning eyes, and disheveled tresses." Another composition which shows "some poetic imagination" is the ninth book of Gogge's translation of Falingeniou's Zodiac, where "a divine mystagogue opens to the poet's eyes an unknown region of infernal kings and inhabitants." Warton also notes that Spenser "transports us into some fairy region" which is "highly pleasing to the imagination."²

There is some rather strong evidence that Warton was inclined to make feeling or sensibility a product of the imagination. In the first place, he often calls attention to a poem's pathos, feeling, or sentiment after having first mentioned the imagination, sometimes in the

¹Ibid., II, 142, 144; I, 73.
²Ibid., II, 279-280, III, 367; Observations on the Fairy Queen, I, 269-270.
same sentence. That in itself might not be considered of too much importance, but it does take on added significance in the light of certain other statements which he makes. One such statement is that "the powers of imagination must be awakened and exerted, to teach elegant feelings, and to heighten our natural sensibilities." Moreover, he commends Nicholas Grimald for "a warmth of imagination, and the spirit of pathetic poetry" and also points out Spenser's "warmth of imagination, and, what was its consequence, his sensibility of temper." Finally, he uses the phrase "feeling imagination" in the introduction to his History of English Poetry:

> In the meantime, the manners, monuments, customs, practices, and opinions of antiquity, by forming so strong a contrast with those of our own times, and by exhibiting human nature and human inventions in new lights, in unexpected appearances, and in various forms, are objects which forcibly strike a feeling imagination.¹

The total impression of these excerpts is that Warton certainly must have thought of feeling as dependent on the imagination.

Although Thomas Warton participates to some extent in the tendency of eighteenth-century critics to use the two terms fancy and imagination synonymously, as when he states that something is "imagined with great strength of fancy" (as he did on several occasions in the History), there is nevertheless some evidence of an attempt to distinguish between a creative imagination and an imitative imagination or fancy. Clarissa Rinaker, in her study of Thomas Warton published in 1916, calls attention to Warton's contrast between the poetic faculties of Spenser and Ariosto:

Spenser's power, imagination, he described as creative, vital; it endeavours to body forth the unsubstantial, to represent by visible and external symbols the ideal and abstracted. Ariosto's faculty, fancy, he called imitative, lacking in inventive power.\(^1\)

Moreover, Warton points out that the medieval romances "rouse and invigorate all the powers of imagination" and "store the fancy with those sublime and alarming images, which true poetry best delights to display."\(^2\) Fancy thus differs from the imagination in being but a storehouse, not a creator, of images; in action it is the mind working with these concrete images formed from past experience, reassembling them into different combinations but not creating basically new images. Miss Rinaker does not point out that the passages which she cites are not the only ones where fancy is likened to the faculty for reproducing visual imagery; for example, in his discussion of the ancient Scandinavian poets Warton states, "True religion would have . . . suppressed their wild exertions of fancy, and banished that striking train of imagery," and later praises one of Gawen Douglass's descriptions by asserting that "the poetical beauties of this specimen will be relished by every reader who is fond of lively touches of fancy and rural imagery."\(^3\)

Further evidence, if such is needed, that Warton distinguished between fancy and imagination as two separate faculties is contained in a sentence found in the essay "On the Introduction of Learning into England." In this sentence he has occasion to refer to "those spectres


\(^2\) T. Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen, II, 322-323.

of illusive fancy, so pleasing to the imagination, which delight to hover in the gloom of ignorance and superstition." Warton not only indicates that the two are separate faculties; he also foreshadows Coleridge's observation that imagination must have fancy as its complement and implement.¹

Joseph Warton. The older of the Wartons agreed with his brother that imagination was creative. He insisted that a "creative and glowing imagination" alone could stamp a writer as a poet and that "the genuine poet, of a lively plastic imagination, the true maker or creator" was somewhat rare.² In 1753 Warton wrote that Shakespeare possessed a "lively creative imagination," with The Tempest serving as "the most striking instance of his creative power." In the same year he explained:

It is the peculiar privilege of poetry . . . to give Life and motion to immaterial beings; and form, and colour, and action, even to abstract ideas; to embody the Virtues, and Vices, and the Passions. . . . Prosopopoeia, therefore, or personification, conducted with dignity and propriety, may be justly esteemed one of the greatest efforts of the creative power of a warm and lively imagination.³

As Hoyt Trowbridge has previously affirmed, there are two other important aspects to Joseph Warton's concept of the imagination and its functions.⁴ The first of these was his associating the imagination with the ability to conceive or respond to visual imagery. He identified the

¹Coleridge, op. cit., I, 270.
⁴Trowbridge, op. cit., pp. 73-75.
imagination with the ability to raise "clear, complete, and circum-
stantial images," thus "turning readers into spectators." He announced
that the thing which constituted true poetry was the selection of "such
circumstances as are best adapted to strike the imagination by lively
pictures."¹

The other essential in Joseph Warton's theory of imagination
was his relating it to the marvelous and supernatural. He thought that
the superstitions of the East were "highly striking to the imagination"
and that poetry was the worse for having been forced through the influence
of reason to neglect "these fairy regions." He quoted James Thomson as an
example of one of a minority who thought that poetry had "suffered by
deserting these fields of fancy, and by totally laying aside the descrip-
tions of magic and enchantment." Warton directs the reader's attention
to "the terrible graces of our irregular Shakespeare, especially in his
scenes of magic and incantations," and then observes, "These gothic
charms are, in truth, more striking to the imagination than the
classical."²

There are times when Joseph Warton seems on the brink of making
the same distinction between the terms imagination and fancy as that
made by his brother. One such example is his statement that Thomson
possessed a "strong and copious fancy; he hath enriched poetry with a
variety of new and original images, which he painted from nature itself
and from his own actual observations."³ Here he comes close to implying

³ Ibid., I, 40.
the same concept of fancy as that held by Thomas Warton: that the fancy is a storehouse of images formed from past experiences. More commonly, however, fancy is merely a synonym for imagination, one example of which is his approval of the following two lines from the Essay on Criticism as an excellent metaphor for "the effects of the warmth of fancy":

Where beams of bright Imagination play,
The Memory's soft figures melt away.\(^1\)

It is true that Warton confines his use of fancy primarily, but not exclusively, to those places where imagination is related to visual imagery, but he is not consistent enough to warrant forming any but the general opinion that he thought of fancy as a synonym.

Richard Hurd. Bishop Hurd's concept of imagination bears a very close resemblance to that of the two Warton brothers in most respects. There is no indication, however, that Hurd conceived of two separate faculties of fancy and imagination as Thomas Warton apparently did; therefore, wherever the term fancy appears in an illustrative quotation, it is merely a synonym for imagination.

Hurd follows the pattern of the Wartons in making the imagination a creative faculty and linking it with invention. In discussing poetry as an imitation he explains that "every wondrous original, which ages have gazed at, as the offspring of creative fancy . . . is itself but a copy . . . from some brighter page of this vast volume of the universe." Considered in this sense, he says, "All is derived; all is unoriginal." He further explains, however, that "this primary or original

\(^1\) Ibid., I, 11. Cf. I, 348; II, 401-402.
copying, which in the ideas of Philosophy is *Imitation*, is, in the language of Criticism, called *INVENTION*.  

Bishop Hurd also joined the Wartons in assigning to the imagination the power of conceiving or responding to visual imagery. He asserted that "the proper office of true genius" was "to give life and colour to the selected circumstance, and imprint it on the imagination with distinctness and vivacity." In a note to Horace's *Art of Poetry* he wrote that "the Imagination is incessantly presenting to the mind an infinite variety of images or pictures."  

A third phase of his theory of imagination was the associating of it with the supernatural. "The poet," said Hurd, "has a world of his own, where experience has less to do, than consistent imagination. He has, besides, a supernatural world to range in." According to Hurd, one reason why the Gothic writers were more poetical than the classic was that their superstitions and their religious machinery were "more awakening to the imagination."

The current popular tales of Elves and Fairies were even fitter to take the credulous mind, and charm it into a willing admiration of the specious miracles, which wayward fancy delights in, than those of the old traditionary rabble of pagan divinities. And then, for the more solemn fancies of witchcraft and incantation, the horrors of the Gothic were above measure striking and terrible.  

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Summary of the pre-romantic concept. The use which the two Wartons and Bishop Hurd make of the term *imagination* reveals these three similarities: (1) each pronounces the imagination to be a

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1Hurd, op. cit., II, 111.
2Ibid., I, 105, II, 127.
creative faculty responsible for originality and inventiveness; (2) each links it with the marvelous and supernatural; (3) each identifies it with the ability of a writer to create and of a reader to respond to visual imagery. Only Thomas Warton, however, makes any reasonably clear-cut effort to distinguish between two separate faculties of fancy and imagination.

Romantic Concepts of Imagination

Samuel T. Coleridge. In the nineteenth century a determined effort was made by poets and critics to arrive at a concrete definition of the imagination, whereas there was no attempt by the pre-romantics at making a serious analysis of it. One of the more famous of the nineteenth-century statements is Coleridge's distinction between the primary and secondary imagination:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode or 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.

The primary imagination would seem to be a faculty common to all men, for it is the means by which they experience the external world. It receives external stimuli from the senses and turns them into

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1Cf. Trowbridge, op. cit., pp. 73-86.
2Coleridge, op. cit., II, 12.
perceptions within the mind; thus the primary imagination is the power through which one obtains knowledge and apprehension of any object or combination of objects in the world around him. The primary imagination can be considered as acting automatically and continuously inasmuch as it is not subject to the direction of the will but rather is activated by the senses. It is thus a purely perceptive process.

The secondary imagination is "an echo of the former" in that it works with the perceptions formed by the primary imagination, shaping them into new combinations and forms which are projected into art forms such as poetry. The secondary imagination, through a special kind of perception of unity in diversity, is able to blend and fuse "opposite or discordant qualities" into "one graceful and intelligent whole."

As a "synthetic" and "permeative" power, the secondary imagination takes the heterogeneous perceptions of primary imagination and reshapes them into what M. H. Abrams appropriately calls an "organic" unity; just as no single part can exist separately from a living organism, neither can an element which has gone into a creation of the imagination be removed without losing its identity and seriously impairing the whole. ¹

Thus a poem which is truly a product of the secondary imagination is marked by an interdependence of parts, each of which makes its own contribution to the whole and could not exist in and for itself alone.

Coleridge’s concept of the imagination as a "synthetic and magical power" which blends opposites into unity is clarified by his enumeration of the "opposite or discordant qualities" which are reconciled

¹Ibid., II, 12, 264; Abrams, op. cit., p. 175.
by the secondary imagination. Among them are

• sameness, with difference; • 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.¹

Thus is imagination the "SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."²

After his contrast of the primary and secondary imagination Coleridge proceeds to define fancy:

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. 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.³

According to Coleridge, the secondary imagination is an active power, for it "generates and produces a form of its own."⁴ Fancy, however, is passive, working only with "fixities and definites" which are the elementary images formed as a result of past sensory experiences. When the poet makes use of fancy, he arbitrarily chooses certain of these images and links them together by means of some accidental coincidence. Whereas the secondary imagination is "essentially vital" and creates a

¹Coleridge, op. cit., II, 12.
²Ibid., II, 13.
³Ibid., I, 202.
⁴Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 387.
form of its own, fancy merely reassembles images having no "connection natural or moral," as Coleridge phrased it. Fancy does not create images; it merely regroups images already formed, working "by means of a sort of juxtaposition." It brings together "images dissimilar in the main" through finding "some one point or more of likeness," while the imagination makes "one image or feeling . . . to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion to force many into one." As an example of fancy Coleridge quotes the following from Venus and Adonis:

    Full gently now she takes him by the hand,  
    A lily imprisoned in a jail of snow,  
    Or ivory in an alabaster band;  
    So white a friend ingsirs so white a foe! 

Here whiteness serves as the "one point of likeness" to link otherwise disparate objects.

Another passage from the same poem serves as an example of imagination:

    Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky;  
    So glides he in the night from Venus' eye! 

As Coleridge explains, several images and feelings are combined in these two lines "without effort and without discord, in the beauty of Adonis, the rapidity of his flight, the yearning, yet hopelessness, of the en-amored gazer, while a shadowy ideal character is thrown over the whole."}

The imagination (used in the sense of Coleridge's secondary

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1 Ibid.


3 Ibid.
imagination henceforth) as a creative power which integrates parts into a unified whole is the basic factor in Coleridge's concept of imagination. From what has already been said it should be clear that his concept incorporates the eighteenth century identification of the imagination with the ability of a writer to create and of a reader to respond to visual imagery. He also agrees with the pre-romantics in making the supernatural a province of the imagination. As an example there is his statement that his province in the volume of poems to be published by Wordsworth and him was to be "persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic," but with an attachment to them of "a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."¹

There is some indication that Coleridge accepted the common romantic assumption that the imagination was capable of identifying itself with its object of contemplation, of grasping its essence, thus associating sympathy with imagination. In Anima Poetae he calls imagination "the laboratory in which the thought elaborates essence into existence." There is also his statement that

. . . in poetry, whether metrical or unbound, the supernatural will be impressive and obtain a mastery over the Imagination and feelings, will tend to infect the reader, and draw him to identify himself with, or substitute himself for, the Person of the Drama or Tale, in proportion as it is true to Nature . . . .²

This is not to say that Coleridge believed the imagination to be an

¹Coleridge, op. cit., II, 6.
²Ibid., I, 267; Coburn, op. cit., p. 191.
intuitive source of basic truth. His philosophy itself is derived from reason, not imagination, for it is the former faculty which has "the power of acquainting itself with invisible realities or spiritual objects." \(^{1}\)

William Wordsworth. In many respects Wordsworth's concept of imagination was similar to that of his friend Coleridge. In fact, when he defined the imagination as "that chemical faculty by which elements of the most different nature and distant origin are blended together into one harmonious and homogeneous whole," it could almost have been Coleridge speaking, for this definition involves the imagination in the synthesizing of opposites or disparates into unity. \(^{2}\) His use of the term chemical indicates clearly the kind of unity Wordsworth had in mind. When chemical elements are put into a solution, there is an interaction of parts to maintain the solution; each element no longer has an independent identity but rather exists in the whole. Thus, when the imagination blends "elements of the most different nature" together, the resulting unity is marked by a similar interdependence of parts. The imagination, insisted Wordsworth,

... 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.

The imagination "shapes and creates"; it joins images in such a way that "they modify each other" and "unite and coalesce in just comparison." \(^{3}\)

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\(^{1}\) The Friend, quoted by Abrams, **op. cit.**, p. 314.

\(^{2}\) Stephens, Beck, Snow, **op. cit.**, p. 139.

Thus far Wordsworth would seem to be in perfect agreement with Coleridge, but near the beginning of the "Preface to Poems" (1815) Wordsworth, in listing "the powers requisite for the production of poetry," indicates a divergence of opinion by indicating that it is the purpose of both imagination and fancy "to modify, to create, and to associate." He thus makes fancy a creative power and indicates that imagination may work through association, both of which were ideas Coleridge strongly opposed. Wordsworth later expanded on his views in the "Preface":"\[\text{To the mode in which Fancy has already been characterized as the power of evoking and combining, or, as my friend, Mr. Coleridge has styled it, "the aggregative and associative power," my objection is only that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose. Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent. Directly reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination. She recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite.}\]

Wordsworth here points out a twofold difference between the fancy and the imagination: (1) the materials used may be different; (2) the materials may be combined "under a different law, and for a different purpose." In the first place, writes Wordsworth, fancy employs materials which by their very nature may not be susceptible to change or modification, whereas imagination requires "the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite." When the imagination frames a comparison, "the images invariably modify each other" into a unity; when fancy combines

\[\text{1Tbid., pp. 312, 322.}\]
materials, the resemblance depends primarily "upon outline of form and feature" and "casual and outstanding" rather than "inherent and internal properties." When the imagination works:

The song would speak
Of that interminable building reared
By observation of affinities
In objects where no brotherhood exists
To passive minds.

(The Prelude, Bk. II, ll. 376-381)

The imagination, by a perception of "affinities" which "passive minds" overlook, is capable of blending dissimilar materials into unity (the "interminable building").

Regarding the second difference, Wordsworth says that "the law under which the processes of Fancy are carried on is as capricious as the accidents of things." Fancy's effects are "unstable" and "transitory," whereas the "imagination is conscious of an indestructible dominion." Once the imagination is felt, "by no act of any other faculty of the mind can it be relaxed, impaired, or diminished."

When one considers Wordsworth's description of the actual operations of both fancy and imagination, there seems to be but little difference between his and Coleridge's concepts; at least the result is about the same. Wordsworth may have said that the imagination was just as much an "aggregative and associative power" as the fancy, but the aspect of imagination that is stressed is its "consolidating numbers into unity," whereas fancy merely "forms casual and fleeting combinations" which depend upon some accidental coincidence.

1 Ibid., pp. 322-323.
On the basis of what Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude* it is possible to draw the conclusion that he considered the imagination as an intuitive source of truth. Wordsworth, of course, was very much concerned with the relation between man and the world of nature, feeling that nature was the source of all his sensations:

> 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 on sought.
> (*The Prelude*, Book XIII, ll. 1-10)

"Nature," he wrote in Book II, ll. 447-448, "Thou hast fed my lofty speculations." Nature is thus capable of revealing truth if man will expose himself to it, and the means by which man attunes himself to nature is the imagination. In the fourteenth book, lines 171-175, Wordsworth wrote that "this spiritual Love" (love of nature as expressed in "Tintern Abbey") cannot exist nor act without imagination,

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

To this can be added his statement that

> 'twas proved that not in vain
> I had been taught to reverence a power
> That is the visible quality and shape
> And image of right reason...
> (*Book XIII*, ll. 11-14)

A difficulty arises, however, when his more exact prose comments
are considered. For example, he wrote, "Imagination is a subjective term; it deals with objects not as they are, but as they appear to the mind of the poet." There is also his statement regarding poetic diction that "no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth."¹

The solution, if there be one, to this apparent conflict may rest in the possibility that Wordsworth does not actually intend to say, in the passages quoted from The Prelude, that imagination is a source of truth itself but rather that it is merely a means by which man adjusts himself to nature, that perhaps he conceives of imagination as having two purposes: on the one hand, it enables man to commune with nature; on the other, it is the modifying power by means of which the poet creates his individual forms. There is also the distinct possibility that under the stress of exalting the imagination's importance he may have implied more than he actually believed. At any rate, after taking into consideration the heightened style and natural ambiguity of poetry and the fact that his more lucid prose statements reflect opinions of several years later than the completion date of The Prelude, one is inclined to surmise that the prose comments are a more accurate representation of his concept of poetic imagination as an intuitive source of truth.

Percy Bysshe Shelley. In the opening paragraph of his Defence of Poetry Shelley, in his contrast of reason and imagination, reflects

the influence that his reading of Plato had upon him, for the contrast is based upon Plato's theory that a certain order and coherence exist in the universe and that there is a relation between everything that is. Reason, Shelley affirms, is "mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another," while imagination is

... mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity. Imagination is the ... principle of synthesis, and has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself. ... ¹

The imagination, by a special perceptive operation, discerns the relation between thoughts and objects, and through its perception of "the similitudes of things" it is able to form them into a coherent whole. The extent to which Shelley accepted Coleridge's concept of the imagination as a creative faculty which could form "opposite or discordant qualities" into an integral unity is partially indicated by his likening the imagination to the "principle of synthesis," for Coleridge, as we have seen, termed the imagination a "synthetic" power. The same concept is expressed by Shelley when he writes that poetry "marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things."

Inasmuch as Shelley had previously defined poetry as "the expression of the imagination," there can be no doubting that it is this "principle of synthesis" which is responsible for forming the "irreconcilable things" into a whole. ²

¹Shelley, op. cit., pp. 555-556.
²Ibid., pp. 565, 556.
The nineteenth-century tendency to link feeling and sympathy with the imagination is strongly evident in Shelley when he writes of the "wondrous sympathy" of the imagination which enables man to identify himself with the "beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person."

The moral purpose which poetry may have depends on the sympathetic imagination according to Shelley's reasoning:

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.¹

He confided to Godwin that he had long believed

... that my power consists in sympathy—and that part of imagination which relate to sentiment and contemplation. I am formed, if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind, to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us.²

There is a strong indication that Shelley believed this sympathetic imagination to be an intuitive source of truth. After all, it "has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself," and whereas reason is merely "the enumeration of quantities already known," the imagination "is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole." Hence, Shelley insists,

... to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. ... A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one.³

¹Ibid., pp. 580, 563.
²Ingpen, op. cit., II, 574.
³Shelley, op. cit., pp. 556, 558.
Shelley, of course, also accepted the commonplace dictum that it was through the imagination that one was able to conceive or respond to visual imagery, for he stated that poetry, "the expression of the imagination," should communicate "the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings in the vivid presence of which within his own mind consists at once his inspiration and his reward."\(^1\)

\section*{John Keats.} Unfortunately the statements by Keats on the imagination are not of such a nature or quantity as to permit evolving a truly adequate analysis of his concept of this faculty, for he has little of a concrete nature to say about how the imagination works.

That which stands out in sharpest relief is his linking the imagination to feeling and sympathy. In one of his many letters to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats asked his friend to "pick out some lines from Hyperion" and mark those which revealed "the true voice of feeling," for, said Keats, "upon my soul 'twas imagination I cannot make the distinction."\(^2\)

Keats felt that it was through the imagination that the poet was able to identify himself with the object of his contemplation, a necessary prerequisite to his expressing himself in poetry. He declared that "the poetical Character"

\ldots has no self--it is every thing and nothing--It has no character--it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. \ldots

A Poet is the most unpoeitical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity--he is continually in for--and filling some


\footnote{2}{Forman, op. cit., VIII, 49.}
other Body--The Sun, the Moon, the Sea, and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute--the poet has none; no identity. . . .

Even "if a Sparrow come before my Window," wrote Keats, "I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel." 1

For Keats the sympathetic imagination was an intuitive source of truth. 2 "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination," he wrote to Benjamin Bailey in November, 1817. "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not. . . . The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth." Thus the imagination instinctively grasps truth, and the poetry which results from the creative activity of the imagination is a reflection of this truth: "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not." Shortly afterward he assured John Taylor that at the time he wrote a certain passage in Endymion "it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth." Keats doubted that "even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his Goal without putting aside numerous objections," thus strongly hinting that the intuitive imagination was superior to reason in grasping the reality of life. 3

When Keats called invention "the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder," he may have had in mind the creative activity of the imagination in blending the diverse parts of

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1 Ibid., VII, 129-130; VI, 99.
2 Cf. Bate, Negative Capability, op. cit., pp. 16-36 passim.
3 Forman, op. cit., VI, 97-98, 131-132.
a poem into a unified whole, though such a terse statement with no further explanation is admittedly difficult to interpret with any great degree of certainty.¹ A logical conclusion, however, is that Keats means to say that just as a rudder is the means by which a ship avoids steering an erratic course and which guides the vessel true to its destination, so the imagination is the means by which the poet perceives the inherent relationship between the elements he works with and which enables him to reach his goal—the creation of a unified whole.

The same passage also indicates that Keats did make some sort of distinction between fancy and imagination, though what the distinction might be is conjectural. One possibility is that fancy provides the imagery which helps carry the poem along. That this may be the case is indicated by a few lines in a letter from Keats to Reynolds which seem to link fancy to visual imagery:

I cannot write about scenery and visitings—Fancy is indeed less than a present palpable reality, but it is greater than remembrance—you would lift your eyes from Homer only to see before you the real Isle of Tenedos—you would rather read Homer afterwards than remember yourself—One song of Burns's is of more worth to you than all I could think for a whole year in his native country.²

He apparently means that the reader derives greater pleasure from the poet's description which appeals to fancy than from merely trying to remember the scene himself, thus indicating that visual imagery is at least one aspect of fancy. Presumably fancy would not have imagination's perception of unity.

¹Ibid., VI, 76.
²Ibid., VI, 75-76.
Summary of the romantic concept. A survey of the concepts of imagination held by these four romantic poets reveals these similarities: (1) the imagination is a creative faculty blessed with a special perception that enables it to create unity from diverse, even opposite, elements, though this concept is only vaguely implied by Keats; (2) both Coleridge and Wordsworth develop rather fully the distinction between fancy and imagination, in general agreeing that fancy links images by means of some accidental coincidence instead of forming a unity marked by an interdependence of parts; neither Shelley nor Keats analyzes the differences between the two, although there is some evidence that the latter poet recognized them as two separate faculties; (3) each poet links the imagination with feeling and, through its grasp of the essences of objects, with sympathy; (4) each author gives evidence, in the subject matter of his poetry if not in his critical writings, that he recognizes the supernatural as belonging to the realm of the imagination.

The Pre-Romantic and the Romantic Concepts Compared

The most striking difference between the concepts of the pre-romantic and the romantic poets is the extent to which the latter authors, particularly Coleridge and, to a lesser degree, Wordsworth, developed their analysis of the imagination.

Both schools of poets thought of the imagination as a creative faculty, but the creative imagination of the romantic poets was not the simple creativeness of the Wartons and Hurd. The creative imagination
of the pre-romantics merely enabled the writer to do that which had not been done before or to do it in a different way; creativeness primarily implied invention. The nineteenth century, however, held a more complex concept. Their imagination was a synthesizing power which could reconcile unlike parts into an integral unity as well as show originality.

In the eighteenth century the general tendency was to use fancy as a synonym for imagination, with Thomas Warton the only one to give any concrete indication of distinguishing between the two as separate faculties; the romantic poets, on the contrary, made a clear division between imagination and fancy as independent powers and attempted to assign a certain mode of operation to each.

The eighteenth-century men, except for Thomas Warton, reveal little inclination to link feeling with the imagination, and even Thomas Warton joins the two by inference rather than by any direct statement. In the critical writings and letters of the romantic poets, however, numerous passages can be quoted to show a direct relationship between feeling and imagination.

We can briefly sum up by observing that the nineteenth-century men were in general agreement with their predecessors that the imagination was creative, that the supernatural was a special province of it, and that it was by means of the imagination that a writer conceived and a reader responded to imagery (though the romantic poets would no doubt insist that this imagery must involve the blending of disparates and
would assign any lower type imagery to the operations of fancy); how-
ever, the romantic writers went far beyond the Wartons and Hurd in analyzing the imagination and in assigning to it the special perception by which the imagination created unity out of diversity. In thus defining and restricting the operations of the imagination, the romantic poets give further evidence of the narrowing trend pointed out at the end of the preceding chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE POET: HIS FUNCTION, OBLIGATIONS, AND ENDOWMENT

What the pre-romantic and the romantic writers assert and imply regarding the poet himself reveals much about their philosophy of literature. In this chapter we shall examine and compare the opinions of both groups of poets concerning such things as what the main purpose of the poet should be, what qualifications and characteristics he should possess, and what obligations he should meet in his poetry.

Function of the poet: During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries numerous factors combined to make the poet aware of the utility of his craft. The political controversies and the rise of science were but two of the factors which contributed to the increasing emphasis on the practical side of poetry. Among the neo-classical school there were many who not only agreed that poetry could teach as well as delight but who also insisted that instruction be given priority. Hurd and the Warton brothers were quite definitely opposed to this view. Thomas Warton, who declared that sub-joining a moralization reduced a work to a "Christian or moral lesson," criticized both Gower and Wyatt for being too didactic.¹ His brother was convinced that it took more than "a clear head and acute understanding" to make a poet and that "the

most solid observations on human life, expressed with the utmost elegance and brevity, are MORALITY, and not POETRY." Thus Voltaire's Henriade should have contained more "poetic images" and fewer "moral and political reflections." Throughout the Essay on Pope, Joseph Warton consistently maintained that moral and didactic poetry was inferior, that it was not of the most poetical; for that reason Pope was not placed in the first rank of poets along with Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton.¹

The three pre-romantics were quite willing, however, to permit instruction if done properly and not made the prime purpose. Hurd does not object to "the soundest moral lessons ... artfully thrown in, and recommended by the charm of poetry and numbers."² Joseph Warton recommends the introduction of "moral sentences and instructions in an oblique and indirect manner, in places where one naturally expects only painting and ornament." He lists one of Pindar's arts as being the ability to introduce moral reflections.³ According to Thomas Warton, one of the reasons for naming Gower and Chaucer as "the first English poets" was that they were "the first who moralised their song, and strove to render virtue more amiable by cloathing her in the veil of fiction."⁴

There is ample evidence that the two Wartons and Hurd sided with those who believed that the main function of the poet was to please, not instruct. In discussing Gorboduc, Thomas Warton explains how tragedy

² Morley, op. cit., p. 70.
³ J. Warton, op. cit., I, 29, 371.
⁴ T. Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen, II, 94.
may achieve a moral purpose: it is not to instruct "by the inter-
mixture of moral sentences, but by the force of example, and the effect
of the story," and by "pathetic and critical situations." He maintains
that "sentiment and argument will never supply the place of action upon
the stage." In other words, Warton is implying that actually the poet's
first consideration is to give pleasure, a pleasure which "arises in
proportion as our expectation is excited" by the plot.\(^1\) The same im-
plication is contained in one of the most widely quoted passages in the
Observations on the Fairy Queen. This poem's "graces please, because
they are situated beyond the reach of art," and it contains "something
which engages the affections, the feelings of the heart, rather than
the cold approbation of the head." He concludes that "if the critic is
not satisfied, yet the reader is transported."\(^2\) The actual basis on
which Spenser is being praised is that the poet gives pleasure to the
reader.

Joseph Warton and Bishop Hurd, in their battle on behalf of the
imagination, were also advancing the cause of giving pleasure as the
first function of the poet. "True poetry," wrote Warton, is chiefly
constituted by the selection of "such circumstances as are best adapted
to strike the imagination by lively pictures," and he praises the "wild
and romantic" scenes of Thomson's Seasons, stating that it "will ever
be perused with delight."\(^3\) The final few sentences of Hurd's Letters
certainly establish his belief that the poet's function is to give

\(^1\) T. Warton, History of English Poetry, III, 494-495.
\(^3\) J. Warton, op. cit., I, 26, 40-41.
pleasure. He writes that the revolution in taste which established the supremacy of reason cost the reader "a world of fine fabling; the illusion of which is so grateful to the charmed Spirit," and that "earth-born critics" may criticize Spenser,

But all the Gods are ravish'd with delight
Of his celestial Song, and music's wondrous might. ¹

This but foreshadowed his unequivocal statement in the essay "On the Idea of Universal Poetry" (written about two years after the Letters were published) that pleasure is the end of poetry, an end to which instruction must be subservient:

Poetry . . . undertakes to please. If it employs all its powers to this purpose, it effects all that is of its nature: if it serve, besides, to inform or instruct us, by the truths it conveys, and by the precepts or examples it inculcates, this service may rather be accepted, than required by us: if it pleased only, by its ingenious fictions, and harmonious structure, it would discharge its office, and answer its end.

Hurd concluded with his opinion that instruction was but one means by which the poet could achieve his ultimate end of pleasure. ²

The views of the four nineteenth-century romantics regarding pleasure as the aim of the poet agree quite closely with those expressed by Richard Hurd and the two Warton brothers. Coleridge "doubted not but that the most important moral truths might be impressed by poetry; but such is not the immediate object of the poet." The immediate object of the poet was pleasure, and "it was that which constituted a poet, to whatever purpose he employed his means." Sprinkled throughout his critical writings and lectures are other statements making immediate pleasure

¹Morley, op. cit., p. 155.
²Hurd, op. cit., II, 15-16.
the poet's aim. Wordsworth concurred with Coleridge, contending, "The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him . . . as a Man." There is a scarcity of definite statements on this matter in the writings of both Keats and Shelley, but the latter did indicate his agreement that "poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure." The romantic poets further agree with their predecessors that a moral purpose is permissible if properly integrated and, in fact, intimate that the best poets will "aim at something nobler as their end—viz.—to cultivate and predispose the heart of the reader, etc." Coleridge felt it "is right to inquire . . . whether the pleasure we receive" from a poem "has a tendency to keep us good, to make us better, or to reward us for being good," and that "the grandest point of resemblance" between poetry and religion was that "both have for their object . . . the perfecting, and the pointing out to us the indefinite improvement of our nature, and fixing our attention upon that." Coleridge insisted, however, as the three pre-romantic poets had, that instruction must be done properly, as evident by his comment on Paradise Regained:

In its kind it is the most perfect poem extant, though its kind may be inferior in interest—being in its essence didactic—to that other sort, in which instruction is conveyed more

1Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 75-76, 66, 69; Coleridge, op. cit., II, 9-10.
3Shelley, op. cit., p. 562.
4Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 321.
5Ibid.; Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 147.
effectively, because less directly, in connection with stronger
and more pleasurable emotions, and thereby in a closer affinity
with action.\textsuperscript{1}

Wordsworth's recognition of the moral values of poetry is re-
vealed in the letter to John Wilson (1802):

A great Poet ought, \ldots to a certain degree, to rectify
men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to
render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short,
more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the
great moving spirit of things.\textsuperscript{2}

That Wordsworth's views underwent little change during the next several
years is indicated by his statement in 1815 that "of genius \ldots the
only infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility,
for the delight, honour, and benefit of human nature," and by his ap-
proval in 1827 of a work edited by Samuel C. Hall on the basis that
"the literary part is conducted upon a principle that cannot but be
highly approved, that of uniting instruction with amusement.\textsuperscript{3}" Shelley's approval of this concept is indicated by his opinion "that all
poetical beauty ought to be subordinate to the insculpted moral \ldots
that metaphorical language ought to be a pleasing vehicle for useful
and momentous instruction," although he warned that "a poem very didac-
tic is, I think, very stupid."\textsuperscript{4}

Both the pre-romantic and the romantic poets were thus in es-
sential agreement that the immediate function of the poet is to give

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 166.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Stephens, Beck, Snow, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 562.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Ingpen, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 90, 379.
\end{itemize}
pleasure and that a moral aim is permissible, even desirable, if properly integrated.

Obligations of the poet. The eighteenth-century neo-classical pull upon the Wartons and Hurd is quite evident in the parts of their critical works where they echo the eighteenth-century insistence on truth, meaning reality or a correspondence to actual life. In his discussion of Pope's "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady," Joseph Warton implied that the affairs of humanity were of greater interest than the creations of the imagination:

If this Elegy be so excellent, it may be ascribed to this cause, that the occasion of it was real; for it is an indisputable maxim, "That nature is more powerful than fancy, that we can feel more than we can imagine . . . . Events that have actually happened, are, after all, the properest subjects for poetry. . . . If we briefly cast our eyes over the most interesting and affecting stories, ancient or modern, we shall find that they are such, as, however, adorned, and a little diversified, are yet grounded on true history, and on real matters of fact."

His younger brother praised the pictures of ancient manners contained in early writings such as King Horn for

. . . being founded in truth and reality, and actually painted from the life. To talk of the grossness and absurdity of such manners is little to the purpose; the poet is only concerned in the justness and faithfulness of the representation.

He also comments Chaucer for giving "such an accurate picture of antient manners . . . copied from the life, and represented with equal truth and spirit." He later wrote, "Our heart requires truth even in fiction itself." Bishop Hurd echoed the Warton brothers in his insistence on

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1 J. Warton, op. cit., I, 249-250.
3 Ibid., I, 42, II, 199; T. Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen, II, 109-110.
"some foundation in truth and nature."\(^1\)

As might be expected from their acceptance of neo-classical truth (though, as will be shown, their acceptance was not without some reservations), the Wartons and Hurd also emphasized the observance of probability, decorum, and propriety as obligations of the poet. Joseph Warton, for example, supported the unities of time and place as being among "those fundamental and indispensable rules which nature and necessity dictate" and which are necessary to preserve probability. Because Rowe "sadly violated" probability "by the neglect of the unity of time," Warton criticized the play *Jane Shore*. "For a person to be supposed to be starved during the representation of five acts," scoffed the older Warton brother, "is a striking instance of the absurdity of this violation." Moreover, "To produce, and carry on with probability and decorum, a series of events, is the most difficult work of invention."\(^2\) Thomas Warton stated his belief that the great rapidity with which Spenser worked resulted in "contradictions, inconsistencies, and repetitions," which caused him to violate the rules "of probability, truth, and propriety." The younger Warton wonders that it should take so many years after the revival of interest in the works of Homer and Aristotle for the Italian poets to turn "to that decorum which nature dictated, and which the example and the precept of antiquity had authorised."\(^3\) Hurd agreed that in drama "that, which passes in representation and

\(^1\)Hurd, *op. cit.*, I, 214.

\(^2\)J. Warton, *op. cit.*, I, 120-123, 269, II, 2.

challenges as it were, the scrutiny of the eye, must be truth itself, or something very nearly approaching to it."¹

As hinted in the preceding paragraph, the acceptance by these three pre-romantics of the neo-classical doctrine of truth was not a whole-hearted one. Hurd, while agreeing that "in those species which have men and manners professedly for their theme, a strict conformity with human nature is reasonably demanded," and that "in those species that . . . would obtain their end, not thro' the Imagination, but thro' the Passions, . . . poetical truth is . . . almost as severe a thing as historical," yet maintained that the poet also "has a world of his own, where experience has less to do, than consistent imagination." Hurd added:

He has, besides, a supernatural world to range in. He has Gods, and Faeries, and Witches at his command . . . Thus in the poet's world, all is marvellous and extraordinary; yet not unnatural in one sense, as it agrees to the conceptions that are readily entertained of these magical and wonder-working Natures . . . The more sublime and creative poetry . . . addressing itself solely or principally to the Imagination; a young and credulous faculty, which loves . . . to be deceived; has no need to observe these cautious rules of credibility so necessary to be followed by him, who would touch the affections and interest the heart.²

Eleven years earlier (1751) in a note to the Epistle to Augustus, Hurd had admitted that poetry's "effects are instantaneous and irresistible. Rules, art, decorum, all fall before it," and in "On the Idea of the Universal in Poetry" he finally concluded that poetry "in short, prefers not only the agreeable and the graceful, but, as occasion calls

¹Morley, op. cit., p. 140.
²Ibid., p. 138.
upon her, the vast, the incredible, I had almost said, the impossible, to the obvious truth and nature of things."  

The Warton brothers also evidenced some misgivings about adhering too closely to truth and reality. There is, for example, the younger Warton's expression of regret that the influence of science on literature had resulted in fancy's being weakened by "reflection and philosophy." Despite admitting that the scientific revolution contained its "more solid advantages," among which were "good sense, good taste, and good criticism," Warton deplored the fact that

We have lost a set of manners, and a system of machinery, more suitable to the purposes of poetry, than those which have been adopted in their place. We have parted with extravagancies that are above propriety, with incredibilities that are more acceptable than truth, and with fictions that are more valuable than reality.  

His brother regretted that the "geometrical, and systematical, spirit so much in vogue, which has spread itself from the sciences even into polite literature," had "diminished and destroyed sentiment, and made our poets write from and to the head, rather than the heart."  

The pre-romantic poets were thus caught between two extremes: on the one hand, they were reluctant to break with the neo-classical concept of truth which required the poet to portray only that which corresponded to reality; on the other, they were impelled by an inherent feeling that the higher types of poetry resulted from "a creative and glowing imagination" to try to justify a departure from strict

1Hurd, op. cit., I, 397, II, 9.  
3J. Warton, op. cit., I, 198-199.
truth in describing events, manners, and objects. The nineteenth-century romantic solved the problem rather simply. He was aware that poetry was, as Coleridge stated, "illusion, contra-distinguished from delusion," and that the poet had a right to expect "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."¹

In the "Essay Supplementary to Preface" (1815) Wordsworth wrote:

> The appropriate business of poetry ..., her appropriate employment, her privilege and her duty, is to treat of 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."²

Coleridge asserted in the seventh lecture, 1811-12 series:

> It is a general but mistaken notion that, because some forms of writing, and some combinations of thought, are not usual, they are not natural; but we are to recollect that the dramatist represents his characters in every situation of life and in every state of mind, and there is no form of language that may not be introduced with effect by a great and judicious poet, and yet be most strictly according to nature.³

The romantic poets, therefore, put no stock in such things as the unities of time and place which Joseph Warton had contended were necessary. Coleridge insisted that presuming them necessary was as much a mistake as presuming that "the drama impresses with pleasure only as it is supposed to be reality. The truth is, it is never believed to be real."⁴ He admits a unity of action (the lack of which formed the basis for his criticizing Faust: "There is no whole in the poem; the scenes are

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¹ Coleridge, op. cit., II, 6, 107.
³ R. W.になると, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 139.
⁴ Ibid., II, 82-83.
mere magic-lantern pictures.\(^1\) and, which is emphasized even more and which ties in so very closely with the romantic emphasis on feeling, a unity of effect, which he consistently defined as "modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling."\(^2\)

The neo-classical influence on Hurd and the Warton brothers is also evident in their reflecting the classical preference for the general over the specific, an excellent example of which is the following statement by Hurd in one of his notes on the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, part of which was previously quoted in Chapter II to illustrate his concept of nature:

> Truth, in poetry, means such an expression, as conforms to the general nature of things; falsehood, that, which, however suitable to the particular instance in view, doth yet not correspond to such general nature. . . . The artist, when he would give a Copy of nature, may confine himself too scrupulously to the exhibition of particulars, and so fail of representing the general idea of the kind. . . . We see then that in deviating from particular and partial, the poet more faithfully imitates universal truth.\(^3\)

Joseph Warton's explanation of the similarities that sometimes exist in the descriptions of writers rested on this concept of the universal, and his brother stated that the business of heroic poetry was to "compound rather than to copy nature, and to present those exalted combinations, which ever existed together, amid the general and necessary defects of real life."\(^4\)

It is rather surprising that these men should have failed to recognize the incongruity of their obliging the poet to restrict himself

\(^1\)Raysor, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, p. 414.
\(^2\)Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, II, 91, 329.
\(^3\)Hurd, *op. cit.*, I, 255-256.
to general nature, on the one hand, and, on the other, their pleas for detailed imagery. Joseph Warton's praise of the "wild and romantic" scenes in Thomson's Seasons has been previously quoted in this chapter in another connection. Warton went on to add that "innumerable are the little circumstances in his descriptions, totally unobserved by all his predecessors," a statement which he illustrated by quoting examples of Thomson's use of accurate and exact descriptions. He contended that "the use, the force, and the excellence of language, certainly consists in raising clear, complete, and circumstantial images, and in turning readers into spectators."¹ Thomas Warton praised Chaucer for his "accurate picture of antient manners" and his "lively, particular" characters.² Bishop Hurd, just one year after making the observation on general nature quoted above, contradicted himself in "A Discourse on Poetical Imitation":

Every object stands forth in bright sunshine to the view of the true poet. Every minute mark and lineament of the contemplated form leaves a corresponding trace on his fancy. And ... he finds it no difficulty to convey the liveliest ideas of them to others. This is what we call painting in poetry; by which not only the general natures of things are described, and their more obvious appearances shadowed forth; but every single property marked, and the poet's own image set in distinct relief before the view of the reader.³

The nineteenth-century romantic poet was involved in no such conflict, not that he was totally unaware of the importance of the universal. Wordsworth agreed with Aristotle that the object of poetry "is

³Hurd, op. cit., II, 127.
truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative.

Coleridge said that the essence of poetry was its universality, and Shelley called a poem "the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. . . ; the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature." As Bate has pointed out, the romantic poet "tended to regard the universal as attainable only through the particular." Coleridge furnishes the best example of an attempt to reconcile the universal and the particular. He praised Shakespeare for "that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science." Equally familiar in his statement that "it was Shakespeare's prerogative to have the universal which is potentially in each particular, opened out to him." Wordsworth, in conversations with his friend, H. C. Robinson, expressed a similar idea: "The poet first conceives the essential nature of his object" and then "reclthes his idea in an individual dress which expresses the essential quality and has also the spirit and life of a sensual object." In brief, then, the romantic poets solved the conflict which had existed in the mind of the pre-romantic by narrowing the emphasis in poetry to the particular, for in poetry that "which


2 Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 9; Shelley, op. cit., p. 561.


4 Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 342; Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 43-44.

5 Quoted by Shawcross in note to Biographia Literaria, op. cit., I, 227.
is uppermost in the consciousness" is "the individual form in which the Truth is clothed."\(^1\)

Thus far, two obligations which were placed on the poet by the three pre-romantics have been mentioned, each of which, as we have seen, involved a conflict. (1) The poet was to emphasize reality and was bound by a fidelity to truth, which in turn involved observance of the laws of probability, decorum, and propriety. Their allegiance to this doctrine, however, was strongly tempered by the realization that, art, rules, and decorum to the contrary, the higher types of poetry were those which would obtain their ends through the imagination and were therefore not responsible to strict truth. (2) The poet should depict general nature and universal truth; yet, as pointed out, the two Wartons and Hurd involved themselves in contradictions by encouraging the poet to utilize particulars in their descriptions.

The romantic, on the other hand, allowed the poet to escape from reality by postulating the theory of poetic faith which, in brief, meant that the reader was not supposed to be deluded into an idea of reality, but was simply led to suspend his powers of judgment for the moment so that they merely remained passive. Thus the imagination was released from the check of correspondence to actuality and given comparatively free rein. The restrictions of the universal, which had given difficulty to the pre-romantics, were removed by the firm belief that the universal was best portrayed or revealed in the particular.

\(^1\)Coleridge, op. cit., II, 159.
A third obligation which the pre-romantic critics would place on the poet was that of perspicuity. In his demand for perspicuity Thomas Warton was, for once, consistent. While admitting that Spenser's romantic materials claim great liberties, Warton insists that "no materials exclude order and perspicuity."1 Throughout his History of English Poetry and his Observations on the Fairy Queen he praises clarity and perspicuity and condemns obscurity. Joseph Warton maintains that Pindar's style is "far more pure and perspicuous than is generally imagined," and he praises Pope's "Ode to St. Cecelia" for the perspicuity of the thoughts.2 Hurd felt that one factor in the production of superior poetry during the age of Elizabeth was the "pure, strong, and perspicuous" condition of the English language.3

The romantic poets have almost nothing to say about neo-classical perspicuity. Coleridge remarks that "a poem is not necessarily obscure, because it does not aim to be popular. It is enough, if a work be perspicuous to those for whom it is written, and 'Fit audience find, though few.'"4 Although Wordsworth makes no use of the terms perspicuity or perspicuous, his remarks in the "Observations Prefixed to Lyrical Ballads" concerning language of poetry at least imply the necessity of clarity. Wordsworth claims to avoid "poetic diction" in order to bring his language "near to the language of men," for

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1 T. Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen, II, 323-324.
3 Morley, op. cit., p. 71.
4 Coleridge, op. cit., II, 120.
Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which subsists upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves.¹

All of which is but to say that poetic diction leads to obscurity. It should be remembered, however, that what Wordsworth is objecting to primarily is false poetic diction or language which does not arise from the subject itself, a matter which will be discussed in more detail later.

A fourth obligation of the poet, according to both the romantic and the pre-romantic schools, concerned the morality of his poetry. "It is in vain," said Thomas Warton, "to apologise for the coarseness, obscenity, and scurrility of Skelton . . . His festive levities are . . . vulgar and indelicate." He also warned that the satirist who indulged too freely "in the display of that licentiousness which he means to proscribe" absolutely defeated his own purpose. He seemed to feel that there was some possibility that every "censurer of obscenity" did some harm "by turning the attention to an immodest object"; at any rate, he added, "When Vice is led forth to be sacrificed at the shrine of Virtue, the victim should not be too richly dressed."² Bishop Hurd insisted that poetry "prevent the impressions of vice," that there be given "no quarter to immoral poets," and that poetry serve "in turning the ear of youth from that early corruptor of its innocence, the seduction of a loose and impure communication."³

³Hurd, op. cit., I, 382.
In the nineteenth century Shelley complained that Ariosto was sometimes "cruel in his descriptions" and that among the vices in his poetry was the vindication of "revenge in its grossest form." Of the four romantic poets Coleridge was the most outspoken against a poet's portraying any type of immorality. He called attention to "the gross and disgusting licentiousness, the daring profaneness," of the Decameron and observed that it was the influence of this work "which poisons Ariosto." Swift is censured for his "moral dirt"; Sterne, for his "indecency, his degradation of the passion of Love." Shakespeare, on the other hand, is praised for

... keeping at all times the high road of life. With him there were no innocent adulteries; he never rendered that amiable which religion and reason taught us to detest; he never clothed vice in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher.2

The poet is thus obligated to maintain a high standard of purity in his verse.

To recapitulate, the two Wartons and Hurd placed these obligations on the poet: (1) he should adhere to truth and reality; (2) he should depict general nature; (3) he should be perspicuous; (4) he must keep his poetry clear of licentiousness. Their sanction of the imagination and approbation of the particular in descriptions led them, however, into statements which conflicted with the first two of these obligations. On the other hand, the four romantic poets as a group dispense with adhering to strict truth and reality and general nature. Instead, the poet

1Ingpen, op. cit., II, 603-604.

2Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 23, 114, 116; Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 266.
is to utilize the particular in his verse, for the universal is best revealed through the particular. Hence, since perspicuity is given but scant attention, the fourth point, morality, is the only pre-romantic obligation retained as such by the nineteenth century. The important thing was that the poet fulfill his primary function of giving pleasure.

Endowment of the poet. For a poet to achieve his primary function of giving pleasure, the Wartons and Hurd were in agreement with Wordsworth and his three contemporaries that he should possess three general qualifications. For one thing, the poet should be well-read and conversant with a wide variety of subjects. According to Thomas Warton, the fact that "general knowledge was increasing with a wide diffusion and a hasty rapidity" and that books were being printed which treated of "a variety of the most useful and rational topics" contributed to the production of "original and true poetry" during the Elizabethan period. Bishop Hurd expressed a similar opinion in the Third Elizabethan Dialogue.

In the nineteenth century Coleridge insisted that the poet govern his style by "the principles of grammar, logic, psychology: In one word by such a knowledge of the facts, material and spiritual, that most pertain to his art." This knowledge, "governed and applied by good sense, and rendered instinctive by habit," was, of course, what Coleridge defined as taste. He also alleged that Shakespeare's "stupendous power" in part resulted from the fact that he "first studied patiently, meditat-

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ed deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge, become habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings." Indeed, he could not have become a great poet without "a most profound, energetic, and philosophic mind." In the preface to the second edition of his poems (1800) Wordsworth defined poetry as the "breath and finer spirit of all knowledge"; "the Poet," he added, "binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society." He further made the acquisition of taste dependent in part on "a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition." Even Keats, in spite of being "certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination," in a letter to John Taylor (April, 1818) expressed regret that "I know nothing--I have read nothing--and I mean to follow Solomon's directions, 'Get learning--get understanding.'" In a letter to Reynolds written less than two weeks later Keats expressed his conviction of the necessity of "an extensive knowledge":

The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this: in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again, without wings, and with all the horror or a bare-shouldered Creature--in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear. A second requisite of the poet was that he be experienced in the ways of people; he must possess what Hurd termed "a knowledge of the world" or "common sense."

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1 Coleridge, op. cit., II, 63-64, 19-20, 270.
3 Forman, op. cit., VI, 97; Stephens, Beck, Snow, op. cit., pp. 627-628.
It is this art of entering into the characters, prejudices, and expectations of others, and of knowing to suit our application, prudently, but with innocence, to them, which constitutes what we call A KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD.\(^1\)

Thomas Warton asserted that Chaucer's "knowledge of the world availed him in a peculiar degree, and enabled him to give such an accurate picture of antient manners," while his brother intimates that "for a poet to write happily and well" a background of experience is highly desirable.\(^2\)

The nineteenth-century poets were equally cognizant of the value of a knowledge of the world and the ways of man. In the preface to The Revolt of Islam, Shelley expresses his appreciation of the value of his "accidental education," of the fact that he had flirted with danger, that he had "been a wanderer among distant fields," that he had "sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth," and that he had "seen populous cities," and "watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men."\(^3\) Wordsworth pointed out that the poet should have "a greater knowledge of human nature" than other men.\(^4\)

W. J. Bate, in his discussion of Keats' **Negative Capability**, points out that the poet felt it necessary to experience life in order to portray it. "Until we are sick, we understand not," wrote Keats, and in

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\(^1\)Hurd, *op. cit.*., I, 379.


a later letter to Bailey stated his belief that his projected four months walking-tour of Scotland would "give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, ... and strengthen more my reach in Poetry."\(^1\)

The third and most important endowment of the poet was sensibility. The poet must be able to feel deeply, so deeply that he might be capable of sympathizing with the object of his work. In a note to Ars Poetica, Hurd said:

> In order to awaken and call forth in the spectator all those sympathies, which naturally await on the lively exhibition of such a scene, the writer must have a soul tuned to the most exquisite sensibility, and susceptible of the same vibrations from his own created images, which are known to shake the sufferer in real life.

No poet, indicated Hurd, "can describe of others further than he hath felt himself."\(^2\) A similar thought is echoed by Thomas Warton: "Experience proves, that we best paint what we have felt most." Joseph Warton indicated his warm approval of the sensibility with which Pope painted certain "raptures" in "Eloisa to Abelard."\(^3\)

The nineteenth-century romantic emphasized sympathy as such to a much greater extent than had the pre-romantics. Coleridge listed one of Wordsworth's excellencies as being

> ... a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man; the sympathy indeed of a contemplator, rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate, ... but of a contemplator from whose view no difference of rank conceals the sameness of the nature; no injuries of wind or weather, or toil, or even of ignorance, wholly disguise the human face divine.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Bate, Negative Capability, p. 36.

\(^2\)Hurd, op. cit., I, 116, II, 129.

\(^3\)J. Warton, op. cit., I, 317.

\(^4\)Coleridge, op. cit., II, 122-123.
In his "Observations," Wordsworth listed a "more than usual organic sensibility" as a necessity for the poet, who will wish

... to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, may, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs... 1

The concept of sympathy in the sense of the poet's identifying himself with the object of his contemplation is carried to its furthest extreme by Keats. As previously noted in the chapter on imagination, truth is grasped by the identification of the imagination with its object. It is this concept which lies behind Keats' statement that "Men of Genius... have not any individuality, any determined Character." 2 In a letter to Richard Woodhouse (October, 1818) Keats wrote:

A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity—he is continually in for and filling some other body... . When I am in a room with people, if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then, not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me, so that I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among men; it would be the same in a nursery of Children.3

That Keats carries sympathy in the sense of identification with the object of contemplation to a greater extreme than Coleridge is evident from the latter's emphasis on sympathy "of a contemplator, rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate."

Thus there was a general agreement between the pre-romantics and the romantic schools regarding the general attributes which a poet

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2Bate, Negative Capability, p. 25.
should possess, the chief distinction between the two schools lying in
the latter's carrying sympathy to a fuller, more significant development.

The place of genius and of art. One further basis for comparing
the romantic and the pre-romantic concepts of the endowment of the poet
rests in the relative importance which each placed in genius or nature
and art or method.

In his notes on Horace's Ars Poetica Hurd agrees that both art
and nature are necessary to produce a perfect poem and then cites Long-
inus for the five sources of the sublime, "two only" of which (a "gran-
deur of conception, and the pathetic") come from nature and the rest (a
"just arrangement of figures, a splendid diction, and dignity of compo-
sition") from art. Although Hurd points out that each should be "con-
sociated with the other," the fact that he refers to art as forming
"milder beauties" would seem to indicate a greater reliance in genius.
The same implication is contained in a note to the Epistle of Augustus:
Homer, writes Hurd, a "vehement and impetuous genius" who wrote before
composition was "turned into an art," was "contented to put down his
first thoughts."\(^1\) Since Homer was considered an excellent poet and since
Hurd makes Homer's poetry largely the result of nature or genius, the
conclusion must be that genius was of first importance.

Thomas Warton apparently shared Hurd's views. He was of the
opinion that the minstrels of the Middle English period, "who were to-
tally uneducated, and poured forth spontaneous rhymes in obedience to
the workings of nature, often exhibit more genuine strokes of passion

\(^1\) Hurd, op. cit., I, 273, 369.
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and imagination than the professed poets." Chaucer, of course, being an exception. His examination of the Fairy Queen, it is true, points out certain defects which are largely due to Spenser's neglecting "the niceties of construction"; nevertheless, the Fairy Queen is a poem "whose graces please, because they are situated beyond the reach of art," for it contains something "which more powerfully attracts us: something which engages the affections, the feelings of the heart." What Warton says, in other words, is that Spenser's genius produces great poetry in spite of his breaking the rules of poetic art. It should also be noted that Thomas Warton indicates his disapproval of the seventeenth century as a period "in which imagination gave way to correctness" and poets were "more attentive to words, than to things and objects," with the result that "the nicer beauties of happy expression were preferred to the daring strokes of great invention."

Joseph Warton also ultimately reached the same conclusion as his brother and Bishop Hurd. Although admitting that Dr. Young was not a "correct and equal writer," Warton insisted he possessed a "sublime and original genius." After all, "it is a creative and glowing IMAGINATION," which marks a writer as a poet, for "the most accurate observation of dramatic rules without genius is of no effect." The older Warton brother observed that "in no polished nation, after criticism has been much studied, and the rules of writing established, has any very extraordinary work ever appeared," and speculated if perhaps "the natural powers

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be not confined and debilitated by that timidity and caution which is occasioned by a rigid regard to the dictates of art.\footnote{1}{J. Warton, op. cit., I, ii, 69, 198-199, II, 144.}

On turning to the nineteenth-century poets one finds substantial agreement with the Wartons and Hurd. Coleridge, while recognizing the necessity of "good sense and method" to poets, insisted that the true poet "subordinates art to nature." Genius was a gift "that no labour nor study could supply," for all poets "write from a principle within, not originating in anything without." When Coleridge wrote that "it was Shakespeare's prerogative to have the universal which is potentially in each particular, opened out to him, not as an abstraction of observation from a variety of men, but as a substance capable of endless modifications," he seems at least to suggest that Shakespeare's greatness was largely due to genius. "A deceptive counterfeit of the superficial form and colors may be elaborated," wrote Coleridge, "but the marble peach feels cold and heavy, and children only put it to their mouths."\footnote{2}{Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, pp. 43-44; Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 36; Coleridge, op. cit., II, 12, 65, 288, 282.}

When Wordsworth defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and indicated that successful composition was best carried on when the poet was in an emotional state of mind, he was implying the pre-eminence of genius.\footnote{3}{Wordsworth, "Observations," op. cit., p. 514.} In the eighth book of The Prelude Wordsworth concedes that the "fictions" of poetry may be enhanced when the imagination "did knowingly conform itself" to the "rules of art,"
but his intent is that art should merely reinforce genius. It was his conviction that external nature operated upon man and was the source of his feelings and ideas, and it was these sensations received by communion with nature which genius ultimately translated into poetry. Such, it seems, is the connotation of the following lines from The Prelude (Book 13, ll. 1-10, 289-299):

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.

Keats and Shelley also lent their weight to genius over art.

"If Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all," wrote Keats. "The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept," was an observation he made some six months later. He also spoke of the "false beauty proceeding from art" and expressed his opinion that "Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the vein of art— I wish to devote myself to another sensation." ¹ According to Shelley, the "poetical

power" was not "subject to the control of the active powers of the mind"; poetry is thus a result primarily of inspiration, not art. "Its source is native and involuntary," insisted Shelley, though it "requires in its development severe attention."¹

It is evident, then, that the pre-romantic and the romantic poets agreed that, as regards the relative importance of genius and art, the former was far more essential. The work of art was to supplement and reinforce the native power of genius.

CHAPTER V

POETRY: ITS NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS

To some extent the content of the present chapter has been anticipated by those which have preceded, for in explaining and comparing the pre-romantic and the romantic concepts of the nature of poetry and its characteristics it will be necessary on occasion briefly to refer to aspects of the subject previously explained in detail. The present chapter, in other words, builds on the foundation of what has already been discussed.

The first step will be to detail the pre-romantic and the romantic concepts of poetry and then to follow with a comparison of the two.

The Pre-Romantic Concept

The two Wartons and Hurd accepted the traditional idea that poetry was an imitative art. It was to imitate nature in any one of its three fundamental meanings of: (1) the universal, (2) the exterior world of things, events, manners, and customs, and (3) human nature. We are not surprised, therefore, to find Thomas Warton listing as proper subject matter for poems such things as "real life," "familiar manners," and "genius and character" of men, or to find his brother stating that "events that have actually happened, are, after all, the properest subjects for poetry."\(^1\) A poem would thus have been restricted to reality.

\(^1\)T. Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen, II, 72, 94, 109-110; J. Warton, op. cit., I, 249-250.
It has already been pointed out, however, in the discussion of the obligations of the poet in the preceding chapter, that the Wartons and Hurd were not willing to permit poetry to be thus restricted. Thomas Warton admitted that there were some "inventions" by which "we are willing to be deceived," and Hurd insisted on the "preeminence of the Gothic manners and fictions" as being best adapted to the ends of poetry. The door was thus opened to superstition, the "Terrible Graces of magic and enchantment," "specious miracles," and "the more solemn fancies of witchcraft and incantation" as proper subjects for poetry. The pre-romantics thus removed all limits on the subject matter of poetry.

One basic factor which is evident in the pre-romantic concept of what is alternately called "true" or "pure" poetry is that it should appeal to the imagination. Joseph Warton maintained that "pure poetry" results from a "creative and glowing imagination." His brother was quite insistent that the "extravagancies," the "incredibilities," and the "manners" of the romance better served the interests of true poetry than did the fictions of classical antiquity, and the reason he gave was their greater appeal to the imagination.

The customs, institutions, traditions, and religion of the middle ages, were favorable to poetry. Their pageants, processions, spectacles, and ceremonies, were friendly to imagery, to personification and allegory. Ignorance and superstition, so opposite to the real interests of human society, are the parents of imagination. The very devotion of the Gothic times was romantic.

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Bishop Hurd echoed Thomas Warton's sentiments regarding the Gothic romance and also stated unequivocally that "the greater poetry ... addresses itself to the passions, or imagination."\(^1\)

This last statement also introduces the second important aspect of the pre-romantic theory: poetry should appeal to the feelings; the reading of it should arouse excitement or passion. Richard Hurd insisted that "Poetry, pure Poetry, is the proper language of passion," and in a note to the Epistle to Augustus, he readily agreed with Horace that feeling was the "test of poetical merit," for poetry's "effects are instantaneous and irresistible. ... It goes directly to the heart, and gains all purposes at once." Therefore, said Hurd, "The beauties of a poem can only appear by being felt."\(^2\) Both Wartons echoed his opinion. The younger of the two brothers lists Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde as an example of "true poetry, with much pathos and simplicity of sentiment," and he praises the uneducated minstrels of Gower's day for exhibiting "more genuine strokes of passion and imagination than the professed poets."\(^3\) Joseph Warton states that "the sublime and the pathetic are the two chief nerves of genuine poesy" and consistently makes sentiment one of the criteria for judging "genuine poetry." He indicated his regret that Pope withheld his "poetical enthusiasm," with the result that reading his poetry "affects not our minds with such strong emotions as we feel from Homer and Milton; so that no man of a true poetical

\(^1\) Morley, op. cit., p. 138; Hurd, op. cit., I, 363.

\(^2\) Ibid., I, 104, 390, 397, 398.

\(^3\) T. Warton, History of English Poetry, II, 162, 247.
spirit, is master of himself while he reads them.\(^1\)

The third basic element in the pre-romantic concept of the nature of poetry is that of unity. Thomas Warton deplored the lack of "connexion of parts" in certain thirteenth century compositions; a poem, he said, should "have a regular integrity, in which every part contributes to produce an intended end." He pointed out that the proper "multiplication and disposition of circumstances" were necessary to "a legitimate plot" and that perhaps the most serious defect of the *Fairy Queen* was that the twelve books "have not always a mutual dependence upon each other, and consequently do not properly contribute to constitute one legitimate poem." Each part of a poem should be "relative and dependent" on the other parts, so that the mind "is irresistibly and imperceptibly drawn from part to part."\(^2\) Joseph Warton was of a similar mind. He insisted that a poem have a "just integrity, and a lucid order," so that each part will "naturally introduce the succeeding ones, so as to form an entire whole." There must be nothing which is "foreign and adventitious to the subject" and which contributes "nothing towards the advancement of the main action."\(^3\)

The unity which the two Wartons insist upon is, of course, a unity of action. Bishop Hurd is in full agreement with them up to a certain point, for he accepts "that general and fundamental precept of preserving

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\(^1\)J. Warton, *op. cit.*, I, vi, 355, II, 401-403.


\(^3\)J. Warton, *op. cit.*, I, 69-70, 97-98.
an unity in the subject and the disposition of the piece," and warns "young poets" against the temptation of indulging in descriptions for their own sake. Such descriptions, "if foreign to the subject, and incongruous to the place where they stand, are extremely impertinent."

However, while agreeing that "in some reasonable sense or other... every work of art must be one," he defends the *Fairy Queen* against the charge of lacking unity. His line of defense lies in postulating two kinds of unity. The first is the classical unity of action "which consists in the representation of one entire action" and which should be required of those works written according to the "Grecian rules."

The second is a Gothic unity which results "from the respect which a number of related actions have to one common purpose," in this case, the completion of the *Fairy Queen's* injunctions. This Hurd calls a "unity of design."¹

A fourth requisite of a poem is verse. A poem, writes Hurd, should "be so constructed as to afford all the pleasure which its kind or sort will permit." It then naturally follows, he argues, that metre or verse

... must be essential to every work bearing the name of poem... because a work, which professes to please us by every possible and proper method, and yet does not give us this pleasure, which it is in its power, and is no way improper for it to give, must so far fall short of fulfilling its own engagements to us; that is, it has not all those qualities which we have a right to expect in a work of literary art, of which pleasure is the ultimate end.²

¹Hurd, op. cit., I, 30-31; Morley, op. cit., pp. 118-122.

²Hurd, op. cit., II, 7, 15.
In other words, since a poem is to give the reader the greatest possible pleasure and since metre is a means of pleasing, then a poem must be written in verse. Neither of the Wartons makes any concrete statements about the necessity of verse, but the fact that the terms poem and poetry are never applied to any but metrical compositions should be sufficient evidence that they considered versification to be fundamental to poetry.

In their pronouncements on style, including diction and versification, the pre-romantics emphasize the necessity of simplicity. Thomas Warton praises the language of Gorboduc for its purity and perspicuity and its freedom from "exaggerated imageries and pedantic metaphors." He also commends Surrey's poetry for being "unembarrassed by learned allusions, or elaborate conceits" and censures Marlowe for "an indulgence of the florid style, and an accumulation of conceits." Hall's chief fault, said Thomas Warton, "is obscurity, arising from a remote phraseology, constrained combinations, unfamiliar allusions, elliptical apostrophes, and abruptness of expression." He was convinced that simplicity gave an effect "which it would be vain to seek from the studied ornaments of style."1 Joseph Warton called the attention of the "rising generation" to Addison's "sweetness and purity of style" and recommended abandoning the "pompous rotundity of phrase" and "unnatural, false, inflated, and florid style" in favor of "the chaster model of Addison." He stated his admiration for Pope's brevity, compactness of diction, and choice of exact word, for "simplicity, with elegance and propriety, is the

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perfection of style in every composition." Bishop Hurd echoed the Wartons' denouncements of "forced conceits and affected expression," praising instead the "divine simplicity" of the ancients.2

The three pre-romantics in their plea for simplicity were not denying the validity of a poetic diction; that is evident in the above quotations, for it is diction which is "forced," "inflated," and "pompous" which is criticized. Thomas Warton specifically differentiates between verse and prose styles and warns that mixing the two "destroys the character and effect of both." The clearest statement regarding poetic diction is made by Bishop Hurd:

We may expect then, in the language or style of poetry, a choice of such words as are most sonorous and expressive, and such an arrangement of them as throws the discourse out of the ordinary and common phrase of conversation. Novelty and variety are certain sources of pleasure: a construction of words, which is not vulgar, is therefore more suited to the ends of poetry, than one which we are every day accustomed to in familiar discourse.3

Poetic diction is thus a heightened style which avoids, on the one hand, the commonness of familiar speech and, on the other, the extravagancies of the florid style.

Both of the Wartons' theories of versification are primarily classical. Thomas Warton praises the classical precision of Hall's satires, the "harmony and perspicuity" of Chaucer's versification, and the "most melodious and brilliant Italian versification" of Petrarch.

1J. Warton, op. cit., I, 139, II, 199-200.
2Hurd, op. cit., II, 234; Morley, op. cit., p. 134.
He points out that Wyatt is inferior to Surrey in "harmony of numbers" and marvels that Spenser was able to compose such a long poem "with so much spirit and ease, laden as he was with so many shackles, and embarrassed with so complicated a bondage of rime." Joseph Warton concurs with his brother's views, stating, "The Principal merit of the PASTORALS of Pope consists in their correct and musical versification... which is now become indispensably necessary." He does, however, show some romantic leanings in stating that

... rhyme may be properest for shorter pieces... where closeness of expression, and smartness of style, are expected: but for subjects of a higher order, where any enthusiasm or emotion is to be expressed, or for poems of a greater length, blank verse is undoubtedly preferable.\(^1\)

Bishop Hurd does not state his views on versification and rhyme, although the fact he says nothing in favor of the "classical precision" which Thomas Warton admired coupled with his rather spirited defense of Spenser makes one wonder if he might not have preferred something other than the "correct" versification of Pope.

The three pre-romantics were in general agreement that vivid imagery was a necessity of the best poetry. That this conflicted with their advocacy of general nature has already been noted in the preceding chapter and need not be detailed again here. It will suffice to point out that far more emphasis is placed on exact description than on depicting general nature. Thomas Warton comes to the ultimate conclusion

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that a most important characteristic of the romances is their display of "those sublime and alarming images, which true poetry delights to display." Attention has already been called to Joseph Warton's insistence on "clear, complete, and circumstantial images" and to Hurd's recommendation that the poet mark "every single property." The latter poet further said that the essence of "pure Poetry . . . consists in bold figures and a lively imagery."¹

Bishop Hurd and the two Wartons insisted on one other important characteristic of poetry: it must be perspicuous. Since perspicuity as an obligation of the poet was discussed in detail in the preceding chapter, nothing more need be said regarding it at this point.

To summarize briefly, the three pre-romantics conceived a poem to be an imitative art in verse form, a unified whole which appealed to the imagination and to the emotional forces. It should be characterized by simplicity, perspicuity, and vivid imagery; the versification, at least so the two Wartons stated, should be precise. Its subject matter is unlimited, and its end is immediate pleasure. At the same time it should be remembered that the pre-romantics, because of their closeness to the neo-classical scene, occasionally involved themselves in contradictions by supporting general nature and reality as the proper subjects of a poem.

The Romantic Concept

Because of the greater wealth of material, the more detailed analysis of concepts given, and the fact that the romantic poets do not

agree as closely in details as did the pre-romantics, the concepts of the nineteenth century writers will be handled individually rather than collectively as was done with the two Wartons and Hurd. Following the examination of the individual romantic poets, a comparison will be made of the theories of both schools.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The essence of Coleridge's concept of the nature of poetry is contained in the definition which he gave in his second Shakespearean lecture of the 1811-1812 series:

"It is an art ... of representing, in words, external nature and human thoughts and affections, by the production of as much immediate pleasure in parts, as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole. Or, to vary the words, in order to make the abstract idea more intelligible:--

It is the art of communicating whatever we wish to communicate, so as both to express and produce excitement, but for the purpose of immediate pleasure; and each part is fitted to afford as much pleasure, as is compatible with the largest sum in the whole."

This definition of poetry may also be supplemented by his definition of a poem in the *Biographia Literaria*:

"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 discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part."

Explaining his definition will be greatly facilitated by considering its individual elements one by one, supplementing them with pertinent material from the rest of his criticism.

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1 Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, II, 66.

2 Coleridge, *op. cit.*, II, 10.
In the first place, poetry is an art of representation, that is, imitation. As previously explained in Chapter One in the discussion of the romantic concept of imitation, Coleridge defined this term as a union of sameness and difference, a fusing of disparates by the synthetic imagination.

That which poetry imitates or represents is "external nature and human thoughts and affections." The subject matter of poetry is thus almost unlimited; that there are limits, however, is indicated by his indictment of some Elizabethan dramatists for employing "poetry and poetic diction on unpoeitic subjects, both characters and situations." He does not give any indication as to what subjects he might consider unfit for poetry, his only suggestion on subject matter being that the poet choose subjects "very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself."¹

Coleridge next indicates that the various parts of the poem should produce pleasure through excitement. "The work," writes Coleridge in explanation, "must be so constructed as to produce in each part that highest quantity of pleasure, or a high quantity of pleasure." The most important means by which a poem gives pleasure is by appealing "to our imagination, our passions, and our sympathy." Coleridge agreed with Wordsworth that poetry "does always imply Passion: which word must be here understood in its general sense, as an excited state of the feelings and faculties," and listed deep feeling and pathos as necessary to poetry, one use of which is to make ideas and their accompanying feelings "as

¹Raysor, Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, p. 89; Coleridge, op. cit., II, 14.
vivid and distinct . . . as original impressions.\textsuperscript{1}

One of the elements which contribute towards pleasure and which are therefore necessary to poetry is metre. "Verse is . . . the natural symbol of that union of passion with thought and pleasure, which constitutes the essence of all poetry." It is not something which is superimposed on poetry, for "the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination," and by means of that power all the parts of a poem, including metre, are blended into a harmonious, integral whole. The metre will be adapted to the subject, an illustration of which is Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," in which poem the "march of the words" is varied "without passing into a loftier and more majestic rhythm than was demanded by the thoughts, or permitted by the propriety of preserving a sense of melody predominant."\textsuperscript{2}

Vivid language is another means by which poetry achieves its end of immediate pleasure. Just as "the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement." Moreover, there is in poetry an "interpenetration" of "spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose" which unite to blend delight and emotion. This voluntary encouragement of pleasurable excitement "not only dictates, but of itself tends to produce," a "picturesque and vivifying language."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}Raysor, Coleridge's \textit{Shakespearean Criticism}, II, 67, 261; Coleridge, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 59, II, 24, 56; Coburn, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{2}Raysor, Coleridge's \textit{Miscellaneous Criticism}, p. 277; Coleridge, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 14.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., II, 50.
Coleridge warns that the language and imagery must be appropriate to the subject and condemns a false poetic diction in which figures and metaphors are "stripped of their justifying reasons, and converted into mere artifices of connection or ornament." In true poetry, insists Coleridge, the imagery "moulds and colors itself to the circumstances, passion, or character, present and foremost in the mind."¹

The essence of his thinking on style is contained in his assertion that it is essential

... that poetry be simple, sensuous, and impassionate:—
simple, that it may appeal to the elements and the primary laws of our nature; sensuous, since it is only by sensuous images that we can elicit truth as at a flash; impassionate, since images must be vivid, in order to move our passions and awaken our affections.²

Thus, the various parts of a poem contribute to the production of immediate pleasure; however, and this brings us to the final phase of his definition, the pleasure afforded by each part must be "such as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole." According to Tomalin's report of Coleridge's third lecture, 1811-1812 series, the poet-critic suggested that these two questions be asked of every poem: "Is there more pleasure in the particular lines than is consistent with the whole? Is the sense of totality injured, or not injured, by the splendor of particular passages?" We should not be "chiefly struck" by individual vivid and distinct images but by the total effect. Since poetry is the product of imagination and since the "rules of the Imagination are themselves the very powers of growth and production," then all

¹Ibid., II, 16, 28.
²Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 260.
the parts are assimilated into a harmonious, organized whole. ¹

William Wordsworth. "The appropriate business of poetry," wrote Wordsworth, "her privilege and her duty, is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear . . . to the senses, and to the passions." Wordsworth thus echoes Coleridge's concept of imitation as a union of sameness with difference. "Poetry is the image of man and nature" and "its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind."² As far as subject matter is concerned, poetry may have for its object of imitation any materials it chooses, although Wordsworth himself apparently favored the worth and dignity of human life,

the very heart of man,
As found among the best of those who live . . .
In Nature's presence.³

Wordsworth's most famous definition of poetry was that of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" which "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." The emotion is made the object of thought until gradually the tranquillity disappears and is replaced by an emotion similar to that which was being contemplated. Since the poet does his composing in a state of high emotion, we can naturally expect Wordsworth to assume that a characteristic of poetry will be an appeal to the emotions of the reader, and so he does: "The end of

¹Ibid., II, 79, 128-129; Coleridge, op. cit., II, 56, 65.
poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure." Poetry will give men "new compositions of feeling."

In defining poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" into words, Wordsworth implies that the natural language of poetry will be characterized by spontaneity. He thus sets himself on the side of nature as opposed to the eighteenth century standard of correctness and its resulting artificiality of diction. Wordsworth insisted that

... if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. ... And, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate.

In the light of this statement it seems entirely possible that, as Abrams states, Wordsworth was not primarily concerned with single words or with word order when he spoke of using "the real language of men" but rather with the use of metaphorical language. He explains, for example, that personifications of abstract ideas do not form a "regular part" of "the very language of men" but that occasionally they may be used as a figure of speech prompted by passion or feeling. In poetry, too, they may be used if they arise spontaneously as a result of passion. At any rate, whatever his intentions might have been when he spoke of using the language of humble, rustic men "purified indeed from what


appear to be its real defects," the fact remains that he left the way open for the poet to use language "alive with metaphors and figures," insisting only that the ideas be "expressed in language fitted to their respective importance." He thus is in full agreement with Coleridge that a characteristic of poetry will be language and imagery appropriate to the subject.

Wordsworth also agrees with Coleridge that poetry should be in verse form but does not follow his friend's reasoning that metre is an integral part of the synthesized whole. Wordsworth simply makes metre something which is "superadded" and which is "adventitious to composition," for "more pathetic situations and sentiments . . . may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose." Moreover, "the concurring testimony of ages has shown" that metre will "heighten and improve the pleasure" which is the immediate end of poetry.2

One other necessary characteristic of poetry is that of unity, an essential unity of effect which, as shown in Chapter Three, is a product of the imagination. It is a unity in which all the parts "take one colour and serve to one effect," the sort of unity which was characteristic of the works of Shakespeare, who made his materials, "heterogeneous as they often are, constitute a unity of their own, and contribute all to one great end."3

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Behind much of Wordsworth's theory is the concept of poetry as essentially simple. In the letter to John Wilson, Wordsworth stated that poetry should please "human nature as it has been [and ever] will be," and he makes it clear that this sort of human nature is most likely to be found among men "who lead the simplest lives, and those most according to nature." An appropriate conclusion to this discussion of Wordsworth's concept of the nature of poetry and its characteristics is the following paragraph from "Essay Supplementary to Preface" (1815):

In the higher poetry, an enlightened Critic chiefly looks for a reflection of the wisdom of the heart and the grandeur of the imagination. Wherever these appear, simplicity accompanies them; Magnificence herself, when legitimate, depending upon a simplicity of her own, to regulate her ornaments.1

Percy Bysshe Shelley. "Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination,'" wrote Shelley, who had just defined the imagination as the organ for intuitively perceiving "those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself."

Through the imagination, the poet is able to penetrate the mere outward form of things and to participate in "the eternal, the infinite, and the one." He intuitively perceives the order in the universe which is "the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good."2

Poetry, then, is the "expression of the imagination" in that it expresses this "indestructible order" of the universe. It is in this sense that Shelley declares a poem to be "the very image of life expressed

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2 Shelley, op. cit., pp. 556, 558.
in its eternal truth," for it reflects the unchangeable forms of human nature" and the "naked and sleeping beauty" of the forms of the world. Poetry "makes beautiful that which is distorted" by the accidentalities of particular facts and reveals eternal truths. ¹

Shelley thus conceives poetry to be something which idealizes everything with which it comes in contact. It "collects the brightest rays of human nature and ... touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall."²

Shelley was in agreement with Coleridge that poetry should produce pleasure through excitement. It "communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings" which originally existed in the mind of the poet and which he has transferred to his poetry. Shelley here names two sources of poetical pleasure: imagery and feeling. Poetry should "awaken the feelings" and appeal "to the common sympathies of every human breast," for thus does it reveal "that more essential attribute of Poetry, the power of awakening in others sensations like those which animate" the poet himself.³

The other source of pleasure named is that of imagery and poetic diction. The language of poetry, according to Shelley, is of necessity "vitaly metaphorical" because it "marks the before unapprehended relations of things"; the words of poetry "unveil the permanent analogy of

¹Ibid., pp. 558, 561.
²Ibid., p. 566.
things by images which participate in the life of truth.\textsuperscript{1} In other words, figures of speech are based on a perception of a relationship between things and thus reveal the unity of the universe, the "indestructible order" of things.

Shelley was careful to insist that poetic language be suited to the thoughts and the subject and warned against an "assumed and artificial style." Poetry should avoid

... an over-fastidious and learned choice of words. In this respect I entirely agree with those modern critics who assert that in order to move men to true sympathy we must use the familiar language of men, and that our great ancestors the ancient English poets are the writers, a study of whom might incite us to do that for our own age which they have done for theirs. But it must be the real language of men in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong.

Shelley makes it clear that imagery should develop and illustrate the passion; the stronger the passion, the stronger the imagery may be.\textsuperscript{2} He thus echoes Coleridge and Wordsworth in their insistence that the best poetry will be characterized by language and imagery appropriate to the subject.

In the first paragraph of his preface to The Revolt of Islam, Shelley lists three elements "which essentially compose a Poem," and they are "the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion."\textsuperscript{3}

Thus, the pleasure derived from poetry resides not only in imagery and

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\textsuperscript{1}Shelley, op. cit., pp. 558, 561. \\
\textsuperscript{2}Ingpen, op. cit., II, 604; Baker, op. cit., pp. 438, 450. \\
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 435.
\end{flushright}
feeling but also in metre. "The language of poets," he says, "has
ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound,
without which it were not poetry," and he adds that metre "is scarcely
less indispensable to the communication of its influence than the words
themselves." It is interesting to note that Shelley, while making metre
a necessity, leaves every poet free to choose his own form: "Every great
poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the
exact structure of his peculiar versification." He thus is able to make
poets out of Plato and Bacon, for "the truth and splendour" of Plato's
imagery "and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it
is possible to conceive," and Lord Bacon's language "has a sweet and
majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense."1

Shelley, as has been previously noted, called the imagination
a "principle of synthesis." Hence poetry, as the "expression of the
imagination," must be characterized by unity. A poem must have a
"harmonious and perfect form"; it must be "homogeneous and free from in-
equalities; . . . a whole, consistent with itself." For this reason,
said Shelley, "the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one
another." There must be no detached similes or isolated descriptions.
Therefore, a work marked merely by "splendour of particular passages"
would be inferior to one having a "satisfying completeness." Poetry
"subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things."2

John Keats. The basis of Keats's concept of the nature of

1Shelley, op. cit., p. 560.

2Baker, op. cit., pp. 488, 450; Ingpen, op. cit., II, 749;
Shelley, op. cit., p. 580.
poetry is very closely related to his concept of the imagination as an intuitive source of truth. As previously noted in the explanation of his theory of imagination, Keats felt that this faculty instinctively grasped truth and the reality of life through a sympathetic identification of itself with the object of its contemplation.

Poetry itself was the reflection of the beauty which exists in the intuitive truth grasped by the imagination; it was a creative activity of this power. Keats conceived poetry to be the product of an actual emotional and imaginative experience.

A basic idea in Keats's concept of the nature of poetry is its naturalness. "If Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all," he proclaimed. A poem is something spontaneous, at least in its origin, even though it may be subjected to considerable revision by the poet. He insisted that he never wrote simply for the sake of "making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge or experience." A few months later he wrote Fanny Brawne that he had several "stories" begun, "but as I cannot write for the mere sake of the press, I am obliged to let them progress or lie still as my fancy chooses." A poem was thus something inspired, something which was composed in a state of excitement, "the only state for the best sort of poetry."¹

If poetry is considered to be the reflection of the beauty which exists in the truth of the imagination, then the subject matter of poetry is unlimited because everything contains its own truth and

¹Forman, *op. cit.*, VI, 165, VII, 213, VIII, 14, 34.
beauty, according to Keats. In a letter to his brother he mentions "the mighty abstract Idea I have of Beauty in all things," and since "with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other considera-
tion, or rather obliterates all consideration," nothing is excluded from the realm of poetry. Keats does indicate, however, that the higher poetry will portray "the agonies, the strife of human hearts" ("Sleep and Poetry," ll. 124-125).

That Keats conceived beauty to reside in the particular is quite evident. As Bate points out, the doctrine of Negative Capability "looks upon the concrete as the manifestation, the working out of the ideal;" hence Keats's yearning "for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" and his statement that poetry can only be matured "by sensation and watchfulness in itself." The essentiality of the particular to poetry is reflected in his emphasizing the value of vivid imagery as a characteristic. The importance he placed on imagery is partially indicated by the reason he gave Bailey for composing a long poem: "the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a Week's stroll in the Summer." Again, however, the naturalness of poetry is stressed by Keats when he states that "the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the sun come natural."3

Here Keats's antipathy to art in the neo-classic sense of deliberate and artificial adjustment of language as an end in itself

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1 Stephens, Beck, Snow, op. cit., p. 634; Forman, op. cit., VI, 104.

2 Bate, Negative Capability, p. 47; Forman, op. cit., VI, 98.

3 Ibid., VI, 75-76, 154-155.
becomes apparent. He refers to the "false beauty proceeding from art," at the same time indicating his intention to devote himself "to another sensation."

Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, 'admire me I am a violet!--dote upon me I am a primrose!'

It follows, then, that all imagery and description are to serve a purpose; they are not to be indulged in for their own sake. The poem must constitute a unity in which all parts have their proper place in the whole.

A poem, since it is partially a product of an emotional experience, will also cause an emotional experience in the reader, and the cause of this emotional experience resides in what Keats calls intensity, a word to which it is difficult to affix a definition with the certainty that it fits Keats's precise meaning. However, he apparently uses the word to signify the quality of causing not only strong feeling but also a vivid state of comprehension. Such, at least, would seem to be the effect of his first two axioms of poetry:

1st. I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity--it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance--2nd. Its touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content . . .

Summary of the romantic theories. The four romantic poets do not differ greatly in their concepts of what constitutes poetry in the

1 Ibid., VI, 137-138; VIII, 49, 106-107.
2 Ibid., VI, 154-155.
best sense of the word. The differences which exist relate for the most part to the processes by which poetry is produced. Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, for example, tend to place more emphasis on the spontaneity of poetry than does Coleridge. The latter poet seems to realize more fully than the other three the part that art and method play in the composition of a poem. Another difference lies in the fact that Shelley and Keats make poetry a revelation of intuitive truth which has been grasped by the imagination.

There is general agreement, however, that poetry is an imitative art uniting sameness and difference, having for its preferred subjects external nature and human life. Its immediate end is pleasure, and the elements which contribute to this pleasure are feeling or passion, vivid language, and metre. Emphasis is placed on simplicity and appropriateness of style to the subject; "fine" writing is not tolerated by any of the four romanticists. Finally, each part must contribute to the whole and must not attract attention for its own sake. The poem must have an integral unity.

The Pre-Romantic and the Romantic Concepts Compared

Both the pre-romantics and the romantics declared poetry to be an imitation. The former, however, ran into some difficulty in reconciling the neo-classic tenet that poetry should imitate reality with their own realization that poetry ought not to be thus restricted. The romantics, by narrowing their concept of imitation to a union of sameness and difference and by postulating the theory of poetic faith, avoided
that difficulty posed by the neo-classical doctrine of truth.

None of the seven men denied that the imagination played a most important part in poetry, for each group agreed that poetry not only was a product of the imagination but also appealed to the reader's imagination. The romantic school, however, assigned the imagination a more vital role by making it the power whereby the parts of a poem were fused into a closely knit unity. On the matter of unity, the two Wartons and Hurd stressed that of action, failing to recognize, except for Hurd's unity of design, that there might be any other unity. The romantics admitted the necessity of unity of action to dramatic and narrative works, but in addition they realized there should exist the more essential unity corresponding to Coleridge's organic unity.

Both groups of poets agreed that passion was essential to poetry. A poem should appeal to the reader's feelings, for "the beauties of a poem can only appear by being felt," according to Hurd. The arousing of emotion was one of the means by which a poem gave pleasure.

Another source of pleasure, according to both the pre-romantics and their successors, was metre. Coleridge is the only one who actually shows that verse is an essential in the sense of being one of the disparates blended into the poem by the synthetic imagination, but each of the other men either implies or definitely states that metre is necessary even if, as Wordsworth said, it is "superadded." As far as their opinions on the kind of versification are concerned, the two Wartons reveal the neo-classical influence in indicating a preference for precise, correct

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1Hurd, op. cit., I, 398.
verse, whereas the nineteenth century poets show a tendency to experiment, as illustrated by Keats's search for a better sonnet form. ¹

A comparison of their pronouncements on poetic diction and imagery reveals both similarities and differences with the former predominating. The consensus of both pre-romantic and romantic poets sanctions the use of vivid language and imagery, but Hurd and the Wartons fail to emphasize something which the romantics insisted on: that imagery and diction be appropriate to the subject. It is true, however, that the pre-romantics censure the use of exaggerated imagery, elaborate conceits, and "pompous" diction and, just as did Wordsworth and his contemporaries, recommend simplicity. It is doubtful, however, if the Wartons and Hurd, particularly the former, had quite the same idea as the romantics about what constituted simplicity, for they often seem to associate simplicity of style with the brevity and compactness of Pope. The nineteenth century poets, on the other hand, admit that a style shows simplicity if the language and imagery are dictated by and appropriate to the thought or feeling to be expressed.

The pre-romantics, in adopting the neo-classical doctrine of universal nature, involved themselves in a conflict with their support of vivid, distinct imagery which required the use of particulars. As we have seen, the romantic writers had no such difficulty, for they regarded the universal as best attainable through the particular.

As previously shown in comparing the pre-romantic and the romantic concepts of the function of the poet, there was general agreement that

¹ Forman, op. cit., VII, 292-293.
pleasure was the immediate end of poetry. Both groups also admitted that poetry could have a moral aim if properly integrated into the poem and even indicated that the higher poetry would by its very nature tend to improve the nature of man. With the exception of Keats, who has relatively little to say on the subject, the romantic poets were not content merely to let the matter drop after pointing out that the best poetry will have a moral aim but proceeded to explain, in much more detail than did their predecessors, how it could be brought about, an illustration of which is Shelley's making the imagination the instrument of improving man morally.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

That the romantic movement represented a narrowing and, at the same time, a deepening of the pre-romantic theories of poetry should by now be self-evident. One illustration is the concepts of key terms as detailed in the first chapter. The romantic writers, for example, dropped some meanings, an instance of which is nature in the sense of that which is universal. Even more important, though, is the fact that they defined their terms much more accurately and specifically. In order to determine what the pre-romantics meant by a term it was usually necessary to examine the word in its various contexts and attempt to draw some conclusion.

The narrowing trend is also evident in the dropping or minimizing by the nineteenth-century poets of some terms which were quite important to the pre-romantics, terms such as decorum, perspicuity, probability, and propriety. Moreover, no extensive use was made by the romantic poets of any new terms. Ventriloquism and Negative Capability were new, but their use as terms was extremely limited.

By making a detailed examination of the imagination, its functions, and its operations Coleridge and his contemporaries further reveal the narrowing and deepening trend. As we have seen, the Wartons and Hurd
did not concern themselves with a critical analysis of this faculty, and
only Thomas Warton shows any definite effort to distinguish between the
fancy and the imagination.

The romantic poets also revealed their tendency to be more
analytical than their forerunners in other ways, examples of which are
the place of metre and its origin, what constitutes proper poetic diction,
and the means by which poetry may improve man’s nature.

The pre-romantics revealed the pull of neo-classicism in ways
other than just the retention of such tenets as the rules of decorum and
probability. There was also the doctrine that poetry should depict
reality and that it should imitate general nature. Much of the classical
emphasis on correctness in diction and versification appears, especially
in the writings of the Warton brothers, and the unities of time and place
also receive support. As has already been pointed out on several occa-
sions, these neo-classical pulls often resulted in conflicts with those
of their theories which were basically romantic in origin. In dropping
much of this neo-classical dogma or at least modifying it, the four
nineteenth-century poets further reveal the narrowing trend.

In brief, then, that the romantic poets represent a narrowing of
the literary theories of the pre-romantics is evidenced by such things
as dropping some meanings and in general defining terms more accurately;
making little or no use of some terms which were important to the pre-
romantics; displaying a definite propensity to be more analytical, an
example of which is their detailed analysis of the imagination and its
place in poetry; and discarding such neo-classical tenets as those mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

The narrowing trend thus has a twofold aspect: on the one hand, it is reflected in omission—dropping certain terms and tenets; on the other, in more accurately defining terms and in making much more detailed analyses of various aspects of poetry and the poetical process.
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