COLERIDGE AND WORDSWORTH

I love Coleridge, and I believe I know nearly every line of both the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*—not to speak of the *Three Graves* and the *Hymn in Chamouni*, and the *Dejection*, and I am very willing to allow that he has more imagination than Wordsworth, and more of the real poet. But after all Coleridge is nothing more than an intellectual opium-eater—a man of many crude though lovely thoughts—of confused though brilliant imagination, liable to much error—error even of the heart, very sensual in many of his ideas of pleasure—indolent to a degree, and evidently and always thinking without discipline; letting the fine brains which God gave him work themselves irregularly and without end or object—and carry him whither they will. Wordsworth has a grand, consistent, perfectly disciplined, all grasping intellect—for which nothing is too small, nothing too great, arranging everything in due relations, divinely pure in its conceptions of pleasure, majestic in the equanimity of its benevolence—intense as white fire with chastised feeling. Coleridge may be the greater poet, but surely it admits of no question which is the greater man. Wordsworth often appears to want energy because he has so much judgment, and because he never enunciates any truth but with full views of many points which diminish the extent of its application, while Coleridge and others say more boldly what they see more partially. I believe Coleridge has very little moral influence on the world; his writings are those of a benevolent man in a fever. Wordsworth may be trusted as a guide in everything, he feels nothing but what we ought all to feel—what every mind in pure moral health must feel, he says nothing but what we all ought to believe—what all strong intellects must believe. He has written some things trifling, some verses which might be omitted—but none to be regretted.

POETIC KNOWLEDGE

Every kind of knowledge may be sought from ignoble motives, and for ignoble ends; and in those who so possess it, it is ignoble knowledge; while the very same knowledge is in another mind an attainment of the highest dignity, and conveying the greatest blessing. This is the difference between the mere botanist's knowledge of plants, and the great poet’s or painter's knowledge of them. The one notes their distinctions for the sake of swelling his herbarium, the other, that he may render them vehicles of expression and emotion. The one counts the stamens, and affixes a name, and is content; the other observes every character of the plant's colour and form; considering each of its attributes as an element of expression, he seized on its lines of grace or energy, rigidity or repose; notes the feebleness or the vigour, the serenity or tremulousness of its hues; observes its local habits, its love or fear of peculiar places, its nourishment or destruction by particular influences; he associates it in his mind with all the features of the situations it inhabits, and the ministering agencies necessary to its support. Thenceforward the flower is to him a living creature, with histories written on its leaves, and passions breathing in its motion. Its occurrence in his picture is no mere point of colour, no meaningless spark of light. It is a voice rising from the earth, a new chord of the mind’s music, a necessary note in the harmony of his picture, contributing alike to its tenderness and its dignity, nor less to its loveliness than its truth.


THE IMAGINATIVE FACULTY

Unfortunately, the works of metaphysicians will afford us in this most interesting inquiry, no aid whatsoever. They who are constantly endeavouring to fathom and explain the essence of the faculties of mind, are sure in the end, to lose sight of all that cannot be explained (though it may be defined and felt); and because, as I shall presently show, the essence of the Imaginative faculty is utterly mysterious and inexplicable, and to be recognized in its results only, or in the negative results of its absence, the metaphysicians, as far as I am acquainted with their works miss it altogether, and never reach higher than a definition of Fancy by a false name.

What I understand by Fancy will presently appear, not that I contend for nomenclature, but only for distinction between two mental faculties, by whatever name they be called; one the source of all that is great in the poetic arts, the other merely decorative and entertaining; but which are often confounded together, and which have so much in common as to render strict definition of either difficult.

Dugald Stewart's meagre definition may serve us for a starting point. "Imagination", he says, "includes conception or simple apprehension, which enables us to form a notion of those former objects of perception or of knowledge, out of which we are to make a selection; abstraction, which separates the selected materials from the qualities and circumstances which are connected with them in nature; and judgment or taste, which selects the materials and directs their combination. To these powers we may add that particular habit of association to which I formerly gave the name of Fancy, as it is this which presents to our choice all the different materials which are subservient to the efforts of imagination, and which may therefore
be considered as forming the ground-work of poetical genius.”

(By Fancy in this passage, we find on referring to the chapter treating of it, that nothing more is meant than the rapid occurrence of ideas of sense to the mind.)

Now, in this definition, the very point and purpose of all the inquiry is missed. We are told that judgment or taste “directs the combination”. In order that anything may be directed, an end must be previously determined; what is the faculty that determines this end? and of what frame and make, how boned and fleshed, how conceived or seen, is the end itself? Bare judgment or taste, cannot approve of what has no existence; and yet by Dugald Stewart’s definition we are left to their catering among a host of conceptions, to produce a combination which, as they work for, they must see and approve before it exists. This power of prophecy is the very essence of the whole matter, and it is just that inexplicable part which the metaphysician misses.

As might be expected from his misunderstanding of the faculty he has given an instance entirely nugatory. It would be difficult to find in Milton a passage in which less power of imagination was shown, than the description of

1 Philosophy of Human Mind, Part I, ch. viii.

2 He continues thus: “To illustrate these observations, let us consider the steps by which Milton must have proceeded, in creating his imaginary garden of Eden. When he first proposed to himself that subject of description, it is reasonable to suppose that a variety of the most striking scenes which he had seen, crowded into his mind. The association of ideas suggested them, and the power of conception placed each of them before him with all its beauties and imperfections. In every natural scene, if we destine it for any particular purpose, there are defects and redundancies, which art may sometimes, but cannot always correct. But the power of Imagination is unlimited. She can create and annihilate, and dispose at pleasure, her woods, her rocks, and her rivers. Milton, accordingly, would not copy his Eden from any one scene, but would select from each the features which were most eminently beautiful. The power of abstraction enabled him to make the separation, and taste directed him in the selection.”

FROM Modern Painters II

Eden, if, as I suppose, this be the passage meant, at the beginning of the fourth book, where I can find three expressions only in which this power is shown; the “burnished with golden rind, hung amiable”, of the Hesperian fruit, the “lays forth her purple grape” of the vine, and the “fringed bank with myrtle crowned” of the lake: and these are not what Stewart meant, but only that accumulation of bowers, groves, lawns, and hillocks, which is not imagination at all, but composition, and that of the commonest kind. Hence, if we take any passage in which there is real imagination, we shall find Stewart’s hypothesis not only inefficient and obscure, but utterly inapplicable.

Take one or two at random.

On the other side,

Incensed with indignation, Satan stood
Unterrified, and like a comet burned,
That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge
In the arctic sky, and from his horrid hair
Shakes pestilence and war.8

(Note that the word incensed is to be taken in its literal and material sense, set on fire.) What taste or judgment was it that directed this combination? or is there nothing more than taste or judgment here?

Ten paces huge
He back recoiled; the tenth on bended knee
His massy spear upstaid; as if on earth
Winds under ground, or waters forcing way,
Sidelong had pushed a mountain from his seat,
Half-sunk with all his pines.4

Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
We drove afield, and both together heard
What time the grey-fly winds her sultry horn.5

8 Par. Lost, u, 707.
4 Par. Lost, vi, 193.
5 Lycidas, 25.
Missing thee, I walk unseen
On the dry smooth-shaven green,
To behold the wandering moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way;
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

It is evident that Stewart's explanation utterly fails in all these instances; for there is in them no "combination" whatsoever, but a particular mode of regarding the qualities or appearances of a single thing, illustrated and conveyed to us by the image of another; and the act of imagination, observe, is not the selection of this image, but the mode of regarding the object.

But the metaphysician's definition fails yet more utterly, when we look at the imagination neither as regarding, nor combining, but as penetrating,

My gracious silence, hail!
Wouldst thou have laugh'd, had I come coffin'd home,
That weep'st to see me triumph? Ah, my dear,
Such eyes the widows in Corioli wear,
And mothers that lack sons.

How did Shakespeare know that Virgilia could not speak?

This knowledge, this intuitive and penetrative perception, is still one of the forms, the highest, of imagination, but there is no combination of images here.

We find, then, that the Imagination has three totally distinct functions. It combines, and by combination creates new forms; but the secret principle of this combination has not been shown by the analysts. Again, it treats, or regards, both the simple images and its own combinations in peculiar ways; and, thirdly, it penetrates, analyzes, and reaches truths by no other faculty discoverable. These its three functions, I shall endeavour to illustrate, but not in this order: the most logical mode of treatment would be to follow the order in which commonly the mind works; that is, penetrating first, combining next, and treating or regarding, finally; but this arrangement would be inconvenient, because the acts of penetration and of regard are so closely connected, and so like in their relations to other mental acts, that I wish to examine them consecutively; and the rather, because they have to do with higher subject matter than the mere act of combination, whose distinctive nature, that property which makes it imagination and not composition, it will, I think, be best to explain at setting out, as we easily may, in subjects familiar and material. I shall therefore examine the Imaginative faculty in these three forms; first, as Combinative or Associative; secondly, as Analytic or Penetrative; thirdly, as Regardant or Contemplative.


THE IMAGINATION ASSOCIATIVE

(a) COMPOSITION

We will suppose a man to retain such clear image of a large number of the material things he has seen, as to be able to set down any of them on paper, with perfect fidelity and absolute memory of their most minute features.

In thus setting them down on paper, he works, I suppose, exactly as he would work from nature, only copying the remembered image in his mind, instead of the real thing. He is, therefore, still nothing more than a copyist. There is no exercise of imagination in this whatsoever.

But over these images, vivid and distinct as nature herself, he has a command which over nature he has not. He can summon any that he chooses; and if, therefore, any

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6 Il Penseroso, 65.
7 Coriolanus, ii, i.
group of them which he received from nature be not altogether to his mind, he is at liberty to remove some of the component images, add others foreign, and re-arrange the whole.

Let us suppose, for instance, that he has perfect knowledge of the forms of the Aiguilles Verte and Argentière, and of the great glacier between them at the upper extremity of the valley of Chamonix. The forms of the mountains please him, but the presence of the glacier suits not his purpose. He removes the glacier, sets the mountains farther apart, and introduces between them part of the valley of the Rhone.

This is composition, and is what Dugald Stewart mistook for imagination, in the kingdom of which noble faculty it has no part nor lot.

The essential acts of Composition, properly so called, are the following. The mind which desires the new feature summons up before it those images which it supposes to be the kind wanted; of these it takes the one which it supposes to be fittest, and tries it; if it will not answer, it tries another, until it has obtained such an association as pleases it.

In this operation, if it be of little sensibility, it regards only the absolute beauty or value of the images brought before it; and takes that or those which it thinks fairest or most interesting, without any regard to their sympathy with those for whose company they are destined. Of this kind is all vulgar composition; the “Mulino” of Claude, being a characteristic example.

If the mind be of higher feeling, it will look to the sympathy or contrast of the features, to their likeness or dissimilarity: it will take, as it thinks best, features resembling or discordant; and if, when it has put them together, it be not satisfied, it will repeat the process on the features themselves, cutting away one part and putting in another; so working more and more delicately down to the lowest details, until by dint of experiment, of repeated trials and shifting, and constant reference to principles (as that two lines must not mimic one another, that one mass must not be equal to another), etc., it has mortised together a satisfactory result.

This process will be more and more rapid and effective, in proportion to the artist’s powers of conception and association, these in their turn depending on his knowledge and experience. The distinctness of his powers of conception will give value, point, and truth to every fragment that he draws from memory. His powers of association, and his knowledge of nature, will pour out before him, in greater or less number and appositeness, the images from which to choose. His experience guides him to quick discernment in the combination, when made, of the parts that are offensive and require change.

The most elevated power of mind of all these, is that of association, by which images apposite or resemblance, or of whatever kind wanted, are called up quickly and in multitudes. When this power is very brilliant, it is called Fancy; not that this is the only meaning of the word Fancy; but it is the meaning of it in relation to that function of the imagination which we are here considering; for fancy has three functions; one subordinate to each of the three functions of the imagination.

Great differences of power are manifested among artists in this respect; some having hosts of distinct images always at their command, and rapidly discerning resemblance or contrast; others having few images, and obscure, at their disposal, nor readily governing those they have.

Where the powers of fancy are very brilliant, the picture becomes highly interesting; if her images are systematically and rightly combined, and truthfully rendered, it will become even impressive and instructive; if witty and curiously combined, it will be captivating and entertaining.

But all this time the imagination has not once shown itself. All this (except the gift of fancy) may be taught; all this is easily comprehended and analyzed; but imagination is neither to be taught, nor by any efforts to be attained, nor by any acuteness of discernment dissected or analyzed.

(b) MANIFESTATION

It has been said that in composition the mind can only take cognizance of likeness or dissimilarity, or of abstract beauty among the ideas it brings together. But neither likeness nor dissimilarity secures harmony. We saw in the Chapter on Unity that likeness destroyed harmony or unity of membership; and that difference did not necessarily secure it, but only that particular imperfection in each of the harmonizing parts which can only be supplied by its fellow part. If, therefore, the combination made is to be harmonious, the artist must induce in each of its component parts (suppose two only, for simplicity’s sake), such imperfection as that the other shall put it right. If one of them be perfect by itself, the other will be an excess. Both must be faulty when separate, and each corrected by the presence of the other. If he can accomplish this, the result will be beautiful; it will be a whole, an organized body with dependent members;—he is an inventor. If not, let his separate features be as beautiful, as apposite, or as resemblant as they may, they form no whole. They are two members glued together. He is only a carpenter and joiner.

Now, the conceivable imperfections of any single feature are infinite. It is impossible, therefore, to fix upon a form of imperfection in the one, and try with this all the forms of imperfection of the other until one fits; but the two imperfections must be co-relatively and simultaneously conceived.

This is Imagination, properly so called; imagination associative, the grandest mechanical power that the human intelligence possesses, and one which will appear more and more marvellous the longer we consider it. By its operation, two ideas are chosen out of an infinite mass (for it evidently matters not whether the imperfections be conceived out of the infinite number conceivable, or selected out of a number recollected), two ideas which are separately wrong, which together shall be right, and of whose unity, therefore, the idea must be formed at the instant they are seized, as it is only in that unity that either is good, and therefore only the conception of that unity can prompt the preference.


(c) GRASP AND DIGNITY

A powerfully imaginative mind seizes and combines at the same instant, not only two, but all the important ideas of its poem or picture; and while it works with any one of them, it is at the same instant working with and modifying all in their relations to it, never losing sight of their bearings on each other; as the motion of a snake’s body goes through all parts at once, and its volition acts at the same instant in coils that go contrary ways.

This faculty is indeed something that looks as if man were made after the image of God. It is inconceivable, admirable, altogether divine; and yet, wonderful as it may seem, it is palpably evident that no less an operation is necessary for the production of any great work: for, by the definition of Unity of Membership (the essential characteristic of greatness), not only certain couples or groups of parts, but all the parts of a noble work must be separately imperfect; each must imply, and ask for all the rest, and the glory of every one of them must consist in its relation to the rest; neither while so much as one is wanting can any be right. And it is evidently impossible to conceive, in each separate feature, a certain want or wrongness which can only be corrected by the other features of the picture (not by one or two merely, but by all), unless, together with the want, we conceive also of what is wanted, that is, of all the rest of the work or picture.

(d) TESTS OF IMAGINATION

The Imaginative artist owns no laws. He defies all restraint, and cuts down all hedges. There is nothing within the limits of natural possibility that he dares not do, or that he allows the necessity of doing. The laws of nature he knows; these are to him no restraint. They are his own nature. All other laws or limits he sets at utter defiance; his journey is over an untrodden and pathless plain. But he sees his end over the waste from the first, and goes straight at it; never losing sight of it, nor throwing away a step. Nothing can stop him, nothing turn him aside; falcons and lynxes are of slow and uncertain sight compared with his. He saw his tree, trunk, boughs, foliage and all, from the first moment; not only the tree, but the sky behind it; not only that tree or sky, but all the other great features of his picture: by what intense power of instantaneous selection and amalgamation cannot be explained, but by this it may be proved and tested; that, if we examine the tree of the unimaginative painter, we shall find that on removing any part or parts of it, though the rest will indeed suffer, as being deprived of the proper development of a tree, and as involving a blank space that wants occupation, yet the portions left are not made discordant or disagreeable. They are absolutely and in themselves as valuable as they can be; every stem is a perfect stem, and every twig a graceful twig, or at least as perfect and as graceful as they were before the removal of the rest. But if we try the same experiment on the imaginative painter's work, and break off the merest stem or twig of it, it all goes to pieces like a Prince Rupert's drop. There is not so much as a seed of it but it lies on the tree's life, like the grain upon the tongue of Chaucer's sainted child. Take it away, and the boughs will sing to us no longer. All is dead and cold.

8 The Prioress's Tale, line 1852.

This then is the first sign of the presence of real imagination as opposed to composition. But here is another not less important.

We have seen that as each part is selected and fitted by the unimaginative painter, he renders it, in itself, as beautiful as he is able. If it be ugly it remains so; he is incapable of correcting it by the addition of another ugliness, and therefore he chooses all his features as fair as they may be (at least if his object be beauty). But a small proportion only of the ideas he has at his disposal will reach his standard of absolute beauty. The others will be of no use to him: and among those which he permits himself to use, there will be so marked a family likeness that he will be more and more cramped, as his picture advances, for want of material, and tormented by multiplying resemblances, unless disguised by some artifice of light and shade or other forced difference; and with all the differences he can imagine, his tree will yet show a sameness and sickening repetition in all its parts, and all his trees will be like one another, except so far as one leans east and another west, one is broadest at the top and another at the bottom; while through all this insipid repetition, the means by which he forces contrast, dark boughs opposed to light, rugged to smooth, etc., will be painfully evident, to the utter destruction of all dignity and repose. The imaginative work is necessarily the absolute opposite of all this. As all its parts are imperfect, and as there is an unlimited supply of imperfection (for the ways in which things may be wrong are infinite), the imagination is never at a loss, nor ever likely to repeat itself; nothing comes amiss to it; but whatever rude matter it receives, it instantly so arranges that it comes right; all things fall into their place, and appear in that place perfect, useful, and evidently not to be spared; so that of its combinations there is endless variety, and every intractable and seemingly unavailable fragment that we give to it, is instantly turned to some brilliant use, and made the nucleus of a new group of glory; however poor or common the gift, it
will be thankful for it, treasure it up, and pay in gold; and it has that life in it and fire, that wherever it passes, among the dead bones and dust of things, behold! a shaking, and the bones come together bone to his bone.

And now we find what noble sympathy and unity there are between the Imaginative and the Theoretic faculties. Both agree in this, that they reject nothing, and are thankful for all; but the Theoretic faculty takes out of everything that which is beautiful, while the Imaginative faculty takes hold of the very imperfections which the Theoretic rejects; and, by means of these angles and roughnesses, it joints and bolts the separate stones into a mighty temple, wherein the Theoretic faculty, in its turn, does deepest homage. Thus sympathetic in their desires, harmoniously diverse in their operation, each working for the other with what the other needs not, all things external to man are by one or other turned to good.


(e) NATURE AND TRUTH

There remains but one question to be determined relating to this faculty; what operation, namely, supposing it possessed in high degree, it has or ought to have in the artist's treatment of natural scenery?

I have just said that nature is always imaginative, but it does not follow that her imagination is always of high subject, or that the imagination of all the parts is of a like and sympathetic kind; the boughs of every bramble bush are imaginatively arranged, so are those of every oak and cedar; but it does not follow that there is imaginative sympathy between bramble and cedar. There are few natural scenes whose harmonies are not conceivably improvable either by banishment of some discordant point, or by addition of some sympathetic one; it constantly happens that there is a profuseness too great to be comprehended, or an inequality in the pitch, meaning, and intensity of different parts. The imagination will banish all that is extraneous; it will seize out of the many threads of different feeling which nature has suffered to become entangled, one only; and where that seems thin and likely to break, it will spin it stouter, and in doing this, it never knits, but weaves in the new thread; so that all its work looks as pure and true as nature itself, and cannot be guessed from it but by its exceeding simplicity (known from it, it cannot be); so that herein we find another test of the imaginative work, that it looks always as if it had been gathered straight from nature, whereas the unimaginative shows its joints and knots, and is visibly composition.

And here, then, we arrive at an important conclusion (though one somewhat contrary to the positions commonly held on the subject), namely, that if anything looks unnatural, there can be no imagination in it (at least not associative). We frequently hear works that have no truth in them, justified or elevated on the score of being imaginative. Let it be understood once for all, that imagination never deigns to touch anything but truth; and though it does not follow that where there is the appearance of truth, there has been imaginative operation, of this we may be assured, that where there is appearance of falsehood, the imagination has had no hand.


(f) FINAL TESTS

The final tests, therefore, of the work of Associative imagination are, its intense simplicity, its perfect harmony, and its absolute truth. It may be a harmony, majestic or humble, abrupt or prolonged, but it is always a governed and perfect whole; evidencing in all its relations the weight, prevalence, and universal dominion of an awful inexplicable Power; a chastising, animating, and disposing Mind.

THE IMAGINATION PENETRATIVE

(a) IMAGINATION AND FANCY

Thus far we have been defining that combining operation of the Imagination, which appears to be in a sort mechanical, yet takes place in the same inexplicable modes, whatever be the order of conception submitted to it, though I choose to illustrate it by its dealings with mere matter before taking cognizance of any nobler subjects of imagery. We must now examine the dealing of the Imagination with its separate conceptions, and endeavour to understand, not only its principles of selection, but its modes of apprehension with respect to what it selects.

When Milton's Satan first "rears from off the pool his mighty stature", the image of leviathan before suggested not being yet abandoned, the effect of the fire-wave is described as of the upheaved monster on the ocean stream:

On each hand the flames
Driven backward, slope their pointing spires, and, rolled
In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.\(^9\)

And then follows a fiercely restless piece of volcanic imagery:

As when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill
Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
Of thundering Ætna, whose combustible
And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singéd bottom all involved
With stench and smoke; such resting found the sole
Of unblest feet.

\(^9\) Par. Lost, I, 222.

Yet I think all this is too far detailed, and deals too much with externals: we feel rather the form of the fire-waves than their fury; we walk upon them too securely; and the fuel, sublimation, smoke, and singing seem to me images only of partial combustion; they vary and extend the conception, but they lower the thermometer. Look back, if you will, and add to the description the glimmering of the livid flames; the sulphurous hail and red lightning; yet all together, however they overwhelm us with horror, fail of making us thoroughly, unendurably hot. The essence of intense flame has not been given. Now hear Dante:

Feriam 'l Sole in su 'l omero destro,
Che già raggiando tutto 'l Occidente
Mutava in bianco aspetto di cilestro.
Ed io facea con 'l ombra più rovente
Parer la fiamma.\(^{10}\)

That is a slight touch; he has not gone to Ætna or Pelorus for fuel; but we shall not soon recover from it, he has taken our breath away, and leaves us gasping. No smoke nor cinders there. Pure white, hurtling, formless flame; very fire crystal, we cannot make spires nor waves of it, nor divide it, nor walk on it; there is no question about singing soles of feet. It is lamentable annihilation.

Such is always the mode in which the highest imaginative faculty seizes its materials. It never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very central fiery heart; nothing else will content its spirituality; whatever semblances and various outward shows and phases its subject may possess go for nothing; it gets within all fence, cuts down to the root, and drinks the very vital sap of that it deals with; once therein, it is at liberty to throw up what new

\(^{10}\) Purg. xxvi, 4. Cary translates:

The sun
Now all the western clime irradiate changed
From azure tinct to white; and, as I passed,
My passing shadow made the umbred flame
Burn ruddier.
shooting it will, so always that the true juice and sap be in them, and to prune and twist them at its pleasure, and bring them to fairer fruit than grew on the old tree; but all this pruning and twisting is work that it likes not, and often does ill; its function and gift are the getting at the root, its nature and dignity depend on its holding things always by the heart. Take its hand from off the beating of that, and it will prophesy no longer; it looks not in the eyes, it judges not by the voice, it describes not by outward features; all that it affirms, judges, or describes, it affirms, from within.

It may seem to the reader that I am incorrect in calling this penetrating possession-taking faculty Imagination. Be it so; the name is of little consequence; the faculty itself, called by what name we will, I insist upon as the highest intellectual power of man. There is no reasoning in it; it works not by algebra, nor by integral calculus; it is a piercing pholos-like mind’s tongue, that works and tastes into the very rock heart; no matter what be the subject submitted to it, substance or spirit; all is like divided asunder, joint and narrow, whatever utmost truth, life, principle it has, laid bare, and that which has no truth, life, nor principle, dissipated into its original smoke at a touch. The whispers at men’s ears it lifts into visible angels. Vials that have lain sealed in the deep sea a thousand years it unsseals, and brings out of them Genii.\textsuperscript{11}

Every great conception of poet or painter is held and treated by this faculty. Every character that is so much as touched by men like Aeschylus, Homer, Dante, or Shakespeare, is by them held by the heart; and every circumstance or sentence of their being, speaking, or seeming, is seized by process from without, and is referred to that inner secret spring of which the hold is never lost for an instant: so that every sentence, as it has been thought out from the heart, opens for us a way down to the heart, leads us to the centre, and then leaves us to gather what more we may. It is the Open Sesame of a huge, obscure, endless cave, with inexhaustible treasure of pure gold scattered in it: the wandering about and gathering the pieces may be left to any of us, all can accomplish that; but the first opening of that invisible door in the rock is of the imagination only.

Hence there is in every word set down by the imaginative mind an awful under-current of meaning, and evidence and shadow upon it of the deep places out of which it has come. It is often obscure, often half-told; for he who wrote it, in his clear seeing of the things beneath, may have been impatient of detailed interpretation: but, if we choose to dwell upon it and trace it, it will lead us always securely back to that metropolis of the soul’s dominion from which we may follow out all the ways and tracks to its farthest coasts.

I think the “Quel giorno più non vi leggemo avante”\textsuperscript{12} of Francesca di Rimini, and the “He has no children” of Macduff,\textsuperscript{13} are as fine instances as can be given; but the sign and mark of it are visible on every line of the four great men above instanced.

The unimaginative writer on the other hand, as he has never pierced to the heart, so he can never touch it. If he has to paint a passion, he remembers the external signs of it, he collects expressions of it from other writers, he searches for similes, he composes, exaggerates, heaps term on term, figure on figure, till we groan beneath the cold disjoined heap; but it is all faggot and no fire; the life breath is not in it; his passion has the form of the levitan, but it never makes the deep boil; he fastens us all at anchor in the scaly rind of it; our sympathies remain as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.

And that virtue of originality that men so strain after is not newness, as they vainly think (there is nothing new), it is only genuineness; it all depends on this single glorious faculty of getting to the spring of things and working out from that; it is the coolness, and clearness, and deliciousness of the water fresh from the fountain head, opposed to the thick, hot, unrefreshing drainage from other men’s meadows.

\textsuperscript{11} Arab. Nights, ch. ii (Lane).

\textsuperscript{12} “That day we read no farther”: Inferno, v, 138.

\textsuperscript{13} Macbeth, iv, iii.
This freshness, however, is not to be taken for an infallible sign of imagination, inasmuch as it results also from a vivid operation of fancy, whose parallel function to this division of the imaginative faculty it is here necessary to distinguish.

I believe it will be found that the entirely unimaginative mind sees nothing of the object it has to dwell upon or describe, and is therefore utterly unable, as it is blind itself, to set anything before the eyes of the reader.

The fancy sees the outside, and is able to give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail.

The imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail.

Take an instance. A writer with neither imagination nor fancy, describing a fair lip, does not see it, but thinks about it, and about what is said of it, and calls it well turned, or rosy, or delicate, or lovely, or afflicts us with some other quenching and chilling epithet. Now hear Fancy speak:

Her lips were red, and one was thin,
Compared with that was next her chin,
Some bee had stung it newly.14

The real, red, bright being of the lip is there in a moment. But it is all outside; no expression yet, no mind. Let us go a step farther with Warner, of Fair Rosamond struck by Eleanor:

With that she dashed her on the lips
So dyed double red;
Hard was the heart that gave the blow,
Soft were those lips that bled.15

The tenderness of mind begins to mingle with the outside colour, the Imagination is seen in its awakening. Next Shelley:

Bring the rathe primrose, that forsaken
dies,
The tufted crow-toe and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowlips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears.

Then hear Perdita:

Lamp of life, thy lips are burning
Through the veil that seems to hide them,
As the radiant lines of morning
Through thin clouds ere they divide them.16

There dawns the entire soul in that morning; yet we may stop if we choose at the image still external, at the crimson clouds. The imagination is contemplative rather than penetrative. Last, hear Hamlet:

Here hung those lips that I have kissed, I know not how oft. Where be your gibe now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?17

There is the essence of lip, and the full power of the imagination.

Again, compare Milton’s flowers in Lycidas with Perdita’s. In Milton it happens, I think, generally, and in the case before us most certainly, that the imagination is mixed and broken with fancy, and so the strength of the imagery is part of iron and part of clay:

Imagination.
Nugatory.

Fancy.
Imagination.

Fancy, vulgar.

Imagination.
Mixed.

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14 Quoted from Sir J. Suckling in Leigh Hunt’s Imagination and Fancy.
15 Quoted from William Warner, in Leigh Hunt.
16 Prometheus Unbound, II, v, 54.
17 Hamlet, v, i, 181.
O Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frightened, thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids.\(^{18}\)

Observe how the imagination in these last lines goes
into the very inmost soul of every flower, after having
touched them all at first with that heavenly timidity, the
shadow of Proserpine's, and gilded them with celestial
gathering, and never stops on their spots, or their bodly
shape; while Milton sticks in the stains upon them, and
puts us off with that unhappy freak of jet in the very
flower that, without this bit of paper-staining, would have
been the most precious to us of all. "There is pansies, that's
for thoughts."\(^{19}\)

So, I believe, it will be found throughout the operation
of the fancy, that it has to do with the outsides of things,
and is content therewith; of this there can be no doubt
in such passages as that description of Mab so often given
as an illustration of it,\(^{20}\) and many other instances will be
found in Leigh Hunt's work already referred to. Only some
embarrassment is caused by passages in which Fancy is
seizing the outward signs of emotion, understanding them
as such, and yet, in pursuance of her proper function, tak-
ing for her share, and for that which she chooses to dwell
upon, the outside sign rather than the emotion. Note in
Macbeth that brilliant instance:

Where the Norwegian banners flout the sky,
And fan our people cold.\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) Winter's Tale, iv, iii.
\(^{19}\) Hamlet, iv, v.
\(^{20}\) Romeo and Juliet, i, iv.
\(^{21}\) Act i, Sc. ii, line 51.

The outward shiver and coldness of fear is seized on,
and irregularly but admirably attributed by the fancy to
the drift of the banners. Compare Solomon's Song, where
the imagination stays not at the outside, but dwells on the
fearful emotion itself:

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning; fair
as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army
with banners?

Now, if these be the prevailing characteristics of the
two faculties, it is evident that certain other collateral dif-
ferences will result from them. Fancy, as she stays at the
externals, can never feel. She is one of the hardest-hearted
of the intellectual faculties, or rather one of the most
purely and simply intellectual. She cannot be made seri-
ous, no edgetools but she will play with. Whereas the
Imagination is in all things the reverse. She cannot be too
serious; she sees too far, too darkly, too solemnly, too
earnestly ever to smile. There is something in the heart of
everything, if we can reach it, that we shall not be incl-
lined to laugh at. And thus there is reciprocal action be-
tween the intensity of moral feeling and the power of
imagination; for, on the one hand, those who have keen-
est sympathy are those who look closest and pierce deep-
est, and hold securest; and on the other, those who have
so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things are
filled with the most intense passion and gentleness of symp-
pathy. Hence, I suppose that the powers of the imagina-
tion may always be tested by accompanying tenderness of
emotion; and thus, as Byron said,\(^{22}\) there is no tenderness
like Dante's, neither any intensity nor seriousness like his,
such seriousness that it is incapable of perceiving that
which is commonplace or ridiculous, but fuses all down
into its own white-hot fire. And, on the other hand, I sup-
pose the chief bar to the action of imagination, and stop
to all greatness in this present age of ours, is its mean and

\(^{22}\) Byron's Diary, Jan. 29, 1821.
shallow love of jest; so that if there be in any good and lofty work a flaw, falling, or undipped vulnerable part, where sarcasm may stick or stay, it is caught at, and pointed at, and buzzed about, and fixed upon, and stung into, as a recent wound is by flies; and nothing is ever taken seriously or as it was meant, but always, if it may be, turned the wrong way, and misunderstood; and while this is so, there is not, nor cannot be, any hope of achievement of high things; men dare not open their hearts to us, if we are to broil them on a thorn-fire.

This, then, is one essential difference between imagination and fancy; and another is like it and resultant from it, that the imagination being at the heart of things, poises herself there, and is still, quiet, and brooding, comprehending all around her with her fixed look; but the fancy staying at the outside of things, cannot see them all at once; but runs hither and thither, and round and about to see more and more, bounding merrily from point to point, and glittering here and there, but necessarily always settling, if she settle at all, on a point only, never embracing the whole. And from these single points she can strike out analogies and catch resemblances, which, so far as the point she looks at is concerned, are true, but would be false, if she could see through to the other side. This, however, she cares not to do; the point of contact is enough for her, and even if there be a gap left between the two things and they do not quite touch, she will spring from one to the other like an electric spark, and be seen brightest in her leaping.

Now these differences between the imagination and the fancy hold, not only in the way they lay hold of separate conceptions, but even in the points they occupy of time; for the fancy loves to run hither and thither in time, and to follow long chains of circumstances from link to link; but the imagination, if it may, gets hold of a moment or link in the middle that implies all the rest, and fastens there. Hence Fuseli’s aphorism: “Invention never suffers the action to expire, nor the spectator’s fancy to consume itself in preparation, or stagnate into repose. It neither begins from the egg, nor coldly gathers the remains.”


(b) INTUITIVE PERCEPTION OF ULTIMATE TRUTH

Now, in all these instances, let it be observed—for it is to that end alone that I have been arguing all along—that the virtue of the Imagination is its reaching, by intuition and intensity of gaze (not by reasoning, but by its authoritative opening and revealing power), a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things. I repeat that it matters not whether the reader is willing to call this faculty Imagination or not; I do not care about the name; but I would be understood when I speak of imagination hereafter, to mean this, the base of whose authority and being is its perpetual thirst for truth and purpose to be true. It has no food, no delight, no care, no perception, except of truth; it is for ever looking under masks, and burning up mists; no fairness of form, no majesty of seeming will satisfy it; the first condition of its existence is incapability of being deceived; and though it sometimes dwells upon and substantiates the fictions of fancy, yet its own operation is to trace to their farthest limit the true laws and likelihoods even of the fictitious creation.

_modern Painters, vol. ii, sec. ii, ch. iii, par. 29.

THE IMAGINATION CONTEMPLATIVE

We have, in the two preceding chapters, arrived at definite conclusions respecting the power and essence of the imaginative faculty. In these two acts of penetration and combination, its separating and characteristic attributes are entirely developed; it remains for us only to observe a
certain habit or mode of operation in which it frequently delights, and by which it addresses itself to our perceptions more forcibly, and asserts its presence more distinctly than in those mighty but more secret workings wherein its life consists.

In our examination of the combining imagination, we chose to assume the first or simple conception to be as clear in the absence as in the presence of the object of it. This, I suppose, is, in point of fact, never the case, nor is an approximation to such distinctness of conception always a characteristic of the imaginative mind. Many persons have thorough and felicitous power of drawing from memory, yet never originate a thought, nor excite an emotion.

The form in which conception actually occurs to ordinary minds appears to derive value and preciousness from indefiniteness; for there is an unfailing charm in the memory and anticipation of things beautiful, more sunny and spiritual than attaches to their presence; for with their presence it is possible to be sated, and even wearied, but with the imagination of them never; in so far that it needs some self-discipline to prevent the mind from falling into a morbid condition of dissatisfaction with all that it immediately possesses, and continual longing for things absent; and yet I think this charm is not justly to be attributed to the mere vagueness and uncertainty of the conception, except thus far, that of objects whose substantial presence was painful, the sublimity and impressiveness, if there were any, are retained in the conception, while the sensual offensiveness is withdrawn; thus circumstances of horror may be safely touched in verbal description, and for a time dwelt upon by the mind as often by Homer and Spenser (by the latter frequently with too much grossness), which could not for a moment be regarded or tolerated in their reality, or on canvas; and besides this mellowing and softening operation on those it retains, the concepitive faculty has the power of letting go many of them altogether out of its groups of ideas, and retaining only those where the "meminisse juvabit" will apply; and in this way the entire group of memories becomes altogether delightful. But of those parts of anything which are in themselves beautiful, I think the indistinctness no benefit, but that the brighter they are the better; and that the peculiar charm we feel in conception results from its grasp and blending of ideas, rather than from their obscurity; for we do not usually recall, as we have seen, one part at a time only of a pleasant scene, one moment only of a happy day; but together with each single object we summon up a kind of crowded and involved shadowing forth of all the other glories with which it was associated, and into every moment we concentrate an epitome of the day; and it will happen frequently that even when the visible objects or actual circumstances are not in detail remembered, the feeling and joy of them are obtained we know not how or whence; and so, with a kind of concepitive burning-glass; we bend the sunshine of all the day, and the fulness of all the scene upon every point that we successively seize; and this together with more vivid action of Fancy, for I think that the wilful and playful seizures of the points that suit her purpose, and help her springing, whereby she is distinguished from simple conception, take place more easily and actively with the memory of things than in presence of them. But, however this be, and I confess that there is much that I cannot satisfactorily to myself unravel with respect to the nature of simple conception, it is evident that this agreeableness, whatever it be, is not by art attainable, for all art is, in some sort, realization; it may be the realization of obscurity or indefiniteness, but still it must differ from the mere conception of obscurity and indefiniteness; so that whatever emotions depend absolutely on imperfectness of conception, as the horror of Milton's Death, cannot be rendered by art; for art can only lay hold of things which have shape, and destroys by its touch the fearfulness or pleasurableness of those which "shape have none".

23 Vergil, Aeneid, i, 203.
24 Par. Lost, ii, 667.
But on this indistinctness of conception, itself comparatively valueless and unaffecting, is based the operation of the Imaginative faculty with which we are at present concerned, and in which its glory is consummated; whereby, depriving the subject of material and bodily shape, and regarding such of its qualities only as it chooses for particular purpose, it forges these qualities together in such groups and forms as it desires, and gives to their abstract being consistency and reality, by striking them as it were with the die of an image belonging to other matter, which stroke having once received, they pass current at once in the peculiar conjunction and for the peculiar value desired.

Thus, in the description of Satan, “and like a comet burned,” the bodily shape of the angel is destroyed, the inflaming of the formless spirit is alone regarded; and this, and his power of evil, associated in one fearful and abstract conception, are stamped to give them distinctness and permanence with the image of the comet, “That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge.” Yet this could not be done, but that the image of the comet itself is in a measure indistinct, capable of awful expansion, and full of threatening and fear. Again, in his fall, the imagination gathers up the thunder, the resistance, the massy prostration, separates them from the external form, and binds them together by the help of that image of the mountain half sunk; which again would be unfit but for its own indistinctness, and for that glorious addition “with all his pines”, whereby a vitality and spear-like hostility are communicated to its falling form; and the fall is marked as not utter subversion, but sinking only, the pines remaining in their uprightness and unity, and threatening of darkness upon the descended precipice; and again, in that yet more noble passage at the close of the fourth book, where almost every operation of the contemplative imagination is concentrated; the angelic squadron first gathered into one burning mass by the single expression “sharpening in mooned horns”, then told out in their unity and multitude and stooped hostility, by the image of the wind upon the corn;

Satan endowed with god-like strength and endurance in that mighty line, “Like Teneriff or Atlas, unremoved”, with infinitude of size the next instant, and with all the vagueness and terribleness of spiritual power, by the “Horrore plumed”, and the “what seemed both spear and shield”.25

The third function of Fancy, already spoken of as subordinate to this of the Imagination, is the highest of which she is capable; like the Imagination, she beholds in the things submitted to her treatment things different from the actual; but the suggestions she follows are not in their nature essential in the object contemplated; and the images resulting, instead of illustrating, may lead the mind away from it, and change the current of contemplative feeling: for, as in her operation parallel to Imagination penetrative we saw her dwelling upon external features, while the nobler sister faculty entered within; so now, when both, from what they see and know in their immediate object, are conjuring up images illustrative or elevatory of it, the Fancy necessarily summons those of mere external relationship, and therefore of unaffecting influence; while the Imagination, by every ghost she raises, tells tales about the prison house, and therefore never loses her power over the heart, nor her unity of emotion. On the other hand, the regardant or contemplative action of Fancy is in this different from, and in this nobler than, that mere seizing and likeness-catching operation we saw in her before; that, when contemplative, she verily believes in the truth of the vision she has summoned, loses sight of actuality, and beholds the new and spiritual image faithfully and even seriously; whereas, before, she summoned no spiritual image, but merely caught the vivid actuality, or the curious resemblance of the real object; not that these two operations are separate, for the Fancy passes gradually from mere vivid sight of reality, and witty suggestion of likeness, to a ghostly sight of what is unreal; and through this, in proportion as she begins to feel, she rises towards and partakes of Imagination itself; for Imag-

25 Vide Par. Lost, iv, 979–990.
ination and Fancy are continually united, and it is necessary, when they are so, carefully to distinguish the feelingless part which is Fancy's, from the sentient part which is Imagination's. Let us take a few instances. Here is Fancy, first, very beautiful, in her simple capacity of likeness-catch ing:

To-day we purpose—ay, this hour we mount,
To spur three leagues towards the Apennine.
Come down, we pray thee, ere the hot sun count
His dewy rosary on the eglantine.26

Seizing on the outside resemblances of bead form, and on the slipping from their threading bough one by one, the fancy is content to lose the heart of the thing, the solemnity of prayer: or perhaps I do the glorious poet wrong in saying this, for the sense of a sun worship and orison in beginning its race, may have been in his mind; and so far as it was so, the passage is imaginative and not fanciful. But that which most readers would accept from it, is the mere flash of the external image, in whose truth the Fancy herself does not yet believe, and therefore is not yet contemplative. Here, however, is Fancy believing in the images she creates:

It feeds the quick growth of the serpent-vine,
And the dark linked ivy tangling wild,
And budding, blown, or odour-faded blooms,
Which star the winds with points of coloured light
As they rain through them; and bright golden globes
Of fruit suspended in their own green heaven.27

It is not, observe, a mere likeness that is caught here; but the flowers and fruit are entirely deprived by the fancy of their material existence, and contemplated by her seriously and faithfully as stars and worlds; yet it is only external likeness that she catches; she forces the resemblance, and lowers the dignity of the adopted image.

26 Keats, Isabella, xxiv.
27 Shelley, Prometheus, ii, 3.
Grey rocks did peep from the spare moss, and stemmed
The struggling brook; tall spires of windlestrae
Threw their thin shadows down the rugged slope,
And nought but gnarled roots of ancient pines,
Branchless and blasted, clenched, with grasping roots,
Th' unwilling soil.

... A gradual change was here,
Yet ghastly. For, as fast years fly away,
The smooth brow gathers, and the hair grows thin
And white; and, where irradiate dewy eyes
Had shone, gleam stony orbs;--so from his steps
Bright flowers departed, and the beautiful shade
Of the green groves, with all their odorous winds
And musical motions.

... Where the pass extends
Its stony jaws, the abrupt mountain breaks,
And seems with its accumulated crags
To overhang the world; for wide expand
Beneath the wan stars, and descending moon,
Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams,
Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom
Of leaden-coloured even, and fiery hills
Mingling their flames with twilight, on the verge
Of the remote horizon. The near scene,
In naked and severe simplicity,
Made contrast with the universe. A pine
Rock-rooted, stretch'd athwart the vacancy
Its swinging boughs, to each inconstant blast
Yielding one only response at each pause,
In most familiar cadence, with the howl,
The thunder, and the hiss of homeless streams,
Mingling its solemn song.

In this last passage, the mind never departs from its
solemn possession of the solitary scene, the Imagination
only giving weight, meaning, and strange human sympa-
thies to all its sights and sounds.

80 Shelley, Alastor, 527.
In that from Scott* the Fancy, led away by the outside resemblance of floating form and hue to the banners, loses the feeling and possession of the scene, and places herself in circumstances of character completely opposite to the quietness and grandeur of the natural objects; this would have been unjustifiable, but that the resemblance occurs to the mind of the monarch, rather than to that of the poet; and it is that which, of all others, would have been the most likely to occur at the time; from this point of view it has high imaginative propriety. Of the same fanciful character is that transformation of the tree trunks into dragons noticed before in Turner’s Jason; and in the same way this becomes imaginative, as it exhibits the effect of Fear in disposing to morbid perception. Compare with it the real and high action of the Imagination on the same matter in Wordsworth’s Yew trees (perhaps the most vigorous and solemn bit of forest landscape ever painted):—

Each particular trunk a growth  
Of intertwisted fibres serpentine,  
Up-coiling and inveterately convolved,  
Nor uninformed with Phantasy, and looks  
That threaten the profane.

It is too long to quote, but the reader should refer to it: let him note especially, if painter, that pure touch of colour, “By sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged.”

I have been led perhaps into too great detail in illus-

* Let it not be supposed, that I mean to compare the sickly dreaming of Shelley over clouds and waves, with the masculine and magnificent grasp of men and things which we find in Scott; it only happens that these two passages are more illustrative, by the likeness of the scenery they treat, than any others I could have opposed, and that Shelley is peculiarly distinguished by the faculty of Contemplative imagination. Scott’s healthy and truthful feeling would not allow him to represent the benighted hunter, provoked by loss of game, horse, and way at once, as indulging in any more exalted flights of imagination than those naturally consequent on the contrast between the night’s lodging he expected, and that which befitted him.