Coleridge's Idea of Fancy and Imagination for Literature

Even though there have been many writers who are eminent for their poetic style in terms of imagination and dream vision, Coleridge is one of those writers who is deeply engaged with inner dream vision and imagination. It can be said that his sense of the sublime or his muse depends precisely on imagination. Accordingly, there are two major theories of Coleridge concerning the role of imagination in literary production: fancy and imagination. These concepts differ from each other in the way they observe and construct reality, and this article will explain their differences and their roles in literary production.

To begin with, Coleridge divides imagination into two categories: primary imagination and secondary imagination. Primary imagination refers to ordinary, everyday things that already exist in the world, such as chairs, trees, and other objects that have been created and perceived before. For this reason, Coleridge claims that we do not need to create what already exists in order to involve it in poetry, since no special effort is required to imagine such basic elements. These objects already exist in the human mind as part of common perception. Therefore, a poem that relies only on primary imagination depends on basic mental capacity that anyone can possess.

The second category is secondary imagination. Coleridge argues that secondary imagination is what a poet must use in order to create poetry, while still drawing upon primary imagination. It is the imagination of deep thinking, through which people can perceive things differently from others. Through secondary imagination, a poet reshapes, transforms, and ornaments ordinary objects, turning simple daily realities into something elevated and meaningful. In this sense, primary and secondary imagination must work together. Secondary imagination does not merely imitate everyday objects; rather, it re-creates and intensifies them. Because imagination holds a mysterious

power, nature, memory, and imagination become essential in transforming daily objects into something imaginative and almost supernatural within poetry.

Another category in Coleridge's theory is the fanciful mind. Fancy is a more mechanical operation of the mind in which separate elements function independently while contributing to a whole. A fanciful mind allows a poet to recall images or memories from everyday life and use them metaphorically or comparatively. For Coleridge, fancy is clearly distinct from both primary and secondary imagination in terms of poetic creation.

For example, primary imagination consists of familiar objects such as beds, wardrobes, tables, carpets, and curtains, all of which already exist in our minds. If a writer wants to describe a room, he must rely on these materials provided by primary imagination. However, the concept of the room itself belongs to fancy, because the poet gathers these separate materials to construct the image of a room. Each object retains its own identity, yet together they form the identity of the room. The room, by itself, has no meaning without these materials. Thus, fancy creates a combination, but the elements do not lose their individual identities.

When primary imagination and fancy operate together, secondary imagination is revealed as the shaping force that unifies them into a single whole. The room remains incomplete until secondary imagination gives it coherence and meaning. Once secondary imagination is applied, the room can be identified, for instance, as a bedroom, because primary imagination and fancy have merged through the power of secondary imagination. Fancy alone cannot create a unified identity; therefore, it is inferior to imagination in Coleridge's hierarchy.

Coleridge's purpose in bringing imagination and fancy together is to emphasize pleasure as the central role of literary production. He avoids facts drawn from mathematics or science in poetry, as they do not provide pleasure. For Coleridge, every line of a poem should offer delight and satisfaction, achieved through the collaboration of imagination and fancy. A poem's purpose is not

to solve problems or present factual truth, but to give pleasure. Each line should build upon the previous one so that the reader is absorbed by imagination rather than searching for logical solutions or empirical facts.

In conclusion, Coleridge's theory of imagination demonstrates that primary and secondary imagination are fundamentally different. Primary imagination is a universal human capacity based on already existing objects, whereas secondary imagination belongs to poets, who transform ordinary materials into something rich and elevated. In contrast, fancy is a materialistic mental process that rearranges elements of primary imagination without fully transforming them. When fancy and imagination work together under the guidance of secondary imagination, poetic pleasure is achieved, which Coleridge sees as the ultimate purpose of literary production.