

College of Education		
Department of English		Instructor: Dr.Mugdad
Third Stage (Morning)		Subject: Poetry
Lecture 10		

Who was Samuel Taylor Coleridge?

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a widely celebrated poet, philosopher and critic. He was born in England in the late eighteenth century. Coleridge was one of the priests of the English **Romantic Movement**. He had a rich romantic imagination, and was the master of narrative verse, **supernaturalism**, witchery of language, and exquisite verbal melody. In his poems, he created a world of magic, mystery, and awe. His poetry is replete with characteristics such as the love of liberty, interest in the supernatural and the mysterious, the revolutionary zeal, the medieval imaginative faculty, and new experiments in verse. Moreover, we also find simplicity of diction, humanism, love for nature, and expression of melancholy in Coleridge's poems.

Coleridge's poetry, like other romantic poets, is highly rich, sensuous, and pictorial. In fact, his fondness for the weird and the unusual romantic themes makes him, inevitably, the purest of the Romantics. Besides, the chief contribution of Coleridge to poetry is his subtle appeal for the supernatural to the Romantic sense. He had intense imaginative power and also possessed a talent of creating hallucinatory reality and communicating moral truths through his works.

Coleridge's Life At Cambridge and His Enrollment in Army

At Christ's Hospital School, Samuel Taylor Coleridge received a scholarship to attend Jesus College, Cambridge. When leaving school, he composed a poem *On Quitting School for College* saying goodbye to his previous homes in an optimistic manner. At nineteen, he entered Cambridge in 1791. There Coleridge became an enthusiastic republican and the leader of a group of students more addicted to wine parties than to the pursuit of learning. He was second to Samuel Butler in the Craven Scholarship, but offended the authorities by his Unitarianism and his sympathies with French Republic. Moreover, he also spent a large part of his scholarship money on drugs and prostitutes. Getting into large amounts of debt, he ran away from Cambridge in 1793 and enlisted as a soldier.

This was the most strange proceeding on his part because Coleridge had an extreme horror of warfare. After serving three months in the English army, however, he was discharged and returned to college. In 1793, his poem *Absence: A Farewell Ode on Quitting School for Jesus College*, Coleridge appeared in Sherborne "*The Weekly Entertainment*." In 1794, Coleridge left the college without taking a degree. Later on, while traveling to Wales, Coleridge met a student named Robert Southey, striking an instant friendship with him.

His Reputation as a Young Poet and Major Life Conflicts

Coleridge's youthful reputation as poet was based on a few short poems in the *Cambridge Intelligencer* and the *Morning Post*, on the play *The Fall of Robespierre* and on other poems, such as, *Religious Musings*, circulated among friends. His literary and social interest in Bristol introduced him to Joseph Cottle, a bookseller and publisher. In 1796, Coleridge published his first volume, *Poems on Various Subjects*, for which he got 30 guineas from Joseph Cottle.

During this period, Coleridge was beset by a continual conflict which in a sense these events represented: the struggle with what he called "bread and cheese", the efforts to be a practical husband, father, and professional man. The conflict, acute enough in the economic conditions of the wars against France, was not lessened on the professional literary side by the

shifting intellectual currents and values of the period after the French Revolution.

His Theory of Imagination

Coleridge's most significant contribution to English literary criticism is his theory of imagination. His treatment of the subject is different from all the previous discussions of imagination. Coleridge was the first critic who presented a difference between Imagination and Fancy, and also primary and secondary Imagination. His theory of imagination radically revolutionized the concept of artistic imitation.

According to Coleridge, poetry is neither an imitation or a copy of nature, nor is the creation of something different from nature. Rather, it is a creation based on the sensations and impressions received from the external world. The poet's imagination perceives these impressions, modifies them in a way that opposites are reconciled and harmonized, and in this way poetic creation takes place.

There were three aspects of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Philosophy of Imagination:

1. The idea of the immanence of Divine everywhere in man and nature.
2. The idea of unity, through the immanent Divine life, between Man—a spiritual entity—and Nature, a manifestation of Divine.
3. Lastly, the idea of the organic unity of all life transcending outward phenomena of perfect harmony among Man, Nature, and God.

Nature and Man are the two phases of divine unfolding. In this philosophy are to be found the sources of Wordsworth's spiritual interpretation of Nature and of Coleridge's theory of imagination. Imagination, according to Coleridge, is that synthetic and magical power by which a poet diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends each into each. It has a tendency to bring the whole soul into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, in accordance to their relative dignity and worth.

Literary Qualities of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

- 1. Treatment of the supernatural:** He treats the supernatural in such a manner that it becomes convincing and at the same time, in some sense, a criticism of life.
- 2. Suspension of Disbelief:** The way in which Coleridge has achieved the willing suspension of disbelief has been even explained beautifully in the book *The Romantic Imagination* by Bowra.
- 3. Realism:** He exercises an imaginative realism, which is an attitude of accepting things and situations as they are.
- 4. Extreme Emotions Beautifully Described:** His poems are balanced, as both ecstasy and grimness are described with equal importance.
- 5. All Traits of Romanticism:** His poems are an epitome of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality (Ideals of the French Revolution). Also, individualism, sensuousness, love for Nature, inspiration from self can be seen as embellishments in his works.
- 6. Medievalism Present:** Medievalism is present everywhere in Coleridge's poetry.