

Life and Works of S.T Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

- ✓ Coleridge was a romantic as well as **a revolutionary** poet in the History of English Literature.
- ✓ He was a best friend of William Wordsworth. Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey were called “**Lake Poets**” by one of the Scottish magazines just because of their visits to a lakeside in England. In the Beginning Coleridge believed with Wordsworth that nature leads one from “**Joy to Joy**” and that she never betrays the heart that loves her.
- ✓ Later he became more “**Realistic**” and came to realize that joy came from within, not from external nature.

Life of Coleridge

- ✓ Coleridge was born in 1772 in Otter St. Mary, Devonshire.
- ✓ He was the son of Rev. John Coleridge, Vicar of the parish church and master of a local grammar school.
- ✓ Coleridge was the youngest of all the thirteen children of John Coleridge.
- ✓ He had a religious environment from the very beginning.
- ✓ He could read at the age of three; before five he had read the Bible and the Arabian Nights.
- ✓ From three to six he attended a “**Dame**” school.
- ✓ From six to Nine (when his father died and left the family destitute), he was in father’s school, learning the classics.
- ✓ At ten he was sent to the Charity School of Christ’s Hospital, London, where he met Charles Lamb.
- ✓ He remained for 8 or 9 years in this school with not having a single visit to his home.
- ✓ Coleridge’s life was miserable and he was a poor neglected boy.
- ✓ At nineteen he was entered to Cambridge as a charity student and remained there for three years.
- ✓ He ran away from the university because of a trifling debt and enlisted in the Dragoons; later he was discovered and brought back to the university.
- ✓ But in 1794, he left again without taking his degree.
- ✓ Afterwards he joined the company of youthful Southey- a kindred spirit, who was highly inspired from the French Revolution.
- ✓ These two revolutionary spirits married two sisters.
- ✓ He studied in Germany as well; worked as a private secretary, till the drudgery wore upon his free spirit.
- ✓ Later he went to Rome, remained for two years, lost in study.
- ✓ Once he was offered an excellent position and a half interest (amounting to some £2000) in the Morning post and the Courier but he declined it, and said:
 “I would not give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times two thousand pounds, - in short, that beyond £350 a year I considered money a real evil.”
- ✓ His life was so miserable and he left so apart from his family that a small pension from his two friends enabled him to live for a few years without regular employment.

Works

- ✓ His works divide themselves naturally into three classes- the poetic, the critical, and the philosophical, corresponding to the early, the middle, and the later periods of his career.
- ✓ His early poems show the influence of Gray and Blake; for example the first line “**My eyes make pictures when they are shut**”, of his poem “**Day Dream**” remind us Blake’s haunting Songs of Innocence.
- ✓ The influence of Blake can be seen in his other early works like “**The Devil Thoughts**”, **The Suicide’s Argument**,” and “**The Wandering of Cain**”.

Major Works:

▪ **Kubla Khan**

- ✓ It is a fragment, painting a gorgeous Oriental dream picture, such as one might see in an October sunset.
- ✓ The whole poem came to Coleridge one morning when he had fallen asleep over Purchas and upon awakening he began to write hastily,

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*

- ✓ In *Kubla Khan*, Coleridge makes mention of an *Abyssinian* maid and mount Abora etc.
- ✓ Thus he is a very representative Romantic poet.
- ✓ He loves remote, the strange, and the mysterious, rather than the immediate, the commonplace, and the probable.
- ✓ Coleridge describes the “Pleasure-Dome” of *Kubla Khan* in these words:

*It was a miracle of strange device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice*

- ✓ He was interrupted after fifty-four lines were written, and he never finished the poem.

Christabel:

- ✓ It is the story of a pure young girl who fell under the spell of a sorcerer.
- ✓ It is full of a strange melody.
- ✓ It contains many passages of exquisite poetry.
- ✓ It suggests the supernatural terrors of the popular hysterical novels.
- ✓ Because *Supernaturalism* was the main element of Coleridge’s poetry.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner:

- It is Coleridge’s chief contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 and one of the world’s masterpieces.
- The mechanism of the poem, its meter, rime and melody are perfect.
- Its setting is medieval.
- The supernatural events in the poem find a befitting backdrop in the medieval setting.
- The phantom ship, the crew of dead men, the magic breeze, the vesper bell and the prayer to Mary in the poem- all point to the medieval setting of the poem.

Ode to Dejection:

- ✓ In *Ode to Dejection*, Coleridge sets forth his contradictory view of Nature.
- ✓ According to him it isn’t the spirit of nature which leads even the cheerless men to joys and happiness.
- ✓ Rather it is something essentially external which mirrors a man’s mood; whether it is of joy or sorrow, says he:

*O Lady! We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live;*

Ours in her wedding garment, ours her shroud

✓ What makes Nature look cheerful is the inner joy, peculiar to every man, present in some, absent in most, He says, accordingly:

I may not hope from outward forms to win

The passion and the life whose fountains are within.

The “**Passion and the life**” are internal having nothing to do with nature or anything external.

We in ourselves rejoice!

And thence flows all that charms our ear or sight;

All melodies the echoes of that voice,

All colors suffusion from that light,

Minor Works:

• Minor works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge are:-

- ✓ Ode to France
- ✓ Ode to Youth, Age and Dejection.
- ✓ Fears in Solitude
- ✓ Religious Musings
- ✓ Version of Schiller’s Wallenstein
- ✓ Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni.
- ✓ His most famous prose works are:-
- ✓ The ***Biographia Literaria***, in which he has given explanation and criticism of Wordsworth’s theory of poetry.
- ✓ It also contains more sound sense and illuminating ideas on the general subject of poetry.
- ✓ His collected ***Lectures on Shakespeare (1849)*** is an attempt to sweep away the arbitrary rules which for two centuries had stood in the way of literary criticism of Shakespeare.

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Aids to Reflection (1825)

- ✓ In these Philosophical works, he introduced the idealistic philosophy of Germany to England.
- ✓ This is Coleridge’s more profound work.
- ✓ It is more interesting to the student of religion and philosophy than to the readers of Literature.

His illness

- ✓ Coleridge suffered from Neuralgia which made him a slave to drug habit.
- ✓ After fifteen years of pain, struggle and despair, he gave up and put himself in charge of a physician, Mr. Gillman.
- ✓ Thomas Carlyle, who after visited him said, “ A king of men but he gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings, a life heavy-laden, half-vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment.”
- ✓ He was died in 1834, and was buried in High gate Church.