



## Modern Elements in Coleridge's Romantic Poetry: A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract:** This paper tries to investigate Coleridge's theoretical potentials and major contributions to literary criticism. First and foremost, this discussion will focus on the reasons, both conscious and subconscious, that led such a prominent romantic poet to abandon verse writing in favor of focusing almost exclusively on criticism, public culture, religion, or politics. The intellectual, epistemological, and artistic underpinnings of his critical enterprise, whether theoretical or practical, are of equal interest. In the final section, we survey the legacy of his critical writings on the literary scene and the various responses he has elicited from authors.

**Keywords:** Conception of Poetry, Coleridgean phenomenon, Literary theory, Absenting, Criticism, Defamiliarization, Aesthetic pleasure, Signifiers and signified.

### Introduction:

S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834) is among the many authors in western literature whose works exhibit a synthesis of creative and critical thinking. According to Eliot, "the larger part of an author's labor in composing his work is critical labor; the labor of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing," and "many creative writers" (with Eliot and Coleridge at the forefront) "have a critical activity which is not all discharged into their work." At one point in his life, Coleridge was a reviewer for the influential journal *The Critical Review* [1]. We learn of his "terrible burden, having been a hireling in *The Critical Review*." But at some point, in the not-too-distant future, his creative ability will begin to wane, or so he says; at that point, his critical faculty will be the last thing he can rely on. Coleridge takes a unique stance here in comparison to other writers who have dabbled in both creative and critical activities at the same time. His wide-ranging expertise and eclectic interests, as well as the contrasting responses he has elicited, also play a role. As Holmes points out, Coleridge is well-known for his "enormous reading, his knowledge of classical and European literature, his scientific interests." [2].

Coleridge's intellect is so well-rounded and extensive that even a renowned scholar like George Saintsbury ranks him among "the great critics," alongside Aristotle and Longinus. Those passionate claims are supported by even a cursory reading of Coleridge's poetry and criticism [3]. In his own poetry, he poses profound philosophical questions about creativity, introspection, and the nature of the mind with surprising casualness. An interesting introspection of the poetic process, which will be developed further in subsequent poems, can be found in his "Apologia pro Vita sua" (1800). The following lines are critical, but their tone is self-evident, so we won't bother explaining why.

**The poet in his lone yet genial hour**  
**Gives to his eyes a magnifying power**  
**Or rather he emancipates his eyes**  
**From the black shapeless accidents of size**  
**In unctuous cones of kindling coal,**  
**Or smoke up wreathing from the pipe's trim hole**  
**His gifted ken can see**

**Phantoms of sublimity. (Note 5)**

Classical authors, especially Plato, were keenly interested in the ideas presented here about the nature of new and innovative solutions. For the record, "The artist (the poet) is similarly described in Plato's Ion: "these Melody-Poets pen those nice Music of theirs, only once they're out of their sober Minds." This is where "Kubla Khan" clearly draws inspiration from. They aren't transported like the Priestesses of Bacchus, who no longer draw Water, but Honey as well as Milk out of the Springs and Fountains, but only after they give Voice and Motion to those Songs, trying to add to their Words the Harmony of Musick and the Measure of Dance."<sup>[4]</sup> This is a roundabout way of saying that the writer or poet, if you will, is both fully aware of and only partially aware of his own creative process. Eliot's statement that has already been given will summarize it effectively. Coleridge expresses concern that the dialogue between the creative and critical minds will detract from his ultimate work: "I hope, Philosophy and Poetry, will not neutralize each other, and leave one an inert mass." Such worries are well-founded in Coleridge's case, as any reader of his collected works will quickly realize. Coleridge's critical faculty far outweighs and even thrives at the expense of his creative side. Rather than waste time on the formalisms and fanciful flights of verse, he focused all of his energy on the debates surrounding literary criticism.<sup>[5]</sup>

Do all great poets also make great critics? Based on the illuminating examples of Coleridge and Baudelaire, Arthur Symons poses this titillating question. (Note 9) The translator or critic of a particular field should, of course, have extensive first-hand experience in that field and a thorough understanding of its inner workings and practices. Only by fully grasping the relevant text can the essential task be completed successfully.<sup>[6]</sup> In contrast, the practice of poetry itself may become a stifling, limiting force rather than an asset. This is because a poet's natural inclination is to evaluate other poems in light of his or her own poetry-writing habits and standards for what constitutes a good poem. On the other hand, he may be secretly envious of certain works he wishes he had written himself. That's why it's so common to find unfair and one-sided criticism of working poets online. Coleridge is also one of those as will be shown in due course. There is plenty of room for conjecture and guesswork surrounding Coleridge's gradual transition from poetry to prose writings and criticism, including the possibility that Coleridge's critical activity was an attempt to compensate for his diminished poetic new and innovative solutions. Coleridge's own admission that he sought "a refuge from bodily pain and mismanaged sensibility in abstruse researches" while writing the *Biographia Literaria* is relevant here. (Note 10) Biographical data (particularly the dates of the publishing of his known poems "The Ancient Mariner" (1797), "Kubla Khan" (1798), "The Nightingale" (1798) and "Dejection" (1802) betray a shrinking of his poetic ability at the turn of the 19th century. Coleridge's own admission that "the poet is dead in me" is a significant step in the right direction. Coleridge tried to tell Godwin in 1801, "As to Poetry, I have altogether abandoned it ... being convinced that I never had the essentials of poetic genius, and that I mistook a strong desire for original power." (Note 11) Coleridge is unusually honest about his creative impasse by admitting it; many other writers in the canon of English literature have struggled with the same issue, but they prefer to gloss over their failure by reiterating their past successes. In addition, there is a second intellectual root that is just as excruciating. Poems like "Human Life: On the Denial of Immortality" reveal his Satrean skepticism and religious doubt:

**0 Man ! Thou vessel purposeless, unmeant,  
Yet drone — hire strange of phantom purposes  
Surplus of Nature's dread activity  
Blank accident! nothing's anomaly !**

The religious crisis in Coleridge's life reached its zenith at this time. This is what opens his eyes to "the unfathomable hell within" (Note 12). The pursuit of an adequate response to these ontological questions motivates him to read philosophical & intellectual texts in addition to devoting himself to verse-writing. With his current predicament, it is reasonable to assume that he will focus on intellectual and philosophical pursuits. His opium addiction, which has caused him physical and financial distress, is another factor. His financial needs are met, and his surplus of intellectual activity is let loose, thanks to what he calls a "interim report" (Note 13). Since this is a generic issue, one that concerns the unique qualities of the creative faculty in general, it is necessary to refer to a more general cause that is not specific to Coleridge's case. Criticism, according to Northrop Frye, the prototypical Canadian critic, is the only field that is "articulate," while the arts, whether verbal or plastic, are inherently "mute." (Note 14) There are, in fact, a wide variety of issues that could be "articulated" in criticism but which, when brought up in the context of creative writing, come across as irrelevant or out of place. Therefore, many creative works "silences" because of the aching realization that they are fundamentally inarticulate. (Note 15) In imaginative writing, the gap between the object as well as

the symbol is always too great to cross. On the other hand, Coleridge's restless and oversensitive ego finally finds a satisfying outlet in the vast space & infinite field of criticism.

### **Coleridge was not a poet who ever completed a work.**

Coleridge's significance as a poet, however, lies less in the things he actually accomplished than in the things he suggested to readers. His poetry is uneven; he can write long passages that are dull and lifeless, and he often abandons projects halfway through. Only one of his poems, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, which grew out of his friendship with Wordsworth, is considered to be of the highest quality [7].

Christabel, by Coleridge, is a splendid fragment of which the first part lay unfinished for years before the chance of an evening's intoxication prompted him to start the second. The second part may have ruined the first by giving the fairy-like vibes a "local habitation and a name," thus diminishing their value. As well as something the general public could use more of from Scott, that was what he gave in return. Coleridge's Kubla Khan was also left unfinished because he was interrupted mid-revelation by a phone call.

Coleridge and William Wordsworth's early collaboration never materialized into anything they had hoped for. However, the second generation of Romantic poets built upon the foundation he helped lay with his contribution to 'the pioneer work,' and not Wordsworth's.

### **Romantic Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge:**

Coleridge was instrumental in establishing Romanticism as a literary movement in England. Coleridge is thoroughly a romantic poet in every respect: his suggestiveness, imagery, love of nature, fascination with the faraway, treatment of the supernatural, medievalism, appreciation of music, and the dreamlike quality of his poetry [7]. His poetry is the pinnacle of Romanticism. Critics have called his work "the most finished, supreme embodiment of everything that is pure and ethereal in the romantic spirit."

Wordsworth's contribution to Romanticism was to broaden intellectual horizons and lift the artificial barrier that had separated humans from the natural world. But Coleridge gave this wider realm its music, and the academic side of the movement its concrete beauty.

Furthermore, Coleridge, like Wordsworth, had a loftier ideal of poetry and bravely opposed the synthetic style of the previous age. Coleridge embodies the major traits of Romanticism, including a spare use of language, a wide range of meter, a vivid imagination, an affinity for the natural world, and a humane and democratic worldview.

Coleridge's greatest artistic strengths as a romantic poet are on display in such works as The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, and Kubla Khan. Referring to a quote by C.M. Bowra:

**"Of all English romantic masterpieces, they are the most unusual and the most romantic."**

### **Coleridge and the Depths of the Romantic Imagination:**

Coleridge, as a romantic poet, possessed the expansive imagination that is the genre's defining feature. His gaze swung from below to above and back again. Both the natural as well as the supernatural were accessible to his mind and perception. Both in theory and in practice, he placed a premium on creative thinking [8]. In his Biographia Literaria, he also placed an unprecedented emphasis on creative thinking. He saw only absolutes and certainties in the real world. Only the poet's creative mind could have made it great.

Coleridge, with the help of Schiller and Kant, made an impassioned case for the value of the mind and the potential of the imagination. He was reacting to the ideas of Locke and Hobbes, two philosophers from the 18th century who had viewed the mind as a tabula rasa, or blank slate. Coleridge disregarded logic in favor of intuition and creativity. Kubla Khan is an excellent illustration of his fertile imagination:

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momently was forced:  
Amid whose swift half-intermittent burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail...

### The Supernatural in Coleridge's Poetry:

When compared to other Romantic poets, Coleridge's treatment of the supernatural is unparalleled. Coleridge's supernaturalism relies most heavily on its underlying air of mystery. A psychologically grounded form of "supernaturalism." Coleridge takes a different approach to supernatural occurrences than traditional ghost and devil stories do, "by presenting them as phenomena of the mind" and what is excited in the psyche by the passions.

In addition, Coleridge does not create fantastical or horrifying elements, but rather the supernatural in the form of psychic phenomena that represent the enigma of life. He uses the most restrained methods to 'suggest' the terror of an unspecific threat. Coleridge's genius was to "make the supernatural appear very real by a thousand delicate touches and sublime hints," of a profoundly impressive nature that persuaded the reader to take it as true, whereas Wordsworth's genius was to stamp the common, everyday life and character with the charms of novelty [9].

Coleridge infuses romantic adventure, which was itself a new or revived thing at the time, with a finer, more delicate supernaturalism as a result of his "own more delicate psychology." Coleridge's daydreamy mind was enchanted by the mysterious and otherworldly aura of the supernatural. Invoked to conjure a glimpse of the unknown, its power was at its peak. The supernatural exists behind and beyond the visible world of natural reality. Coleridge used his imagination to bring to life an unseen world full of supernatural beings and potent forces.

Further, unlike the Gothic Romantics, Coleridge does not pile on gory specifics. In its place, he offers a psychological take on the supernatural. As a result, his work serves as an example for subsequent Romantic poets.

### Coleridge's poetry is sensual in many ways:

Coleridge possessed a rare ability to create both mysteries that stirred the depths of the soul and beauties that delighted the senses. Adding realism like this is essential to the craft of making the fantastic appealing. Sensual images keep us rooted to the ground while stirring up a range of emotions, including pity, horror, and wonder.

Coleridge does an excellent job with the visual details. Sometimes, his observations appear to transcend the bounds of typical visual perceptions. Just as much of his worldview is shaped by what he fails to perceive as by what he does. While Keats is able to perceive the nightingale only because it is not seen, Coleridge's inability to hear it is what brings nature's workings to life in Frost at Midnight.

Visually, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is stunning. Coleridge's verse seems to freeze the moon in its orbit. His pictorial descriptions of natural phenomena are another example. Similar illustrative sections can be found in Christabel and Kubla Khan. One more perfect pen-picture from his Ode to Dejection that we can cite is as follows.

In addition, Coleridge depicts the sensual side of romantic love in Christabel. Christabel's physical beauty is often portrayed sensually, and Geraldine's breasts are presented as something to admire rather than touch. Christabel's tears reflect brilliantly off her long, dark lashes, creating a striking image.

### **Coleridge's Poetry Has a Dreamlike Quality:**

Coleridge's poetry is characterized in large part by a surreal quality. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner & Christabel were envisioned and wrought by Coleridge when he was removed from the world of human reality and immersed instead in the world of his own personality or the mystic realm. Furthermore, in that world where Humans and Nature are the things which dreams are made of; his imagination works up into high activities. Christabel's half-light, twilight vagueness, in which everything is seen as if through a haze or a glimmer from a dreamland, is a prime example of this.

Coleridge's greatness as a poet stemmed, therefore, from his extraordinary ability to dream. Christabel's tone is consistent with that of the snoring mastiff bitch, which "did not wake," and the crowing cock. Yet she an angry moan did make.' Everything that Christabel felt, she did feel 'with open eyes, asleep, and dreaming fearfully'. In addition, Geraldine's charm is infused with a mysterious obscurity that is only discernible in the twilight.

Coleridge's Kubla Khan is primarily a dream poem, narrating the poet's vivid dream in poetic detail. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, which features a prominently dreamlike quality, aims to demonstrate that, in line with our intuitive knowledge that sin brings inevitable suffering, there is, in fact, a severe punishment in this life following upon even the most trivial and wanton act, like killing an innocent bird.

### **Coleridge's Influence on Metrical Art:**

When compared to the artificial poignant diction of the 18th century as well as the tyranny of the heroic couplet, Romantic poetry can be seen as a form of revolt. Although Coleridge did not agree with Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, he managed to create his own unique brand of charming simplicity in his writing. He ignored the heroic couplet in favor of a variety of ancient metres, most of which were medieval in origin.

Perfectly utilizing the traditional ballad meter, he writes The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. In Christabel, another of his major works, he demonstrates a mastery of the compared to the typical couplet. The poem is written in an innovative, irregular meter in which the accents, rather than the syllables, are counted. Exactly as with Christabel, so with Kubla Khan. The meter of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, like Christabel, is four-foot iambic with rhymes abab, though these are not always strictly adhered to.

All of Coleridge's most recognizable works also feature the common trend in poetry toward musical similitude. His music is always a sure bet. He has never been surpassed in his ability to write in either octosyllabic or ballad meter. These poems have a certain allure that can be experienced only by the reader's submission to wonderment in silence.

Coleridge clearly adopted the principle of accentuation, and this led to a variation in the unstressed syllables that served the artistic requirements of melody. For example, the hypnotic effect of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is achieved through a series of deceptively simple sound patterns.

### **As the Father of Modern Poetry, Coleridge**

However, Christabel was a more immediate and potent agent of transformation. After 18 years of being left unfinished in a manuscript, the poem eventually gained widespread attention. More than that, it was the inspiration for early works by both Byron and Scott, including Lay of the Last Minstrel. Almost every popular narrative poet of the time took inspiration from this odd tale in verse.

Christabel is an absolute stylistic masterpiece. There isn't much of a plot or memorable characters to keep readers engaged, and the poet certainly isn't trying to impart any sort of lesson, but he has strung together a series of lines that build in resonant momentum. This sort of thing is the only way a poet can win over his peers. These, without a doubt, will be the basis for Coleridge's ultimate evaluation.

Consequently, it's hard to think of a poet who hasn't subconsciously or explicitly tried to emulate The Rime of the Ancient Mariner or Christabel. Coleridge is widely regarded as the originator of modern poetry. Both Scott and Byron drew heavily from him.

## Conclusion:

In sum, we can say that Coleridge's criticism is characterized by a high degree of particularity and subjectivity, i.e., it is replete with digressions, anecdotes, personal recollections, and the like, some of which are impromptu. Sometimes the impression left on the reader or recipient is negative because of the author's indulgence in highly personal judgments. For instance, the reporter could tell from Coleridge's comments on "Hamlet's lecture of 2 January 1812" that the talk was a satire on the lecturer because of how obviously satirical they were. Especially with Milton, whose poetry and situations share many characteristics with Coleridge's own outlook as a man and an artist, he has a keen and insightful understanding of the texts he takes on. Coleridge demonstrates a remarkable propensity to rely primarily on common sense, wit, and sensibility in his analysis of Shakespeare's Hamlet, whereas in other works he relies more on his intuitive understanding of the text. Even though his criticism is primarily written in prose, it still manages to convey the same suggestiveness and multifaceted as a poem. His goal, like that of many modern critics, is to create a text that stands on its own while still being close to or even parallel to the original. Indeed, it is his criticism's formal and figurative language that disproves the distinction between poetry and prose as such. His prose is just as powerful as his poetry. Once he finds a text worthy of praise, he sings its praises from the rooftops, collecting quotes, maxims, and proverbs of all stripes to back up his claims. He frequently makes contradictory assessments and assertions. Coleridge's definition of prose is illustrative because there are many works in prose, his own included, whose lyrical beauty and grace are undeniable. They do not show any signs of weakness when compared to verse counterparts. This dividing line that Coleridge draws here will be echoed by Sartre, who will argue that poets are distinct from prose writers because they do not "utilize" the language or dream of "naming" the world like prose writers do. (Note 71) Coleridge's interest in and admiration of prose fiction, especially that of Jane Austen (Note 72) and her "pure" novels, stands in stark contrast to his previously mentioned judgment of prose. Prose in such works is not limited to serving merely communicative functions and is not subject to the sort of secondaries that Sartre decries. To top it all off, the Bibliographic Literaria does on occasion make references to itself, making it a foundational text in what is now commonly known as "metacriticism," or criticism that is largely self-referential and has much to say about its own existential dilemmas, practices, strategies, & interests. Coleridge's acute perception and knowledgeable & comprehensive mind in addressing critical issues in his own age and the ages to come have earned his criticism a preeminent place in its field. Coleridge deserves the substantial niche he has been aptly put into, despite the subjectivity and even moodiness of passing his own judgments, though the term "perfect" already used by his admirers needs beyond and substantial modification in order to properly justify it.

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