

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Evidence of Despair

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By *WINFORD DEATON*

Thesis Director
Dr. Blake Hobby

Thesis Advisor
Dr. David Hopes

Despair and depression dominate Samuel Taylor Coleridge's life. His poetical works, such as "Aeolian Harp," "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and "Dejection: An Ode," contain a troubled voice pleading to be heard. Coleridge's opium addiction, his incomplete works, his signs of self incompleteness, and his anguish are all affirmed in his writings. In fact, Coleridge portrays himself as the object of chance, allowing outside influences, including the supernatural and criticism, to rule his thoughts and affect his works. By examining "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Aeolian Harp," "Kubla Khan," and "Dejection: An Ode" in light of Coleridge's external and internal struggles, we can see how he transforms these struggles into timeless art. But, perhaps most importantly, as Coleridge turns outside himself and begins to write about other writers, he emancipates himself and becomes the observer, exercising agency as a literary critic.

His early poetry, including "Aeolian Harp," examines the theme of isolation and incompleteness. Throughout his poetic career, Coleridge alludes to the wind blowing which brings change, along with the unknown. For instance, his poem "Aeolian Harp" describes an experience of pure joy. The harp is played by the wind and its loudness depends on the strength of the breeze: "And now, its strings / Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes / Over delicious surges sink and rise..." (Tiefert 19-20). The word "Boldlier," or bold, denotes something imaginative and beyond the limits of conventional thought. The sweeping of the harp describes the wind driving air with a steady force, creating music that soothes the speaker beyond imagine. This metaphor is powerful, and the soothing sound is appetizing to the speaker's soul and is "delicious."

The “surges” that are sinking and rising resemble an ocean of crests and troughs which bring change to its surroundings. The “sequacious” melody is leading the speaker and the speaker follows. Moreover, these musical “surges” affect the speaker’s imagination. In fact, Coleridge’s passive mood and his submission to the imagination link to this poem significantly. For example, lines thirteen through sixteen read,

And that simplest lute,
 Plac’d length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!
 How by the desultory breeze caress’d,
 Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover...(Tiefert 13-16)

Here, Coleridge implements the lute which is the object of the wind. The lute does not act; rather, it is acted upon without resistance. This resembles lovers embracing or “clasping” their mates sensually in order to show their love for one another. At the same time, Coleridge’s lover, Sarah, is the maid he seeks for companionship. The lines “How by the desultory breeze caress’d, / Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover...” (15-16) are brought to attention by the difference in the arrangement of the words and their syllabic feet.

For instance, the first line is written in iambs while the second line contains stressed syllables, such as “coy maid” and “half yield.” Coleridge places emphasis on the second line for a reason. The young, shy, unmarried girl is the object of the man who pursues her. At the same time, the speaker’s imagination is the object of fate and is controlled by the randomness or “desultory” breeze of the wind. Coleridge’s passivity is witnessed in “Aeolian Harp,” and instead of taking action, he is the object of chance.

Nature is the object of weather, and the “Aeolian Harp” breeze dictates the outcome. Coleridge’s writes, “To make the object one with us we must become one with the object” (Sharp

37). Coleridge, in his early years, believed humankind and nature were fused together as one. At the same time, mankind is moved and changed by outside forces, including the supernatural and the subject of criticism. In a letter to Thomas Poole, Coleridge states, “The black clouds, which hide the Sun from my view, are they not big with fertility? and [sic] will they not drop it on me?” (Griggs 228). Again, outside influences navigate Coleridge’s mind, and the “black clouds” represent the impending despair headed straight for him.

He continues to write about situations that affect him which leads him to search for a remedy. Less than six months after writing “Aeolian Harp,” Coleridge admits, “I have been tottering on the edge of madness – my mind overbalanced on the e contra side of Happiness...at home Mrs. Coleridge [is] dangerously ill, and expected hourly to miscarry. Such has been my situation for this last fortnight – I have been obliged to take Laudanum almost every night. Blessed be God! the prospect begins to clear up – Mrs. Coleridge is considerably better, tho’ she still keeps her bed” (Griggs 188). His attitude changes immediately after writing how ghastly his life has become. His mind soon becomes the object, or victim, of the drug laudanum, or opium, leading him to despair.

Critics discuss Coleridge’s passivity and grief in “Aeolian Harp.” According to author William H. Scheuerle, Coleridge’s “mind was like the harp, merely being played upon without any active participation on its part” (596). The music playing is the aim of the wind which controls the lute’s song. The speaker of the poem shows no resistance to the winds of change; conversely, the speaker accepts the unknown and alien winds, allowing chance to decide the future. Scheuerle writes, “With his passive and indolent brain, his thoughts had no logical arrangement and were as wild and as flitting as were the similes that described the harp music” (599). Instead of “indolent” weather, the speaker is conducive to inactivity and laziness.

The poem contains harmonious music of the harp, along with an outcry of wind and turmoil. Author Milton Teichman asserts, “Coleridge uses the sound of the [Aeolian] harp in much the same way as he uses the external situation of calm and storm, to which the sound of the harp is closely related. The dull, sobbing, droning sound at the outset, becoming eventually “a Scream / Of agony, by Torture lengthen’d out,” echoes the ultimate breaking forth of Coleridge’s initially stifled grief” (985). The winds of chance blow into Coleridge’s world, leading to despondency and grief.

However, Coleridge senses joy when he is in deep thought, and the harp’s music symbolizes his thinking. Goodson adds that “Nature as an animated, omnipresent life force, a benevolent companion, is memorably characterized through the image of the wind harp” and “poetic imagination is simply an instrument of this Nature, one ‘organic harp’ among others in its universal symphony” (107). The flow of thought is creating music through the harp: “A light in sound, a sound-like power in light, / Rhythm an all thought, and joyance everywhere.” This makes the power of nature even greater than before, and Coleridge emphasizes its strength.

The imaginative music, through nature’s winds, plays a song for the passive speaker. John Spencer Hill, author of *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, describes Coleridge’s theory of imagination and how it significantly changes through time (3). For example, Coleridge’s belief in the strong connection between the perceiving mind and the object of its ambition is prevalent during his early poetic years. The poem encapsulates the feeling of isolation and complete despair. Other examples of passiveness are connected to Coleridge’s works.

The blowing wind of the Aeolian harp does not end there. In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” the speaker admits his wrongdoing of killing an albatross and awaits penance:

And I had done a hellish thing,

And it would work 'em woe:
 For all averred, I had killed the bird
 That made the breeze to blow.
 Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
 That made the breeze to blow! (Parini 298)

The mariner concedes that he has sinned and the crewmen make it known that it was he who killed the albatross. Consequently, the winds of chance bring change to the ship and crew, and there will be a price to pay. The anguish of the mariner and shipmates is heightened by the words “would work 'em woe.” The “w” sound enhances the grief and foreshadows a dreadful fate that awaits them. At the same time, the line “That made the breeze to blow” is repeated two lines later. This is no accident. In fact, the alliteration, rhyme, and repetition are placed here to signify a powerful change in the lives of the crew, and more importantly, the mariner. Here, the wind is a force that leads the passive mariner and his mates to a destination unknown.

“Rime of the Ancient Mariner” adds a supernatural presence through the power of nature. The albatross in the poem symbolizes the omnipresent power of nature, yet still reflects his despair. The mariner, according to A.M. Buchan, is “the passive victim of forces more active than he, and the observer of events that determine his fate without his participation” (92). Coleridge’s belief in the intimate connection of the perceiving mind to the object of its contemplation is eerily similar to the mariner’s passivity. The mariner is acted upon through the elements of wind, change, and uncertainty. The mariner’s uncontrolled fate meets a supernatural female presence:

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
 Her locks were yellow as gold:

Her skin was as white as leprosy,
 The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
 Who thicks man's blood with cold. (301)

The horrific image of this supernatural being is enhanced after the first two lines. The description of the woman is innocent until line three when the mariner reveals “her skin was as white as leprosy” (50). The word “leprosy” evokes the thought of a chronic, infectious disease that causes widespread fear. Here the fear is overwhelming for the mariner and he is chilled to the bone. At the same time, this word could refer to the woman as an outcast from normal society. The reader is left with an incomplete and isolated awareness of Coleridge’s poem. The sense of something unfinished is in Coleridge’s conscience. The uncertainty of the future is prevalent in Coleridge’s work, and the sense of aloneness is evident.

The words “Life-in-Death” depict the supernatural female who has found life in death. She makes herself known to the mariner whose sin has bereaved him. Author George Whalley emphasizes, “I wish to show that the ‘haunting quality’ grows from our intimate experience in the poem of the most intense personal suffering, perplexity, loneliness, longing, horror, fear. This experience brings us, with Coleridge, to the fringes of madness and death, and carries us to that nightmare land that Coleridge inhabited, the realm of Life-in-Death. There is no other single poem in which we come so close to the fullness of his innermost suffering” (74). The albatross in the poem symbolizes the omnipresent power of nature, yet still reflects his despair through the isolation of the mariner. Like “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “his special nature may be the sign of an incomplete self” (Kirchoff 8), one who is always lost and never found, but one who feels complete with nature and the supernatural.

The theme of isolation is prevalent. Frederick Kirchoff, author of *Critical Survey of Poetry*, notes that the Mariner becomes ostracized by the crewmen and becomes the object of supernatural occurrences (6). Man versus nature is emphasized when he must wear the albatross around his neck. According to Kirchoff, this is the “nightmare alternative to the conversational poem” (6). Coleridge began to stray from the conversation poems, such as “Aeolian Harp,” by adding a supernatural twist to the despair of the main character. This poem, unlike “Aeolian Harp,” is not a poem of meditation but a poem of metaphysical complexity and aloneness.

There is something haunting more than Coleridge’s characters. His feelings of isolation and aloneness are evident in his writings. Whalley reports of Coleridge, “For a short time he was lifted up by his marriage, by the birth of Haley, by his intimacy with William and Dorothy Wordsworth. But even such ‘fecundating’ happiness, a happiness ominously stressed in the letters of the periods, was not able to change the thing that was Coleridge. The early period foreshadows the later. In 1796 he had written: ‘There is one Ghost, that I *am* afraid of; with that I should be perpetually haunted in this cursed Action, the hideous Ghost of departed Hope” (83). Coleridge’s sufferings mimic the mariner in that he felt isolated and experienced loss of hope. Coleridge’s personal letters prove his state of mind.

“Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” is written in the same year as “Aeolia Harp.” During this time, Coleridge writes to Joseph Cottle, “On the Saturday, the Sunday, and the ten days after my arrival at Stowey I felt a depression too dreadful to be described [and] Wordsworth’s conversation...roused me somewhat; but even now I am not the man I have been – and I think never shall. A sort of calm hopelessness diffuses itself over my heart” (Coleridge 183-84). This letter accentuates Coleridge’s inner most thoughts during this trying time, while a voice is crying out to be heard and discovered throughout his letters.

Interestingly, the word “agony” is the only word that is more than two syllables in this passage. The word separates itself from the others and takes longer to voice, reiterating the mariner’s despair. The isolation felt by Coleridge during his life relates to the isolation felt by the speaker of the poem in that he felt ostracized by critics who castigated his work. Coleridge sympathizes with the mariner because of their similar encounters of aloneness.

The mariner relates to Coleridge in more than one way. The mariner’s emotional and spiritual experiences are similar, if not identical, than the suffrages of Coleridge (Whalley 81). Coleridge’s life of loneliness and wandering through life are as though everyone else has departed from him:

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
 And the balls like pulses beat,
 For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
 Lay like a load on my weary eye,
 And the dead were at my feet. (81)

The implication of killing the albatross is evident to the mariner, and he knows now that his boredom has cost him an ultimate price. At the same time, Coleridge’s poem “The Pains of Sleep” eerily connects with due punishment:

Such punishments, I said, were due
 To natures deepliest stained with sin, -
 For aye entempesting anew
 The unfathomable hell within,
 The horror of their deeds to view,

To know and loathe, yet wish and do!
 Such griefs with such men well agree,
 But wherefore, wherefore fall on me? (81)

This “unfathomable hell within” is a state of inner suffering by the speaker. The mariner and Coleridge both know the consequences of their actions: the mariner knows not to kill the albatross, and Coleridge knows not to abuse the opium; however, they still make costly decisions affecting their lives and transporting supernatural entities into their worlds.

External forces and the supernatural affect Coleridge’s poems again when he writes the poem “Kubla Khan.” Again, the passive speaker is the object of action:

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
 Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
 A savage place! as holy and enchanted
 As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
 By woman wailing for her demon-lover! (Parini 881.12-16)

This poem is a result of one of Coleridge’s opium induced states in which he recounts a dream he has about a powerful ruler, Kubla Khan, who demands the building of a pleasure dome. When Coleridge awakens, he recalls a portion of it and begins to write. The words in this passage are thought provoking. The reader feels the excitement of the speaker and the fanciful or “romantic” abyss falls upon a “pleasure dome” made of cedar, and the speaker is subjected to its magical influence. Furthermore, the addition of a supernatural entity, the “woman wailing for her demon-lover!,” strikes a nerve with the reader, denoting something or someone mournfully crying out, as in grief or suffering.

The supernatural entities in Coleridge's poems signify a place where practicality and reality cannot exist. Thus, the opium, causing him to fall deeper into an abnormal state, magnifies his imagination. According to Paul Magnuson, author of "Kubla Khan: That Phantom-World so Fair," "Kubla Khan" is described as an incomplete dream. The visions and images seen by the speaker momentarily become reality, but soon they become nothing or nonexistent (71). His search for truth is found in the "pleasure dome decree," but not in reality. However, author John Livingston Lowes argues that the vivid dream is complete, though the mind's recollection of it is tainted (368). Thus, a vision in a dream is difficult to remember when awaking, and recalling all the details in the dream in order to write the poem is impossible.

Since this poem was published but never completed, this alludes to Coleridge life as a whole. For example, *The Friend* (1808), a periodical written by Coleridge, was off to a slow start because of his "procrastination". It contained essays on "philosophical questions, politics, and allied subjects," but twenty seven issues later, the periodical was discontinued; however, Coleridge revises and revamps the periodical ten years later (Stanger 3). Coleridge's focus on literary criticism would surface and would temporarily replenish the overwhelming anxiety that once drowned him.

Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn" is one of his last poems published, yet may have been the most powerful. The language in the poem is breathtaking and allows the mind to ponder and wonder. The poem "is Coleridge's most daring account of poetic inspiration and the special nature of the poet" (Kirchhoff 7). Alliteration and imagery is used brilliantly throughout: "Five miles meandering with a mazy motion / Through wood and dale the sacred river ran, / Then reached the caverns measureless to man, / And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean." The words flow like the sacred river. Coleridge's transition from nature to supernatural also occurs.

Coleridge's despair becomes evident by his opium addiction. The aforementioned poem "Kubla Khan," argued by critics, is the result of his opium induced state. John D. Rea, author of "Coleridge's Health," claims that after writing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan," Coleridge was unable to produce poems that would ever come close to these (12). In fact, he asserts that *Kubla Khan* was never completed. Coleridge's physical ailment and his addiction to opium are reasons for his incompleteness and his unfinished work.

Coleridge's addiction is indisputable in his letters. He admits on a November day in 1796 to Joseph Cottle, "My dear Cottle, I feel pain in being disappointed - & still greater pain in the idea of disappointing - but I am seriously ill. The complaint, my medical attendant says, is nervous - and originating in *mental* causes. I have a Blister under my right - ear - & I take Laudanum every four hours, 25 drops each dose" (Coleridge 248). Writing this letter has to be emotionally difficult for Coleridge, and his deepest secrets about his despair and depression are openly discussed.

Coleridge suffers pain, agony, and sadness during the entire year of 1796. A letter to Thomas Poole immediately follows: "On Wednesday night I was seized with an intolerable pain from my right temple to the tip of my right shoulder, including my right eye, cheek, jaw, and that side of the throat. I was nearly frantic, and ran about the house naked, endeavoring by every means to excite sensations in different part of my body, and so to weaken the enemy by creating division...It came on fitfully; but I took between sixty and seventy drops of laudanum...in sober sadness I have suffered this day more bodily pain than I had before a conception of...My medical attendant decides it to be altogether nervous, and that it originates either in severe application, or excessive anxiety. My beloved Poole! In excessive anxiety, I believe it might originate" (251). Coleridge's entries relate to a dramatic monologue where the speaker reveals himself and the

dramatic situation. Coleridge succumbs to opium to alleviate his pains, and by doing so, it causes his health to plummet.

William and Dorothy Wordsworth share a friendship with Coleridge; however, Dorothy Wordsworth comments on his failing health: “He is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half-curling, rough, black hair.” At the same time, Coleridge writes to Thomas Poole that he is in poor health and cannot function properly without drops of laudanum and says, “I drank fears like wormwood, yea, made myself drunken with bitterness; for my ever-shaping and distrustful mind still mingled gall-drops till out of the cup of hope I almost *poisoned* myself with despair” (Coleridge 250). Coleridge admits that he is taking the opium to elude the depression and anguish that consume him. The evidence of his poor health is staggering, and hiding from reality by taking opium is, to Coleridge, his only way to escape – from himself and his critics.

Critics break down Coleridge’s addiction to opium and argue how it manipulates his literary talents. Paul Youngquist, author of “Rehabilitating Coleridge,” contends that “Coleridge finds comfort, if no full cure, in [a] personal asylum” with his opium use. “With it comes renewed vitality as philosopher and moralist – as if asylum and philosophy are somehow allied” (886). However, Coleridge’s intention to prosper as a philosopher does not trigger his need to inject laudanum. He lessens his pain and suffering from the infection of bone tissue. Taking too much of the drug poisons the body, and claiming his intentions are elsewhere is false.

Nevertheless, Youngquist also mentions Molly Lefebure, author of *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage to Opium*, who “dares to declare aloud what Coleridge’s friends would only confide in whispers, that Coleridge’s life and labors were a failure and that demon opium was the cause: ‘his predicament was not simply a matter of a sapped will. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s

imaginative powers and concentration were literally destroyed by the drug: his intellectual capacity was fearfully eroded...[and] that he really was – a junkie” (887). This statement is an outrage. Coleridge’s letters regarding opium are in the same year as the poems “Aeolian Harp,” “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and the beginnings of “Kubla Khan.” These three poems are the reason for Coleridge’s success. Again, John D. Rea, author of “Coleridge’s Health,” claims that after writing “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “Christabel,” and “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge was unable to produce poems that would ever come close to these (12). How does Coleridge’s “intellectual capacity...fearfully erode” in his most successful year as poet? Yes, Coleridge battles with ailments aided with addiction, yet his ability to create masterpieces on paper does not elude him.

Coleridge does not hold back the truth when admitting its effects. He comments that the opium abuse led to “a derangement, an utter impotence of the Volition’, though leaving the ‘intellectual Faculties’ behind” (Richardson 10). “Coleridge [is] very evidently the victim of a definite physical ailment that any physician of to-day could diagnose in an instant...[and] no physician of Coleridge’s day could recognize the ailment or its cause” (Rea 12). There may not be a cure for Coleridge at this moment, and his excruciating pain calls for more remedy; nonetheless, he writes effectively and creatively.

“Kubla Khan” stands as a prime symbol of majestic imagination and stimulation. Coleridge’s deep dream could be induced by opium; however, “Kubla Khan” “might be seen as the most spectacular psychophysiological experiment of his career...a ‘psychological curiosity’ of the highest moment” (8). The “pleasure dome” of Coleridge’s imagination circulated around “caves of ice” while drinking his “milk of Paradise.” In the midst of the anguish, pain, and despair

surrounding Coleridge, he continues to compose and reveal an imaginable, true spirit venturing into another literary spectrum.

“Dejection: An Ode” (1802) offers a complete transformation in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s life and depicts a permanent change in his writing and career. The poem “begins in a mood of solitary contemplation,” where despair and depression have no relief, and his identity, once again, has shifted to a “termination to his own self-consciousness” (Kirchoff 9). Author Frederick Kirchoff breaks it down by stating, “[Coleridge] is able to ‘see’ the beauty of the natural world, but he cannot ‘feel’ it” (9). Coleridge has freed himself from the chains of poetry and decides to discover and experience another endeavor, literary criticism. Goodson adds that Coleridge abruptly “renounced” his poetic writing at the age of thirty (98). A realistic transformation was happening before his eyes.

“Dejection: An Ode” describes his life and his emotions during 1802. Coleridge refers to a “deadly storm” that approaches and is fearful of it. He writes of his critics,

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,

Reality’s dark dream!

I turn from you, and listen to the wind...(Eotnoe VII.1-3)

The metaphor of a serpent is powerful in the first line. A viper is aggressive and is always cocked and ready to lash out at unsuspecting prey. Similarly, Coleridge suffers the verbal and written attacks from critics who prey on poets who are passionately seeking their own truth in poetry. He does not take criticism well; for example, in a letter to Caius Gracchus, a critic, Coleridge answers, “You have attacked me because I ventured to disapprove... I notice your attack because it affords me an opportunity of expressing more fully my sentiments respecting those principles, - I must not however wholly pass over the former part of your letter. The sentence ‘implicating

them with party and calumniating opinions,' is so inaccurately worded, that I must *guess* at your meaning" (Coleridge 198). Coleridge defends himself and assures his critics that there is a purposeful meaning behind his words.

The next line of "Dejection: An Ode" reads, "What a scream / Of agony by torture lengthened out / That lute sent forth" (Eotnoe VII.4-6). The aforementioned uncertainty of the music played by the lute proves that Coleridge did not foresee unfortunate occurrences and that certain critics helped him down a path of despair. Again, the random, unsuspecting tones of the metaphorical lute are played, as the wind or nature, controls the outcome.

Furthermore, supernatural references, such as "Or lonely house, long held the witches' home," connotes his long time suffering of his opium addiction and the external forces that led his imagination astray. "Witches" is plural; thus, the recurrence of horrid nightmares and signs of ghosts haunt the poet for years.

Later in the poem, he reacts to his critics once again:

With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds –

At once they groan with pain, and shudder with cold!

But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!

And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,

With groans, and tremulous shuddering – all is over – (Eotnoe VII.19-23)

The word "groan" is repeated in this passage. "Groan" denotes a mournful sound coming from one who is dejected. He is defending literary writers who have been exposed by critics, and he is putting an end to it by freeing himself from the chains of poetry and decides to discover and experience another endeavor, literary criticism. The cold fear of "tremulous shuddering" makes it easy for Coleridge to decide his future.

Coleridge is left feeling incomplete and never truly satisfied. His struggle with isolation and despair has consumed him. The second stanza begins, “My genial spirits fail; / And what can these avail / To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?” (Parini 270). Nevertheless, he does not concede and uses a reference in the poem from Wordsworth’s “Lucy Gray,” a girl who has accidentally vanished from her family:

Joy lift thy spirit, joy attunes thy voice;
To thee do all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of thy living soul! (270)

Coleridge’s is expressing his hope for more creative writers, such as Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. To attune is to bring harmony and make literary music – the music of poetry. As for Coleridge, a heavy, burdensome weight may lift from his shoulders, and his despair might subside. Through literature, his joy is anew and his demons are temporarily buried. “Coleridge [declares] that without joy we do not perceive a light in nature but only an ‘inanimate cold World’” (Teichman 984). Coleridge seeks this light – this joy – but never fully reaches or sustains exuberance and fruition. “Dejection: An Ode” is Coleridge’s stepping stone in reaching another plateau, literary criticism.

The aforementioned passivity of Coleridge and his willingness to be the object of influences connects with critics who dissect his works. He is acted upon when critics analyze and scrutinize his poetry. Therefore, when he changes to prose, his passivity evaporates, for he is now acting upon others as a critic. He does not have to defend himself anymore – the reciprocal of writing poetry is to criticize it, and there will be no more running and hiding.

This transformation also led to changes in Coleridge’s philosophies. According to Ronald A. Sharp, Coleridge’s philosophy on human perception changes from his early years “which is

now understood not as a passive and mechanical registering of impressions,” as Coleridge once thought, but now “as a vitally creative activity of the mind” (42). Therefore, Coleridge is creating another voice, an active one, to critique others as they write. Read defends the philosophic views of Coleridge contending that his literary criticism strengthened because of his transcendental philosophy. At the same time, he acknowledges that Coleridge dishonestly plagiarized countless times, leading Coleridge to become sensitive to heavy scrutiny regarding his mistakes (12). His search for truth and completeness overwhelmed him inside his incomplete world.

Coleridge’s shift from poetry to prose lifts stress and tension; he has always been critiqued, and now, he is the analyzer with authority. With this transformation of writing comes a different philosophy for Coleridge. He begins to reject the mechanical, passive faculty psychology, and his thoughts of rationality emerge (Sharp 42). Romantics, like Coleridge, hardly believed in rationality, but this conversion of philosophies abruptly emerges. He communicates with all readers as a poet, and as a critic, he now demonstrates a willingness and urge to reach fresh, new audiences and other critics.

Coleridge begins to use his literary experience to critique other critics. *Biographia Literaria*, written in 1817, receives high accolades from England which inspires him to write more criticism. Coleridge writes, “Hence of all trades, literature at present demands the least talent or information; and, of all modes of literature, the manufacturing of poems. The difference indeed between these and the works of genius is not less than between an egg and an egg-shell; yet at a distance they both look alike. Now it no less remarkable than true, with how little examination works of polite literature are commonly perused, not only by the mass of readers, but by men of first rate ability” (Coleridge 26). He stands up to critics everywhere, telling them to closely read and analyze a work without jumping to conclusions and without using prejudice.

According to James Aaron Stanger, this work is “one of the premier achievements of the Romantic period and is still a monument to great literary criticism” (3). It contains two volumes of “brilliant analysis mixed with rambling discussions and letters” (3). Coleridge used to be an author who was criticized, but now he is the critic who logically asserts his position as a writer. Coleridge is rapidly changing as a writer, and his experience as a critic helps him gain confidence in composing, leading to more writing.

Less than eight years later, Samuel Taylor Coleridge publishes another brilliant work of art, *Aids to Reflection*, in 1825. Elinor S. Shaffer, author of “Metaphysics of Culture: Kant and Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*,” reports that “Coleridge’s development of the ‘aid to reflection’ is a major contribution to the idealist effort to found and justify a mode of thought that will be aesthetic and moral without sacrificing rationality” (199). The ever changing culture is upon him and he reacts. Shaffer adds, “No one in England did as much as Coleridge to form a sense of his historical civilization as the training ground of the faculties, as a pattern for individual perfection and the organization of the state, and as the moral and aesthetical ideal which was a touchstone of rationality itself” (199). Coleridge’s idealistic values of noble principles, purposes, and goals are a priority to him.

Through Coleridge’s physical struggles, *Biographia Literaria* and *Aids to Reflection* mark his transition from poetry to prose. The critics who once criticized him are now respecting and complimenting his work. For example, author A.C. Goodson acknowledges that Coleridge’s criticism is lively, strong, and full of truth (98). His critical writing alone fills a missing void in Coleridge’s life. His social instability and his isolation from society are now reconnected through his literary criticism, and his feedback is welcomed and respected. This proves his ever changing identity as a writer, and it temporarily masks the pain and anguish surrounding him.

However, Coleridge's trials and tribulations follow him his entire life. He has positive intentions but they fold before he knows it. For instance, when writing the periodical, *The Friend*, Coleridge's procrastination in finishing the articles grew concern. Dierdre Coleman asserts, "The problem lay in an anxiety-ridden inability to carry out his stated intentions, a failing which provoked William Hazlitt to caricature the journal as nothing but an 'enormous title-page, the longest and most tiresome Prospectus that ever was written'" (3). Again, *The Friend* occurred in the middle of Coleridge's failing health, opium obsession, and despair. Dorothy Wordsworth writes, "I have little doubt that [*The Friend*] will be well executed if his health does not fail him; but on that score...I have many fears" (Shawcross xlvi). Coleridge's troubled life finds him wherever he travels and wherever he writes.

William Wordsworth, close companion to Coleridge, defends his friend's despair. Wordsworth constantly reminds Coleridge during his grieving "that his unusual capacity for pleasure and wonder cannot be permanently taken from him" (987). Coleridge suffers from infections of bone tissue, depression, and opium abuse. At the same time, Wordsworth battles with despair and lack of faith, and he does not hesitate telling Coleridge. In Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," he "reminds Coleridge that he himself has not been immune to despondency" (Teichman 983). Wordsworth sympathizes with Coleridge and tells him that he's not alone in the fight for pure joy. Wordsworth's poem about a Leech-gatherer includes the lines, "I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair" (983). Coleridge's response is never known; however, he must have read the poem with a heavy heart.

Coleridge's despair leads him down to an abyss of despondency. The opium induced poem, *Kubla Khan*, serves as a deeply inflicted dream and the rehashing of thoughts by a man spiraling down to a place of extreme darkness and depth "down to a sunless sea." Coleridge writes, "in point of spirits I am but dregs of my former self – a decaying flame agonizing in the snuff of tallow candle – a kind of hobgoblin, clouted and bagged up in the most contemptible shreds, rags, and yellow relics of threadbare mortality" (Coleridge 47). As Paul Youngquist writes, "The habit of pathologizing Coleridge as somehow failed, broken, beaten – Other – [is] established early and still shapes the way he is read, celebrated, or dismissed" (886). Nonetheless, Coleridge's despair did not extinguish all his literary talents as poet, critic, and philosopher. His three celebrated poems, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Kubla Khan," and "Dejection: An Ode" all symbolize a wanderer of imagination through all his despair.

The imagination is taken to new heights in his poems. The "poetry and criticism remain a source of never – ending pleasure and discussion" (Smith 34). At the end of his life, Coleridge forces himself to live with a doctor who monitors his condition and his pain killing medicine. Coleridge's shift "toward philosophy involves a turn away, not merely from opium and lie of his habit, but from poetry, too, and the truth of excess" (Youngquist 886). Coleridge writes to his brother, "But you, I believe, know how divine repose is – what a spot of enchantment, a green spot of fountains, & flowers & trees, in the heart of a waste of Sands – God be praised" (394). Coleridge's sporadic renewals and his search for joy never fade.

In closing, depression and despair encircle Coleridge's thoughts and are unmistakably present in his poetry. Poems, such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Aeolian Harp," "Kubla Khan," and "Dejection: An Ode" all contain symbols, metaphors, and writing styles that prove his thoughts on isolation, grief, joy, and rejoicing as he migrates through his fanciful

words. His incompleteness and the void in his life can be seen through the mariner and the voice in “Kubla Khan” and “Dejection: An Ode.” Coleridge’s never ending search for happiness eludes him for most of his life, and this haunts and pains him; however, he seeks another literary realm and remains passionate about works of literature. Coleridge’s willingness to fight under dire fits of distress, anxiety, and depression help him to tread water in a deep pool of pain and thought.

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