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IMAGINATION, SYMBOLISM, AND THE LIMITS OF PERCEPTION IN THE POETRY OF SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

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ABSTRACT

Samuel Taylor Coleridge holds a unique place in English Romanticism as a poet and as a philosopher who paid a lot of attention to the question of imagination and to the perception of human beings. The imagination, which mediates between reality and mind, is an unstable, dynamic, and all-changing feature that is exploited by Coleridge, unlike Romantic poets who depict nature as a stabilizing moral presence. The given paper will analyse the theory and practice of imagination as applied by Coleridge with a close focus on the detailed analysis of the chosen poems, namely The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, and Frost at Midnight, and his theoretical considerations in Biographia Literaria. Using a qualitative and interpretative approach, the paper has contended that the imagination of Coleridge represents a metaphysical and symbolic force that subverts and reconstructs experience, at the same time showing just how weak and psychologically limited human creativity is. The paper shows that the poetic vision of Coleridge presupposes ambiguity, internal struggle, and supersession, which is a complex Romantic perception of imagination as creative and risky. The research adds to the Romantic literature by highlighting the contribution that Coleridge made to the expansion of imagination past the aesthetic form of creativity and into the philosophical and psychological investigation.

KEYWORDS: *Coleridge; Romanticism; Imagination; Symbolism; Supernatural.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Romantic movement stood as a radical reaction to Enlightenment principles of rationality and objectivity and made imagination, emotion, and subjective experience the main ways of cognition. In this shift of intellect, poetry was the tool with which poets connected the outer reality to the inner consciousness. Whereas the imagination was considered by many Romantic writers as a path to harmony and moral understanding, Samuel Taylor Coleridge considered the imagination to be a multifaceted philosophical and metaphysical power. Coleridge was influenced by German Idealism and post-Kantian philosophy, and his theory of imagination has been applied in epistemology and metaphysics as well as in the field of aesthetics. In contrast to the reflective and moral imagination of Wordsworth, Coleridge has a visionary, symbolic imagination, and it is tense and perplexing. In this essay, the imagination in Coleridge is analysed as a changing but dangerous force that influenced symbolism, the supernatural, and the psychological complexity of his leading works.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The imagination of Coleridge has been accepted as the focus of the Romantic theory. His work was frequently stressed by the early critics as a philosopher, as compared with a poetic craftsman, but his theory was brought back into the limelight of criticism of the twentieth century as a poetic practice that dramatized his theory. M. H. Abrams places the imagination of Coleridge in the space of mediating between mind and nature as a shift in mechanical models of creativity and organic models of creativity (Abrams 171). I. A. Richards and Humphry House, in their psychological readings of poems like The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, discuss them as symbolic, exploratory writings about the question of guilt, alienation, and moral consciousness rather than escapist fantasy (Richards 289; House 104). Kathleen Coburn also states that the discontinuity of the work of Coleridge is an indicator of the impossibility of describing transcendental vision (Coburn 56)

Subsequently, the distinction between primary and secondary imagination is later criticized by Coleridge's critics. Thomas McFarland situates this theory in German Idealism, whereby imagination is considered to be a combination of subject and object (McFarland 92). Instead, Jerome Christensen and Paul Magnuson focus on the instability and crisis, stating that Coleridge dramatizes boundaries and not the success of imagination (Christensen 143; Magnuson 118). The contemporary critics still find Coleridge significant as he acknowledged the imaginative weakness and metaphysical scepticism (Perry 77; Beer 64).

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

i. To explore the idea of imagination as a symbolic and transformative art proposed by Coleridge.
ii. To examine the metaphysical importance of imagination in creating nature and the imagination of the supernatural in his poetry.
iii. To delve into the psychological aspects of imagination as experienced by Coleridge in his poetic vision.

4. RESEARCH QUESTION

In what ways does the theory and practice of imagination offered by Samuel Taylor Coleridge confront the harmonious Romantic ideas of nature in anticipating symbolism, inner struggle, and the boundaries of human perceptions?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper has followed a qualitative and interpretative research approach that involves a close reading of the text of a few poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, such as The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, and Frost at Midnight. The prose literary work of Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, is applied as a theoretical framework in order to place his poetic imagination into perspective. The secondary materials are utilized to facilitate the analysis; such books include critical essays, philosophical research, and Romantic scholarship. The style is literary and philosophical as opposed to biographical or historical.

5.1 IMAGINATION AS METAPHYSICAL POWER

The most important input by Coleridge into the Romantic theory is his description of primary and secondary imagination. In the work Biographia Literaria, the conception of primary imagination is the vital aspect of human perception, whereas secondary imagination is the conscious creative power, which is soluble and regenerative of experience (Coleridge 167). This difference brings imagination up to the level of a poetical decoration to that of a metaphysical law of being human consciousness. In contrast to mechanical fancy, where people simply change the placement of the given pictures, imagination gathers opposites and brings out the more profound unity. The poetic imagination of Coleridge is therefore transcendental in its striving to reach past the surface. But this dream is accompanied by a sense of acute imaginative limitation, a strain which pervades most of his poetry.

5.2 SYMBOLISM AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Imagination is manifested or portrayed in Coleridge's poetry through symbolism and the supernatural. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is a good example of this symbolic mode, in which supernatural aspects externalize the psychological and moral conflict. The act committed by the Mariner against nature leads to a spiritual crisis that cannot be explained by reason. Instead of providing harmony, nature is morally responsive and becomes mysterious, which is a sign of guilt and alienation. The supernatural in Coleridge is not the escapist fantasy but the symbolic narration. The opponents, like Humphry House, propose that supernatural machinery in the poem is symbolic of states of conscience and redemption and not actual belief (House 109). Imagination, therefore, will be the vehicle through which moral truth is enacted using symbolic action.

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5.3 CREATIVE VISION AND DIVISION.

Kubla Khan is a strong depiction of vision and imagination, and their weaknesses. This poem shows an ecstatic creativity that is interrupted by a lack of completion, indicating that Coleridge knew of the precariousness of inspirational creativity. The disjointed form of the poem reflects the unsteadiness of the experience of vision itself. This poem reveals the strength and the weakness of imagination as Seamus Perry explains that the tension between transcendence and restriction is caught in the poem (Perry 81). In Frost at Midnight, imagination plays a muter but no less important role. The poem concerning inner consciousness and the natural world is depicted in the poem, yet as opposed to the affirmative vision of Wordsworth, the meditation of Coleridge is full of uncertainty and desire. Nature gives us a hope of harmony in the future, but the current experience of the poet is one of isolation and introspection.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The examination shows that the imagination of Coleridge is a moving though very fluctuating power that alters experience, exposing the boundaries of perception. His nature in poetry is symbolic but not reparative, and rarely depicts the aspect of psychological crisis and metaphysical inquiry. There is no Romantic vision of harmony like the one Coleridge anticipates; there is fragmentation, guilt, and uncertainty, introducing imagination as both creative and vulnerable. These results indicate that Coleridge extends the Romantic imagination into philosophical inquiry to foresee current issues with consciousness and creativity. His poetry questions naive beliefs of Romantic Idealism that take into consideration inner struggle and imaginative weakness as the basic elements of human life.

7. CONCLUSION

In his poems, Samuel Taylor Coleridge introduces the imagination as a metaphysical and symbolic power, which is the centre of perceiving, creativity, and morality. Coleridge can address not only the creative force of imagination but also the shortcomings and instability of the imagination through the supernatural imagery, philosophical contemplation, and broken poetry. His poetry brings out the conflict of the mind in the search to align the inner vision to the outer reality, and thus the psychological and spiritual conflicts inherent in human experience. Through this, the work by Coleridge disputes the idea that Romanticism is a movement of undivided unity and instead presents the idea as a manifold of intellectual investigation and psychological profundity. In foregrounding uncertainty, transformation, and symbolic meaning, Coleridge leaves a deep and lasting impact on Romantic literature and also adds much insight into the philosophical perception of imagination within the Romantic tradition.

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